

Feminist Foundations

*Toward
Transforming
Sociology*

Editors

Kristen A. Myers
Cynthia D. Anderson
Barbara J. Risman

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Feminist Foundations

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Introduction: Bridging the Gaps in Feminist Sociology

I am not asking what sociology can do for women—for example by filling in the gaps in our knowledge about them, itself a significant contribution—but rather what women (and sympathetic male colleagues) can do for sociology.

Jessie Bernard

In discussing the four revolutions she experienced in the American Sociological Association, Bernard (Chapter 1, this volume) called for a feminist revolution in sociology so as to open the previously closed doors to new areas, new questions, and new paradigms that better capture the reality of *all* people. It is noteworthy that Bernard did not trust sociologists (a predominantly male group) to interpret women's situations and "fill in the gaps." She feared that such interpretations would be grounded in stereotypes (Note 13, p.15). Indeed, she considered the task of transforming sociology to be so overwhelming that she sought only to "nibble" at the problem. Twenty-five years later, sociology as a discipline has largely moved beyond such stereotypes, and a great deal of literature has been written by women (and sympathetic male colleagues) on the inequality between men and women in society. Yet gaps still remain in our intellectual understandings of gender inequality. Feminist scholarship—though remarkably more commonplace than during Bernard's career—remains at the margins of sociological theory. After all of these years, we are still filling in the intellectual gaps with feminist scholarship. This book is an illustrative overview of feminist thought through the years, beginning with Bernard's renowned indictment of sociology. With this book, we act as sociologists doing something for women; and we act as women doing something for sociology.

RECOGNIZING THE INTELLECTUAL GAPS IN SOCIOLOGY

The idea for this book grew out of a conversation on the Sociologists for Women in Society Internet list server during 1995. Many sociologists use this forum not only to discuss issues and announce upcoming conferences, but also to request references and discuss important scholarship—new and old. In ongoing dialogue, participants discussed key pieces of feminist scholarship in sociology that had particularly influenced their careers and their sociological thinking. They paid homage to their *foremothers* and advised each other of where to find more enlightening materials. The conversation highlighted the herstory of feminist scholarship in sociology. It also illuminated for us the absence of a comprehensive volume of feminist contributions to sociology. While list server discussions are stimulating, they leave no trace for future reference. We thought such discussions too important to lose in cyberspace.

Until the feminist influence on the academy, most sociology was a chronicle of men's writings, research, and theories. Classical theory courses still concentrate on our intellectual "fathers," Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Contemporary theory courses focus primarily on neo-Marxists, neo-Weberians, and neo-Durkheimians, occasionally sprinkling in some interactionists, phenomenologists, and feminists. The "fathers'" ideas formed the foundation for sociological theories and research methods. While their work was necessarily informed by their European, white male standpoints (Sprague, 1997), we continue as a discipline to ground our most important and serious endeavors on this foundation. Even our subjects have traditionally been men (as well as white and middle class, for that matter [Sprague, 1997]).

Although some sociologists have compiled examples of feminist scholarship (Campbell & Manicom, 1995; England, 1993; Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Risman & Schwartz, 1989; Wallace, 1989), these books represent a drop in the bucket. More collections are desperately needed to ground our field in its own herstory, and to continue transforming the field itself. We feel the time has come to begin to mainstream feminist scholarship more completely. This book is designed to provide an overview of sociological feminist thought for students in required sociology theory courses at both the upper-division undergraduate and the graduate student level. This book chronicles feminist theories and research about gender, work, family, sexuality, culture, organizations, race, class, sociology, and myriad other embedded concepts. The articles bridge every level of analysis—individual, interactional, and institutional. Taken together, the authors show the dialectical nature of social forces: how individuals are shaped by their social context, and yet, how individuals shape their worlds themselves.

We are personally and intellectually committed to providing this resource for many groups of sociologists and students. For Cindy Anderson and

Kristen Myers, interest in a project like this one began early in graduate school. We were concerned about the lack of feminist theory and scholarship in our graduate theory classes. We had a strong feminist mentor in Barbara Risman, and we were fully steeped in critical scholarship in our inequality graduate specialization. However, we were concerned about the state of the other subdisciplines in sociology. We read Stacey and Thorne's discussion (Chapter 9, this volume) of a feminist revolution in sociology, looked at our own graduate curriculum (outside of the inequality area), and woefully agreed with their assessment. Together with Jammie Price, we decided to find out what students in other area sociology programs were learning about feminist theory. Because our university—North Carolina State University—was located in an area with other large sociology graduate programs, we were able to survey NCSU students as well as students from two other major universities in our home community—University of North Carolina and Duke University. We found that, overall, few students had been exposed to gender *as a concept*, let alone feminist theory and scholarship. Those students who had been exposed cited a great variety of scholarship as feminist, including work that used gender as a variable, work that considered gender only as a personality trait, and work that critically challenged structures of inequality in society (for more, see Anderson, Myers, & Price, 1995). We recognized a need in sociology for a book that provides an extensive overview of feminist theory and research. Editing this book is our first attempt at contributing to the field of sociology.

