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Social Work and Middle-Aged Women:

Epistemological Issues

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Social Work

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

"Being in the middle" can have several meanings. In the most simple sense, it means being in a position that is neither at one edge or the other, or being among or in the midst of objects or events. "To be in the middle" commonly represents the mean, the average case, to be in the centre or to be a base for actions or objects above or below the centre. (Websters,1977,pg. 728)

Many religious mythologies contain a middle place that symbolizes the principle of "neutralization". The middle is the place where all rules and laws no longer exist and one floats in a limbo. "Being in the middle"also symbolized the perfect centre where one "finds oneself" and can place everything around in perspective. "Being in the middle" has also suggested a position at a crossroads caught between ambivalent forces. In western cultures, the epitome of the "middle place" is purgatory or limbo. (Cirlot, 1962, pp. 39-40,pg. 200)

"Being in the middle" can be a point of confluence where all forces and acting principles meet - hence a creative location. (Cirlot, 1962, pg. 68)

According to Jung, women as mothers are associated with "where the roads cross and enter into one another ... there is the mother, the object and epitome of all union". (Jung, 1955, pg. 132)

Finally, there is the colloquial sense of "being in the middle", being caught as a victim of opposing forces, without the capability of resolving the situation. It may also mean being the object of blame or sanction for acts beyond one's control.

All these meanings are relevant to the experience of middle-aged women. The literature on middle-aged women is certainly not unanimous in its interpretation of what living through middle age means for North American women. This stage of life has been variously described. To some it is a time of consolidation - of being able to put the conflicts of young adulthood in perspective, to sort priorities and to continue on with renewed creativity and purpose. The consequences of the middle stage of life have also

been related to a deep sense of impotence,

worthlessness and an absence of any satisfactory

options. The middle-aged woman is sometimes

referred to as a point of confluence or as an

exemplar case of the changes that have occurred

in the family, in the labour force and in the

relationship between the sexes. There is strong

disagreement as to the nature of the social impact

of these changes.

Most middle-aged women in North America

are married and have atleast two children. (Boyd, 1976,

pg. 17, pg. 36) It is these women who are the topic

of this thesis. The developmental stages of women

who do not marry and, to a lesser extent, of those

who choose not to have children if they are

married, have been found to more closely parallel

the "career" of men their own age than that of

married women with children in most aspects. (Mayer,

1969, pg. 101; Back, 1971, pp. 296-304) The

following essay, it is hoped, will make it clear that

there is a necessary and inextricable relationship

in our culture between the experience of middle age

for women and the facts of motherhood and marriage.

Fiske-Lowenthal et. al. , in their study of four stages of the life cycle state, " It is at this stage [middle age] that the greatest difference occurs between men and women." (Fiske-Lowenthal et. al., 1975, pg. 23) This is one fact about middle age that is agreed upon in the literature. Middle age means different things to men and women. This difference can, in large part, be attributed to the structures of family and occupational careers which, by and large, do not have the same consequences for the two sexes. It has also been widely accepted that the meaning middle age has for women is a function of how they and others view the roles of wives and mothers. The interpretations of these roles and their relative power in building or destroying ego strength are powerful predictors of success or problems in the transition to middle age. Because this relationship is so often proposed in the literature, a large part of this essay will deal with how these roles can affect the psychological development of women and how the conceptions of these roles by academics and practitioners can help or hinder women in successful adaptation to

middle age.

The classic definition of knowledge in philosophy is "the conformity between object and intellect." The issue of how this "conformity" is reached and justified in interpreting the behavior and experience of women and middle-aged women in particular, therefore, would appear to be essential in any analytic presentation of the relevant knowledge base. When middle-aged women can be considered a problem, from what theoretical and political contexts current knowledge is derived, who the individuals are who write about them and whose values establish the definition of functional or dysfunctional in their case will, it is clear, affect what is believed to be true about them.

Current social science may be seen to contain two basic views of what is functional behavior in women. The first view assumes a necessary and fixed relationship between the physiology of women and their development which is universally applicable. Maturity and success are defined differently for men and women due to their different developmental needs. Specifically, the achievment of feminine maturity is charactarized

by accepting the needs of others, especially husbands and children, as the primary focus of adult life. In the wider context, this developmental model represents a social role necessary to the continued stability and functioning of a society that also operates according to fixed laws of human nature. In this context, it becomes crucial to prescribe and maintain a rigid sex-differentiated model of adult functioning.

The second view assumes the criteria for mental health and social responsibility for men and women are essentially the same. The continued functioning and stability of society depend, in large part,on providing and creating multiple roles that fill various types of needs in the individual. In this context, the primary focus of adult life is expected to change with time and circumstance. Functioning is basically evaluated and understood in terms of the ability to create new satisfactory and productive roles as these change.

There is atleast an equal amount of eveidence to support both views.

Later in this essay, the observation that
the social work literature overwhelmingly reflects
the first view to the virtual exclusion of the
other will be discussed at length. The treatment
of women by the profession, it is clear, will be
directly related to its choice of conceptual
framework.

A critical examination of its knowledge base
may be especially important when producing a work for
a social work audience for two basic reasons. The first
is that the social work profession, to a great degree,
operates from a reactive position. It derives its
definition of the desirable and formulates practice
methods on the basis of theoretical and political
justification from other sectors of society and academic
disciplines. This can mean that significant beliefs from
other fields and the mandates they imply are often accepted
at face value. The assumptions underlying these ideas
and their consequences are not always fully appreciated
by social workers. * Thus, it can be proposed that

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* A historical overview of the interaction between the
development of social work goals and dominant political
and social thinking is presented in "The Influence of
Political Power in Determining the Theoretical Develop-

examining the political and theoretical derivations

of current practice literature will constitute an

addition to social work knowledge. Secondly, it has

been noted in the literature that social work has

generated very little in the way of descriptive-

analytical studies of the family, women and the forces

that affect them . (Maas,1971,pp.123 ff.;Johnson 1976,

pg.531) One writer relates this observation to the

increasing evidence of the ineffectiveness of standard

social work practices which he attributes to a lack of

conceptual rigour in the formulation of practice

policy. The specific criticisms put forward in this

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* cont. - - ment of Social Work" by Reuben Bitensky.
(Jour. of Social Policy Vol. II, No. 2 (Apr. '73,119-30))
Bitensky elaborates, documents and defends the thesis
that the social work profession has tended to react to
political influences by co-opting them into its own
structure. This has not been done in a self-aware manner,
and, so, the professsion has found itself forwarding
objectives whose implications are not fully understood.
He relates this trend to what he perceives to be a
pervasive pre-occupation with methodological concerns
and a narrowing of the ambit of professional concerns.
    Joseph L. Vigilante (" Between Values and Science:
Education for the Profession During a Moral Crisis- Is
Proof Truth?", Jour. of Education for Social Work,VOL.X,
no. 3, Wint. '76, 10-6) proposes the profession has
accepted the scientific logical-posivist model to the
extent it considers value as a species of fact.He
believes this has resulted in a neglect to acknowledge

regard are that there has been a trend to narrowing

the perspectives used to evaluate social situations

and to intellectual isolation from new relevant work

in other fields in an effort to clearly deliniate an

identifiable area of social work expertise.

It has been suggested that social work practice

with women in particular suffers from a lack of concept-

ual clarity in distinguishing fact from value and in

exercising any kind of critical sense about the

consequences of the theoretical frameworks commonly

used a basis of practice with women. (Wetzel, 1976 b;

Meisel and Friedman, 1974; Schwartz , 1973; Berlin, 1976)

In addition, in simple language, there is evidence that

most social workers do not know very much about women,

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* cont. - - the instrumental role values and context
play in the construction of social science theory
and practice decision making.

Janice Wetzel (" Social Adjustment as a Social
Work Principle", Frontiers, VOL. I, No. 3, Wint. '76,
17-25) defends similar arguments in her review of
the work of major social work theorists. In another
article, (" Interaction of Feminism and Social Work
in America", Social Casework, Apr. '76, 227-36), she
pursues the theme of the unconscious interaction
between the "value climate" and the social work
profession in terms of women as clients and workers.

have not read even rudimentary texts about the

sociological and psychological forces that affect

women and most social work curricula do not address

these issues. (Meisel and Friedman, 1974; Berlin,

1976; Johnson, 1976; Kravetz, 1976; Smith and Cummings,

1976) Some recent content analyses of various

professional journals and books suggest that these issues

do not receive substantive attention in these

publications. (Rosenblatt, et. al., 1973; Kravetz, 1976)

In the light of these observations, it would seem

resonable to examine where "intellect and object conform"

in social work knowledge and in the formation of

practice goals for women and then to analyse these

goals in the light of knowledge available from

other fields. Several authors have engaged in

critical examination of the derivation and consequen-

ces of current conceptions of norms for women in

fields allied to social work, especially psychology

and sociology. Part of this thesis will present

this material in an endeavour to enrich the current

social work practice context.

The goal of this thesis is to compile a

"working paper" for social work practice with married middle-aged women who have children. It is a library thesis and, as such, contains no primary data or findings from original research. It has been conceived as an attempt to provide a sensible and appropriate context for practice decisions. It is based on the assumption that, though relevant and useful information exists on this subject, it has not been structured in a form that is easily accessible to social workers. Therefore, a good deal of the analysis presented here is not the result of original interpretation for the purposes of this thesis, but represents the insight of the authors that were consulted in compiling this paper. The task undertaken was to form connections between various analytical and critical works and to suggest what relevance they might have in practice with middle-aged women. A secondary goal of this thesis is to use the situation of middle-aged women as an exemplar case of how the various ways social workers understand women can affect the ways we can serve them professionally. This question revolves around issues

in the "epistomology" of social work knowledge -

the examination of "its nature and grounds with

reference to its limits and validity". (Baldwin,1940)

Characteristics of the Population being Discussed

Mddle age is a relatively new mass

phenomenon (Vedder, 1965, pp. 4 ff.) In prehistoric

times, the average life span was 18 years. Fossil

remains indicate that few lived beyond forty. As

recently as 1900, the average life expectancy in

America was 45 years and only 10% of the population

was middle-aged. In 1965, 80% of the population

survived to 60 and the average adult in the labour

force was 45 years of age. While the total population

of the United States increased 98% between 1915 and

1965, the total number of middle-aged increased by

200%.

There is, however, considerable disagreement

as to when exactly middle age begins and ends. Several

authors have reported difficulty in establishing

guidelines for their own research. Bart (1967) uses

the limits of 40-60 but she notes the 45-70 might
be equally appropriate for other types of research.
General standards in the field of demography
deliniate the years between 45 to 64, yet a large
number of human development and social science
textbooks refer to the period between 30 and 60.
(Vedder, 1965, pp. ix-xii) Other experts (Levine,
1957; Leighton 1952; Thompson 1955) have calculated
the middle allocation,based on the average age of
onset of biological or psychological changes marking
the end of youth, as the ages from 36 to 55. Studies
of middle-aged women tend to favour the lower ends
of these ranges. (Lloyd-Jones, 1956; Self, 1969;
Klass and Redfern, 1977; Dulude, 1978)

Identifying the boundaries of middle age
for women is no easier. Though there is a temporal
relationship beteen the physiological changes
associated with middle age, there is no hard evidence
establishing a necessary or causal relationship
between the biological events of menopause and the
social and psychological phnomena associated with

middle age. Furthermore, middle-aged women cannot
be readily identified by a wide variety of features
of ascribed status and prescribed age roles. (Neugarten,
1968a; Bart, 1969; Turner, 1970, pg. 369) Middle age is
a stage more distinguished by a lack of such definitions.

The overwhelming majority of middle-aged women
in Canada are married and have children. (Boyd, 1976,
pg. 17, pg. 36) In the case of married women with chil-
dren, a starting point in developing a definition of
middle age seems to be the age and status of the last
child. (Neugarten, 1961, pp. 364-6; Bart, 1967,pp. 150 ff.;
Neugarten, 1968b , pg. 95; Mayer , 1969, pg. 101; Harris,
1975, chap. 4; Glick, 1977 , pg. 11) It has variously
been described as the point at which the youngest child
begins schooling, the point at which he turns eighteen
or the point at which he marries The chronological
age that would correlate with these events ranges from
32 to 64 years of age. The end point of middle age is
usually identified as the time at which a woman's
husband retires, which is usually age 65 for men and

so would, in most cases, apply to women in their late fifties and early sixties.

Lloyd Jones (1956) emphasized that middle age for women, whatever its exact boundaries, was emerging as a longer period of the life cycle, beginning earlier and ending later. Her research findings have indicated that earlier marriage ages and compressed childbearing spans for women have resulted in an earlier age at which the youngest child enters school. She calculated the average American woman reached this stage at age 46 in 1940 and at age 32 in 1955. At this point, Lloyd Jones notes, " the very definite objectives every girl has clearly in mind - getting married and having children-have been realized. Women at 32 enter into the fairly uncharted and vague business of trying to 'live happily ever after'." (Lloyd-Jones 1956, pg. 21)

The evidence that middle age is becoming the major span in the life cycle of women has been supported by other researchers. There is widespread agreement that there have been basic shifts in the timing of major life

events, especially for women. "The much longer empty nest period now than formerly is perhaps the most dramatic change that has occurred in the pattern of the typical family life cycle. The increase from two years to thirteen years for this stage... has a multitude of social, economic and psychological implications." (Glick, 1977, pg. 11)**

Studies in Canada (Boyd, 1976, pg. 28) have concluded that there is an increasing tendency for Canadian women to compress their childbearing into a shorter time span. A large proportion of women do not make a 'career' of childrearing but return to work when or shortly after the youngest child enters school.(Gunderson, 1976, pg. 96) Given the average age of the mother at the birth of the last child, 29.5 years, (Boyd, 1976, pg. 34) the majority of married

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** Paul C. Glick ("Updating the Family Lifecycle", Jour. of Marriage and the Family , VOL. XXXIX, No. 5, Aug. '77, 5-13) bases this calculation on the average time between the marriage of the last child and the death of one the spouses. He himself notes (pg. 8) that these figures do not realistically reflect the length of the post-parental stage because they do not take into account the increasingly younger age of women at the end of childbearing or children who have left for college or established seperate households on their own.

women with children in Canada will experience a
relatively short span of time in the exclusive
wife-mother role and can expect to re-enter the
labour force some time before their thirty-fifth
birthday.

i Return to the Labour Force

Boyd notes that unmarried women have always
worked due to a lack of an alternative source of
income; the rise in labour force participation
rates for women in recent years has been due to the
influx of married women. (Boyd, 1976, pg. 27) However,
she cautions against using these figures to exaggerate,
overstate or magnify any implications for changes in
the norms for the behavior of married women or to any
major changes within the family. Many married women
work because of simple financial need. Level of
spouses' income is a potent predictor of labour force
involvment of wives. The lower the family income, the
more likely it is the wife will work. (Gunderson, 1976,
pg. 99)

ii Childbearing

The fertility rates of Canadian women have been dropping. Older women tend to have more children than younger women. (Boyd, 1976, pg. 34) A women whose youngest child entered school in 1977 has spent less time in the exclusive role of childrearing than a woman in the same situation in 1967 or 1971. As previously stated, there has been an increasing tendency to compress the space between children and complete families in a much shorter period of time.

Most ever-married middle-aged women in Canada in 1971 did, however, have children. Women in the five-year age categories (35-9, 40-4 etc.) between 35 and 59 had atleast three children on average. (3.1 to 3.4) (Boyd, 1976, pg. 36, pg. 45) The figures for percentage of childlessness, adjusted for assumed rates of biological sterility, indicate a trend to voluntary childlessness among young women. However the rates for women between 35 and 59 decreased between 1961 and 1971. In 1971, over 90% of married women in Canada between 35 and 49 and a slightly lower percentage of women between 50

and 59 had children. However, a study has found that
"for all age groups, the data on labour force experience
show that fertility is highest for women who have never
worked in the labour force. Women who are in the labour
force in 1971 have (sic) on average one child less than
women who have been full-time housewives since marriage.
This relationship holds when age, age at marriage and
education are controlled." (Boyd, 1976, pg. 41) A causal
explanation of this correlation is not offered by the
researchers because it was not clear to them in their
manipulation of the variables whether women who have more
children do so rather than enter the labour force or
whether this correlation reflects the difficulty of
working and caring for a larger family. (Boyd, 1976, pg. 43)

iii <u>Education</u>

With regards to education, figures for women over
35 indicate that in 1971 approximately 55% of English-
speaking Canadian women between 35 and 45 and 60% of
those between 45 and 55 had not completed high school.
A small proportion, 5%, had completed university. (Robb
and Spencer, 1976, pg. 68) About 25-30% of French-
speaking women between 35 and 55 had completed high

school in 1971 and approximately 3% of this group had

completed university. An additional 20% of women in

both these groups had completed vocational training

or non-university post-secondary training mainly in

normal schools, nursing colleges and secretarial

schools.   (Robb and Spencer, 1976, pp. 66-9) Demand

in these occupational groups has been steadily

decreasing in recent years. (Dulude, 1978, pg. 10)

It should be noted that enrolment in adult education

programmes quadrupled between 1959 and 1973 and

figures available for selected years indicate a

male/female ratio of 3:1. However, age breakdowns

are not available in relation to these programmes.

(Robb and Spencer, 1976, pg. 63)   The number of females

per 100,00 in the labour force in Manpower training

courses for 1971-1974 is roughly equal to the ratio

of males per 100,000 enrolled in these programmes.

(Robb and Spencer, 1976, pg. 64)

It would be reasonable to assume that a large

part of the female enrolment in adult education

programmes and Manpower training courses is over 35

years of age; however, a report prepared for International

Womens' Year on woman and education notes that

documentation is incomplete and unavailable on these
kinds of programmes. (Robb and Spencer, 1976,pg.62)

In summary, these figures show that middle-
aged women have attained a relatively low level of
education on average in Canada. Moreover, there
is an ever-decreasing demand for the vocational
skills a large number of them possess. The figures
on enrolment in continuing education or upgrading
courses may suggest that a large number of these
women perceive a need to enhance their preparation
for changing demands at work or in the community.

iv <u>Magnitude</u>

Finally, let us consider the group in terms
of magnitude. In this year, 1979, there will be
1,372,800 women between 35-44, 1,240,300 women between
45 and 54 and 595,800 women between 54 and 59 for a
total of 3,208,900. Thus middle-aged women represent
over a quarter of the females in Canada (28.5%) and
almost 15% of the total Canadian population. (Statistics
Canada, Population Projections,1976) The situation of
a group this size, it is clear, cannot be considered
inconsequential.

