

Research Article

Feminism and Feminist Scholarship in Academe: Women's Struggle for Recognition continues in Sociology.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on feminism and feminist scholarship as basic frameworks for women's struggles for recognition in academe in general and in sociology in particular. A distinct contribution of the paper to the current literature is the focus on the theory-perspective distinction in sociology as one of the major focuses of women's struggle for recognition in academe in general and in sociology in particular.

After a careful and critical examination of the classical roots, varieties, basic domain assumptions of feminist theory, theoretical and methodological arguments for and against a feminist perspective in sociology, the following conclusions are drawn: 1) feminist theory must be recognized and accepted for its significant contribution to the birth and development of sociology and its major role in helping to broaden the field of sociology and provide a broader and better understanding of society, the individual in society, and various social phenomena; 2) however, there is no sound sociological grounds for the establishment of a separate, distinct feminist perspective in sociology; and 3) it is necessary to clearly separate feminism in its activist form from legitimate feminist scholarship in sociology in order to preserve and maintain the integrity of the discipline as a legitimate science.

Keywords: Feminism, Feminist Scholarship, Feminist Theory, Theory, Theoretical Perspective

Introduction

The history of women's subjugation, domination and oppression is a long and painful one, involving all forms of discrimination and exclusionary practices used by men. The impact of all these on women's life chances has been well documented (Anderson and Collins 2004; Collins 1990, 1998; Jaggar 1983; Laslett and Thorne 1997; Lotz 2003; Rhode 1990; Wallace 2000; Wood 2003). Despite the crippling effect of the subjugation, domination and oppression, women have made great strides and continue to struggle to eliminate all the discriminatory and exclusionary practices directed toward them. This struggle's main objective is to achieve equality for all at the cultural, social, political, economic and global levels. In this struggle women have utilized several strategies. Prominent among these strategies are social movements, political activism, and intellectual and scholarly expression. The intellectual and scholarly struggle has been wide-ranging, involving interdisciplinary scholarship that seeks to present social reality and the world from a woman's point of view (Harding 2000; Julia 2000, Kelly 1984; Ritzer 2004; Wood 2003). However, in sociology in particular, some find this scholarship new and unacceptable, especially because: 1) Feminist theory is not anchored in any one of the three paradigms, social-facts, social definition, and social behavior, that have long patterned sociology's orientation to its subject matter; 2) Feminist scholarship is interdisciplinary in orientation, including not only sociology but anthropology, biology, economics, history, law, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology and theology; 3) Feminist theory is so radical, created by non-sociologists and women whose scientific credentials are under suspicion since the theory is closely linked to political activism (Ritzer 2004); and 4) historically, men have succeeded in systematically excluding women's contributions from major textbooks (Laslett and Thorne 1997; Ritzer 2000, 2004).

The obstacles, barriers, and resistance mounted by males notwithstanding, female scholars are asserting themselves in virtually every academic discipline. In the field of sociology this effort has resulted in a variety of feminist theories developed from and in some ways in direct opposition to, some of the existing sociological paradigms. Generally, sociologists recognize and accept the following five perspectives in sociology: 1) Structural-Functionalist; 2) Conflict; 3) Symbolic Interactionist; 4) Phenomenological; and 5) Rational Choice. However, with the proliferation of feminist theories in

sociology that all share similar basic domain assumptions which highlight women's unique experiences and the partial world view presented by men who dominate society in general and sociology in particular, is asking why there is no feminist perspective in sociology, independent of the five identified above a legitimate sociological question?

This paper focuses on feminism and feminist scholarship as basic frameworks for women's struggle for recognition in academe in general and in sociology in particular. A distinct contribution of the paper to the current literature is the focus on the theory-perspective distinction in sociology as one of the major focuses for women's struggle for recognition in academe in general and in sociology in particular. In an attempt to address why there is no feminist perspective in sociology, independent of the five identified above, a critical examination of the classical roots, varieties, basic domain assumptions, and methodological approaches of feminist theory in sociology is provided. This critical examination focuses on: 1) feminist scholarship in sociology; 2) the raging intellectual debates related to why there is no feminist perspective in sociology; 3) theoretical and methodological arguments advanced in support of or against a feminist perspective in the discipline; and 4) the sociological, as well as, social implications for the field of sociology drawn from these scholarship and debates. Before embarking upon the subject matter of this paper, it is necessary to first of all provide operational definitions of the following key terms as used in the paper : 1) feminism; 2) feminist scholarship, and 3) recognition in academe.

Operational Definitions

Feminism

Feminism as used in this paper combines the following two definitions: 1) in its narrowest sense, feminism is a complex set of political ideologies used by the women's movement to advance the cause of women's equality and put an end to sexist theory and the practice of social oppression; and 2) in a broader and deeper sense, feminism is defined as a variety of interrelated frameworks used to observe, analyze, and interpret the complex ways in which the social reality of gender inequality is constructed, enforced, and manifested from the largest institutional settings to the details of people's daily lives (Ali, Coate and Goro 2000; Barsky 1992; Bryson 2002; Johnson 1995; Ritzer 2000; Segal 1999; Zalewski 2000). The second definition implies, as well as, includes feminist scholarship. The two definitions combined, capture the essence of feminism, the praxis dimension, and the essence of feminist scholarship, the theoretical, academic, and intellectual dimension of feminism.

Feminist Scholarship

As used in this paper, feminist scholarship is defined as a set of facts and ideas acquired by those whose academic and intellectual orientation and interests are directed toward women's issues and problems in general and in particular those originating from oppressive, exclusionary, and discriminatory practices built into societal institutions, especially institutions such as the family, economy, religion, and the political, judicial and educational systems. In other words, feminist scholarship refers to the body of knowledge and learning acquired through studying, investigating, and observing these women's issues and problems specified above by those who are interested and do specialize in them. These scholars' objective is not just to produce knowledge about these issues and problems for the sake of knowledge but to ensure that the knowledge is of use to themselves as the investigators, as well as, to all those interested in finding solutions to these women's issues and problems. The ultimate goal of feminist scholars interested and specialized in the issues and social problems specified above is to contribute to the improvement of society and the lives of all, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin and other related variables (Barsky 1992; Collins 1998, 2004; Julia 2000; Lengermann and Niebrugge 2002; Pearsall 1999; Ritzer 2000; Segal 1999; Smith 1987; Zalewski 2000). As defined here, feminist scholarship implies feminism in that it provides the intellectual and academic frameworks and tools for feminism, as well as, the platform and foundation for praxis.