This book is for sociologists who had to dig long and hard to find any feminist work; for those whose graduate school committees would not allow them to study gender as a research topic; for those in departments who still “don’t get it”; for those lucky sociologists of today who have access to various genres within gender sociology, but who are looking for an intellectual framework; and for those who teach contemporary theory and do not yet incorporate feminist thought.

GENRES OF FEMINIST THOUGHT

When we began this project, we conceptualized feminist scholarship as following a distinct, cumulative trajectory as it has attempted to transform traditional sociology (see Johnson & Risman, 1997). We expected to show how feminist scholarship has moved through the following stages: (a) from discovering the absence of women in theory and research; (b) to documenting the inequity of socially created sex differences; (c) to discovering that gender is not only about women and subsequently incorporating men; (d) to focusing on gender as a social structure rather than simply a characteristic of individuals; and, finally, (e) to the realization that gender is systematically and inextricably tied to other matrices of inequality, such as race, sexual orienta-

tion, and class. Our argument was not that each new stage supplanted the former. Instead, we believed that the stages built upon one another. In planning and organizing this book, however, we reconceptualized the process by which feminist theory and scholarship has developed in sociology. We realized as we collected articles, as you too will notice, that many of the articles in the different sections of this book were originally published in the same time period. For example, Rosenfeld (1980) and Kanter (1976) were writing in the same time period, even though we have included their work in different "stages" of development in feminist theory and research.

Organizing feminist scholarship in terms of "stages" presumes that the dominant model of evaluating theory and research applies to this marginalized genre in sociology. Karl Popper (1968) explains this dominant model of scholarly development as a process of falsification whereby one theory or paradigm rises to dominance in a discipline. Over time, other theorists will challenge the dominant paradigm by trying to falsify its claims, providing contrary evidence and arguments. As old theories are falsified, new paradigms become dominant. Popper is writing about the "hard" sciences, but other sciences, including sociology, have borrowed this process as the only legitimate means to transform disciplines over time. Although there is much debate over the politics and the efficacy of this model of scholarly development (see Feyerabend, 1978; Kuhn, 1970; Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970; Sprague, 1997), we believe that feminist scholarship has developed largely outside of this process. Because feminist work has traditionally been marginalized, feminist scholars have not had the benefit of building upon each others' work in the way mainstream researchers have been able to do. As many of the reflectors in this book explain, feminist scholars have often worked in a relative vacuum of previous scholarship.

Given the historic invisibility of feminist scholarship—except for within cloistered circles and feminist enclaves—we prefer to conceptualize the sections of this book as *intellectual genres* rather than stages of feminist development in sociology. Based on these intellectual genres, we have broken the book into these five sections: "The Fourth Revolution: Confronting Androcentrism in Sociology"; "Exposing the Gender Gap: Separate Is Never Equal"; "Theorizing What Gender Means"; "Gender in the Machine: Structured Inequality"; and "Panning to the Margins." Although they are diverse, many of the different ideas and concepts presented in this collection originated concomitantly in time. Clearly, though, some scholarship received attention from the mainstream before others. The differential recognition is undoubtedly tied to the political climate of society in general and sociology in particular, both of which are typically conservative on gender issues. We resist reifying the conservative development of sociology by defining discrete stages of feminist scholarship. To do so implies that the new and better theories replaced old, inaccurate ones. We hope to span traditional intellec-

tual boundaries within feminist scholarship by situating this theoretical waxing and waning into the political climate at large. *All* of these genres have impacted feminist scholars. We celebrate the different genres and hope to underscore all of their contributions to the discipline and to individuals' careers and personal lives.

Overall, then, we stand by our early perceptions about how the field has changed over time—realizing, however, that this is a consequence of what sociologists were ready to hear, to cite, and to understand, not a result of when important ideas were first introduced. Women of color called attention to the margins a decade before white feminists began to look there. Perhaps the ability to understand these conceptual categories is cumulative—one can hardly see gender systematically built into organizations before one has noticed women are absent entirely from sociological thought.