Guidelines for Defining the Problem

The underlying assumption behind providing a context for social work practice is that the group has problems. Service to middle-aged women can be considered a legitimate social work field of practice only if this is the case.

Attempts to define what identifies a social work field of practice often have not clearly stated the question of how and when the profession decides a situation is a problem. A legitimate field of practice or concern is generally identified as one which is perceived as problematic according to social work values. (Bartlett, 1970) This definition may amount to no more than the tautology -' a social problem for social workers is what social workers see as a problem'.

The Encyclopedia of Social Work states that a legitimate field of Social work practice "centres around some major human need or social problem as part of the services organized to meet the need or the problem. Both the overall services and the specific social work practice are visible, identified and recognized by societal sanction. (my own emphasis) (Bartlett,+E.S.W., 1971, pg. 1480) The

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+ From here on the Encyclopedia of Social Work will be represented by the letters "E.S.W." in textual citations.

above statement implies that recognition of a human
need or social problem is derivitive. The power of
societal sanction has been generally located in
government agencies,professional organizations of
social workers and schools of social work. (Dudley,
1978, pg. 40) These formal societal organizations
identify the problem; social work then determines
its arena for action and area of concern in terms of
the rationale and mandate to intervene provided.

One assumption of this essay is that the
theoretical basis of social work's analyses of social
situation or human need relies upon the knowledge and
value base of other social sciences in general and
psychology and sociology in particular. This reliance
has been widely recognized. (Perlman, 1960, pg. 537;
Lucas, E.S.W., 1971; Wetzel 1976a, pp. 232-5; Wetzel,
1976b, pp. 11-5; Levine, 1976, pp. 27-9) An
examination of how general social science theory
concerning social problems relevant to the situation
of middle-aged women is therefore crucial.

Extensive and lengthy documentation (Bernard, 1957, chap. 5; Davis, 1970; Merton, 1971; Henshel and Henshel, 1973; Siporin, 1975, sec. I, sec. II) established that current theoretical criteria for defining a 'problem' rely heavily on:

a) whether a social situation is seen to conflict with a pervasive consensual standard

b) whether it is a situation undesirable to to a functionally significant group in society

c) whether its solution is seen as ethically imperative

The existence of a"vexing or deplorable social situation" or a"wide discrepancy between social goals and the social actuality" is merely a "latent" problem until it becomes defined as a societal concern. Social scientists are seen as central to the process of legitimizing such situations as areas for collective action. (Merton, 1971, pp. 805-8) The legitimacy, then, of the problem group is dependent on whether or not dominant groups which endorse pervasive consensual standards see the amelioration of the problem group's situation as a higher good. Social scientists' interpretation of the consequences of

various courses of action are especially important
to the way a group's needs will be understood.

When the problems of a group are not viewed
as legitimate, they may instead be viewed as merely
a deviation from a collectively defined social reality.
Despite the subjective reality of their personal
distress, the individuals in this group become the
object of societal censure. Whether conflicts
between the perceived needs of the dominant and problem
group are viewed as disruptive in themselves or as
shortcomings in the conceptualization of the functional
requirements of society will, of course, affect the
way in which a solution to the conflict is sought.

Thus, even though a great number of middle-
aged women may be unhappy or unable to function, this
will not be the basis for defining their situation as
a problem. The interpretation given their
circumstances by academics and sanctioning authorities
will be the basis for any definition. Whatever the
real pain or injustice felt, middle-aged women, as a
group which does not possess the power to disseminate
its point of view and whose situation may not be seen

impinge on the requirements of the collectivity,
may find themselves excluded from traditional
frameworks for describing social problems.

An alternative definition of a "social problem"
has been suggested by Henshel and Henshel. It is "any
situation that affects large numbers of people, causes
suffering and generates intense feelings." (Henshel
and Henshel, 1973, pg. 11) This definition has the
merit of acknowledging the difficulties of a given
group and the pain they experience as problematic
even if it cannot be theoretically defined as such.
The definition allows for frameworks that are not
based on a utilitarian premise, permitting the
situation to be viewed from the 'inside', in terms
of its psychological impact on experience and not
merely to bestow importance on a problem because it
interferes with the usefulness of some group to
society.

Human situations cannot exist in isolation;
they necessarily relate to collective norms, role

designations and the meanings and purposes role

designations convey. A coherence between putative

and actual meaning is essential. The relationship

between the individual and collective guidelines -

whether they are called structures of meaning,

norms, role functions, social standards, historical

precendents, or societal mandates - is not only

critical to social well-being, it is definitive of

social well-being. Thus, if the problems of middle-

aged women are demonstably due largely to adherence

to collective guidelines, change in the norms used

to judge their behavior and in the consequent

interpretatation of their predicament as personal

failures or as functional within society must

logically follow.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL ACTUALITY OF MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN

The following presentation of the factual background to the situation of middle-aged women will attempt to establish the pervasiveness and magnitude of the problem.

i Suicide

In the United States, in 1974, the highest suicide rates for women were in the middle-aged group. Age specific rates per 100,000 rise steadily from 9.8 for women 35-39 to 13.2 for women 45-49 and level off again in steadily decreasing rates in groups over the age of 65. These statistics are based on reported suicides which are believed to severely underrepresent its actual occurence. Women also have more 'unsuccessful' suicide attempts than men. The ratio of reported attempts to death by suicide may be of the order of 30:1. (Butler and Lewis, 1977, pg. 68) The rate of completed suicide attempts steadily rises after age 35 and, therefore, the ratio of attempts to deaths should be viewed in this light. (Butler and Lewis, 1977, pg. 70)

Suicide is generally associated with anomie or alienation - a feeling of powerlessless and meaninglessness-and is correlated to sudden loss of status. Suicide is also interpreted as the attempt to exercise control over one's life and the lives of significant others where no other options appear workable. It has been seen as a final rebellious act against an environment that continually annihilates any sense of personal power. (Butler and Lewis, 1977, pp. 68 ff.) Although the figures presented here represent only reported incidents, it is clear that during middle age women are moved to take their own lives to a much greater degree than in any other period of life.

ii Alcoholism

The average female alcoholic is middle-aged and did not begin to drink before somewhere between ages 35-45. This represents an average onset of problem drinking that is later for women than for men. Alcoholism in middle-aged

women often appears within a constellation of
problems. The female alcoholic has a 50% chance
of having a diagnosable psychiatric illness and
has attempted suicide in 33% of all cases.
(Badiet, 1976, pg. 59)

Some research findings suggest that, generally,
there is no identifiable crisis or event that
precipitates alcoholism in middle-aged women. Rather,
most of these women drink to escape routine, to
improve their self-image or to gain confidence.
(Johnson, DeVries and Houghton, 1966) However, in
a study specifically focussed on females between
35 and 45, the findings suggested that the onset of
alcoholism in this group is very often related to
middle age crisis. The study shows that a significant
proportion begin drinking when their children leave
home and when their husbands die, divorce or become
over-involved in their careers.

"... Without their children or husbands to depend
on for their own identity or sense of worth, these
women turn to alcohol. The drinking only compounds
their feelings of self-disgust and a vicious cycle
is created. " (Curlee, 1969, pg. 170)

Curlee sums up this crisis as the"devastating

loss of self-worth for middle-aged women".

(Curlee, 1969, pg. 170)

Fraser reiterates Curlee's observations.

"...typically this woman is between 35
and 45 years of age. While her children were
growing she did not take the time or perhaps,
did not have the time to involve herself in
community activities. Not did she work towards
her own personal growth and identity. Now she
no longer feels worthwhile."(Fraser, 1976,pg. 46)

The literature notes that, traditionally, female

alcoholism has been viewed as related to a

rejection of the feminine role. However, recent

research suggests that those characteristics

that were interpreted as a rejection of the

feminine role masked a profound desire to meet

the feminine ideal. Therapeutic interventions

based on the second assumption were significantly

more successful. The majority of women alcoholics

studied were almost exclusively dependent on their

husbands and children for defining their identity.

(Birchmore and Walderman, 1975, pg. 14: Badiet,

1976, pg. 67)

An insignificant number of female alcoholics

of any age were the sole economic support of their

families. (Badiet, 1976, pg. 60) This further

substantiates the view that the loss of a wife or

mother role and a resulting loss of identity or

feeling of usefulness may lead to alcoholism in

middle-aged women. It may reasonably be surmised

that women who are the sole support for their

families feel their economic role makes them useful.

Curlee pointed out that a substitute source of

satisfaction shoud be offered the female middle-

aged alcoholic, many of whom have never been trained

for any job but housework, However, she could find

no reports in the literature of interventions with

this group that included job training. (Curlee, 1969,

pg. 169)

As in the case of suicide, the incidence of an

acknowledged social problem, alcoholism, is heavily

clustered in the middle-aged group for women and

differs dramatically from the age-specific rates

for men. There is evidence to suggest that

alcoholism in middle-aged women is related to
an extreme dependency on husbands and children
for purpose, meaning and identity.

Although the true prevalence of the problem
cannot be estimated. The ratio of unreported
alcoholism to diagnosed cases in women at home
is believed to be 9:1. (Badiet, 1976, pg. 64)
In addition, Doreen Birchmore, director of
the Donwood Institute Day Programme, cites
research findings in support of the proposition
that cases of women who seek help for alcohol
problems are likely to reported in the statistics
as mental illness rather than alcoholism.
(Birchmore and Walderman, 1975, pg. 11)

Given this situation, the pervasiveness of
alcoholism in women in general and middle-aged
women in particular cannot be fully appreciated.

iii Use of Psychotropic Drugs

In a review of the use of psychotropic drugs
by women, Ruth Cooperstock cites a nation-wide
United States study that concluded that the
majority of regular users were housewives between

the ages of 35 and 50 who did not work. The

correlation between both psychiatric admissions

and the use of psychotropic drugs and traditional

housewife status has been corroborated by a great

number of other studies. (Cooperstock, 1976, pg. 93)

As well, the ratio of adult married women to

unmarried women who take a tranquilizer regularly

is almost 2:1 (8.3% vs. 3.4%): the ratio is almost

3:1 for hypnotics. (11.6% vs. 4.5%) (Cooperstock,

1976, pg. 105) Cooperstock proposes that there

may be a socio-cultural basis for the different

rates of psychotropic drug use by married women

versus unmarried women and by women in the labour

force versus women at home.

iv <u>Depression</u>

A study undertaken to compare the characteristics

of various life stages in the population of a large

American city found that, using standard diagnostic

instruments, middle-aged women and newlywed women

accounted for 70% of the depression reported in

the sample. (Fiske-lowenthal et.al., 1975, pg. 105)

Middle-aged women and newlywed women constituted

25% of the sample and the general prevalence

rate of depression in the pool of respondents

was in accordance with general mental health

statistics for the United States. (13%) The

writers note...

"a curious parallel between middle-aged
women and newlyweds in terms of existential
dispair, with both groups having felt that life
is meaningless. Two thirds of those [in the total
sample] who reported such feelings were middle-aged
women or newlyweds. Middle-aged and newlywed women
were most likely to have contemplated suicide...
[They] in both stages were, of course, confronted
with restructuring their lives around the presence
and absence of other people. Marriage involves a
maximum demand for social readjustment *** and
can be construed as being a kind of "death" of
the former social self especially for women who
have no other major committments other than
marriage and family. For the older women, the
imminent empty nest period may have similar
connotations." (Fiske-Lowenthal et. al., 1975, pg,105).

Depression has been identified as the second

major psycho-social condition of middle-aged women.

(Self, 1969, pg. 2) Two prevalence studies (that

*** Holmes, T.H. and Rahe, R.H., The Social
Readjustment Rating Scale", Jour. of Psychosomatic
Research, No. 11, Aug. '67, 213-8)

is, studies drawing from a sample from the general population not from clients of agencies or patients at clinics) conducted across the United States found that psychological anxiety and age correlate for women but not for men.(Bart, 1967, pg. 6) In general, middle-aged women are four times as likely to manifest psychiatric disorders as men. (Bell, 1975,pg. 151) Not only does age appear to be a salient variable in the incidence of psychological distress in women, but there are strong correlations between marital status and major occupation, and manifest psychiatric symptoms. The majority of women admitted to psychiatric facilities are in their forties or fifties, are married and are housewives, Unmarried or working women do not exhibit psychiatric symptoms in similar percentages. (Garai, 1970, pg. 134; Chesler, 1971,pg. 746; Gove and Tudor, 1973; Cooperstock, 1976, pg. 105) In addition, the correlations for men differ significantly; the ratio of single to married men is exactly the opposite for men with psychiatric symptoms as for women. (Gove andTudor, 1973,pg. 134; Cooperstock, 1976,pg. 105)

v Usefulness

Pauline Bart, in her study of depression in middle-aged women, offers a guideline for viewing and interpreting these kinds of findings. She says, "... the major assumption is that people must feel useful to maintain their mental health." (Bart, 1967,pg. 146) It should be clear that "feeling useful" is a complex concept. It can mean you feel the thing you do benefits others. It can mean others make you feel that what you do is consequential. It can also mean you feel that there is potential or opportunity to be useful or that your personal attributes are seen positively. It can simply mean the perception that you have the capability to do what is required. Finally, "feeling useful" can mean feeling relevant to what transpires around you.

In his study of the relationship between the social roles of women and their sense of usefulness and importance, Weiss found that "a rather substantial proportion(25%) said nothing made them feel useful or important."(Weiss and Samuelson, 1958,pg. 359) Given that most middle-aged women with

with psychological problems are housewives, it
is interesting to note that less than half of
the women with high school or less felt being a
housewife made them feel some worth. Less than
one third of college educated women found the
housewife role sustaining. However, 60% of all
women who were employed referred to their job
as a basis for feelings of importance and
usefulness. (Weiss and Samuelson, 1958, pg. 359)
This study was conducted several years ago,
it can be suggested that the pervasive
proposition that dissatisfaction with the housewife
role is a very recent phenomenom may be more a func-
tion of the perception of observers. A 1949 survey
found that female college graduates found the
housewife role"stagnant and frustrating". (New York
Times Magazine, June 12, 1949) Mirra Komorovsky's
study of women in America in 1953 revealed
essentially the same thing. (Chafe, 1972, pg. 311)

vi Self-Esteem and Role

Later work by Komarovsky suggests it is an oversimplification to assume that it is only relatively well-off or well-accomplished women who are dissatisfied with the housewife role. She found that lower-class women in menial jobs enjoyed more self-esteem than lower-class women at home; housework was not identified as contributing to a sense of personal achievment by the majority of lower-class housewives. (Komarovsky, 1962, pp. 62 ff.)

Viewing the findings of his own research and the pertinent literature, Weiss concludes that, because of the high amount of women who report no basis for feelings of worth," there is good reason for concern about the apparent emptiness of social roles available to these women." (Weiss and Samuelson, 1958, pg. 366)

Weiss concluded that " how one identifies with a role will attack or enhance self-regard." (Weiss and Samuelson, 1958,pg. 358) Another aspect of

the sustaining or destructive power of roles is
their ability to confer importance and worth on
individuals. A corrolary to Weiss' conclusion is
that how one's role is identified by others will
attack or enhance self-regard. Roles have been
defined as"identity-giving units of culture."
As well, a positive relationship has been
established between high status and mental health.
(Bart, 1969,)

Recent sociological investigation into the
placement of women in the social structure suggests
that the occupation of the male is the primary basis
for the status of a family in the North American
social structure. 'Housewife' is perceived as a
pseudo-occupation and women receive their public
identity secondhand from their husbands. (Humphrey,
1974,pg. 220) Haavio-Mannila found that the ranking
of 'wife' and 'housewife' , relative to other occup-
ations, was significantly lower and that even the
"reflected" status of 'wife' does not allow a woman
to participate and benefit from the social placement

of her husband. For instance, in legal and
financial transactions, the wife of a wealthy man
will still be treated as if she had no economic
resources. (Oakley, 1974, pg. 10)

vii <u>Age and Value</u>

Within a stratification or status structure
that accords relatively little status to the 'wife'
and 'housewife' role, it is the middle-aged woman
who comes out on the bottom. Bell reports that
"available studies point to older (40-60) women as
the lowerst prestige group in society". (Bell, 1975,
pg. 150) Pauline Bart has shown through comparitive
cultural studies that, in many cultures, this is
not the case. In many places, the status of middle-
aged women compares favourably with other groups.
(Bart, 1969) She isolates eight relevant variables
of the differential status of middle-aged women
across cultures. For the most part, these variables
reflect whether age is valued over youth- whether
older women are seen as wise or useless. Another
fundamental variable is whether roles for older

women are institutionalized on the basis of
skills and experience they can contribute to their
own families or community life. Bart has also found
that the prestige of middle-aged women is higher in
cultures where sexual attractiveness is not an
important value and sex is viewed solely in a
reproductive context. (Bart, 1969)

The low prestige of middle-aged women in our
society is not only a reflection of the placement
of women in the social structure but is substan-
tially related to the placement of women in the
age-status structure as well. A large part of the
prestige given women depends on their youth. They
lose value in the societal context when they no
longer are considered sexually attractive. Bell
observes,

"... Society pictures women as "old" ten or
fifteen years sooner than men. Nobody in this
culture wants to grow old; age is not honored among
us. Yet women must endure this specter of aging
much sooner than men... A man's wrinkles will not
define him as sexually undesirable until his late
fifties. For him, sexual value is defined in terms
of personality, intelligence and earning power.
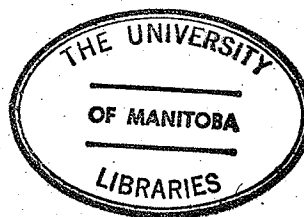
Women must rest their case largely on their bodies.
Their ability to attain status in other than
physical ways and to translate that status into
sexual attractiveness is severely limited by the
culture. [A woman] approaching middle age begins
to notice a change in the way people treat her...
in the growing indifference of others to her looks
and sexuality she can see and measure the decline
of her worth." (Bell, 1975,pg. 146)

This so called "double standard of aging" puts

middle-aged women in a position of discrepancy or

tension between social ideals and social actuality.