Recognition in Academe

Recognition in academe, as used in this paper, is defined as the intellectual ability, the readiness, and objectivity, of males and females alike, to embrace women's scholarly contributions and feminist scholarship in academe in general and in sociology in particular. This requires the elimination of all forms of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. It also requires

the establishment of what Habermas (1985, Vol. II: 139) refers to as communicative action which “is not only a process of reaching understanding; ...actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm and renew their membership in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions are not only processes of interpretation in which cultural knowledge is ‘tested against the world’; they are at the same time processes of social integration and of socialization.” This definition recognizes, acknowledges, and takes into account the differences in standpoint not only between men and women but also among women, as well as, among men, hence the need for communicative action which ensures meaningful socialization and subsequently meaningful, substantive recognition. Implicit in this definition is the sharing of ideas and knowledge that requires and is dictated by a true intellectual revolution brought about by sound scholarship and intellectual discourse, involving the following three levels, all contingent upon and facilitated by Habermas’s communicative action: 1) intellectual revolution among all scholars and intellectuals, both female and male; and 2) intellectual revolution among all females and males, facilitated by female and male scholars and intellectuals.

A basic assumption which drives our discussion in the next section is that in order to determine the status of women’s scholarly contributions to sociology and understand the theory-perspective distinction, it is necessary to identify and discuss social and intellectual forces which gave birth to sociology and feminism. Our discussion in the section below focuses on these forces and how classical sociologists responded to them, with the main objective of highlighting intellectual dishonesty exhibited by males and the discriminatory and exclusionary practices instituted and directed toward female scholars by their male counterparts.

Social and Intellectual Forces and the Birth of Sociology and Feminism

Both sociology and feminism emerged from social and intellectual conditions and changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kandal 1988; Ritzer 2004; Zeitlin 2001). These social and intellectual conditions and changes were precipitated by a host of forces, among them the following: the scientific revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the Enlightenment; the conservative reaction to the enlightenment; political revolutions; the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism; feminism; urbanization; socialism; religious change and the growth of science (Ritzer 2004).

Collectively, these forces brought about major changes in social structure, economic arrangement, and the relationship between society and the individual. At the individual level, their impact was both positive and negative. The negative effects included loss of economic security, excessive exploitation, poverty for many, devaluation and undermining of the family as both a production unit and a consumption unit, an increase in crime rate and in general, human alienation (Gilman 1898/1973; Thomas 1985; Ritzer 2004; Webb 1926; Weber 1905/1919). The positive effects included capital accumulation and self-actualization for a few, freedom of movement, increased political freedom and participation, increased individual rights and liberty, creation of conditions necessary for the destruction of vestiges of old tradition and customs (Kandal 1988; Thomas 1985; Ritzer 2004; Weber 1905/1919; Zeitlin 2001).

An important question that guides our discussion here is: How did these forces contribute to the birth of sociology and feminism? These forces contributed to the birth of sociology and feminism in a number of ways. However, our focus here is on the one we consider to be the most important, i.e. the conditions and the social problems these forces created, such as the destruction of ancient societies, marginalization, subjugation, and oppression of women, poverty, alienation, increased crime rate, child abuse and neglect, social upheaval, which all attracted the attention and interests of both male and female classical social thinkers. What is of significance to us here are the responses of classical social thinkers, both male and female, to these social conditions and problems created by these forces. How did these responses contribute to the birth of sociology and feminism? The discussion that follows is guided and driven by this question.

For Auguste Comte, the focus was on the destabilizing impact of these forces, especially the French Revolution and his response focused on finding a scientific solution to the chaos and intellectual anarchy that reigned in France. His approach can be characterized as both liberal and conservative. On one hand he supported equality in education for women and men but on the other he believed that only males had the intellectual ability to become sociologists and to understand a scientific examination of social reality. He argued that men were intellectually superior to women. This, of course, was not an accurate depiction of women’s intellectual capacity and many female scholars immediately recognized this flaw in Comte’s view of women and responded accordingly. For example, Harriet Martineau’s work disproves Comte’s views of women. In 1853 she published an extensively edited English version of Comte’s “Positive Philosophy”, a version he so approved that he substituted it, translated back into French, for his original edition. According to Ritzer (2004), it is only in

this relationship to Comte that, until the present decade, Martineau's name survived in the record of sociology's history. She can readily be considered the first sociologist, sociology's "founding mother." The failure to recognize her as sociology's "founding mother" and males' blatant acts of discrimination and exclusion contributed to the birth of feminism.

Emile Durkheim was concerned, especially with industrialization and the growth of cities and the problems they created for society. His response was shaped by his conservative intellectual slant which was driven by his obsession with social order and the need for social integration and firm regulation. Durkheim assumed that human beings were "impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification that always leads to a need for more" and if these passions are unrestrained, they multiply and human beings become enslaved by them and they become a threat to themselves and society (Ritzer 2004:193). Although Durkheim was concerned that the division of labor was characterized by certain liabilities such as competition, class conflict, and the feeling of meaninglessness generated by routine industrial work, he did not believe that there was a basic conflict among the owners, managers, and workers within an industry. He argued that any sign of such conflict indicated a lack of a common morality resulting from a lack of an integrative structure that produces social justice and equality of opportunity. Therefore, he proposed occupational association as the solution to conflict. His conservative response ignored gender and the negative consequences of gender socialization for females. For example, he viewed patriarchy simply as: 1) a form of division of labor by gender which socialized women into *expected* roles of subordination; 2) a result of conflicts arising from gender differences and gender inequalities; and 3) a form of discrimination, built into almost every institution in society, especially the economy. These later became major areas of focus for feminists and the feminist movement.