While feminist scholarship has not benefited in the same ways as mainstream scholarship from a progressive development of ideas and findings, some feminist scholarship has emerged in direct response to previous research. For example, work on the social construction of gender developed by building on and reacting against sex role theory. Feminist scholars do elaborate on and reconceptualize previous feminist work. The problem is that this intellectual process takes place largely in the margins, where it has limited effect on the center. Likewise, the mood of the discipline affects which strains of thought come into vogue in different time periods. The progression of thought may be as much related to social politics as to scholarly importance of ideas. By incorporating many different intellectual genres here, we hope to bridge the gaps that divide feminist scholarship.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

We organize the book according to the genres' chronological recognition in sociology. The first section is titled "The Fourth Revolution: Confronting Androcentrism in Sociology." Articles in this section were among the first in sociology to recognize that women's experiences were conspicuously absent from theory, methods, and data. They explain that men's experiences and perspectives are not generalizable to all people. They indict sociologists for being androcentric and call for future work to include women's experiences as well as men's. This may be the first body of work that elucidates the hegemony of patriarchy in sociology. The second section is called "Exposing the Gender Gap: Separate Is Never Equal." In these articles, feminist scholars empirically document inequality between women and men, bringing women into traditional stratification research and providing evidence of unequal outcomes. These scholars provide the methodological and theoretical groundwork for generations to come.

We have titled the third section of this collection “Theorizing What Gender Means.” Feminists who fit into this intellectual genre critically assess the definition of gender. They argue—and demonstrate—that differences between women and men are not essential to either sex. They point out that men have gender, too, and they help make the social construction of gender a vital assumption of feminist research. In the fourth strain of thought, “Gender in the Machine: Structured Inequality,” feminists begin to apply the assumption of social construction to the institutional level of analysis, arguing that gender is more than individual behavior or identity. These scholars show how gender is built into structures and how this helps to create and maintain gender inequality.

The fifth intellectual genre is one that has only recently been recognized in sociology, although much of the groundwork was laid decades ago. We call this section “Panning to the Margins.” The efforts of these and other feminists who have traditionally been at the margins of mainstream society and academia have helped to alter the assumptions of many mainstream (i.e., white, middle/upper class) feminists. These challengers include people of color as well as gay, lesbian, and bisexual scholars. Today, more feminists validate a variety of experiences, as exemplified by standpoint theories. They make research more inclusive and responsive to diverse needs. We end the book with this intellectual genre because we feel it offers the best template for an integrative sociology in the future.

THE POLITICS OF PARTICIPATION

The hardest part of this project was deciding which articles to include. In making these decisions, we relied on our own sense of which intellectual traditions have impacted the discipline. We used citation indexes and listened to the women on the SWS list server. Even so, we have made substantive decisions as to what to include. Although occasionally our colleagues have jokingly referred to this volume as the “feminist canon book,” we resist the label. Many of these articles are written by the “mothers” of feminist sociology; there are many other seriously important articles we did not have room to include. The articles included here are best seen as *illustrations* of the kinds of key theoretical perspectives in feminist sociology. For each article included, there are several others equally central that had to be omitted because of space. Despite the absence of many important works, we believe this book can play a critical role in beginning to integrate feminist scholarship into the mainstream of sociological discourse. Here, we provide one volume for professors who teach sociological theory to add to their syllabi to provide an overview of feminist discourse. We supply the conceptual frameworks and some illustrative articles to help understand the place of

feminist thought *in sociology*. Providing an overview for those yet uninitiated is one of our goals; another goal is to provide feminist colleagues with a set of conceptual frameworks upon which to build future scholarship.

REFLECTIONS BY FEMINIST SCHOLARS

A unique aspect of this book is the inclusion of reflectors at the end of each section. In the spirit of the list server discussion, we invited feminist scholars to comment and reflect upon each section. The reflectors each discuss how the articles and perspectives they represent impacted them as sociologists, as feminists, and as individuals. The reflectors add a human element to the development of feminist scholarship. As sociologists, our scholarship all too often tends towards abstraction from reality (Sprague, 1997). The reflectors help ground us in the social context in which feminist scholarship takes place. They remind us of the emancipatory, transformative goal of feminism, talking personally about feminist theory and research. The reflectors illustrate that, for scholarship to develop, we require an intellectual community. We hope this book will foster such a community of feminist scholars. We encourage you to reflect on how these strains of feminist thought affect you intellectually, politically, and personally. Taken together, the articles and reflections in this book should act as a catalyst for future feminist forums where intellectual growth can occur. We have included electronic mail addresses for reflectors, and we have included them for ourselves. We hope this will stimulate further development of feminist thought through the interaction of readers, editors, and authors.