Susan Sontag comments that the standards set for

female attractiveness bear no relation to what women

actually look like. "This double standard perpetuates

the view that women have nothing to offer but their

bodies; no amount of intelligence, learning and

wisdom can make up for the lost bloom of youth".

(Sontag,1972,pg.33) The consequences of the loss

of prestige with age are especially severe for

women who have invested most of their psychic

energy in the 'wife role'. They become insecure in

their ability to be a 'glamourous' attractive

companion to their husbands and are especially

vulnerable to insecurity in a relationship that

encompasses all their goals and meanings. (Dulude,

1978,pg. 16)

As discussed previously, Bart found that middle-aged women lost status in cultures that valued youth over age. She also found that age statuses and the accompanying power to destroy or enhance identity were related to the perceived usefulness of the activities associated with different age groups. The three primary roles of women in our culture are mother, wife and sexual partner. The roles of wife and sexual partner lose their ability to accord prestige and positive self-regard for middle-aged women in a great many cases.

Because of the differing developmental patterns of men and women, the primary focus and source of identity for middle-aged men is the consolidation of their occupational careers. This has been related to both an absence of continually present emotional support for middle-aged women -their husbands' emotional investment is outside the home - and to a narrowing of the possibilities for the wife role to be sustaining.. (Self,1969,pg.3; Fiske-Lowenthal et.al.,1975,pg.33; Dulude,1978,pg.16)

viii <u>Marital Dissatisfaction</u>

Middle-aged women report the highest incidence
of marital dissatisfaction among all age-sex
groupings. (Long Laws,1971,pg. 509; Fiske-Lowen-
thal et.al.,1975, pg. 39) They usually stress
feeling lonely in their reports. Recent Canadian
statistics show that 45% of all divorced women are
over 35 at the time of their divorce. (Dulude,1978,
pg. 10)

It is also interesting to note that, by and large,
North American men combine the wife and mother roles
when they evaluate their spouses. Being "a good
mother" is a major basis for being seen as useful
and important in the eyes of a great many womens'
spouses. (Long Laws, 1971,pg. 488; Fiske-Lowenthal
et.al., 1975, pg.37) A lack of interpersonal
communications skills between spouses has been
correlated to traditional marriages where their is
a rigid sexually defined division of function and
where the spouses identify each other with
instrumental roles. (Freeman,1974,pp.31-3)

Summary

Taken together, these findings may be seen to from a picture of middle age, especially for traditionally oriented women, as marked by increasingly lessopportunity for social desirability as a wife and a sexual partner, and a restiction of avenues to self-worth and importance. In addition, it can be suggested that many middle-aged women do not receive emotional support from their spouses. Feelings of depression and meaninglessness exist more in middle-aged women than in other groups. Low status and feelings of meaninglessnes and isolation are typical characteristics of groups experiencing social problems. Pauline Bart has shown that middle age is not necessarily a problem for women across cultures. Her research suggests that there may be a socio-cultural basis for the situation of middle-aged women. The relationship between marital status, occupational role and the psychological and social difficulties among middle-aged women suggested above has been deduced from

the different prevalence rates among married versus unmarried women and among women who are occupied inside versus those occupied outside the home. Furthermore, large scale prevalence studies have found a correlation between age and various psycho-social problems for women but not for men as well as different patterns of incidence of alcoholism, suicide depression, legal drug use and psychiatric admissions. The extent of these situations is markedly increased for married women in middle age and is greater for married women in general in the cases of legal drug use, depression and psychiatric admissions. Finally, taking Henshel and Henshel's criteria for social problems (extent of suffering, number of people affected and strength of feelings evoked), the statistical data supports the proposition that middle-aged women suffer in sufficiently large numbers. The quality of feeling attached to their situation will be presented in the next section in order to enlarge the context for further discussion.

Conclusions

Middle age for married women has been defined previously as the stage in life when childrearing ceases to be a primary activity. This occurrence is widely referred to as "empty nest". Traditional perspectives on the development of adult women see an empty nest crisis as part of the normal course of events - as something to be expected. There is some weight of truth in this view. However, for many women the empty nest stage is not a problem. In fact, it enhances their ability to find roles and activities that increase their sense of import- ance and worth.++ It cannot be denied that common sense dictates that raising children is a demanding enterprise which consumes a great deal of the woman's time and energy. It follows that if a component of one's life disappears, there has to be a change in one's orientation and purpose. It

++See "Introduction" , Chapter 4

may also be that focussing one's energies in one
area for a long period of time affects the ability
to make these changes.

Descriptive and Analytical Material:
Suggestions on the Dynamics of the Problem

In a survey of empirical studies on the
psychology of women in the later years, Julia
Sherman concludes that a major issue for middle-
aged women is identity. She distinguishes the
problem from other developmental "identity crises"
and comments, " ... The identity problem for
women is not so much in achieving identity but
mastering shifts in identity. (Sherman,1971,pg.21)

Middle age for women is associated with a
dessication of status and prestige. The capacity
to predict and control one's social context and to
be able to establish continuity of meaning through
various shifts in the relationship between the
individual and the environment is crucial to adaptive
ability. (Marris,1974,pp.16-7; Martin and Osmond,
1975, pp. 339-41, 362-3) The perceived

ability to control and predict one's social
context and a personal sense of competence and
worth has been found to rely, in large part, on
the structure of the environment in which the
individual acts.(Weisstein,1971; Martin and
Osmond,1974) Major structural factors influencing
both subjective and external perceptions of social
power and the consequentiality of an individual's
acts are "the conditions that govern the relative
dependence of individuals in a social relationship."
(MacDonald,1977,pg. 708) The 'social power' literature
emphasizes that the qualities of a person have a
much weaker relationship to the amount of influence
exerted than his or her contextual definition.
(Martin and Osmond,1974,pp. 362-3; MacDonald,1977,
pg. 708) Finally, Marjorie Fiske-Lowenthal's
research into the dynamics of major life changes
led her to conclude that...

    " a sense of inner control was clearly the
most important of pre-transitional cognitions...
whether or not the individual foresaw problems
with his main transition had little bearing on
whether his attitude toward it was positive or
negative, the amount of planning or his sense of
being in control."(Fiske-Lowenthal et.al.,1975,
pg. 209)

Thus, if a large number of middle-aged women

perceived a lack of control over internal and

external forces, could not envision a role that

provided them with meaning or identity-enhancing

goals or were dependent on others to provide

continuity of purpose through time, there is

justification in believing that their ability

to the change accompanying empty nest would be

severely limited.

Gerald Self identifies the most common

characteristic of middle-aged American housewives

to be " a pervasive lack of confidence in their

own abilities". (Self, 1969,pg.2) His observations

were based on interviews with 2,000 women during

a five year period. The women were participants

in discussion programmes for middle-aged women at

Oakland University and in community centres in the

State of Michigan. Self relates this sense of

incompetence to a lack of feedback for housewives

on their real abilities and a lack of external

objective criteria for self-evaluation. He

characterizes the position of the middle-aged

housewife as one without criteria for performance.
(Self,1969,pp.2 ff.)

Self's observation was reiterated in the Fiske-
Lowenthal study. The study found that women of all
ages repeatedly said that they felt a need for ego-
strength and power. +++ In particular, 35% of the
middle-aged women expressed a need to be more
"imaginative". The study linked these expressed
needs to an anticipation of future changes and a
call for new modes of adjustment. (Fiske-Lowenthal
et.al., 1975.pp.77-8) The sense of a lack of
imagination may reflect an anticipation that the
change in life is not positive. Again, as in Self's
work, this study found that the strength of self-
image was not so much a function of a particular
configuration of events but of the existence of
feedback on performance from others.

+++ defined by the authors as "less socially
vulnerable and possessing more mastery and
confidence" (pg. 77)

In her examination of the social horizons and
activity patterns of her sample, Fiske-Lowenthal
states that the extent of the family-centredness
of her respondents' lifestyle was striking. (Fiske-
Lowenthal,et.al., 1975,pg. 235) She notes a
behavioral committment to their jobs and an
exceptionally stable history in the women who
worked. However, the middle-aged women in her
sample, for the most part, were not primarily
committed to their work and saw their employment
income as a contribution to the lifestyle of
their families. Most of these women said that
they would leave their jobs or pass up chances
for advancement if their occupational
responsibilities drained the energy they could
direct to family resonsibilities. (Fiske-
Lowenthal et.al., 1975, pg. 20) These responses
would seem to be at odds with the earlier reported
findings which suggest that occupational roles
provide a basis for self-esteem for more women
than the homemaker-wife-mother functions.

However, they can be seen to reflect the psychic
demands normatively required in the family of
women in our culture and not as a statement of
the relative satisfaction inherent in these roles.

Marjorie Fiske-Lowenthal and other writers
have related the lack of primary occupational
committment to the discontinuity and contingent
nature of womens' lifestyles. Women are compelled
to structure their goals around the needs of
others, especially their husbands , and so may not
have the option of grasping the opportunities that
provide the most satisfaction to them. (Coser and
Rokoff,1968,pg.552; Bem and Bem,1971 ; Sherman,
1971,chap. 2; Fiske-Lowenthal et.al,1975,pg.22)
Orienting most of their energy to family responsibi-
lities is a mode of accomodating to externally
imposed restrictions.

Notwithstanding the social forces that may
create the situation,middle-aged women suffering
from a lack of adaptive resources and a great many
women of all ages exist within a very narrow sphere

ERRATUM: The citation of Rose Laub Coser and Gerald
Rokoff on this page and all subsequent citations
to these authors should read 1971.

of roles. In general, they participate in few

extra-familial roles and rely on their affiliations

within the family to construct their self-image.

An almost exclusive identification with the

housewife-wife-mother role has been identified

with depression, menopausal distress and emotional

problems focussed on the empty nest. (Kisik,1961;

Bart,1967,pg. 12; Dulude,1978,pp.14-6)A larger role

scope has been positively correlated to individual

development and adaption. Simmel, for example, noted

that membership in dyads or groups that make

conflicting demands provides increased opportunity

for the development of a complex individualized

personality. (Fiske-Lowenthal et.al,1975,pg. 10)

Thus it can be inferred that an exclusive identific-

ation with family roles puts middle-aged women in

a vacuum when these functions are dessicated and they

are left without an alternative sphere of action.

However, to contribute the pervasive demoralization

of middle-aged women to the loss of the mother-role

or menopause might be simplistic. Empty nest is
not perceived as problematic through cultures. The
way one identifies with a role is a function of its
impact on self-image. The perception of personal
power seems to be related to the balance of
independence and dependence in others for identity
and to structural exigencies.

The empty nest crisis need not be viewed as
'maternal role loss'. Rather, it may be seen as in
a continuum where the previous role damaged
capacity to make future adaptations. The findings
on the small contribution to self-worth and the
relative status of the traditional female roles
may be considered evidence to this effect.

It has been suggested that self-image for the
traditional mother-housewife-wife, in large part,
consists of structuring one's life around of others
and is dependent on affiliation with others for
its support. Life-satisfaction in many middle-aged
women is strongly related to immediate environmental
feedback. (Wyckoff,1971; Bardwick,1972,pg. 157,pp.
320-4,pp. 307-14; Chesler,1972,pg. 39) Characteristics

of such an identity structure may mean that empty

nest or 'maternal role loss' calls for new

intra-personal qualities which have not been

developed. Gerald Self identified a pervasive

conflict around the issue of dependence and

independence in the middle-aged women he had met.

He explains,

"... unspoken questions centre around dependence
and independence...contempleted or actual involvment
in activities, especially if successful... threatens
to upset the dependent relationship which the woman
has enjoyed and desperately needs to maintain...
Ambition by these women is often termed as
aggressiveness and the emotionally healthy desire
to use talents and energies to the fullest as
negative and undesirable."

Closely related to this issue is the woman's

"directly and consistantly expressed need for the

blessings of some authority". (Self,1969,pg.6)

Self believes this issue is directly related

to the lack of legitimation of her own needs to

which a traditional woman has accomodated.

He adds,

"The third major psychological characteristic
of the American-Housewife-Mother [1. no sense of
personal competence: 2. depression] is the
"identity crisis" ... This condition seems to
arise because these women have devoted the major
portion of their energies to the attainment of
other peoples' goals ... primarily their husbands'
occupational advancement and their childrens'
academic progress ... After years of such sacrifice,
many lose sight of their own needs and long term
goals. Aspirations which were once held are often
forgotten or discarded and a sense of
"directionlessness" prevails." (Self, 1969, pg. 7)

Dependency and passivity in relation to personal

needs have been correlated to low self-esteem.

(Bardwick, 1972, pg. 157, pp. 320-4) When excessive

psychic energy is directed at meeting others' needs,

the capacity to assess and deal with intrapsychic

issues becomes 'atrophied'. When all identity is

based on others, an individual may not develop

personal resources that allow her to define herself

any other way. Self's obervation that achievement

seems to threaten a middle-aged woman's basis for

identity correlates with findings in major studies

on middle age or the development of women. The

works of Judith Miller, Ruth Moulton and Bernice

Neugarten present evidence that traditionally

oriented women see these qualities as inimical to

the central functions of motherhood and that they

invoke self-doubt in these women. (Neugarten,1964,

pg. 85; Miller,1973,pg. 360; Moulton,1973,pp.45-9)

The women studied said that these traits may

enhance the worth of a woman only if they supplement

rather than replace traditional roles and relation-

ships. Thus, it is not surprising that a content

analysis of research on middle-aged women identified

a major psychological problem for tham as "being so

involved with others they cannot disengage." (Sherman,

1971,pg.22)

For many women, the loss of the mother function

and the restriction of the wife function become a

double bind - to continue to derive identity from

others creates an uncomfortable and untenable

dependency that lowers their sense of personal

power and limits their sources of gratification,to

participate in role spheres outside the home threat-

ens any sense of adequacy that has remained intact.

Given the manner in which women identify with these options, the pervasive anomie and the contrast in perception of environment of middle-aged women to other groups is understandable.

Hogie Wyckoff summarized the dynamics that underlie the inability to disengage in terms of transactional psychology. A concept that is often used in transactional psychology is that of the "banal script". Scripts are life-plans induced in childhood from the image one forms of oneself through the injunction and attributions of authority figures. Banal scripts are those in which the individual does not seek roles on the basis of subjective requirements but, rather, almost automatically does what his or her ascribed characteristics demand. In banal life-scripts, the individual 'takes' roles rather than creates them. The fundamental premise of transactional analysis is that psychological integration is based on an appropriate ratio of "strokes" (recognition, ego

enhancement) to strokes given. If this ratio is skewed, the functioning ability of the individual will be impaired.

Wyckoff's analysis of womens' scripts is based on the premise that the development of nurturing and suportive capacities will oblige them to give out more strokes than they receive. She says,

"... women become one dimentional specialists incapable of functioning autonomously ... and are trained to accept the mystification that they are not O.K. and inadequate and independent; so they must embrace a situation of stroke exploitation. (Wyckoff, 1971, pp. 16-17)

Wyckoff summarizes a typical middle-aged woman's script this way.

"... she takes care of everyone but herself. She gives twenty [strokes] for every one that she gets and accepts this inequity because she feels she is the least important member of the family and her worth is only as a source of supplies. This inequity is constantly made legitimate by the media's promotion of "housewife" and mother as capable of providing women woth meaning and ful- fillment. She feels worthless because strokes and meaning in life do not come to her for herself... but for her husband and children. When her tasks and usefulness ends, often coincidental with menopause, she undergoes psychic death. (involutional melancholia) " (Wyckoff,1971,pg. 16)

If the nurture and support of others is almost the exclusive basis for survival and any activity that usurps these roles is equated with psychic death, it is not surprising that middle-aged women are the exception to research findings that most people anticipating major life events see their future as positive. (Bart, 1967,pg.144; Fiske-Lowenthal et. al., 1975, pg. 205)

It has also been observed that middle-aged women in an identity crisis are usually unable to describe their problem specifically and tend to feel guilty about not being satisfied with their situation. A relationship may exist between these two difficulties and the threatening implications of blaming or expressing anger at the very people who 'justify' their existence. Gerald Self comments as follows in this subject.

"...the perceived loss of attractiveness, functioning ability or whatever else the woman realistically identifies or imagines usually generates great anger. But, who can be blamed for one's age or menopause? Thus, many women are caught in the dilemna of trying to contain a rage whose expression has no appropriate target ...this rage is internalized and directed towards the self ...

The peculiar manner in which many women deal with
normal anger generated by their environment is the
second major cause of the feminine depressive
syndrome which occurs with such frequency."
(Self, 1969, pg. 4)

Marjorie Fiske-Lowenthal found that middle-aged

women who exhibited symptoms of situational

distress complained of "confusion" in large numbers.

However, her review of the literature revealed that

most middle-aged women do not feel that empty nest

or menopause are particular problems. The majority

saw these events as a relief from fear of pregnancy

and the time-consuming demands of childrearing.