For Karl Marx, the concern was, especially, with social problems arising from the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism and their dehumanizing, alienating and exploitative tendencies. For example, one of his focuses was on the impact of capitalism on the family, patriarchy and the treatment of women. Marx and Engels (1956) considered patriarchy to be a product of capitalism and women were oppressed by capitalist society and the "bourgeois family." In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels (1970) argued that with the transition from a subsistence economy to one "with inherited property," the man took control in the home, and the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude. Those women and children who could find jobs, worked sixteen hours a day for low, starvation level wages. Women, in particular, experienced job discrimination and those who found employment made much less than their male counterparts. Marx's and Engels's ideas about and responses to a variety of social problems, produced by these forces, provided the basic foundation for contemporary sociology, especially for the conflict perspective and for feminism. Contemporary radical, socialist, and Marxist feminists draw on this foundation.

Georg Simmel focused on the money economy and his response was shaped enormously by his views of cities and the money economy. In his response, especially to the impact of cities and the money economy, he emphasized the unfair dominance of men which, in the cultural domain, prevented females from both contributing to common culture and achieving autonomy in their identity (Kandal 1988). He clearly attributed this to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the money economy.

Herbert Spencer was greatly influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism. Like Auguste Comte, his response was both liberal and conservative. In *Social Statics* (1851), Herbert Spencer expressed his concern about the unequal treatment of women. According to him, "Equity knows no difference in sex....the law of equal freedom manifestly applies to the whole race-female as well as male" (Kandal 1988: 24). Later, Spencer changed his views on the subject and argued, prior to 1854, that women were intellectually and emotionally inferior to men as a result of early socialization. After 1854, Spencer argued that females were emotionally and intellectually inferior to males because of an early arrest of their evolution necessitated by the need to reserve vital power needed for reproduction (Ashely and Orenstein 2001). According to him, women are destined by nature to take on domestic roles of motherhood. It is unnatural, he argued, for them not to be married; and their education and opportunities should be limited to learning those things necessary for their biologically ordained social role. These absurd claims enraged feminist scholars and their responses contributed to the rise of feminist theory and feminism.

Thorstein Bunde Veblen was concerned with the impact of capitalism in particular and he focused on the emergence of and distinction between the predatory and industrious classes. He argued that women were the first industrious class from the evolutionary transition from savagery to Barbarianism (Ashely and Orenstein 2001). But then, he argued, men removed them from productive labor and put them in conspicuous wasteful activities such as the binding of women's feet in China, women's supporting roles, typing, and copying. He argued further that men promoted the ideal female beauty as a frail, pale appearance which symbolizes a person incapable of hard work, with dresses that constrain

movement and fabric impractical for work. According to him, men have succeeded in removing women from all publicly visible important labor. All these, he argued, designed to perpetuate patterns of job discrimination against women.

Max Weber focused on free market and “free labor” and argued they were the precondition of modern industrial capitalism. In his response, he argued that capitalism provided for individual freedom through “free labor”. However, he argued, on the face of it, workers hire themselves out voluntarily, but actually it is “...under the compulsion of the whip of hunger...” (Weber 1961:208-209). To both Karl Marx and Max Weber, free labor had a double meaning: workers’ freedom from slavery and other forms of forced servitude and workers’ separation from any and all means of production. Weber found capitalism to be liberating for women, even though it fails to provide women the same opportunity to own the means of production that it does for men. In this sense, therefore, capitalism is viewed as both liberating and enslaving for women.

Female scholars such as Jane Addams, Anna Julia Cooper, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Harriet Martineau, Beatrice Potter Webb and Marianne Weber were also alarmed by the social problems created by these forces, especially those created by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism. Their responses, which were unique and in many ways in reaction to and/or in clarification of the responses of their male counterparts, contributed to the emergence of sociological theory and provided the intellectual roots of modern feminist scholarship.

Jane Adams’s response was shaped partially by the fact that from an omnibus in London she saw poor people desperately bidding for rotten food and eating it raw (Ritzer 2004). This led to her creation of Hull House which focused primarily on the poor and their conditions. She fought to establish socialize democracy, aimed at creating a society in which relations are based on what contemporary feminists describe as inclusivity, empowerment, and vantage point. She aimed at presenting a feminist sociological theory created around the pursuit of a distinctively cultural feminist goal for society. She envisioned a society of relationships of human beings in social interaction who are filled with the desire for kindness and recognition of others’ vantage point.

In her response, Anna Julia Cooper focused on race, gender and class stratifications which she viewed as ultimately the product of a global capitalist economic system. She demonstrated a clear understanding of the fact that domination, inequality, and race conflict were not only issues in the various nation-states of the West, but a process in the “global order” of capitalism. She never identified herself as a sociologist not because of her intellectual alienation from sociology but because of the enormous barriers to her participation in the sociological community posed by a combination of sexism and racism (Ritzer 2004).

In the “Voices from the South”, she discussed Comte and Spencer and presented her most general principle of social organization as a sociological one: “This.... law holds true in sociology as in the world of matter, that equilibrium, not repression among conflicting forces is the condition of natural harmony, of permanent progress, and of universal freedom.”(Cooper 1892/1969:160, cited in Ritzer 2004:294).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s response focused on what she viewed as the fundamental social institution, the economy, in which gender stratification is the primary tension in all the economies of all known societies, producing in effect, two sex classes—men as a “master class” and women as a class of subordinate and disempowered social beings (Ritzer 2004:279). She called this pattern the “sexuo-economic arrangement”. Her explanation of the consequences of this sexuo-economic arrangement parallels Marx’s exploration of the implication of economic class conflict for history and society. Ritzer (2004:279) argues, “that Marx is more familiar to us reflects not only his position in world history but a massive politics of knowledge in both society and sociology that has periodically advanced the Marxian thesis and systematically erased Gilman’s feminist thesis.” Like Marx, Gilman argued that: 1) the economy was the basic social institution, an area of physical human work that produces individual and social life and moves society progressively forward; 2) it is through work that individuals potentially realize their species-nature as agentic producers; and 3) our personalities are formed by our actual experiences of work. According to her, meaningful work is the essence of human self-realization and that restricting or denying the individual access to meaningful work reduces the individual to a condition of non-humanity. This is the criterion by which she judges the essential fairness or unfairness of the society in place.