This volume will, at first glance, appeal mostly to feminist scholars and sociologists who study gender. As this community is our own intellectual home, we dedicate this work to the feminist sisterhood embodied in Sociologists for Women in Society—and this work is published in an SWS series. We are pleased to be the birth mothers. But this “baby” will thrive only if othermothers and otherfathers—like you—nurture the child, for our goal is to help mainstream feminist thought into the discipline—to further transform sociology. So we end our editorial musings with a challenge to every reader. If you are a feminist sociologist, do you know if the students in your departments (including the men) routinely encounter feminist scholarship in their required contemporary theory courses? If not, take our challenge to do your part to mainstream feminist discourse. Share this book with the (usually male) instructor who determines what is the contemporary “core” of the discipline presented to all students. Let him (or, less often, her) know that in the next century no one can do good sociology without an appreciation for the feminist re-visioning of intellectual thought. If you teach contemporary theory, please think of your role sociologically; you *are* a gatekeeper to what

the next generation of scholars considers the center of intellectual discourse. Bring feminist thought from the margins to the center. Assign this book—or some other feminist theory. If you are a student, we encourage you to share this book with other students and even faculty. Together, we will move feminist sociology closer to the center of the discipline.

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Contents

Introduction: Bridging the Gaps in Feminist Sociology	ix
Part I: The Fourth Revolution: Confronting Androcentrism in Sociology	1
1. My Four Revolutions: An Autobiographical History of the ASA <i>Jessie Bernard</i>	3
2. Women and Social Stratification: A Case of Intellectual Sexism <i>Joan Acker</i>	21
3. Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal <i>Alice S. Rossi</i>	31
Reflections	
Jobs and the Gender Gap: Bringing Women Into the Workplace <i>Christine E. Bose</i>	70
The Fourth Revolution: Reflection on Three Pioneers in the Transformation of American Sociology <i>Doris Wilkinson</i>	76
Part II: Exposing the Gender Gap: Separate Is Never Equal	81
4. Trends in Gender Stratification, 1970-1985 <i>Joan Huber</i>	83
5. Sex Differences in the Games Children Play <i>Janet Lever</i>	102
6. Race and Sex Differences in Career Dynamics <i>Rachel A. Rosenfeld</i>	113

Reflections

- Using the "Master's Tools" and Beyond:
Reconstructing Difference 152
Toni M. Calasanti

- From Sex/Gender Roles to Gender Stratification:
From Victim Blame to System Blame 159
Janet Saltzman Chafetz

Part III: Theorizing What Gender Means 165

7. Doing Gender 167
Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman

8. A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual
Experience, and the Dynamics of Gender 191
R. W. Connell

9. The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology 219
Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne

Reflections

- Challenging the Self With Feminist Scholarship 240
Douglas Mason-Schrock

- Discourses on Women, Sex, and Gender 247
Esther Ngan-ling Chow

Part IV: Gender in the Machine: Structured Inequality 257

10. The Impact of Hierarchical Structures on the
Work Behavior of Women and Men 259
Rosabeth Moss Kanter

11. Bringing the Men Back In: Sex Differentiation
and the Devaluation of Women's Work 278
Barbara F. Reskin

12. Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of
Gendered Organizations 299
Joan Acker

Reflections

- Personal Reflection on Three Gender and Work Articles 319
Irene Padavic

Gender and Organizations <i>Patricia Yancey Martin</i>	322
Part V: Panning to the Margins	327
13. Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism <i>Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp</i>	329
14. Mexican-American Women in the Social Sciences <i>Maxine Baca Zinn</i>	357
15. The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought <i>Patricia Hill Collins</i>	371
Reflections	
Finding Myself Among the Long-Haired Women: Reflections of Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Feminist Identity <i>Jacqueline Johnson</i>	397
Reflections on Transformations in Feminist Sociology—and in Myself <i>Nancy Whittier</i>	403
Conclusion: The Philosophy of Feminist Knowledge: Contemplating the Future of Feminist Thought	408
Reflection References	412
Index	416
About the Editors	434
About the Reflectors	436