(Fiske-Lowenthal et.al.,1975,pg. 23) These data

are consonant with the report on middle age of

the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of

Women and Pauline Bart's research into middle-aged

womens' perception of these events. (Bart, 1967.

pg. 12; Dulude,1978,pg. 19)

The idea that 'not knowing who to blame"

contributes to middle age depression and confusion

has been reiterated in other examinations of the

problem and in the work of Phyllis Chesler in

particular. (Chesler, 1971, pg. 746)

Many middle-aged women are confused and target their anger inward. This is the logical conclusion of the evidence presented above:

a) the correlation established between the incidence of social difficulties and the end of the childrearing stage

b) the relationships suggested betweeen the structure of the traditional female role and adaptability

c) and finally, the suggestion that any change in direction is not capatible with the values of many middle-aged women

Pauline Bart stresses the distinction between the sadness at seeing children leaving and the problem of empty nest crisis. She says,

"It is the loss of the role itself that is to blame and the <u>way it was linked to self-concept.</u> (my own emphasis) ... Women who are overcommitted to the maternal role are suffering the unattended consequences of that commitment. Many women who adapt were very close with their children while a great number who get depressed did not get along with them." (in Dulude,1978,pg. 15)

These "unattended consequences" have been

identified as a progressive decline in personal

growth values, a lack of sense of control

accompanied by a crippling dependence on others,

a limited role scope and inadequate personal

resources to adapt to transitional stress.

(Self, 1969,pg. 6; Fiske-Lowenthal et.al., 1975

pg. 159)

Marjorie Fiske-Lowenthal summarized the

situation of middle-aged women in her sample as

follows.

"The profile of women facing the empty nest
is one of not very "quiet desperation" ... these
middle-aged women were the least sure of themselves
of all groups and their uneasy and often conflicting
characterizations of themselves suggest identity
confusion if not outright "crisis". The future in
general looked bleak and empty to [her] and the
majority did not feel in control. They reported
themselves to be unhappy; they reported more
psychological symptoms than anyone else; and they
were the most likely to say at some time they had
contemplated suicide. Their life styles were
primarily simplistic.**** While they had more complex
social horizons than younger women and altruistic
goals ...they felt uneasy about their ability and
motivation to realize them. Regardless of the amount
of stress they experienced, they were preoccupied
with it. Many seemed in dispair about their marriages
and what they sensed to be an increasing dependency
on their husbands." (Fiske-Lowenthal et.al.,1975,
pg. 199)

**** defined as"few roles and limited range of
activities" (pg. 13)

Pauline Bart and Marjorie Fiske-Lowenthal both observed that the particulars of a woman's situation were not directly correlated to the amount of distress reported. Whether the woman had a good experience as a parent or whether there were particular difficulties in her environment at the time was basically irrelevant. The crucial 'variables' seemed to be:

a) an ability to envisage a substitute role that did not represent "self-estrangement" - that was not "inimical to self-ideal set" (Seeman,1959)

b) whether the structure of the adult role the woman had held to that point had allowed her to attend to matters of personal growth or had damaged her ability to perceive of herself as competent in her own right

Though an inherently dysfunctional life situation can occur at any age,for either sex, the incidence of dispair and psychological difficulties

in middle-aged women has been reported to have reached "epidemic proportions" and to be markedly more prevalent than in most other groups.(Wetzel, 1976b,pg.11) That the evidence points to no situational or psychological antecedents except an overcommit ment to the traditional female role and that it suggests that successful adjustment through life is negatively correlated to"feminine characteristics" (Long Laws,1971,pg. 495; Cooperstock,1976,pg. 107; Fiske-Lowenthal et.al., 1975,pg. 218) further demonstrates that the difficulties of middle-aged women meet the criteria of a latent social problem. An objectively undesir- able and destructive situation that can be seen to be social in origin exists.

In this group, the extent of the difficulties would seem to preclude an interpretation relying on the unique characteristics of individual situations or isolated constellations of events in particular lives. Those who strictly adhere to consensual norms experience more trouble than those who do

not. Therefore, it is reasonable to eliminate an explanation based on deviancy. A Dysfunctional interpretation assumes that the characteristics of troubled middle-aged women render them incapable of meeting the functional requirements of the collectivity. (Merton,1971,pg. 820) Material presented in subsequent chapters of this essay will support the view that,within widely-accepted definitions of these requirements, the situation of middle-aged women is not seen to have substantial impact on the workings of essential sectors of society.

However, there seems to be little question that a great number of middle-aged women cannot derive any meaning or find any purpose in their environment. Some studies have suggested that the situation of middle-aged women is related both to strict adherence to norms and an absence of norms. Belknap and Friedman found that a loss of identity can be due to either institutionalization (altruistic)

or to the disappearence of normative minima(anomie)
Strict adherence to institutional norms can
deny the unique humanity of an individual and
ultimately destroy any capacity for autonomy. In the
other hand, social interaction is dependent on some
kind of framework and must collapse in the absence
of norms. (Belknap and Friedman,1949,pg. 370) In
this context it is not difficult to imagine how
one can lead to the other. If altrusim hampers
autonomous function, it may logically follow that
the symptoms of anomie,which are thematically
linked as aspects of impotence or incompetence,
can result.

In "The Meaning of Alienation", the situation
of anomie was correlated to isolation,low status
and alack of participation in formal and informal
groups. (Seeman,1959) The author found five
correlates to alienation: feelings of social
isolation,normlessness,feelings of meaninglessness,
feelings of powerlessness and self-estrangment-
"failure to meet self-ideal set". These five features

have been widely identified as indigenous to the situation of middle-aged women who identify with traditional sex-role values. In terms of the social problem, then, the difficulties of middle-aged women can be defined as widespread alienation in a large number of persons. In addition, a theoretical assumption underlying the concepts of alienation and anomie is that "there is a disparity between cultural goals and opportunity in the social structure for individuals to achieve a sense of social cohesion" - to be able to identify their needs with the functions available to them. (Davis, 1970,pp.36-7)

One theoretical perspective that seeks to outline the dynamics of alienation uses the concept of the "Unemployed Self". The central assumption is that the fundamental and universal dynamic behind modern culture is Utilitarianism. Following from this assumption, it is proposed that to receive rewards and opportunities, an

individual must submit to an education and a socialization that, early on, validate and cultivate only those selected parts of the individual that are expected to have subsequent utility. Once the individual is inducted into this structure, she receives rewards or opportunities in proportion to the perception of usefulness of others in a collectively defined hierarchy. Thus, the Utilitarian framework constitutes a selective mechanism that divides the world into the "useful" and the "not useful." Another implication of the Utilitarian assumption is that the opportunities available in such a culture include or exclude certain attributes and teach the individual to organize self and personality to conform to operating standards of utility. This theoretical framework includes the notion that those attributes of a person that do not directly relate to her collectively defined function impinge on her utility and, hence, the personality or social structure

that is not viewed as potentially useful is
"managed" by a system of closing avenues for
the experience of those aspects. Thus, the system
leaves only one option - social adjustment to
roles circumscribed by utility to the system.
When an individual is unable to adjust, the
results are alienation or rebellion. (Gouldner.
1970, sec.II,part 3,"The Unemployed Self)

A definition of the problems of middle-aged
women within this framework would seem to be
compatible with the description of feminine
middle-aged crisis presented earlier in terms
of transactional psychology. Wyckoff believed
that, because of their socialization, adult women
accept a role structured around utility to others
and neglect or are compelled to neglect the
cultivation of their own personal resources. She
believed, that since nurturing is collectively
equated with usefulness of adult women,at middle
age, their perceived usefulness to the system is

over and, so, they suffer from alienation, an alienation induced by their isolation from fulfilling opportunities, low status in a collectively-defined hierarchy of utility and being barred from alternatives.

This kind of perspective considers individual and societal functioning together. Jesse Bernard believes that social problems can only be understood in such a manner rather than existing in 'macro' or 'micro' universes. She argues for a unity in social science and underscores the symbiotic relationship between psychology and sociology. In this context, the distinction between studies of the individual and studies of society becomes an academic convenience. Bernard identifies the interaction of the individual, status and role as the frame of reference for examining the problems of the second half of the twentieth century. (Bernard, 1957, pg. x, pg. 50)

If we accept the contention widespread depression in middle-aged women is fundamentally related to the forces operating in an essentially Utilitarian culture, the prevalence of this illness is strong evidence for the conclusion that an inaability to function within circumscribed roles leads to either alienation or rebellion. The evidence that large numbers of middle-aged women are alienated has been presented earlier. Phyllis Chesler has proposed that depression in traditionally-oriented women can also be understood as an expression of rebellion against restrictive definitions of their functions. Briefly, her thesis is that an individual who is in a subservient position to others and who can find no other alternatives will wage "covert" rebellion against those who have power over her by manifesting symptoms of depression. These symptoms make her unable to fill the role she finds untenable. Chesler describes this kind of depression as an "unconscious strike directed toward resented task masters". (Chesler, 1971, pp. 746 ff.)

Within this context, subsequent chapters will investigate the view that the widespread dispair of middle-aged women is a result of their inability to adjust to legitimate expectations. The attempt will be made to ascertain the extent to which the personal attributes of women are understood in terms of their utility as mothers. The widely-supported definitions of adult women will be examined to ascertain the degree to which they deny reward or opportunity outside a collectively-defined function , the degree to which the utilization of the "non useful" segments of woman's selves is seen as inimical to the collective good and, finally, the degree to which problems posed by current definitions of female functions are ignored. Through this investigation, the concept of the "Unemployed Self" as applicable to the situation of middle-aged women will be thoroughly examined.

Finally, the proposition that Utilitarian culture manages the aspirations of individuals and groups by not acknowledging alternative roles merit

recognition will be examined in the light of
of evidence that the situation of middle-aged
women lacks the legimization of dominant groups.

The exploration of these question may provide
a theoretical framework unifying divergent
definitions of the problem.

Summary of Chapter Two

The statistical data available on the incidence
of various phenomena generally accepted as indicators
of a social problem and individual distress have been
reviewed. These data indicate that the incidence of
psychiatric illness, suicide, alcoholism and legal
drug use markedly increases in women at middle age
and is correlated to marital status and má òr
occupation. The prevalence rate for these
difficulties is not comparable for men, unmarried
women or women who primarily identify themselves
with spheres outside the family, In addition, no
correlations have been found in the literature
between these social indicators and age for men.

These statistics suggest that these problems are
realted to sex status and widespread similarities
in the circumstances of middle-aged women rather
than individual life situations. As well, they
indicate that unmarried men have more problems
than married men, suggesting that the spouse role
holds different implications for the two sexes.

Descriptive data on the characterisitcs
common to middle-aged women have been presented
and related to some theoretical conceptions of
social and psychological functioning. Literature
was cited in support of the contention that the
housewife-mother role received less status than
other roles and did not constitute a basis for
feelings of importance and self-worth for many
women. Middle-aged women, in particular, could
find little meaning or purpose in their daily
lives.

The propostion that the structure of the
traditional housewife-mother role presented
obstacles to finding alternatives at middle age
was related to social power. If social power
is correlated to the ratio of dependence and

independence in social relationships, the exclusive dependency on others for identity inherent in traditional roles may result in perceptions of little social power and low status by both the woman and those around her.

Research that is consistant with the view that traditional middle-aged women have held adult roles that compel them to be dependent on others for identity, to exist within a narrow role scope and that offer little opportunity to receive feedback on their personal competence has been reviewed. Identification with the traditional mother-wife role was seen to be negatively correlated to social and personal difficulties. The research suggested that committment to traditional sex roles may be a predictor of social difficulties in middle age. The relationship between these two 'variables' is more evident then any correlations between stressful events in individual situations or personality characteristics.

The structural dependence and limits to alternate meaningful purposes leaves many middle-aged women with no viable alternatives. Some authors believe this is due to a personal value internalized by traditional women which causes them to see alternative roles as threatening their essential identity- equating feminity with nurturing. These women see assertiveness as inimical to both feminity and nurturing. However, assertiveness and personal mastery are seen as essential to adaptive capacity. Within this framework, either a traditional female role or substituting a more autonomous role destroy identity. In addition, findings that how one identifies with a role will determine its impact have been related to descriptive material illustrating that the sense of a lack of social power and the inability to relate intrapsychic needs to any particular course of action have led many middle-aged women to exhibit symptoms of self-estrangement.

Marvin Seeman's work on alienation offers a
framework in which strict adherence to norms at
one point in time can be seen to lead to an
anomic situation charactarized by psychic
exhaustion, low status, low self-esteem and an
inability to find meaningful guidelines in
the environment. Parallel frameworks within
psychology were presented in order to unify the
individual and social contexts of the problem.

Finally, the concept of the "Unemployed
Self" has been presented. It has been suggested
that a definition of the problem of middle-aged
women within this framework would account for
any discrepancy between widely-held views of the
situation of this group and the extant empirical
data and explain why their problem is not
recognized as a legitimate public concern. It
was also proposed that the consequences foreseen
within the conception of the dymanics of the
"Unemployed Self" in a utilitarian culture are
paralleled in the situation of many traditionally
oriented middle-aged women.

Given the descriptions of the situation of
middle-aged women, the conclusion has been drawn
that it meets the criteria of a latent social
problem. There is evidence to support the case
that the difficulties of this group are social
in origin, are not primarily the function of
personal attributes or individual life events
and that they are affecting a large number of
people.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL STANDARDS

Introduction

A central criterion of a social problem is the existence of a significant discrepancy between social standards and social actuality. (Merton, 1971,pg. 794) The response to such an incongruity will depend,for the most part, on the values relevant to the situation. "New issues and new problems can emerge without any objective change in status as a result of a change in prorities of value." (Davis,1970,pg.30) Herbert Blumer proposes that "social problems are fundamentally products of a process of collective definition instead of exisiting indepedently as a set ofobjective social arrangements with an intrinsic make-up." (Blumer, 1971,pg. 298) He presents evidence to support the case that world-view and ideology are chief determinants of societal reaction to 'social problems.'

and that the world-view of social scientists
affects their reactions in the same way. Thus,
social scientists' interpretations of events
should be seen as aprt of the collective
definition of standards and not as pure reportage.

Whether these values and ideologies allow the
legitimization of a situation as a public concern
is directly related to the observer of the situation.
Social problem literature identifies the relevant
groups to be those that are 'functionally
significant', 'dominant' or 'salient'. The
circumstances that are problematic must be seen to
pertain to the welfare of these 'significant',
'dominant' or 'salient' groups.

Robert Merton, among others, has identified
social scientists as one the the primary forces
in accomodating the remediation of the objectively
perceivable distress of particualr groups into
collective definitions of acceptable social
standards. However, social scientists' descriptions
of social situations select those characteristics
perceived to be salient in terms of the theoretical
base of their particular academic area.

(Gouldner,1970,pg. 84; Merton, 1971,pg. 808;

Mednick and Tangri,1972,pg. 6; Henshel and

Henshel,1973,pg. 75) Thus, social science not

only serves a function of integrating previously

unrecognized phenomena in to the social landscape

but determines by choice of emphases the ideological

context within which they will be perceived.

As stated previously,the knowledge and values

of social work are widely acknowledged to be

derived from psychology and sociology, particularly

from psychoanalytic frameworks and the instrumental-

posivistic theories of sociology.. (Lucas,E.S.W.,

1971,pg. 324; Henshel and Henshel,1973,pg 84;

Meisel and Friedman,1974,pg. 70; Wetzel,1976a,

pp. 232-3) Material has been presented demonstrating

that the social work profession formally integrates

an issue into fields of practice on the basis of

official societal sanction.

In the previous chapter,it was represented

that the social actuality of middle-aged women as

a group may be considered as a latent social problem. Given the function of social science described above, a review of the social standards and interpretations of the meanings of these standards in the social science frameworks from which social work practice is derived is of interest. Some practice literature which directly relates the ways the social science knowledge base is integrated into interventive frameworks will also be reviewed.

A description of widely-accepted criteria should offer insight into the degree of incongruence betweeen the circumstances of adult women and social standards. If there is no disparity, this may aid in describing how the situation is interpreted and what the nature of the problem is thought to be. Finally, a review of the beliefs underlying social work practice with this group may be useful in establishing what is generally seen to constitute 'functional significance'.Given the close relationship earlier

presented between a traditional female role and difficulty during middle-age, the focus will be on the treatment of this role in terms of social work values.

The Female Role

i Wives and Mothers

The conceptions of the place of adult women and their problems in general are particularly relevant to the examination of middle-aged women as a group. The middle stage in the life cycle of a woman is a point of confluence where the social forces that act on women meet. The circumstances of middle-aged women provide an exemplar case of the consequences, both good and bad, of functioning within various definitions of the female role.

This idea has been expressed by one writer as follows:

"We are not only middle aged,but we feel caught in the middle of our past and present...we have always been in the middle. We were raised to have respect for our elders and to see it as a central focus in our lives to please our parents: we are

still trying to do this...we were the first
crop of parents to take our childrens' failures
and limitations as indication of our
inadequacies not theirs; the first to believe that
one could aspire to become a perfect parent. We
found ourselves in the middle trying to please an
older and younger generation."(Leshan,1973,pg.24)

Noting that the problems of middle-aged women
seem to rebound off the expectations of others in
the family and in society and the personal issues
of accomplishment and adequacy, the writer
continues,

"There we are, trying to face what menopause
or empty nest or retirement will mean to us as
women and we are caught in the midst of a battle
of what it means to be a woman from birth to
daeth."(Leshan,1973,pg. 102)

Susan Meisel sees the situation of middle-aged
women as exemplary,as "the most glaring problem"
associated with the implications of the adult
female roles.   (Meisel,1974,pg.68)

Marjorie Fiske-Lowenthal selected the situation
of middle-aged women as the focus of her conclusions
on the dynamics of adult development across life
stages. Expressing pessimism about the ability of
current social standards to accomodate the

developmental needs of adult women, she ends
with this statement.

"We may soon find ourselves with an increasing
proportion of frustrated, self-deprecating or
even self-hating middle-aged and older individuals
whose personal way out of a dilemna is to adopt
the sick role, thus wreaking a legitimate if not
deliberate revenge on a society that has denied
them any challenging alternatives."
(Fiske-Lowenthal et.al.,1975,pg. 245)

These kinds of observations support the
relevance of examining definitions of social
standards of adult sex-roles to provide a context
for understanding middle-aged women. There will be
self-evident parallels in the implications of
definitions of the feminine situation in general
and those of middle-aged women in particular.