Additionally, she argued the sexuo-economic arrangement is a major barrier to self-actualizing work for both men and women, though for women much more than men, resulting in individual unhappiness and major social pathologies such as class conflict, political corruption, distorted sexuality, greed, poverty, waste and environmental exploitation, inhuman conditions in both wage labor and unpaid household labor, harmful educational practices, child neglect and abuse, ideological excess, war, and above all, a systemic structural condition of human alienation. The solution to all these social problems of the wasteful sexuo-economic arrangement, according to Gilman, was to break up the arrangement of the sex classes. She argued that the first step to achieving this is the economic emancipation of women which requires: 1) fundamental changes in gender socialization and in education; 2) the physical development of women to their full size and

strength; 3) a rethinking and renegotiation of the personal, relational, and sexual expectations between women and men; and 4) the rational dismantling and reconstruction of the institution of the household so that women can have freedom to do the work they choose so that society may be enriched by their labor (Ritzer 2004:282).

Harriet Martineau's response focused on investigating "women's education, family, marriage and law, violence against women, the tyranny of fashion, the inhumanity of the Arab harem, the inhumanity of the British treatment of prostitutes, the nature of women's paid work in terms of its brutally heavy physical demands and wretchedly low wages. Her particular focus was on the wage labor of working-class women in factories, agriculture, and domestic service and in these studies she brought together the double oppressions of class and gender," (Ritzer 2004:277). She viewed society as a nation state or politico-cultural entity produced by interacting individuals as autonomous moral and practical agents with the ultimate goal of providing for human happiness. Overall, she focused on a woman-centered sociology and argued that the domination of women paralleled the domination of slaves.

In Beatrice Potter Webb's response, she decided to devote herself to: 1) the problems of "poverty amidst riches", focusing on the causes of poverty ; 2) the problems of economic inequality; and 3) finding ways to reform the capitalist economy. She admitted that her focus on these problems was not because she was moved by charity but because she was moved by the unease that "affected much of the class of wealthy British capitalists to which her family belonged as they confronted the fact that four-fifths of the population of Britain had not benefitted from the Industrial Revolution and were indeed the worse off for it," (Ritzer 2004:301). Webb found the solution to these problems in Fabian Socialism which sought to influence the course of reform in Britain by a process of "permeation" which involved supplying information and platform planks to any political party that would champion any aspect of the reform of inequality.

In Marianne Weber's response she argued that "the interaction of capitalism and patriarchy creates barriers to the attempts of women, especially non-elite women, to seek greater liberty and autonomy," (Ritzer, 2004: 300). She contended that in capitalistic work arrangements, women are doomed to wage-sector work that is exhausting, onerous, and grossly underpaid. This situation, she believed, produces meaninglessness and alienation for these women. It is worthwhile noting and recognizing her excellent grasp of the ambivalent and contradictory position of women as she argued further that most working women have not chosen to work outside the home. They have been forced to seek wages by capitalistic and class pressures. These working women, she pointed out, have a double burden of wage-work demands and unaltered expectations for them to be fully responsible for child care and house work. Marianne Weber, however, did not suggest that the home situations of women become an alternative to wage work either because house work is an area of incessant drudgery and women who stay at home, regardless of their social class, are oppressed by economic dependency and patriarchal male authority. According to Marianne Weber, the improvement of women's situation required a reform of the patriarchal household rather than the capitalistic workplace since patriarchy, more than capitalism, is responsible for the subjugation, oppression and domination of women by men. This was a counter argument to that of Karl Marx and Engels who argued that the subjugation, oppression and domination of women by men was a direct result of capitalism. As a matter of historical fact, according to Marx and Engels, women were not always viewed as inferior to men. Historical records indicate that ancient societies were matriarchal and women's ability to procreate was revered as possessing supernatural power (Engels 1972; Perry 1978).

In order to establish the link between the classical responses discussed above and contemporary sociology and feminist theory, we start by examining the theory-perspective distinction in contemporary sociology and its implication for feminist theory.

Theory and Perspective in Sociology

As demonstrated in the section above, both contemporary sociological theory and contemporary feminist theory emerged from the responses of classical social thinkers, both male and female, to the social changes and social problems produced by social and intellectual forces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, while the theoretical contributions of male classical theorists have been recognized, accepted, and incorporated into contemporary sociological theory and finally transformed into the five theoretical perspectives identified earlier, the theoretical contributions of their female counterparts, the "founding mothers", have either been pushed to the periphery of the profession, annexed or discounted and written out of sociology's public record of its history (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985). It is only recently through the research and hard work of concerned and interested feminist scholars that these theoretical contributions of the "founding mothers" are brought to light and major varieties of feminist theory have been constructed from them. A relevant question of sociological

significance to the issue of women's recognition in academe in general and in sociology in particular is: Why have these varieties of feminist theory not been transformed into a feminist perspective in sociology?

To respond to this question we must start by addressing the following related questions which are intended to highlight the main focus of this paper: 1) what is the status of the varieties of feminist theory in sociology?; 2) where do they fit in with respect to sociology as a social science?; 3) are they simply theories developed from a woman-centered approach?; 4) should they constitute a perspective?; and 5) does it really matter whether they are classified as a perspective or just as theories? To address these questions we start with a critical distinction between a theory and a perspective.

A scientific theory may be defined as a set of interrelated propositions which allows for the systematization of knowledge, explanation, and prediction of social life and the generation of new research hypotheses (Faia 1986). It can also be conceptualized simply as "a set of interrelated concepts that seeks to explain the causes of an observable phenomenon" (Kornblum 1997: 51). According to Ritzer (1996; 2004), a theory must: 1) have a wide range of application; 2) deal with centrally important social issues; and 3) stand the test of time.

