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Review: Studies in Symbolic Interaction

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This volume 53 of *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* includes a series of twelve explorative essays and case studies, related to the symbolic ties between individuals, experts, activists, even bureaucrats, or just ordinary individuals in a variety of everyday situations within a given community. To define it, Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical framework, a sociological perspective that “focuses on the ways people construct selves, social worlds, and societies through interaction” (Charmaz, Harris & Irvine [2019], quoted here by Kotarba, p. 34). In terms of environmental studies, Symbolic Interactionism focuses on perception, interactions between an individual and his/her environment, social representations, and social construction: an example would be the construction of trust in a relationship, or place attachment (for a local public park, a neighbourhood). The history of this book series, *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, is interestingly summarised in pp. 153-157.

The opening essay by Joseph Kotarba praises team science for its collaborative and often cross-disciplinary approaches in various domains such as health sciences (p. 3). The first pages provide a useful conceptualisation of the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm within a multi-disciplinary research team: “Interaction among group members involves the search for consensus over the nature and potential solutions to the problems at hand. The culture of the local (scientific, university, political, religious, etc.) community serves as a primary source of meanings for the potential solution, but the team itself is always emergent” (p. 4). All contributions try to illustrate, or sometimes contest, this theoretical framework.

The following chapter on “The SCI Café, Health Literacy Education, and Translational Team Science” (by Sharon A. Croisant, Amber L. Anthony, Chantele R. Singleton, and Joseph A. Kotarba) focuses on a mixed-methods evaluation of a public discussion about an environmental health initiative, oddly named “the Science and Communities Interact Café” (SCI Café) (p. 13). One of the aims of such public debates was to open or

broaden the academic world's activities and research to the community with some open, accessible, and free discussions about issues that matter, like environmental hazards (p. 17). In that sense, the SCI Café gatherings were strategies to inform and, ultimately, to make things change. One of the findings was centred on the status of expertise: people without a scientific background need and want experts to share their knowledge and advice, and these SCI Café meetings are just one way to encourage these public discussions (p. 20). But this new approach is just beginning.

Further on, in another substantial essay titled "Building trust in expert settings: An analysis of Miami's sea-level rise," Mitchell Kiefer analyses how expertise can address and conceptualize ongoing issues related to climate change and sea-level in Florida. Kiefer argues that whenever experts and social scientists are working together within a community, "socioenvironmental problems often facilitate the politicization of social problems, when new social relations may be forged" (p. 67). However, in such debates, experts are not alone, and consensus is not easy to achieve there are activists, decision-makers and politicians, people from the community. As Kiefer explains: "In Miami, 'sea-level rise expert' was not an established group, did not infer a set of commonly recognized credentials, and was established to manage a newly recognized problem that entailed ambiguous responsibilities and meanings" (p. 66). This original and instructive essay shows how difficult concerted actions can be whenever teams, committees, and collaborative groups made of individuals from various disciplines want to work together. Inner problems into organizations can emerge and are added to the unresolvable environmental issues. Contested expertise, skepticism, lack of confidence and trust, and easy blaming from each side can sometimes destroy the greatest motivations and the best strategies: "The Chair explained that in the past the committee had struggled gaining access to the city commissioners, most of whom seemed to downplay the importance of the committee" (p. 86). Such situations and related issues reconfirm why sociological knowledge matters whenever doing research and concerted actions.

This fifty-third volume of *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* is a dense but rewarding collection of essays for researchers and doctoral students seeking for new, original theoretical avenues related to social interactions, emotions, and relationships.

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