The context in which adult women are viewed
and the significance accorded to their aspirations
may be illustrated by the kind of representation
their issues receive in the literature. Several
authors who write about middle-aged women have
noted that there has been very little research
done on this topic in the past making it

necessary to extrapolate from research areas they
thought were relevant. (Bart,1967,pp.1-4;Klass and
Redfern,1977.pg.102:Dulude,1978,pg.1)Furthermore,
when issues are raised in general social science
literature about women, it appears that, over-
whelmingly, women warrent attention as wives and
mothers. One critic observed:

"By far, the largest segment of sociological
literature concerning women is focussed on their
roles as wives,mothers and housewives ... they
ARE the family ... a favorite word is "role" and
the dramaturgical metaphor is highly appropriate.
In family and marriage literature, women are
encapsulated within the feminine role. The
psychoanalytic view has lead to an implicit
definition of women as wives and mothers TO THE
VIRTUAL EXCLUSION OF ANY OTHER AREA OF LIFE."
(emphasis of the author) (Oakley,1974,pg.17)

Another author has presented evidence that
widely-used conceptual frameworks in sociology
include women as independent factors only when
considering the family institution and neglect to
consider them as salient in the study of economic
and political structures. As well, womens' role
within the family is described as the maintainance
of human relationships. There are few descriptions
of any instrumental function for women within the

family. This author, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, believes
that the implications of such a pervasive conceptual
framework directly relate the functional signifi-
cance of women as a group to their ability to
fill these ascribed requirements. (Epstein, 1974,
pp. 655 ff.)

ii <u>The General View</u>

The study of the areas of marriage and family
receives low status within academe. The relatively
low significance accorded these subjects has had
the effect, in the eyes of some observers, to
'persistantly trivialize' their importance.
(Long Laws, 1969; Bart, 1971, pg. 736; Bernard,
1973, pp. 22 ff.; Oakley, 1974, pg. 18)

Several woman academics report that the problems
of women are not considered to be as important as
those of other groups, particulary racial minorities
and the poor. One female sociologist wrote,

"Womens' studies were seen to have little value
in understanding politics, art or literature and
also not as important as poor or blacks...Thus
there has been an alliance formed [to exclude
women from analytic structure of social problems]
between The Establishment and the radicals."
(Epstein, 1974, pg. 647)

Mednick and Tangri support this observation,
presenting documentation from academic sources
and the writings of Black leaders in the United
States. (Mednick and Tangri,1972,pp. 12-6) Another
writer, Susan Meisel, feels that in many professional
and academic circles, the womens' movement had been
"dismissed as a fad". She perceived considerable
reluctance within these groups to accomodate the
social forces behind the womens' movement into
their analytic frameworks.(Meisel, 1974,pg. 67)

Investigation has been done into the
situation of female academics and the work they
produce about women. While 33% of graduate
sociology students were women,only 15% of teaching
and research appontments were held by them. Female
sociologists are less likely to be full-time faculty,
have lower faculty rank on average and are more
likely to be restricted to teaching undergraduate
courses. (Humphrey,1974,pg. 219) The situation of
female psychologists is similar. (Fidell,1970)

In social work journals, 67% of the articles written between 1968 and 1973 were written by men while 67% of all social workers were women. (Gripton,1974,pg. 79)

One study of footnote patterns suggests the main readership of female academics who write about women is more or less restricted to other female academics. (Kravetz,1976,pg. 425)

These observations may mean that the quality of attention accorded womens' issues limits the possibility their distress will be viewed as a priority.

iii Basic Distinctions:The Social Science Perspective

Concepts of the place and importance of adult women rest on the assumption that women are essentially different from men. This distinction may have become so much a part of the cognitive landscape as to appear to reflect a self-evident truth.

Testing for masculine and feminine traits has failed to acheive any consistency in predictive value. Clinical psychologists are unable to tell whether a test had been written by a woman or a man. (Weisstein,1971)In a recent large scale study examining the characteristics of men and women, Spence and Helmreich concluded they could find no evidence that any differences in the cognitive mechanisms and psychological require- ments of individuals could be attributed to sex. Specifically selecting the issues of achievement and personal adequacy, they emphasized that no basis was found for believing the underlying dynamics differed for men and women. (Spence and Helmreich,1978,pg. 110) These findings are consistent with research findings regarding the relationship between various traits and sex in the past. In 1936, Lewis Madison Herman and Catherine Cox Miles tried to establish a scale in which personalities could be measured in terms

of their relative masculinity and femininity.

They applied their own scale - carefully worked

out on the basis of questionnaires, test of

attitude, test of interest, opinions and

emotional response - to various groups classified

by age, education, occupation and other social

characteristics, concluding that"femininity is

a quality divorced from sex." (Klein,1951,pg. 8)

Later social science procedures have not

reflected this finding. Garai wrote the following

in 1970:

" ... any available mental health tests that
assume men and women derive happiness from similar
experiences of success and satisfaction and share
the same needs and life goals and do not basically
differ in attitudes, values and beliefs [these
tests are not sensitive to major areas of difference
that exist between men and women] Any mental test
that lays claim to validity must provide differential
criteria and separate norms for males and females."
(Garai, 1970,pg. 125)

The "major areas of difference" he goes on to

identify later in his monograph more or less reflect

principles generally recognized to underly social

work and psychotherapeutic practice with women,

These principles have been summarized by one
author as follows:

"The male is the prototype of humanity.
The female is understood in relation to him.
Observed charcteristics of humanity are
ascribed to women to a greater or lesser
degree (more emotional,less intelligent) ...
[the second is] a dichotomy is established
between the cognitive and affective aspects of
human functioning which are assigned to men and
women respectively. The significance of this
dichotomy for women is virtual identity with
her sensuality and body,so pervasive are these
ideas and the question of the primacy of the
rational as to suggest that man is closely
identified with his body as women is to count
ridicule." (Doherty,1973,pg.68)

The pervasiveness of these themes in social
work and social science literature is beyond
question.

Mary Schwartz has identified the works of
Erik Erikson, Theodore Lidz and Nathan Ackerman
as core components of social work curricula in
the United States. (Schwartz,1973,pg.65)

Erikson proposes a developmental model in
which resolution of various conflicts of identity

in young men lead to a sense of personal mastery
and an effectively functioning adult.

"This integration will be found to be a
combination of mechanical ability ...
autonomy ... leadership and tolerance. Young women,
on the other hand ...must carry the burden of
becoming a woman and a mother ... [her] crisis
will come [with] the vicissitudes of child
training." (Erikson,1963,pp.320-1)

In a later essay, very often included in
anthologies about women, Erikson wrote,

"Am I saying then, that "anatomy IS destiny"?
Yes, it is destiny ... Anatomy co-determines
personality configurations. The modalities of
womans's commitment and involvement, for better
or worse, reflect the ground plan of her body ...
a woman is never not-a-woman, she can see her
long-term goals only in those modes of activity
which include and integrate her natural disposi-
tions ... that which nurses and nourishes, cares
and tolerates, includes and preserves."
(Author's emphasis) (Erikson,1964b,pp.24-6)

While young mens' identity is resolved in
Erikson's work around issues of mastery of skills,
autonomy and achievement, a woman does not achieve
identity until she becomes a mother and is
incomplete until then. When Garai noted that
unmarried women without children exhibit symptoms

of social maladjustment less often than other

groups, he found this "remarkable" in the face

of the losses they suffer in ability to acheive

identity. He ascribes this adjustment to

"overcompensation". (Garai,1970,pg. 134)

In addition, consistent with the summary of

major themes in the psychology of women presented

earlier, Erikson does identify the female body

as the"ground plan" of her personality but not

a similar renunciation of achievement in males

to meet libidinal needs.

Jesse Bernard imagines a social theory

ascribing a parallel 'ground plan' for men

reading as follows:

"It is unreasonable to look forward to a time
when introductory texts begin with the fundamental
social datum that all societies include two
collectivites, one in which the members are
characteristically smaller,slower, less physically
powerful etc., the other less tolerant of sexual
deprivation etc.; but both must live in a common
locale ... I would be happy if this idea produced
even a miniscule shift in atleast one person's
perspective."(Bernard, 1973,pg.22)

The work of Theodore Lidz can be viewed as an expansion of the basic principles of female adult development in Erikson. He offers the incumbent social worker or psychotherapist a description of what 'normal' female identity should look like.

"The formation of female identity consists of the successful resolution of the female identity crisis ... the adolescent girl wants to achieve, to fulfill incomplete feelings [because of the American Acheivement Ethic] ... and, so uses her intellect agressively and phallicly ...

Resolution of her conflict occurs when the female perogative of remaining dependent and gaining status through her her husband's acheivement becomes more enticing.

"Her previous contempt of the woman's role in life and of women who are content to fill it turns into appreciation of its advantages."(Lidz,1968, pg. 351)

iv Implications

Thus, the female identity is structured around accomodation to dependency and a renunciation of personal intellectual and psychological needs. These two circumstances have been correlated to low

self-esteem, the inability for autonomous

adaptation to changing life circumstances and

eventual lack of cohesion with the social

environment. Despite this apparent contradiction,

the developmental aspects of middle-aged women

continue to be seen in the context of frameworks

such as Erikson's and Lidz's.

The Importance of Physiology

A recurrent theme is that middle age

disturbances are grounded in female physiology.

Based on the assumption that menstruation and

motherhood enhance ego strength in women because

they learn to accept the implications of their

physiology, psychological development in middle

age is seen to be a function of how well this

accomodation has been acheived.

" ... the cyclical repetition of gonadal
function of women has a method (sic) of practicing
adaptive capacities. The repetitiveness of the
sexual cycle prepares the woman not only for
motherhood but, through the mastery of fluctuations
corresponding to hormonal decline and menstruation,
for cessation of gonadal stimulation at the
climacterium." (Benedek,1950,pg. 10)

The central thesis is that:

" ... a woman has to have a personality
which permits her to be passive, to be loved and
cared for, so that she may give into her
physiological needs with pleasure, without protest,
and thus may enjoy pregnancy and motherhood. If
her personality does not permit her to respond to
physiological needs, she will struggle against
them during every sexual cycle."
(Benedek, 1950,pg. 18)

The type of women who are perceived as having

problems at middle age are those who have

sublimated their 'femininity' and so have not

mastered the feminine adaptive processes.Specifically

identified are women who, because of their

"narcissistic" faults, have sought their emotional

gratification through intellectual or professional

pleasures, sublimating and rejecting the female

sexuality which, supposedly, results in growth of

a total personality.

Another standard interpretation is that middle

age represents a resurgence of feminine identity

conflict which, it may be recalled, is resolved

through motherhood. Losing the means to integrate

her identity, the middle-aged woman's crisis comes to a resolution when, as a grandmother, she can identify with married daughters and daughters-in-law. Thus she fulfills the basic needs of feminine psychology - "intuition and motherliness". According to this theory, the "condition of most middle-aged women is not normal". (Fessler,1950,pg. 28)

Though strict Freudian interpretations have fallen out of vogue, the identification of womens' psychology with the body is still prevalent in altered forms. (Doherty,1973,pg. 69) However, empirical studies of menopausal women reveal that 20% report no symptoms, psychological or physical, during menopause. (Dulude,1978,pg. 14) Only ten percent of women report symptoms more severe than flushing or headaches. (Bart, 1967, pg. 171) More importantly, menopausal depression has been correlated to previous maladjustment or emotional instability and usually appears within a constellation of other symptoms of emotional impairment. (Mcfarlane,1956) The only symptom

research has thus far related exclusively to

menopause is night sweats. (Dulude,1978,pg. 14)

From her interviews with middle-aged women,

Bernice Neugarten could find no biological/

psychological parallels to be drawn. in fact,

menopause ranked low in the list of major

concerns expressed. Both men and women conceived

of the movement from one age level to the next

in terms of social changes rather than in terms

of the biological. When women spoke about menopause,

it was...

" ... in terms of no longer being afraid of
pregnancy, of having more privacy with the
childrens' departure, a greater acceptence of
their bodies and better sexual and emotional
relations with their spouses."

Neugarten concludes,

" ... though many menopausal women are annoyed
by their symptoms, overall, it is a great relief."
(Neugarten,1968a)

Neugarten's findings have been corroborated

in the works of other researchers. In addition,

many studies found that menopause was a positive

or neutral occurence in many womens' lives.

(Bart, 1967, pp. 165-85; Livson,1977,pp.81-2)

Menopausal Anxiety

As with 'empty nest', menopausal anxiety appears
to be related to an over-commitment to the maternal
role. As with empty nest crisis, menopausal anxiety
is associated with a role loss and a perceived sense
of discontinuity of purpose. The etiology of
menopausal depression has been described as follows:

"The very phrase "change of life" means a tacit
acceptence and endorsement of a utilitarian view of
menopause by the culture. It further implies changes
in the pattern of life, from what one has been
familiar with to what is yet to be defined. The
illness becomes covert communication of hostilities
toward significant others. (you deserted me, now I
compel you to take care of me) In addition, American
culture emphasizes individual independence and even
dependence on one's children is not culturally
sanctioned. This fear of dependence together with
the low status of the old, derived from the
utilitarian philosophy of the Frontier, may be
anticipated with anxiety ... and trigger disinte-
gration in the constricted+++ individual."
(Kisik,1961,pp.237-8)

Although menopausal depression can be related
classically to low status and prestige, dependency,
rolelessness and a self-perception of uselessness
and narrow role scope, the element of rebellion
against a psychicly exhausting situation may also

+++ defined by the author as narrow role scope
        pg. 235

apply.

Though the impact of decreased hormonal activity is the subject of much debate, evidence that menopausal depression is social and not physiological in origin is supported by the findings on the effect of estrogen therapy on menopausal emotional problems. "In the majority of cases, many symptoms, depression in particular, persist even after estrogen treatment has restored pre-menopausal hormone balance." (Dulude,1978,pg. 14)

Summary

Thus, while standard texts widely used in social work training* propose that there is an intrinsic

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* The sociology and psychology works used as examples in this chapter have been used in the curricula of most social work schools as shown in the two articles by Wetzel (op.cit.), Meisel (op.cit.) and Schwartz(op.cit.). They are also identified in the Encyclopedia of Social Work (16th Issue) s.v. "Socialization and Interpersonal Change", "Socialization: Social Structure and Personality", "Socialization Methods in Social Work Practice" and "Ethics".

relationship between bio-sexual characteristics
and the psychology of women, there has been little
to support this belief in the results of empirical
investigations. Specifically, physiological
changes occurring at menopause have not been found
to correlate directly to any 'typical feminine'
psychological response. In addition, despite
support of passivity as the proper feminine role,
depression or more severe impairment is more
prevalent in middle-aged women who have been
commited to this role to a high degree.

The roles of adult women are equated with their
utility within the family and are considered relevant
only in terms of this equation. Since the family
institution is conceptually isolated from other
societal spheres, it is consistent with such a
framework to define the problems of middle-aged
women exclusively in terms of family functions.
The significance of womens' problems and their
study is seen to be relatively minor- an extension
of the general view of the importance of women as
a group in society. To see the middle-aged woman's

problem as deviancy from norms in an individual
precludes consideration of collective
responsibility for their difficulties and viewing
the social remediation of these difficulties as
necessary to the common good.

The issue of competency and social power is
directly related to this exclusive equation of
womens' achievement and to the relative
inconsequentiality of womens' activities for many
societal mechanisms. On the one hand, the feminine
role is viewed as imperative and necessary for
achieving personal fuflfillment, and on the other,
womens' discontent is defined in terms of evasion
of their responsibility to develop themselves and
participate in other spheres by 'choice'. (Turner,
1970,pp.273-7) Some versions have it that, though
some adult women do take on responsibility,society
always demands less from them. Therefore, their
lives are easier than those of men. The assumption
here is that, because the obligations of adult

women are limited, any activity they undertake
beyond these responsibilities is not evaluated
as closely as male activity,which is obligatory
while theirs is voluntary. Within these frameworks,
the public activity of women is perceived as being
significant only as avocations and not as necessary
contributions tp political or economic spheres. In
addition, it is assumed that motherhood, which is
defined as an adult woman's primary resonsibility,
may allow her to evade more 'important' tasks.

Let us pursue the implications and consequences
of these assumptions as evidenced in social work
practice and literature.

Implications for Social Work Theory

The coexistence of these two conflicting
definitions of standards can confuse the formulation
of solutions to the problems of middle-aged women.
It would be consisitent with these definitions to
expect adult women to renounce achievements outside
the family in order to fulfill primary obligations.

It would also be consistent to expect a contribution
to other areas of society on the assumption, that
limiting obligations to the family is not an accept-
able contribution to the collective good. These
definitions imply that the housewife-mother role
is relatively insignificant and   the public
activities of women are insignificant in that they
are "optional". Furthermore, public activities are
not as important as functions within the family.
Within this kind of framework, the difficulty of
identifying how to restore feelings of importance
and worth to middle-aged women with problems is
evident.

The theme that women use the traditional role
to evade other legitimate responsibilites appears
in the writing of Dr. Nathan Ackerman, a widely-
used authority in the field of family dynamics.
Ackerman feels that "women's aggressiveness and
mastery"within the family are only a "facade...
Their facade of self-sufficiency and strength

represents an effort at compensation, to console
herself for her inability ... [she] depends safely
on a man." (Ackerman,1959,pg. 179) More importantly,
in Virginia Satir, he is identified as a major
theoretical influence on her work.(Satir,1971,pg.
200-05) Virginia Satir is a recognized authority
on family practice within the social work profession;
her interventive frameworks are considered core
knowledge in a great many courses on family
counselling.

Satir quotes the following statement from
Ackerman's work. Noting changing mores in the
sex-roles of men and women as a stress of modern
family life, he says,

" ... the forces of change race far ahead of
the forces of continuity ... the father was a man
of vigor, strength and courage, the unchallenged
governor of the family."

Ackerman advocates the reintegration of family
organization through"making authority rigid,
maintaining a sharper division of labour and more
claearly limiting and compartmentalizing roles."
(Ackerman,1959,pp. 147-8) The assumptions behind

this proposal are that family stability is vital

for the continued functioning of society and a

limited and sharply defined role for women is

necessary for family stability. At the same time,

Ackerman (and Satir) believe that mastery of the

traditional role is related to the inability of

women to take on autonomous roles.