A perspective, on the other hand, is defined simply as an orienting strategy (Wagner and Berger 1985). According to Johnson (2000), a perspective is a set of assumptions about reality that underlies the questions we ask and the kinds of answers we arrive at as a result. It is also viewed as "sets of interrelated theories that offer explanations for important aspects of social behavior" (Kornblum 1997: 54). These three definitions combined, provide a general conceptualization of a perspective as simply a paradigm, one that encompasses a variety of theories which all share the same basic domain assumptions. This means a perspective provides a general model of *society* based on a clearly defined, unique and distinct set of basic domain assumptions about a variety of substantive, as well as, conceptual social phenomena such as the nature of social reality, the nature of human nature, the nature of social order, prejudice, discrimination, crime, poverty, stratification, racism, power, social inequality etc. For example, the structural-functionalist perspective is distinguished from other perspectives by the following basic domain assumptions: 1) society is like a living organism or a system with parts that are generally interrelated or interdependent; 2) there exists a normal state of affairs of equilibrium comparable to the normal or healthy state of an organism; 3) the system has strategies designed for all parts of the system to reorganize in order to re-establish normality or equilibrium in case of any disruptions; and 4) there is value consensus which ensures that equilibrium or stability is created and maintained (Wallace and Wolf 1995).

Based on these basic domain assumptions of the structural-functionalist perspective, different theorists construct theories, derive hypotheses, test them and construct new theories. This perspective's research approach is, in most part, driven by objectivity, determinism, and positivism. A sociological perspective, therefore, is much broader than a sociological theory and serves to group theories together to facilitate, as well as, provide a better understanding of the social world (Thio 1992). Before turning to whether or not feminist theory should be transformed into a perspective, it is necessary and helpful to identify and briefly discuss: 1) the varieties of feminist theory; 2) the basic domain assumptions of feminist theory; and 3) methodological approaches of feminist theory.

Varieties of Feminist Theory in Sociology

Based on the classical foundation laid by female and male scholars discussed earlier, varieties of feminist theory have been constructed by contemporary feminist scholars, designed to describe and explain human social experiences from a woman-centered approach. These varieties represent the themes feminist theory offers for constructing feminist sociological theories (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985). Each of the varieties of feminist theory can be classified under the following broad categories: 1) difference; 2) inequality; 3) oppression; and 4) third wave. The distinctions within these four major categories are made on the basis of different responses to the following three questions: What about the women?; Why then is all this as it is?; What about the differences among women? (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

Offering a clear distinction between one category of theory and another allows feminist scholars to both pattern the framework of feminist theory and to create modes of classifying the ever growing body of work on gender. However, it is important to note that the works of many theorists do not conveniently fit into one category or another and therefore, they must be discussed in a more general sense and certain theoretical statements must be emphasized and distinguished as fitting into one particular variety as opposed to another.

The first variety, theories of gender difference, focuses mainly on the differences between the sexes. One way of distinguishing between the several theories of gender difference is the response to the concept of essentialism, which

means that a thing or person possesses or lacks a particular quality as a fundamental and basic nature of its/her/his being (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

Cultural Feminism represents a variant of theory of gender difference. In historical patriarchal society the idea of gender difference was a distinction emphasized by men to justify and to maintain a pattern of male dominance and female subordination. However, feminist scholars, such as Margaret Fuller, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Jane Addams, attempt to extol the positive aspects of the "feminine character", emphasizing such virtues as nonviolence, cooperation, pacifism, and sharing (Donovan 1985). Cultural feminists have continued this tradition up to the present in arguments about such things as a mode of "caring attention" in women's consciousness developed through mothering (Ruddick 1980), about a distinct style of female communication (Bate and Taylor 1988; Tannen 1990, 1993, 1994), and about women's greater capacity for peaceful co-existence (Campbell 1993; Ruddick 1994).

Other explanations of gender difference include those with a biological focus. Biological explanations suggest that gender-specific behavior is determined by hormonal development over the life cycle. Another type of explanation of gender differences relies on institutional and socialization explanations. The emphasis here is on the life-long socialization process and the gender-specific roles men and women are encouraged to act out. These types of explanations place emphasis on the sexual division of labor as a pattern of role-playing in which women's lives are centered more around the home and family (mother roles, wife roles) and the socialization of female children in preparation for similar gender-specific life roles (Best 1983; Brown and Gilligan 1992; Sidel 1990).

The second variety, theories of gender inequality, is characterized by four general themes, all of which focus on unequal relationships of males and females in society. However, in contrast to gender difference theories, gender inequality theories are more political in terms of the belief that the situation of gender inequality can be changed. Prominent among theorists of gender inequality are liberal feminists who do not emphasize the feminine nurturing character found in theories of gender difference. Their belief is that inequality is not based on a biological difference between men and women but is grounded in the fabric of social structure and its institutions. For the most part, they see nothing of particular value in the private sphere traditionally set aside for women. They see goals and aspirations for women in the public sphere and insist on destroying and tearing down the walls of sexism to allow women full access to the public sphere where they are able to self-actualize. Bernard's *The Future of Marriage* (1982) describes how the meaning and impact of marriage are different for the husband and the wife. In fact, she sees a marriage as an arena in which the woman is powerless and performs culturally mandated domestic, emotional, and sexual roles. For liberal feminists the ideal gender arrangement is one in which each individual chooses the lifestyle most suitable for him or her, and has that choice respected (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

Marxian feminists use oppression theory, constructed by Marx and Engels, along with feminist social protest. Like Marx before them, these feminist theorists focus on inequalities of the capitalistic system but from a feminine point of view. They suggest that within any social class, women are less advantaged than men in their access to material goods, power, status, and possibilities of self actualization (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985). Contemporary Marxian feminists feel that any direct mobilization of women against men is counter-revolutionary and that to destroy the capitalist system which perpetuates gender inequality, working class women and men must fight together as one.

The third variety, theories of gender oppression, centers around the notion that women are being used, controlled, subjugated, and exploited by men (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985). Gender oppression theorists are very militant in their stance that the situation of women is a direct consequence of the unequal power between men and women and that this pattern of oppression of women has its roots in patriarchy.

Psychoanalytic feminists use Freud's theories to explain the patriarchal nature of gender oppression. In analyzing the male, these theorists use the male child's ambivalent feelings towards his mother and the adult male's fear of death to explain the male's deep emotional need to control and dominate women. In a sense, women represent a part of himself that he fears or is alienated from. These theorists argue that women as mothers do not have the same fear of death and lack this tendency towards neurosis although they are psychically unable to resist this male domination (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

Radical feminists base their theory on the absolute positive value of women and the idea that the pattern of oppression of women is as pervasive as the system of patriarchy which causes this oppression. Central to radical feminism is the image of patriarchy as violence practiced by men and male-dominated organizations against women. The term violence is used in both overt and covert contexts to refer to such acts as rape, enforced prostitution, and pornography as

well as standards of fashion and beauty, and tyrannical ideas of motherhood (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985). These theorists suggest that the only way that women can overcome this pattern of patriarchy is through realizing their true self-worth and forming a bond with other positive women (sisterhood) (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

The fourth variety, Third-wave feminism, consists of works critical of theories constructed in the 1960s and 1970s which tended to use a generalized, monolithic concept of "woman" as a generic category in stratification. It focuses instead on the factual and theoretical implications of differences among women. The main focus of this variety is on the differences among women resulting from an unequal distribution of socially produced goods and services on the basis of position in the global system, class, race, ethnicity, age, and affectional preference as these factors interact with gender stratification (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

This focus on difference has produced at least the following three areas of concretized intellectual work in third-wave feminist theory: 1) a depiction of the diversity of women's experiences; 2) a critique of many of the most basic categories common to both modern feminist and social analyses; and 3) an attempt to map the world in terms of how the vectors of subordination and privilege—gender, class, race, age, ethnicity, global location, and affectional preference—both interact structurally and intersect dynamically in people's lives to create oppression and inequality (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

In the area of *diversity*, the literature is based on the belief that truth about social relations is discovered best from the vantage point of oppressed peoples (both women and men), whose accounts must therefore be uncovered. Third-wave feminists in this area probe the intricacies of this system of domination by exploring the position of women who are most subordinated, that is, least privileged. One particularly revealing source of knowledge of the social relations of domination has proved to be that of North Atlantic women of color, who find themselves intimately linked to those who control and exploit them in situations of domestic employment, poorly paid service work, and sexual, emotional, and reproductive work, both paid and unpaid. Women of color find themselves closely linked to those who oppress them as women, as people of color, and as poor people. They have the experience of being "the stranger within" the circles of domination (Collins 1990). The literature giving voice to diversity may be seen as being of three main types. First, studies about women from non-privileged backgrounds, those women on the margins. Second, studies that position these women within institutions such as family and work. Third, works which juxtapose or interweave accounts of women's diversity, creating in their totality a theoretically suggestive portrait of diversity (Lengermann and Niebrugge 1985).

In the area of *Critique*, the studies that attempt to critique existing concepts in feminist theory are partly in debt to postmodernism. But that debt can be much overstated. Long before the postmodernist debate and the deconstructive method became academic bywords, feminists on the margins—women of color, lesbians, and working-class women—were questioning (Hewitt 1992) not only sexual ideology and the unequal status of women, but more broadly all systems of domination—sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist, and imperialist—and the particular false consciousness that let middle-class white heterosexual women use the term woman as a monolithic category in opposing male domination while ignoring their own acts of domination toward women who do not share their class, race, and affectional preference. This critique has produced questions about what we mean by categories such as "woman," "gender," and "race" (for example; Butler 1990; Kaminsky 1994) and has redefined "whiteness" as a social construct rather than an absolute from which other "races" depart (Frankenberg 1993; Ware 1992). These questions have forced white women to reevaluate the feminism they produced as a feminism and not feminism per se. In this reevaluation they try to see the revolution they made and failed to make (Breines 1992).

In the area of *Vectors of Oppression and Privilege*, the underlying premise is that no amount of academic questioning of what is meant by "women," "gender," and "difference" will remove from the heart of third-wave feminism the deep conviction that "not all suffering is equal, that there is a calculus of pain" (Arguelles, 1993). That calculus is determined by the intersection in one's individual life of global location, class, race, ethnicity, age, affectional preference, and other dimensions of stratification. Many feminist studies now are devoted to describing and explaining the intersection of these vectors of oppression and privilege as a macro phenomenon and as an individual lived experience. Ultimately, these studies show an intricately interwoven system of class, race, gender, and global oppression and privilege. They show that this oppressive system produces pathological attitudes, actions, and personalities within the ranks of both the oppressor and the oppressed. They show that resistance to both oppression and pathology is: 1) located in the unquenchable need of human beings for full, individuated self-actualization; and 2) located in one's dialectical position in one's particular community of oppressed people, as a member of it, whose culture, nurturance, and survival strategies are essential to the well-being of its individual members. Theories of the vectors of oppression and privilege feed directly into feminist sociological theory.

Based on the varieties of feminist theory discussed above a number of basic domain assumptions of feminist sociological theory can be identified. We now turn to these assumptions in the next section.

Basic Domain Assumptions of Feminist Sociological Theory

Feminist theory first and foremost assumes a "woman-centered" approach to the examination and analysis of the social world. By "woman-centered" feminist scholars mean analyses conducted by women, for women, and about women (Ritzer 1996, 2000). In a more specific way, it is "woman-centered in three respects: 1) its starting point is the situation and experiences of women in society; 2) women are the central subjects in the investigative process; and 3) it is critical and activist on behalf of women, seeking to produce a better world for women in particular and humanity in general (Ritzer 1996, 2000).

A second basic domain assumption of feminist theory is that women are biologically different from men. These biological differences have, historically, been used by male-dominated society as the basis for gender- role socialization which emphasizes female expressive qualities and male instrumental qualities (Wallace and Wolf 1999). Feminist scholars argue that this gender- role socialization, driven by biological differences, has resulted in institutionalized discrimination against women and promoted the subjugation, subordination, and oppression of women.

A third domain assumption of feminist theory is that society is male dominated and oppressive of women. Marxist feminist scholars argue that the main source of this oppression is the capitalist system. This system, they argue, has facilitated the establishment of the patriarchal family which has helped in legitimizing the oppression of women (Ritzer 1996, 2000). It is argued that the systematic exclusion of women's contributions to the field of sociology and male domination of the field are clear examples of this oppression of women. Feminist scholars suggest that knowledge of the world produced by deriving hypotheses from theories constructed by males is partial and insufficient because the full essence of social life has not been captured. Hence, a complete and full understanding of the social world is not possible without a woman's point of view.