The simultaneous expression of the essential

nature of the feminine role and the perception that

commitment to that role is an evasion of responsi-

bility has always been pervasive. One article states:

" ... women lack the self-discipline to ration
their time ... psychologists will tell you that they
[housewives] clutter up their lives with trivial-
ities ... and actually welcome any distraction
because they lack clear-cut objectives and do not
develop willpower ... when a woman gets married, she
feels her goal in life has been achieved and
renounces further ambitions for self-development."

In the same article, this au thor, Agnes Meyer,

states ...

"it has now come to the point where many married
women work and neglect their children because they
feel they must have a paid job to hold respect in
the community ... It is one thing if women work
because they must support their familes or have a
special contribution to make to society. The
deprecation of housework is another thing -

<u>it is socially undesirable-</u> .... as a result, many
worried restless <u>immature</u> females complain bitterly
there are not enough women in the United Nations,
government ... Others actually rebel against the
inescapable fact they are women. Simone de Beauvoir's
<u>The Second Sex</u>   is a brilliant and sinister example
of this pathological state of mind."(my own emphasis)
(Meyer,1956,pg. 149)

In the same article, Meyer has deprecated house-

work and identified the deprecation of housework as

"socially undesirable". It is difficult to imagine

what form "further ambitions for self-development"

might take given that it is socially desirable for

women to work only if they must or if they have a

special contribution to make to society. This

article was written about middle-aged women. Again,

the implication here is that middle-aged women have

no contribution to make except attending to children,

so after childrearing is over, the social standards

for middle-aged women define them as useless.

Meyer's theme that middle-aged women want to do

too little and seek to do too much is reiterated

in other considerations of the problems of middle-

aged women. (Frank,1956; Self, 1969,pp. 9-11)

In their classic study entitled "Lack of Communication between Men and Women" which is yet to be refuted, the Steinmans major finding was that, generally, men expect less of women than women think is expected of them. (Steinman and Steinmen, 1958, pp. 350-2) This finding is consistent with the material presented here which suggests that social standards for middle-aged women consist mainly of be inobtrusive. Alternately, bacause activities, both within and outside the family are granted low import, a woman may well feel the low prestige she is receiving means she is expected to do more. Given this framework, she would not perceive herself to be useful or competent.

The Encyclopedia of Social Work states that women experience less stress than men because they have fewer obligations and functions to fill in society.

... "There is a good deal of evidence that
males have a more difficult time ... than females
do. Advances in science and technology would seem
to have particularly favored women: modern medical
care has drastically reduced the risk of child -
bearing ... educational and vocational opportunities
are virtually as good as those for men; they share
approximately equal rights: they are often favored
by the law; and their small muscled dexterity gives
them a lead in many clerical and manufacturing
positions ... Yet, females are often treated as the
weaker sex: males are expected to protect and
defer to them. The dependencies ... and human frail-
ties of females are more or less encouraged and
indulgently accepted by parents, teachers and
employers ... In many cases, their life experiences
are more benign for them than is the case for men...
socializing agents are far less forgiving of
deficient males than females ... young males are
often caught in a double bind by largely female
socializers - mothers and teachers ... when they
are "little men" - expressive and daring ... and
are "put down" for being too rowdy."
(Chilman, 1971, E.S.W., PP. 1299-1300)

i <u>Scope</u>

Asymmetry in the expectations that men versus
women hold for females, and collective expectations
that the "human frailties" of women will be "indulg-
ently accepted" by parents, spouses and employers
appear widely in the literature. In her review and
analysis of the literature on married women, Judith
Long Laws finds considerable support for both these
observations. Moreover, Long Laws presents and cites

research material that suggests that most men
find these definitions of roles satisfactory and
do not feel they are entitled to increase thier
expectations of the women they live and work with.
(Long Laws ,1971,pg. 488) Taken with the findings
in the Steinman study, and the previous material
from the Encyclopedia of Social Work , it appears
that the norms used in judging womens' behavior
do not define the problems of middle-aged women
as functionally significant. Women who are
exclusively committed to the mother role do not
represent a disparity between social actuality and
social goals for the groups salient in the process
of identifying public issues.

In addition, an assymmetrical balance of
expectations can be correlated to the 'social
power' proposition that the resources an
individual is perceived to have is a major
determinant of the amount of influence she is
permitted to exert. (Martin and Osmond, 1975,
pg. 340) It has already been noted that authors

widely used in social work training apply

standards that define attempts to resolve this

imbalance as unnatural or not consistent with the

collective good.

The perceived threat a revised balance of

expectations would present to society is a major

theme. Moreover, the definition of women as not

really needing more than motherhood is pervasive.

The Council of Social Work Education found

"stereotypical views of female development, anti-

women bias in personality theory and traditional

sex-role standards provide the theoretical frame-

work for much social work practice." It also

found that ...

> " women [in social work texts] were
> presented as innately passive, emotionally
> immature and that motherhood was specified as a
> universal requirement for female fulfillment.
> Standards used to assess and form treatment goals
> for female clients are derived from these concepts.

Further, the council identified the treatment goals

for women in marriage and family practice as

"adjustment-oriented" rather than "emperically

derived". (NASW,1975)

ii Historical Precendent

These conclusions represent a firmly entrenched

historical tradition within the social work

profession. The chief thrust of social casework from

the 1920's to the present has been identified as

Freudian and Neo-Freudian. (Perlman,1960,pg. 537;

Lucas,1971, E.S.W.,pg. 324; Wetzel,1976a,pg. 233)

Despite attempts to integrate concepts of human

interaction that take environmental factors into

account, the editor of a recent five year review

of research in social services concludes that ...

"the notion of "individual failure" still
persists within social service institutions in
America. There is little recognition of the
importance of social forces as a determinent
of economic and psycho-social deprivation."
(Maas, 1971,pg. 192)

Important theorists in social work have always

proposed social work goals consonant with the

stated goals of the NASW, to enter into fields of

practice sanctioned and identified by society.

(Bartlett,1971,E.S.W.,pg. 1480)

The founder of the first social work school
in America in 1921 stated the fundamental principle
of social casework as being:

> "... the adjustment of individuals with social
> difficulties. The better we understand the causes,
> the more readily and confidently we work... No
> time is wasted upon annoyance or indignation with
> the uncooperative housewife, the persistent liar,
> the repeatedly delinquent girl."
> (Jarrett, 1919; quoted in Wetzel, 1976a,pg. 233)

In 1949, almost thirty years later, a handbook
on women with marriage difficulties published by
the Family Service Association of America explained
the following. The desire of a women for satisfying
activity outside the home coupled with a distaste
for housework and child-rearing should be viewed
as a "rejection of femininity". It was considered
necessary to determine whether such an attitude
was a "manifestation of a deep-seated and well-
entrenched pattern of personality disturbance or a
less firmly entrenched pattern of incomplete
maturation". (Hollis, 1949,FSAA,pg. 96,pg. 170)
Dissatisfaction and discontent with the role of
mother and wife, then, was seen as abnormal and
to be cured or adjusted. The treatment goal of

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such immaturity included teaching clients...

> "to develop more patience with their husbands, more stability in their love, more ability to see where they are contributing to the conflict and less self-rightousness." (Hollis,1949,FSAA,pg. 102)

Thus,the author directs women to adjust to society's definition of a selfless nurturer.

iii Recent Approaches to Treatment

A basic textbook in social work practice, written in 1956 and in use until the late sixties, states that treatment is <u>always</u> conditioned by culture. It instructs social work students that...

> "social casework does not include focussing on economic or cultural conditions or social action .... the worker's role is to identify what is real in the world; whether or not one accepts it." (Hamilton,1956,pg. 13)

A social work team investigating depression in women at Yale University found that the life-long submissiveness of the depressed woman due to an inability to assert herself led to a lack of autonomy. However, it stressed the social role functioning of the depressed woman and especially the deletrious effects a dysfunctioning wife and

mother could have on family life. The team advised...

"weigh carefully the consequences of any
therapeutic attempt to encourage more assertive-
ness in marriage, independence from the extended
family or more community participation in working
or lower class clients ... it may be experienced as
disruptive to their social norms.
(Weissman and Paykel, 1974,pg. 203)

This book was published in 1974. In 1972,

the same research team published an article in

the Social Work journal about "recent" approaches

to depressed women.(Weissman   et. al.,1972,

pp. 19-25) This team assumed that the norms of

the middle and upper classes allow a wider

definition of acceptable behavior in women. Inge

Bell, an author who has explored the relationship

between status and standards applicable to women

disagrees.

" ... the assumption [is] that middle class
women are always comfortably imbedded in middle
class primary groups and that middle class status
cushions all of life's shocks ... [it is] assumed
further that the woes of middle-class women are
essentially class-connected rather than
specifically sex-connected. The perplexity of a
woman whose children have left home and finds
herself unwanted on the labour market - these
are real hurts and they go deep ... especially
in the context of middle class values."
(Bell, 1975, pg. 154)

Bell proposes that the standards for acheivement in the middle class, which are more likely to view the individual as personally responsible for his or her own life, might exacerbate feelings of personal inadequacy in middle-class middle-aged women.

Another theoretical underpinning of current social work practice is the social function approach to roles. Roles are seen as the fulfillment of certain functions in distinct spheres that operate in a complementary, but not interactive, framework. Social stability, a major preoccupation of social workers, is achieved when a kind of "equilibrium" is established by the appropriate number of people pulling their weight in appropriate directions. Instability occurs when the perceived balance of "roles" is upset; when individuals chose other than appropriate roles or foresake the ones they were assigned.

In relation to women, the perceived threats to social stability are identified as "role reversal" and "role conflict". Both of these concepts rely

on acceptence of the assertion that roles are

not merely an accomodation of individual capacity

to the environment but have intrinsic value.

The Model for Marriages

Despite the availability of alternate models,

in marriage and family literature, the orthodox

model is the traditional instrumental, institutional,

or utilitarian marriage. Hicks and Platt found that

the majority of investigation between 1960 and 1970

relied on this theoretical model. They describe

" the fundamental principle within this conception

to be that task specialization is the most efficient

means of social organization."(Hicks and Platt,1970,

573) Within this context, as discussed before,

womens' primary responsibility is limited by

"bio-social" factors to a supportive role within

the family.

Judith Long Laws, in a similar review, reached

the same conclusion. Her analysis of the research

on role reversal suggests that, though a number of

investigators found that marital maladjustment was

strongly correlated to the traditional division of

tasks in marriage, these same authors argue for

the superiority of a functionally-based marriage.

(Long Laws, 1971.pp. 488-9) Long Laws believes that

the reason for this seeming paradox is the

theoretical context in which these studies were

carried out. She says,

" ... phenomena associated with womens' other
capabilities [outside the home] are evaluated in
terms of the assumption her primary responsibilities
are the maintenance of the quality of human relations
within the family ... The institutional model
involves role separation ...with instrumental and
expressive functions assigned to different spouses.
It involves, moreover, a premise of inequality which
appears more prominently when changes in marital
roles are being discussed ... especially in the
assumption that the enrichment of roles of women -
whether by ERA, paid employment, or womens'
liberation - will mean a loss for men."
(Long Laws, 1971,pg. 489)

In the social work practice context, Schwartz

found nocasework goals which encouraged a woman to

take charge if there was a male in the house. Rather,

there was ...

" a remarkable amount of dismay expressed
by family therapists that the father was no longer
the head of the house and intervention strategies
were based on helping the father reassert his power."
(Schwartz,1973,pg. 68)

Schwartz goes on to state that role reversal

implies a preferred state of male dominance.

She adds,

"... the instrumental needs of women are
often looked upon with some suspicion. We
[social workers] are constantly reading about
womens' intimacy and tenderness needs as a basis
for casework goals ... in addition ... while men
must "affirm" masculinity through aggressiveness
... agressive domineering women lead ultimately
to the castrating label - while there is no
negative equivilent for a male who overpowers and
devitalizes a woman." (Schwartz,1973,pg. 69)

By acting as an ego threat to her husband,

the forsaking of woman's role is perceived as a

threat to general societal functioning. Erlich

documents the general presence of this concept

in five basic college texts on marriage. (Erlich,

1971) "Whether or not a woman is happy in her role

is seen as fortuitous." (Erlich,1971,pg. 424) One

author, Robert Udry, comments that American women

are "over-emancipated" and thus have lost their moral

influence. Erlich quotes another author,William

Kephart , who believes "a certain amount of

maladjustment [in women] is the necessary price for

for an integrated system of marriage ... female liberation has Orwellian repercussions for the marriage relationship." A third expert, George Leslie, instructs his students that the ultimate conclusion of a partnership marriage is "destructive competition" and tells them that a woman who is a good wife "will not let her work <u>threaten</u> her husband's prestige or the stability of marriage.* (my own emphasis) Erlich reaches the same conclusions as Hicks and Long Laws: even when writers concede that a Utilitarian role division of marriage is not pre-determined, they argue for the superiority and appropriateness of this framework on the basis that it is the most 'efficient' and 'effective'. (Erlich, 1971, pg. 425)

However, many writers used as a basis for social work education about women maintain that there are intrinsic factors in women that justify these divisions. It is believed that women and men have different needs from marriage. These assertions are based on the feminine drive for intimacy and tenderness.

One example is Garai's monograph on sex differences
and mental health. He interprets research findings
as follows.

" a female needs sucess in love before work...
12 week old girls like pictures of faces and,so,
demonstrate they possess inbred affiliative needs
while boys of the same age prefer geometric forms
and,so, exhibit early signs of a need for object
mastery ...[females have] a greater need to be
needed by other people and so see marriage and
family as their identity.(Garai,1970,pg. 133)

In the context of the problems of middle-aged
women, then, these kinds of standards would lead
to interventive goals based on the primacy of the
affiliative needs of women and thus endorse the
view that women are naturally dependent. The central
theme appearing in descriptive and research data on
middle-aged crisis is a desperate need to feel
useful and to replace an affiliative basis for
identity with a sense of personal competence. Thus,
there appears to be a disparity between what Long
Laws desribed as "self-fulfilling prophecies -
authoritive and authoritarian theorizing - and
humble and inelegant empiricism." (Long Laws,1971,
pg. 484)

Conclusions

Given the findings of the NASW council, presented earlier, that social work goals are based on the "emotional immaturity", "need for dependence" and "denigration of status" of women, and the stated social work values to work within cultural norms, the case that social work knowledge treats the problems of middle-aged women in terms of deviancy or as a threat to social stability appears to be well supported.

Given the material presented which suggests an ambivalence in the literature regarding the worth of the mother role -that it is both vital for the collective good and inconsequential -it would be expected that this equivocation be reflected in social work practice.

Role Conflict and the Workplace

Coser and Rokoff have explored the possibility that the interpretations offered in practice literature are a function of a cultural mandate to define acheivement in women as problematic. While Long Laws identifies the theoretical framework in which womens' activities are evaluated as a predictor of the standards they will imply for marriage, Coser and Rokoff extended the analysis to the workplace. They propose that the interpretation traditionally accepted of the relationship between roles and capabilities of adult women are not even consistent with the theoretical frameworks in which they are framed. Their conclusions support the view that women would be viewed in the same way, irrespective of theoretical context, because there is a cultural imperative to do so.

Coser and Rokoff explore the issue of "role conflict" as an exemplar case. They begin with the

standard definition of role conflict as"the
inability to allocate time and energy to
different activity systems." (Coser and Rokoff,
1968,pg. 535) They then briefly review the concepts
of status and role articulation. In summary, role
articulation "priorizes expectations within a single
role"; status articulation "separates activities by
time and,so, priorizes expectation by role set
providing a normative pattern base for action. It
allows individuals to fulfill their various
expectations and functions by removing the burden
to make a new decision in each situation." (Coser
and Rokoff, 1968,pg. 537) Thus, within standard role
theory, individuals can operate in more than one
sphere without difficulty, so long as the expect-
ations and obligations of these different areas are
consensually defined. Coser and Rokoff note that
there would be no need for role theory at all if
there was not an underlying assumption "that total
allegience to one activity system is rarely expected
and normative priorities of involvement are assigned
by separation of time and place."(Coser & Rokoff,
1968,pg. 535)

Thus, in theory, women should not experience role conflict to a greater extent than men.

Coser and Rokoff conclude that it is not womens' inability to segment various activities but a cultural mandate that a women must allocate resources to the family institution not to be shared with other institutions that is the basis for role conflict. "Career and family are presented as mutually exclusive alternates for women. It would seem as if modern women were not as capable as men to segment their various roles and activities."(Coser and Rokoff, 1968,pg. 542) The writers propose that the cultural mandate views womens' activities in the occupational sphere as disruptive to the family sphere and her family roles as disruptive to occupational competence. Because they are defined within the sociological catechism that the occupational anchorage is not essential for women, the authors propose "women cannot avail themselves of the mechanisms of status articulation

because normative priorities are ambiguous- they
are seen to cause disruption in one role sector
or another" (Coser and Rokoff, 1968,pg. 543)
Since a behavioral commitment to occupation and
acheivement is not normatively legitimate,behavior
that demonstrates the obverse is still interpre-
ted within this value context.

Coser and Rokoff note that,within occupational
role theory ,high status occupations demand more
roles than low status occupations. A great deal of
disruption is tolerated in the professional work
place. A strong occupational commitment is not
defined as incompatible with disruptions from
other role spheres. (Coser and Rokoff, 1968, pg
549) Yet, women are cloistered in low status
occupations because it is believed they cannot
sustain a commitment to more demanding jobs in
view of disruptions from family obligations.
(Coser and Rokoff,1968, pg. 543)

The writers' general premise can be supported

by material presented earlier in this chapter.