A fourth domain assumption of feminist theory is that the basic social inequalities that exist between men and women in every society result, primarily, from women's subordinate position in society and their marginal participation in societal institutions. As a result of these social inequalities, women's experiences of life and conception of society are different from those of men and therefore their theoretical formulations and research approaches and orientation are likely to broaden our knowledge base and provide a better understanding of social phenomena in every social setting.

A fifth domain assumption of feminist theory is that women's experiences are unique and these experiences are shaped, primarily, by biological and gender differences between women and men. Feminist scholars argue that because, in every situation, women are treated differently and their experiences are shaped by social forces different from those that shape men's experiences, feminist theory provides us with a conceptualization of social reality, society, and social life that completes our understanding of these social phenomena.

A sixth domain assumption is that feminist theory has a methodological approach that is distinct and different from those of male-dominated theories. This assumption is derived from the various methodological approaches discussed below. Whether or not those methodological approaches are really different is debatable. Most of them are the same ones that are used by male-dominated theories in sociology.

A seventh domain assumption is that there can be no disinterested observers. This means that knowledge and science are social products. As such, the social location or position of the scholar or scientist does affect the knowledge or scientific facts produced about the social world. This fact, of course, has already been pointed out by theorists such as Marx and Durkheim.

Feminist scholars argue that: 1) the methodological approaches they utilize are bound to be dictated by these basic domain assumptions; 2) these basic domain assumptions are consistent with these methodological approaches; and 3) these methodological approaches are unique and different from those used in mainstream perspectives in sociology. Before we turn our attention to whether feminist theory should be transformed into a feminist perspective in sociology, it is worthwhile identifying and critically discussing the methodological approaches of feminist theory.

Feminist Methodologies

According to Ritzer (2000) feminist scholars focus on the following theoretical concerns: 1) those which call for a description of the social world from women's standpoint, asking questions such as: what about the women?; where are the women in the situation being investigated?; how do they experience the situation?; what exactly are they doing?; what does it mean to them?; and 2) those which call for an explanation of the social world by asking questions such as: why have women's roles been different from, less privileged than, and subordinate to those of men?

Feminist theorists typically employ "*oral histories*" as the basis of their methodology.

These oral histories are categorized into three distinct types: topical (open-ended interviews); biographical (using individuals other than the interviewee as the focus); and autobiographical (the interviewee's own life experiences as the focus). Oral histories are generally not considered true research methods by the mainstream academic community because of their subjective nature. Feminist theorists such as Michal Mccall and Judith Wittner, on the other hand claim that they can use oral histories to "study social life from the vantage point of women", (Reinharz 1992).

Feminist content analysis is characterized by the use of cultural artifacts as texts for research in much the same way any researcher would use content analysis as a research method. However, a feminist content analysis would categorize this text by gender. Therefore a feminist theorist would use artifacts made by women, about women and for women. Typically, studying cultural products through the lens of feminist theory exposes a patriarchal culture (Reinharz 1992). Historically ignored women are made visible when relevant cultural artifacts are made visible and studied. Content analysis comes in two varieties: quantitative analysis and interpretive analysis.

Although case studies are used in all types of social research, *feminist case studies* are differentiated by feminist theorists as having three main purposes in addition to generating and testing theory. Those purposes include the analysis of a phenomenon over time, analysis of the significance of a phenomenon for future events, and analysis of the relation between parts of a phenomenon (Reinharz 1992). The interest of feminist scholars in case studies stems partly from the trend in social science to seek generalizations instead of specifics. These scholars feel that this tendency toward generalization is a negative in terms of examining the lives of women.

Feminist interview research is frequently used by feminist researchers who generally favor the open-ended interview in their search to explore people's views of reality (Reinharz 1992). Reinharz further states that the "use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives" (1992:6).

Feminist researchers deny the existence of a social reality independent of the observer. They advocate feminist *ethnography* as a method of feminist fieldwork of interpretive understanding between the researcher and the subject. Feminist ethnography attempts to interpret women's behavior as shaped by the social context.

Original female research methods focus on forms of "conscious-raising" since conscious-raising embodies the principle of enabling women to discuss and understand their experiences in a feminine context. *Group diaries* and *drama* are other methods devised to study life from a feminine point of view.

Based on the discussion of the varieties and methodological approaches of feminist theory above, it is obvious that the existing perspectives are not capable of providing a complete demographic view of social phenomena because they tend to marginalize as well as ignore women's stand point and contributions. The relevance of feminist theory to the study and understanding of the social world is obvious. However, despite its relevance, the question that remains unanswered is whether there are sound sociological grounds on the basis of which feminist theory should be transformed into a feminist perspective in sociology?

Feminist Theory or Feminist Perspective?

The oppression, subordination, domination, and discrimination directed toward women in human societies throughout history is undeniable. In recent times women have fought these social ills in several arenas. In the political arena, they have recorded a number of hard-fought victories through lots of struggles and since most of these social ills are still prevalent in most of society and its institutions today, the struggles continue.

The fiercest of the battles today are in academe where the scholarly contributions of women are ignored, trivialized,

or outright excluded from major textbooks. In the field of sociology many of the so-called "gatekeepers" have not fully embraced feminist theory as valid scientific theory, even though based on the definition of a scientific theory provided earlier in the "Theory and Perspective in Sociology" section, feminist theory is valid, sound, and solid scientific theory. If feminist theory meets and fulfills the requirements and criteria for scientific theory, why then does it continue to be marginalized and ignored in the field of sociology? Does the fact that feminist theory has not been transformed into a perspective have anything to do with this marginalization?

According to Ritzer (1996, 2000) those opposed to feminist theory do advance the following arguments: 1) that feminist theory is interdisciplinary involving anthropology, biology, economics, history, law, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology, and theology and therefore there is nothing distinctively sociological about it; 2) that feminist scholars seek to extend their field only in part while focusing mostly on a critical understanding of society with the view to changing the social world in directions deemed more just and humane; 3) that feminist theory is new, radical, (with many of its creators not sociologists) and closely associated more with activism than with scholarship; and 4) that most of feminist theory is not anchored in any of the major three paradigms (social facts, social definition, and social behavior) that have long patterned sociology's orientation to its subject matter.

The ultimate sociological criteria used by sociologists to transform theories into perspectives is the set of distinct, unique basic domain assumptions common to all those theories. Does feminist theory have such a set of basic domain assumptions and are those assumptions unique to feminist theory or distinctively different from those of the existing perspectives in sociology? This question calls for a careful and critical examination of the basic domain assumptions of feminist theory identified earlier.

The assumptions of oppression of women and social inequalities between men and women are not unique to feminist theory. These are also basic to the conflict perspective in sociology. As a matter of fact, conflict theories provide some of the basic intellectual roots for the work of many feminist scholars.

The assumptions of a woman-centered approach, biological differences between men and women, and unique experiences of women do not provide a sound sociological basis for the transformation of feminist theory into a separate, distinct perspective in sociology because men can also argue for their own perspective which focuses on a man-centered approach, biological differences, and unique experiences. The assumption made by many feminist scholars that sociology is man-centered is in some sense accurate but it is also very inaccurate and a gross misrepresentation of reality. It is accurate in the sense that contemporary sociology recognizes and credits its founding fathers but not its founding mothers. It is inaccurate and a gross misrepresentation of reality because, as many third-wave feminist scholars have correctly argued, even among women there are differences and different stand points. The same is true of men and therefore a transformation of any group-based theory into a perspective in sociology would undermine what seems to be sound sociological criteria on which the existing perspectives are based. In fact, if feminist theory is transformed into a feminist perspective in sociology on the basis of this assumption, then perspectives would have to be established for any minority group in society, for that matter, on the same grounds.

It is important to note that the first and fifth assumptions seem to suggest that one has to be "woman" in order to undertake a legitimate *sociological* analysis of women's views of social reality, society and social life. This seems to be misleading because one does not have to be woman, man, black, white, elderly or any stratification grouping to be *sociological*.

The assumption of feminist distinctive methodological approaches is inaccurate and misleading because they are not entirely unique to feminist scholarship since most of the methodological approaches (oral histories, content analysis, case studies etc.) are also used in the established perspectives in sociology.

The assumption that there are no disinterested observers is also not unique to feminist theory. Sociologists such as Marx and Durkheim also addressed this in their work. Even if this assumption were unique to feminist theory, there would still be a problem because of the differences among women. This would mean that all truth is relative and therefore marginalized women among women as a group would have to use this as a basis for their own perspective in sociology.

Discussion and Conclusions

Both sociology and feminism emerged from the social and intellectual forces of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is the responses provided by classical social thinkers to the social changes and conditions resulting from these forces that paved the way for contemporary sociology and feminism. Although female responses were, in many ways, different from

those of males, there were significant similarities, especially between: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Karl Marx; Marianne Weber and Max Weber; Anna Julia Cooper and Herbert Spencer; Anna Julia Cooper and Auguste Comte; Harriet Martineau and Auguste Comte. These similarities demonstrate that these theorists were all engaged in *sociological* analyses irrespective of their gender. However, contemporary sociology does not reflect this important sociological fact. What is of major sociological concern in contemporary sociology, we argue, is neither the uniqueness nor the distinctiveness of feminist theory but the systematic exclusion and marginalization of the contributions of the founding mothers.

The issue here is systematic exclusion of women and failure to engage in Habermas's communicative action (1985, Vol. II: 139). The issue is not gender because one does not have to be male or female to engage in *sociological* investigations, analyses and understanding of social phenomena. For example, in the feminist sociological theory presented by Lengermann and Niebrugge (1985) a feminist sociology of knowledge, the macro-social order, the micro-social order, subjectivity are discussed. These areas of concern are not new, *all* sociologists grapple with them. What is new about their approach is what contemporary feminists refer to as *inclusivity*. The approaches of male sociologists to these areas of concern fail to examine how women experience them. Lengermann and Niebrugge (1985) have helped to clarify by distinguishing between female and male experiences in these areas of concern.

The argument that feminist theory should be transformed into a feminist perspective based on patterns of gender inequality, oppression, and differences conveniently understates the fact that many groups experience inequality, oppression and differential treatment in society as a result of variables other than gender. Many groups in society do experience their own unique patterns of subordination and domination on the basis of variables such as age, religion, race, ethnicity, national origin and sexual orientation, which are equally crippling to them as gender patterns of domination are to women. Obviously, the patterns of exclusion and discrimination directed toward women historically and women's marginal status in sociology constitute a serious problem and point to the need for inclusiveness which would provide for many more feminine voices and female meaningful participation in societal institutions in general and in sociological theory in particular. This meaningful participation can be achieved in many ways in sociology other than transforming feminist theory into a feminist perspective on the basis of political concerns rather than sound academic and intellectual grounds and arguments. The concern of many sociologists, we argue, is that if political concerns become the basis for this important disciplinary and intellectual discourse, then other groups such as the elderly can use the same political arguments to fight for the creation of an elderly perspective in sociology since the elderly are discriminated against, marginalized and do participate marginally in various societal institutions. This is not an argument against a women-centered perspective per se, but an argument against the creation of any "group-specific" perspective in sociology that is driven by political concerns, irrespective of whether that perspective is representative of race, gender, social class, ethnicity, or any combination of these or other variables.

It is obvious from a careful and critical examination of the existing perspectives in sociology that none of them was established on the basis of any group-specific characteristics or experiences. Each established perspective in sociology represents a group of theories that just attempt to explain the social world or society in general. Based on a critical examination of the basic domain assumptions of feminist theory and arguments for and against a feminist perspective in sociology, we conclude that: 1) feminist theory must be recognized and accepted for its significant contribution to the birth and development of sociology and its major role in helping to broaden the field of sociology and provide a broader and better understanding of society, the individual in society, and various social phenomena and feminist theorists should therefore be embraced and encouraged to continue making these essential contributions to the field; 2) however, there are no sound sociological grounds for the transformation of feminist theory into a feminist perspective in sociology; and 3) feminism in its activist form must be separated from legitimate feminist scholarship in sociology.

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