Coser and Rokoff comment that "since women are defined as ... having this kind of commitment to others , they are restricted to the kind of work defined as requiring a small attitudinal commitment." (Coser and Rokoff,1968, pg. 548) They conclude,"the equivocacy about womens' roles is in the cultural legitimacy of womens' status outside the home. There is little emperical support for the conclusions that women have an intrinsic impaired capacity to articulate their statuses and roles." (Coser and Rokoff, 1968, pg. 551)

Erlich, in her analysis of marriage counselling literature, points out that married women who work are seen to have two full roles. The assumption is that their husbands are not responsible for child rearing or housework. This can be related to the definition of role conflict in women in its implication that the family role is more disruptive to women and womens' occupations are more disruptive to the family than mens'. (Erlich,1971,pg. 428)

In the social work context, Schwartz found
an "emphasis on the negative implications of more
flexible sex-roles rather than the self-actualizing
potential less defined roles can have."(Schwartz,
1973,,pg. 67) In one marriage counselling text
book, the author states," ... the phenomenon of a
successful career woman cast aside by her husband
for a less able and more dependent woman is far
from unknown." (Erlich,1971,pg. 428) Thus,
consistent with Coser and Rokoff's thesis, the
home and other spheres are presented as mutually
exclusive.

The Theoretical Predicament

Given the equivocation described in the above
examples, it can be said that sociology constructs
the female according to cultural prescriptions which
prove to be logically inconsistent with its own
theoretical frameworks. Noami Weisstein proposes
psychology constructs the female in a similar fashion.
She argues that widely-held psychological definitions

are at odds with research findings. The assumption
that human behavior rests on an individual inner
dynamic fixed at infancy in an immovable cognitive
framework produces these discrepancies. The
implications of this concept are that psychology
neglects social context and cannot recognize that
socialization continues throughout adult life stages.
Secondly, research that has never been refuted
demonstrates the unreliability of personality tests
and inconsistencies within personality data.
Weisstein relates these discrepancies to the tradition
of building psychological theory on clinical
observation without empirical testing. Thus, she
concludes that much of psychological theory is
based on an incohesive body of evidence. (Weisstein,
1971)

Weisstein identifies the same cultural assumptions
that Erlich,Doherty,Long Laws and Coser did, to be
the major variable for what standards of psycholog-
ical functioning will apply to women - that the
continuation of the traditionally-defined role is
necessary for social stability.

One set of empirical studies she reviews relate to the effect of social context on behavior, particularly Rosenthal's work on the "pygmalion effect'.He found that an individual who was described to others in positive terms was treated in this light and, more importantly, the individual will develop that particular positive trait, intelligence for instance.

Similar findings have resulted from other research projects. In one experiment, two groups of experimenters were told different hypotheses about the outcome of their work. Each group found evidence to support the hypothesis given. When told rats were bred for dullness, the rats ran the maze poorly; when told rats were bred for brightness,the rats ran the maze quickly. (Weisstein,1971,pg. 77) Other studies in this area suggest that context can affect even reactions within the involuntary nervous system. (Mednick and Tangri, 1972,pg.4)

Drawing on the analogies between dominance/ submission signals used in primates and non-verbal

communcation in humans, another researcher
explored body communications in therapeutic
encounters between men and women. Using classifi-
cation schemes generally accepted in the field of
interpersonal relations, she found signals in the
use of smiling, terms of address, invasion of
personal space etc. that "constantly communicated
to the woman that she was powerless." (Silveira,
1972,pg. 12) Barbara Stevens has suggested that,
in such a context ....

> " the therapist's attitude toward the
> female client is communicated in subtle and
> uncontrollable ways ... because his attitude is
> ego-syntonic for her ... he may do no more than
> perpetuate her own self-contempt; it certainly
> will not help her overcome her self-contempt."
> (Stevens,1971.pp. 14-15)

Thus, again, in psychology as in sociology,
the treatment of women in the helping professions
and its knowledge base can be seen to reside in
dynamics beyond the relationship of theory to
practice. Given the material suggesting that an
autonomous role for women is not a highly-valued
goal in these professions and academic areas, the

relationship between middle-aged womens' problems and social work may be problematic in itself. The inclusion of empirical material at odds with traditional standards for sex-role functioning may provide an accomodation of new material only into theory, but not into practice.

Conclusions

Logical inconsistencies in the social standards applied to women and ambivalence towards the contributions of women to society have been described here. These discrepancies suggest that there are cultural obstacles for women to the mechanisms that segment roles and statuses. This interpretation is consistent with the work of Coser and Rokoff.

Additional material from the field of psychology suggest that orthodox cultural mandates are deeply entrenched there and that they are communicated to women as clients and used in academe in both conscious and unconscious ways.

Finally, statistics on inclusion of women in social science faculties and evidence that work on women by women is not widely disseminated and receives relatively little prestige support the view that social standards in the social science knowledge base reflect male biases and values. These have been identified as the expectation that women will be dependent, emotionally immature and limited in capability outside the family sphere. As well, these values interpret adult female roles beyond traditional definitions as being deleterious to societal goals.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SOCIAL ACTUALITY - ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

Introduction

This section will begin with a brief review of the context in which women have no problems. It will be short because, for the most part, there has been little empirical investigation into the situations that lead to personal mastery or achievement in women. (Epstein,1974,pg.649) Secondly, following Long Laws' prescription for the use of "humble empiricism", many descriptive hypotheses which are as yet untested are not considered here. There is much debate about the 'woman problem'. There is remarkable consensus on the 'woman non-problem'. (Bart, 1967,pg. 156) Some material which addresses the issue of a lack of personal mastery in women as socially undesirable rather then culturally mandated will also be included. Finally, the rationale for presenting this material

is to indicate that alternate workable models are available. The ultimate purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the context in which various theoretical models are put into practice and the extent to which one framework is preferred over another.

Achievement in Women

A dominant characteristic of positive experience for middle-aged women is the perception of personal power and lack of environmental constraints to shifting emotional investments among various spheres of activity. (Bart, 1967,pg. 151; Becker,1968,pg.156; Neugarten,1968a,pg. 137; Spence and Lonner,1971,pg. 375) Judith Long Laws notes that "scant attention is given [in research] to the options a wife might exercise." (Long Laws, 1971,pg. 502) However, the extant data examining the relationship between choice, class and working part-time or full-time to psychological well-being suggests that choice is very strongly related to the absence of problems.

"Women who worked were happy as were housebound wives who didn't want to work." (Long Laws,1971, pg. 498) Other research focussed on the various life stages supports the conclusion that,throughout the life cycle, a woman's perception of latitude and a legitimate range of options is correlated to psychological well-being.

Secondly, throughout this literature, the role of social context in the development of adaptive ability is repeatedly underscored. In fact, several researchers agree with Howard Becker's conclusion that ...

"there are no "deep" personality traits which persist across all situations and roles ...social structure ... produces ... patterned affects on human experience." (Becker,1968,pg. 149)

Becker and Neugarten agree on the point that a critical issue in adult development is the ability of the social context to "give structure to experience and information in light of experience". (Becker, 1968,pg. 149; Neugarten,1968a,pg. 137) The inability of troubled middle-aged women to draw on their past

experience and develop a context for future

activities supports this finding. It is also

consistent with material on middle-aged women

demonstrating weak correlations between

individual personality characteristics and

psychological impairment and strong correlations

to aspects of environment.

Becker elaborates on the relationship between

context and adaptability.

"When it appears people are not adjusting to
situational pressures, closer analysis reveals the
situation is not actually the same for everyone...
commitment to goals outside the present situation...
is related to the degree to which the situation is
seen as connected to important situations later...
and the length of time the individual expects to
be in the situation." (Becker,1968,pp.150-1)

Becker's findings support data that relates an

exclusive commitment to one role as a predictor of

adaptive impairment and the finding that middle-aged

women with problems experience time in an immediate

rather than long-term sense.(Fiske-Lowenthal,et.al.,

1975, pg. 127)

Neugarten found that ...

"well-accomplished middle-aged women were able
to reconcile their achievement and dependency
needs and felt freed from past conflicts of this
sort ... she sees this as her due ... she can have
feelings of dominance and need to be dependent at
the same time."(Neugarten,1956,pg. 40)

These women represent a direct contrast to those

who experience dependency and agressiveness as

identity destroying and so can exercise neither

option. Neugarten emphasizes the role of social

context in these internal perceptions and the

functions of "cues from people around her" in

determining them. Thus, it is not surprising that

she found that the husbands of women with few

problems did not see their wives much differently

than they saw themselves. (Neugarten ,1956,pg. 38)

The parallels are clear between these findings and

those on the difference in expectations between

many men and their wives and the suggestions that

"unconscious and uncontrollable cues"can bolster

or devastate self-image.

Consonant with Neugarten's observations of the

accomodation of dependency and dominance within a

role framework, Pauline Bart found that "happy
middle-aged women ridded themselves of the
unpleasant aspects of their previous roles."
(Bart. 1967,pg. 154) She proposes that a positive
middle age experience is a process of "selective
disengagement" in which a woman maintains role
functions she found sustaining and discards those
that were experienced negatively. Thus, she allows
herself more latitude to choose ego-building
experiences. (Bart, 1967,pg. 154) Her interpretation
of this phenomenon is supported in the findings of
the Fiske-Lowenthal study. (Fiske-Lowenthal,et.al.,
1975, pp. 10-1)

Bart summarized research findings on "good"
adjustment to middle-age in women observing that
flexibility and the ability to shift emotional
commitment was emphatically underscored. There was
some indecision as to whether a broadened role
scope or selective disengagement improved morale,
but , regardless, overcommitment to one role did not.

She identified these two variables as the "sum" of the literature to date.(Bart, 1967,pg. 156)

Some writers emphasize feminine middle age as a time for new energy and achievements, especially for women who were never tempermentally suited for domestic service. Having been depressed during their thirties, at middle age, these women feel free to pick up on earlier ambitions. (Dulude, 1978, pg. 19) Other women review the roles they have already tried and ,realizing that age and biology will soon close these options,consciously seek to develop others.(Dulude,1978,pg.19) Neugarten found that well-accomplished middle-aged women,in general, felt a new freedom to use latent capacities.(Neugarten,1968b,pg. 97)

These works indicate that, in a nurturing environment, women find the opportunity for identity building.

i <u>Identifying the Role Characteristics</u>

Gove and Tudor examined the relationship between mental health and adult sex-roles. They identified five fundamental characteristics of the traditional female role and attempted to ascertain how these characteristics relate to psychological impairment. They used epidemological data, case histories and a content analysis of current mental health literature; and they concluded that women are more likely to have emotional problems owing to circumscribed sex roles. (Gove and Tudor, 1973, pg, 69)

The five identifying characteristics were:

1) Traditional women have one restricted role-they have only one source of gratification.

2) Women find their major instrumental role frustrating - it is not consonant with their educational and intellectual acheivement and could be filled irrespective of education. It bestows low prestige.

3) The role is unstructured and invisible.

4) Even working women are in a less satisfactory position than men.

    i) There has been a consistent decline in the relative status of women in employment since 1940.

    ii) They are under greater strain -working more hours in a day due to household duties.

5) The expectations confronting women are weak and diffuse.

(Gove and Tudor,1973,pp.51-5)

Gove and Tudor observe that the feminine role is"characterized by adjusting to contigencies." The result is constant uncertainty about what will be expected and a lack of control over the life course. They believe that,in large part, emotional problems in women are an expression of frustration with an environment that obstructs continuity in life experiences. (Gove and Tudor,1973,pg. 55)

Joyce Walstedt elaborated on observations such as these concluding that a valid psychology of women must focus on the contingent nature of many individuals' experiences. She says,

" psychology of women must face up to the realities .. the lives of females are full of discontinuities as they go from being learner to predator to wife, migrate with husbands, abruptly end or begin education with jobs,intermix periods of child-birthing and child-raising.A feminist therapist can stimulate thinking and a clearer definition of choices which do not deny a basic part of self and, in this way, help put Humpty Dumpty back together again. (Walstedt,1971,pg. 11)

In 1953, Mirra Komarovsky interpreted the implications of the female sex-role for middle-aged women in a similar fashion. A conflict was precipitated in the educational experience of college women who were urged to be competitive on one hand and docile on the other. This conflict was heightened by discontinuity.Just as black college graduates were frustrated when treated like bell boys or porters, female graduates were disturbed by the ordeal of transferring from the life of a scholar to scrubbing floors and washing diapers. The cycle of confusion appeared again when the mother

sent her last child to school. With no full-time
task to fill the day, she sought a job to use her
education. But she was still expected to serve as
a full-time homemaker, and the confusion over the
priorities in her life remained.(Chafe,1972,pg.213)

Persistence of the Traditional Framework

Given that these frameworks have been available
for atleast 26 years, it is difficult to understand
why traditional perspectives have prevailed.

Despite the availability of a variety of alternate
frameworks, there is considerable evidence that the
alternatives have not been accomodated in the
practice context with clients in the social work
and psychotherapeutic fields. The findings of the
Council of Social Work Education have been discussed
in an earlier section of this paper. It can be
recalled that it concluded that the use of tradition-
al sex-role standards and anti-women bias is wide-
spread and results in mental health practices

disparaging and devaluating women. In addition,
the study found treatment goals in practice to
reflect a social-adjustment value base. (NASW,1975)

A 1975 Task Force on Sex Bias and Sex-Role
Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice of the
American Psychological Association identified
fifteen common sexist themes in current therapuetic
practice under four areas of investigation.
These were:

" 1) fostering of traditional sex-role

   2) biased expectations

   3) devaluation of women and sexist use of
      psychoanalytic concepts

   4) responding to women as sex objects including
      the seduction of female clients"

(Report of Task Force,APA Journal,1975,pg.1171)
The questionnaire was sent to women in the
practicioners' divisions of the APA and to individuals
who identified themselves as academics in the area
of womens' psychology. Three hundred and twenty

(N=1400) female psychologists responded with

documentation of instances of such practices.

(Report of Task Force,APA Journal,1975,pg. 1171)

The Double Standard and its Effect on the Profession

There have been several studies, going back as

far as forty years ago, which demonstrate that

qualities associated with women are considered less

socially desirable than "male" character traits.

(Baruch and Barnett,1975,pg.318) These findings

make evident problems in maintaining consistency in

treatment of women since traits that are generally

socially desirable are socially undesirable in women.

Research findings in other areas demonstrate

that sex-role sterotypes, highly consensual norms

about differing characteristics, are pervasive. Inge

Broverman used these data, taken together with data

that demonstrate that feminine traits are socially

undesirable and further data which suggest social

desirability is closely related to clinical ratings,

and explored the ensuing dynamics. She found that

characteristics of "healthy" adult persons were

were applied only to men. That is, "healthy" women were evaluated within "behavioral sex-type norms of submissiveness, dependence, being easily influenced and noncompetitive". (Broverman,et.al.,1970,pg5) In other words, female clients were evaluated in a better light when they fit the stereotype despite the fact that passivity and dependence were 'professionally' defined to be contraindicative of mental health. Thus,there is one standard for mental health for people and one for women.

The therapeutic encounter can be described in terms of a more dependent individual who seeks assistance from a stronger, more independent individual. Using the assumption that passivity and dependence are similar to characteristics of the client role, Turkot and Glad hypothesized that women, who are usually seen to have personality traits congruent with the therapeutic situation,would be expected to have a greater likelihood for therapeutic success. In an experiment in which raters

evaluated transcripts of the same process recording,
the situation of a male therapist and a female client
was judged to be the one indicating the best
prognosis for recovery. There was no correlation
to the title of the therapist(psychologist,social
worker,psychiatrist) and female patients were viewed
as better subjects when the therapist was female as
well. Turkot and Glad conclude that the female sex
of the client was the most significant factor in
these ratings.(Turkot and Glad,1976,pg. 834)

This 'double standard' has been observed in
the training of student counsellors. Schlossberg and
Pietrofesa found that female counsellors in
training were awarded higher grades and received
better evaluations if they used 'typical feminine'
techniques in counselling clients. They were
rewarded for the use of "empathy" and non-directive
techniques and were not rated as highly for the use
of aggressiveness and confrontation methods. In
addition, the researchers produce evidence that

suggests that the 'double standard' of assessment
and diagnosis of female clients within stereo-
typical norms receives tacit approval and is
rewarded in the education of helping professionals.
(Schlossberg and Pietrofesa,1973,) The conclusions
of Schlossberg and Pietrofesa were corroborated
in the work of Audrey Maislin.(Maislin and Davis,
1975)

The evidence appears to demonstrate that
alternatives to the standard female stereotype do
not enjoy wide usage in direct practice with
female clients. It also appears that therapists
who employ and enact these alternative conceptions
of women may be viewed as engaging in deviant
behavior themselves. One interpretation may be
that the processes that maintain the dominance of
the traditional sex-role stereotype are unconscious
and covert. However, a good deal of the material
presented indicates there is an implicit determin-
ation to maintain rigid sex-role divisions

rationalized in terms of the maintainance of
social stability and 'natural order'. "Social
forces' can be seen to reside in the purposive
actions of workers,teachers and writers who
find current standards acceptable.

In the social work context, the treatment
of women who practice may serve as a case in
point. According to a 1974 Canadian study, two
thirds of Canadian social workers are women.
The proportions are believed to be comparable in
the United States.(Kravetz,1976,pg. 425) In 1970,
24% of all social work doctorates in the United
States were awarded to women while 85% of doctorates
in social work between 1950-1960 were awarded to
women.(Theodore,1971,pg. 20)

Reflecting on a similar situation in Canada
and noting only 7% of senior social work
administrators were women, the authors of the 1974
study identified the role conflicts between
occupations and families as the basis for the
relatively low achievement of female social workers.
(Kravetz,1976,pg. 422) However, in an American

sample, controlled for the variable of marital status, Theodore found that unmarried women, as well, held a small proportion of social work administrative positions. She concludes,"role strain cannot explain promotion .. even single women lose .. the variable is sex." (Theodore, 1971,pg. 23)

In this context, it is interesting to note that a major thrust to "defeminize social work and give it male qualities - make it intellectual, rational and administrative" occurred at the end of the 1950's and in the 1960's. (Chafetz,1972,pg.18) In this period, there was an increased effort to recruit men into social work in an attempt to counteract the perception that the "prestige of Social Work is adversely affected because it is identified as a women's profession". (Kadushin, 1958,pg. 40)

If it is assumed that the status of working women is related to sex-role norms, the implications

of this initiative may be related to Coser's finding that professions in which women predominate will be viewed as less vital than male professions whether or not this is true (eg. nursing) and that women will be given the most "expendable" positions within these professions. (Coser and Rokoff, 1968, pp.544-8) Within this framework, the implications of the fact it was thought necessary to defeminize social work could be the following.

In fact, work carried out mainly by women is less valued and bestows less prestige than male occupations. The thrust to recruit men into social work recognized this fact but did not acknowledge the relationship between sexism and occupational prestige. Thus, it inadvertently created a rise in sexism in the profession. Secondly, female social workers may be placed in roles that are appropriate within sex-type norms and, so, are excluded from more 'rational and intellectual' senior adminstrative positions.

A 1976 study on sexism within social agencies carried out by Dorothy Zeitz and John Erlich suggests a singular lack of awareness of sexism within the profession on the part of male workers. (Zeitz and Erlich,1976,) The researchers found a consistent pattern of men reporting the existence of less sexism than women. Fifty percent of the women felt they were treated as a typical member of their sex as opposed to 13% of the men. Women under forty found sexism to be a problem by a ratio of 3:1 to men under forty. Ninety percent of the males felt there was less sexism in their agencies than in the past, as opposed to 34% of the females. Twenty-five percent more males felt there was equal opportunity for both sexes to build careers. Two thirds of both sexes agreed planning in the agency was done by men. It can be inferred that this phenomenon was so obvious as to be beyond dispute. These findings are consistent with other items on the questionnaire. Zeitz and Erlich believe that there is reason to suppose that female practicioners are under a great deal of pressure to conform to traditional roles and to use them as a basis for practice.(Zeitz and Erlich, 1976,pg.437)

Both Wesley and Levine have observed and described such situations. Levine identified the treatment of middle-aged women as a case in point. (Wesley,1975,pg. 123; Levine,1976,pg. 37)

Conclusions

Data relating to the position of women in social work introduces one more aspect of social context. We have seen that the attributes of the traditional female role are employed in the evaluation of female clients AND their therapists even though satisfactory alternatives exist. One is lead, then, to the question of why a profession that is composed 67% of women legitimizes these practice goals. Again, the dichotomy between the unconscious and conscious environmental features may apply. While it can be suggested that female practicioners are influenced by social pressures to maintain these norms, there is also some evidence they are aware of the disparity between their

practice base and the social actuality. If their
'consciousnesses are raised' to the extent they
can identify characteristic features of sexism
towards themselves to the order of 70 or 90
percent, then they cannot be viewed as mere
victims of circumstance.Unlike other fields of
social work, family and marital practice is
dominated by women and it is they who say
agressiveness and a choice of roles beyond the
family are problematic.

It can be suggested that the reason they chose
this alternative is closely related to the nature
of the social science material used as a knowledge
base. As in other fields of practice, lack of
cohesiveness and clarity in understanding the
dynamics that produce the knowledge used - the
epistemological basis for their actions - puts them
in the compromising position of being unable to focus
their energies toward a Logical solution. (Bitensky,
1973,pg. 130) Acceptence of orthodox social science

theory becomes a basis for evaluating their intellectual competence, whereas alternative viewpoints are judged to be 'less rational' and, therefore, less viable. This issue will be the theme of the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTEXT OF DISCOVERY

It has been previously noted that, within Logical philosophy, knowledge is seen to be the "conformity between object and intellect". The intellectual tradition that frames social science theory is fundamentally rationalistic. Thus, legitimate social science theory must produce a conformity between the object and the criteria of rationalism.

Herbert Marcuse and those who identify with his teachings propose that the institutionalization of rationalism within the social sciences has several logical implications. The primary principle that will underly the creation of knowledge will be the consideration of alternative means to alternative ends. That is to say, the paradigm of a 'good' social situation will be whether or not it efficiently meets the ends of various social institutions. Secondly, it would be consistent with

the rational intellect to assume their are
universal rational principles operating in the
social sphere. Assuming that the laws of social
interaction are intrinsically logical, Marcuse
believes, must lead to the conclusion that the
existing relationships between individuals and
their institutions have evolved because they
follow the structure of collective needs. Much
the same way natural scientists believe that
organisms evolve in accordance with natural laws,
the rational social scientists believe there is
a parallel relationship between collective
entities and efficient functioning of society.
Thus, within this context, the solution of human
problems is conceptualized in terms of technical
problems - of best serving the systems that
supposedly best serve human needs.

Secondly, the individual is seen as fitting
into frameworks of means to ends and is considered
only in terms of his or her ability to enhance the
efficiency of the system. Marcuse argues that the

rationalization of the conditions of life (through control, social engineering) divorces these forces from the political assumptions that underly them, but, in fact, does not in any way cause them to lose their political content. (Marcuse,1968,pp.223 ff.)

These ideas have been described by a social problem theorist as the "normative force of the actual." In this framework, the social theorist assumes the social structure as a given and focusses on ways and means to maintain its optimum functioning. (Merton,1971,pg. 816)

However, the circularity of this kind of approach has been identified as a major logical inconsistency in the social sciences and calls into question a great many definitions of social situations. Holmes, in his essay,"Legitimacy and the Politics of the Knowable",points to the Logical fallacy that the facts and values in the social sciences can be distinguished one from another.

He says,

> " ... the intellectual integrity of science
> has always depended on the assumption the knower
> can be irrelevant to the known because the known
> can have inherent validity ... a validity that can
> have a logical or sensory base. Thus 2 and 2 always
> makes 4 ... however, in the social sciences, the
> pre-existent independent is only knowable as a
> product of the assimilation of these data into a
> framework which is the product of the observer."
> (Holmes,1976,pg. 6)

Thus social science produces the phenomena that it

studies while the natural sciences do not and,so,

cannot rest its validity on universally existent

truths. Holmes believes,

> " ... social scientists can no more be
> declared irrelevant then they can be declared
> non-existent ... thus fact and value,having a
> common source, are not distinct."
> (Holmes,1976,pg.5)

Holmes believes that,ultimately, the recognition

that social scientists produce knowledge and do

not merely gather it will permit social science

to create a purer empiricism by allowing values

to constitute a legitimate basis for social theory.

The principal confusion produced by this assumption may be seen as a neglect to distinguish between power and authority. It is assumed that, because dominant groups determine public priorities, their power over others is legitimization to do so, thus fixing the social order.

Gouldner studied the sociology of sociologists. He finds that, since a social theory is more likely to be accepted by those who share the theory's background assumptions and find them agreeable, sociologists have a stake in justifying the legitimacy of significant groups. Their function than becomes, not simply to study society, but to conceptualize and order. They have a personal stake in maintaining their own legitimacy as experts on the social order. Their professional reality is at stake and the result is a tacit conviction in the opportunity of the status quo. (Gouldner,1970, pp. 29,58,84)

Social scientists work within a perceptual organization that is bound by the findings and research ; and theories that have preceded them.

Theory structures research. However, different

parts of the social order are not all equally

important. Attention is focussed on what is

theoretically important. Gouldner argues that,

in this context,

"... facts are thus seen as products of an
effort to pursue the inferences of theories and
primarily interacting with them ...so facts fill
a self-implicating perception-anchoring and
stabilizing role as distinct from a validity-
testing function." (Gouldner,1970,pg. 32)

In this context, the preference for one view

of women over another may become clearer. If there

is an imperative to provide theoretical continuity

and if the legitimacy of social science rests on

the assumption that facts have meaning only within

a conceptual map that does not include a major

contribution by women to society, this is what will

be found. In the light of Holmes' analysis that

the knower and the knowable are the product of an

interactive process and the material presented

earlier on the relative status of women in the social

sciences,power of the male view in the social

sciences can be understood more clearly. Such

an explanation may subsume numerous other

apparent paradoxes in the social science

consideration of women.

Albert Einstein said that the theory will

determine what is knowable. (Watzlawick,1976,pg.45)

Thus we find that,though researchers in achievement

theory exclude data on women because it is

inconsistent with their theory and base their

conclusions on exclusively male samples, they do

not question their findings. (Meisel and Friedman,

1974,pg. 70) Thus, we find that dependency and

passivity are theoretically signs of emotional

impairment, but women who are defined as healthy

can accept that dependency. Thus, we find that

women commited to their work cannot find themselves

in books about women. Thus, we find that field-

imbedded theory correlates to an insignificant

proportion of the population and is presumed

to explain why women cannot think as logically as men. (Silveira,1972,pg. 4) And in the case of middle-aged women, their problem is seen to both rest on the facts they accepted the traditional role, on one hand, and reject it on the other.

Social science theory rests a great deal of its legitimacy on the assumption of the generalizability of its findings. Gouldner demonstrates the logical faults that can follow from this assumption. He cites the example of Malinowski's theory of magic and its differences from the theory of magic proposed by Radcliffe-Brown. One scholar studied childbirth magic and drew conclusions about the nature of magic from his findings, One studied work and sustenance magic and proposed a theory of magic on this basis. Both scholars assumed the generalizability of their research to paradigmic frameworks. Gouldner, again emphasized the self-fulfilling nature of facts guided by the choice of analytic frameworks. He concludes,

" ... the theory will therefore develop itself
and be shaped by the limited facts and personal
reality available to the theorist and , in
particular, those imputed realities he treats as
paradigms ... he assumes the things he has
researched, and hence "knows", are likely and
may be used to understand other things he is not
acquainted with,... moreover, the research becomes
part of his personal reality with a commitment to
defend it ... and collectively held notions of
reality are the most firmly entrenched components
of a person's reality."(Gouldner,1970,pg. 45)

A parallel dynamic may be suggested to apply

to the identification of social work knowledge

which, it will be recalled, is derived from

social work values which are derived from social

work knowledge. Since the legitimacy of the

profession rests on its ability to implement

socially sanctioned goals, the profession is

commited to accept and produce knowledge that

justifies its own existence. In this context,

the assertion,quoted earlier, in the Social Work

Encyclopedia, that the life experiences of women

are relatively benign,serves to rationalize social

work's commitment to perpetuate the status quo.

However, as Holmes, Marcuse and others have
pointed out, the central logical fallacy within
social science resides in the belief that values
are neutral forces. Findings reviewed in the
previous chapter indicate that the suggestibility
of researchers in finding what is expected of
them calls this assumption into question. However,
the recognition of the role of values may provide
a basis for imputing superiority to a 'biased'
social science framework in preference to
perpetuating the illusion that social science
research can be bias-free. Ironically, the inclusion
of the researcher's values may bring the findings
closer to empirical fact because the context of
investigation is more exactly stated.

Holmes expresses this as follows.

"... the victory of the social over the
scientific will take the very form that social papers
have been at great pain to analyse, namely the
emergence of legitimacy. Knowledge,too, will become
differently valued, the knowable considered
legitimate or illegitimate by those who have lost
the ability to doubt ... once it is granted we

<div align="right">cont.</div>

participate in what we know and once it is
accepted the outer inevitabilities are
achievements to be treasured, not baselines to be
taken for granted, then the danger is there. And
the greatest threat is surely the possible growth
of consensus and unanimity ...
    ... perhaps the best we can hope for (since there
will always be a social dimension to the unknown)
is that an overpowering consensus will not arise-
that through the continuation of conflict inherent
in "politics" some "knowable" will remain possible."
(Holmes,1976,pg. 8)

The only 'true' picture social science can draw

for us includes the values that surround the

social subject because it is these values that

constitute the independent factor in social

situations.

Conclusion and Closing Remarks

In keeping with the prescription for the inclus-

ion of this variable in the consideration of social

problems, I will include my own values before

drawing conclusions. My personal perspective is

that any cognitive framework that does not recognize

inconsistency and paradox as constant realities is

highly simplisitic. One can love and hate at the

same time, experience the same event as both

positive and negative and use one's 'functional'

activities to form emotional ties and vice versa.
Thus, I believe that cause-effect formulations are
merely suggestive. Secondly, I believe that social
situations, and the individuals within them, combine
in much the same way that chemicals interact to
produce a new compound, to produce a new and
different situation. Finally, I believe that the
basis for social action is a moral imperative to
diminish the amount of pain.This is the fundamental
rationale of any system of ethics. And,furthermore,
I believe that no obligation exists to fill the
needs of another with one's own pain - this is
merely a prerogative.

Now, having included the writer as well as
the written material presented here, it is pro-
posed that a significant amount of evidence exists
to support the following conclusions.

Statistical and comparitive data indicate that,
on one level, middle-aged women can be viewed as a
group who have enough experiences in common to
justify treating their situation as distinct from

others within society. By and large, the central event in their lives is the perception that the roles of wife and mother cannot continue to serve as a primary focus of their daily activities and energies. When middle-aged women experience problems, the characteristics of their situation meet the criteria of a latent social problem; an objectively deplorable state of affairs related to societal processes can be seen to exist.

However, there is some evidence in support of the view that the case of middle-aged women can be seen as an exemplar of the central issues pertaining to the definition and understanding of all adult women. This is suggested by the positive correlations that exist between commitment to traditional female role and incidence of psychological and social difficulties in middle-aged women. Moreover, it has consistently been found that women who are not married and married women with no children exhibit different kinds and different incidence rates of problems and that low femininity score

on standard instruments correlated positively to life satisfaction in women. Thus,the facts of marriage and childrearing,and more particularly traditional modes of filling these functions, are significant dynamics in the situations.

In this context, it becomes important to examine what relationship the facts of married life and parenthood have to the functioning of middle-aged women. The material presented in this paper suggests that two widely-held conceptual frameworks for the consideration of these roles exist.

The first is that adult women function according to fixed laws of human nature. These laws provide for mature integration of their personalities through dependency and filling the needs of others. In this framework, a woman who finds these functions difficult to fill is exhibiting symptoms of psychological impairment. Women who choose to focus their energies on goals beyond the definition above are judged to be

confused. In the social context, the first

framework defines the functional significance of

women to exist only within the family sphere.

Activities outside this sphere either threaten

the stability of the current institutional structure

of society, or, minimally, are inconsequential.

An alternative framework proposes that mature

integration of adult personality is the same for

men and women. These personality traits include

the ability to choose activities that promote a

self-perception of control over one's immediate

environment and the ability to establish conditions

of worth in various spheres. In this framework, the

individual who structures her activities on the

basis of dependency and meeting the needs of others

is psychologically impaired. Women who choose to

focus their energies and goals beyond the family

sphere exhibit superior cathetic ability, a sign

of mental health. In the social context, the

functional significance of women in any situation

exists in relation to their relative numbers and

input. These activities are seen to enhance the current institutional structure of society by providing for the contribution of a wider number of individuals and by allowing a greater number of people to meet their needs.

However, middle-aged women and all adult women are usually defined within the first framework. The significance of studying women in academe is seen as relatively lower than that given the study of other groups. The contributions of female academics on the subject of women are not widely acknowledged. The theoretical significance of women as an independent factor is seen to be of little consequence except in studies of the family. Some material demonstrates thatresearchers will still support a traditional view of women in their conclusions, irrespective of theoretical framework. Finally, by and large, the accomocation of alternative frameworks for the study of women is not demonstrably a priority in the academic community.

In the practice context, there is a preponderance of evidence that material used to instruct incumbent social workers is based on the traditional conceptual framework. The pervasiveness of the use of this body of theory for establishing clinical norms and evaluating the competence of therapists and social workers, who are judged to be better workers when they use such norms, has been shown. Evidence that social work bases its interventive goals on a mandate given by political and social institutions while viewing its role as essentially apolitical has been presented. In the case of women, it has been demonstrated that the central theme social work has derived from the literature is the adjustment of women to prevailing cultural norms. However, it was not clear in this context whether women are seen to evade other equally legitimate responsibilities by focussing solely on the family sphere or whether they evade their sole responsibility to society by not focussing exclusively on the home.

It was suggested that this contradiction makes clinical evaluation problematic. Some of the research on social context supported the case that personal values of the practicioner will influence the therapeutic encounter irrespective of theoretical orientation. Finally, in the social work context, it has been suggested that, within the profession, female social workers are assigned tasks in line with a traditional sex-role division of labour. Female social workers perceive pervasive sexism within the profession while male social workers notice its existence to a much smaller degree.

Thus, when middle-aged women are treated in such a context, they will be encouraged to accomodate to a position of dependence and a situation which will make them feel useless. Their family responsibilities do not absorb their daily activities yet their contributions outside the home will be at odds with the identity-giving elements of their family roles.

In the alternative context, they will be

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encouraged to find activities that make them feel useful and to depend on others to give them the support they need without guilt.

The central issue, in the case of middle-aged women, is to determine why they are evaluated and evaluate themselves in one frame of reference and not the other. The logical inconsistencies within social science between theoretical imperatives and the conclusions presented and the suggestibility of reserchers and therapists, irrespective of their intellectual understanding, may mean a re-orientation of theory will not resolve these alternative views.

It is concluded that the relationship between the problems of middle-aged women and social work is not merely a function of prescribing new interventive techniques or even new theoretical perspectives. These already exist. The basic issues at hand are epistemological and reside in the question of what about this group is recognized as knowledge.

Students of theories of knowledge in social science observed the independent factor in the development of social science knowledge is the value assumptions of the observer; social science facts must be integrated into a pre-existing cognitive framework in orde to have meaning. The knower and the known must interact. If this interaction exists in the formulations of social scientists, it is reasonable to allow for the personal values of women, as clients and workers, in social work fields of practice.

It is hoped that social workers will examine their actions more closely than in the past and, in so doing, recognize the political content of their actions. In the light of the material presented here, it is simply impossible to continue the illusion what they do with and to their clients can be apolitical.

The correlation between traditional definitions of the adult role of women and psychological and social impairment has been well-documented in recent years. In a profession which acknowledges that it derives its mandate from social norms, this can only mean the perpetuation of mental illness and dispair in female middle-aged clients. An existential synonym for mental illness is pain, the pain of feeling dead inside. If the social work context for treating these women does not change, then we become accomplices in the psychic death of too many people to ignore. It is not an "academic" question by any means. This suffering is the end result of choosing one point of view over another.

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