

Lecture Notes

Chapter 10: Early Women Sociologists and Classical Sociological Theory: 1830–1930

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction

- A. The traditional telling of the history of sociological theory has been shaped by a politics of gender that tends to emphasize male achievement and erase female contributions.
- B. As conventionally told, the creation of sociological theory is presented as the work of two generations of men, ignoring the women.
- C. The reclamation of forgotten female figures is currently under way in the burgeoning of feminist-inspired research of the past three decades.
- D. Dorothy E. Smith's conception: "A sociology is a systematically developed consciousness of society and of social relations."
- E. The parts that seem essential to any social theory:
 - i. The fundamental organization of society;
 - ii. The nature of the human being;
 - iii. The relation between ideas and materiality;
 - iv. The purpose and methods appropriate to social-science study;
 - v. A definition of the social role of the sociologist;
 - vi. The articulation of a principle from which to judge the essential fairness of the society in place.
- F. From the vantage point of contemporary feminist sociological theory, we recognize certain themes and concerns central to the theories of these women:
 - i. The theorist's awareness of her gender and her stance in that gender identity as she develops her sociological theory;
 - ii. An awareness of the situatedness of her analysis and of the situatedness of the vantage points of others;

- iii. A consistent focus on the lives and work of women;
 - iv. A critical concern with the practices of social inequality;
 - v. Commitment to the practice of sociology in pursuit of social amelioration.
- II. Harriet Martineau (1802–1876)
- A. Harriet Martineau indisputably belongs in that founding generation of sociologists usually represented by Comte, Spencer, and Marx, thinkers who undertook the ambitious task of delineating an intellectual undertaking that would systematically and scientifically study human society.
 - B. The Social Role of the Sociologist
 - i. Martineau’s first venture into this new science was an attempt to popularize “political economy,” an intellectual forerunner both of economics and sociology.
 - ii. Martineau embraced the role of sociologist as public educator.
 - iii. She defined her audience democratically and inclusively:
 - a. The educated intelligentsia like herself;
 - b. The political class of Britain;
 - c. The ordinary working people of both the middle and working classes;
 - d. Women;
 - e. Children (by means of a popular series of children’s stories);
 - f. Her public in America (where since 1837 her popularity had been enormous);
 - g. Feminists and abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic!
 - h. In what must be a sociological first—the disabled—in this case, those who, like her, were deaf.
 - C. The Organization of Society
 - i. Sociology’s subject matter, for Martineau, is social life in society—its patterns, causes, consequences, and problems.
 - ii. She argued that a system of social arrangements is conducive to human happiness to the extent that it allows individuals to realize their basic human nature as autonomous moral and practical agents.
 - iii. Morals and Manners

- a. Sociology's project is, thus, to assess the extent to which a people develop "morals and manners" that produce or subvert this great end of social life, human happiness.
- b. The principle that the aim of human association is human happiness—as much a "law of nature", that is, one to which societies should conform if they are to progress.
- c. In the truest sense of the term, she was a qualitative, comparative sociologist.
- d. The life of each society in its uniqueness from, as well as its similarities to, other societies was her immediate subject of attention.

iv. Anomaly

- a. Martineau called a misalignment between a society's morals or ideals and its manners or everyday practices an *anomaly*.
- b. These anomalies are the institution of slavery, the unequal status of women, the pursuit of wealth, and the fear of public opinion.
- c. Three measures of this progress:
 1. The condition of the less powerful—women, racial minorities, prisoners, servants, those in need of charity.
 2. Cultural attitudes toward authority and autonomy.
 3. The extent to which all people are provided with the necessities for autonomous moral and practical action.

D. Methods

i. "Things" and Sympathy

- a. A concern with issues of measurement is part of Martineau's deep interest in methods for research and for sound scientific thinking.
- b. Martineau gave instruction in the appropriate attitude of the sociologist toward the research experience, in problems of sampling, and in the identification of social indicators.
- c. She also developed the first guidelines for the practice of interpretive sociology.
- d. To overcome problems of sampling, the sociologist must look for "things" that represent the collectivity.

e. Martineau was much more advanced methodologically than Comte or Spencer, and she anticipated the work of the next generation of academically based or trained sociologists, both male and female.

ii. Feminism

- a. Martineau made the relational facts of marriage in the United States a key index of the moral condition of that society.
- b. For Martineau, the domination of women closely paralleled the domination of slaves.
- c. In various studies, she brought together the double oppressions of class and gender.
- d. She expanded her analytic efforts to a wide range of other topics.
- e. Her sociological perspective, although anchored in her gendered life experience and permeated by a woman-centered sensibility, did not produce only a sociology of gender.
- f. In the end, Harriet Martineau was defeated by the very issue she knew to be inseparable from others' reactions to her work—her gender.

III. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935)

- A. Gilman's project was to present, in the impersonal, objective voice that we have come to associate with authoritative theorizing, a formal, theoretical analysis of society.
- B. Theory-building is Gilman's method of doing sociology, and it is as a theorist that she defined her social role as a sociologist.

C. The Organization of Society

i. *The Sexuo-Economic Relation*

- a. Gilman argued that in the foundational social institutions, the economy and the family, we find a basic stratificational practice that explains most of the ills observable in societies, in individual experience, and in history: that practice is gender inequality.
- b. The sexuo-economic arrangement presents just this barrier to self-actualizing work, for both women and men, though for women much more than for men.

- c. Gilman's books give us as comprehensive an analysis of society that traces the complex interaction between materiality and ideas in the sexuo-economic relation.

D. Origins of Gender Stratification

- i. Out of this primary though distorted need for sociability or recognition arises male domination and female subordination.
- ii. Gender will be her only instrument of countervailing power, the wiles of femininity, a focus on sexuality, the fact as well as the ploy of her economic helplessness.
- iii. *Androcentric Culture*
 - a. Gilman shows how this culture creates the ideals of masculinity (aggressive and assertive) and femininity (yielding and compliant) and she describes the extensive impact of androcentrism on all aspects of society.
- iv. *Public and Private Spheres*
 - a. The ramifications of this system are not only psychological and cultural; they profoundly penetrate and distort economic and community life.
 - b. Society can be understood as dividing between the public economy of the marketplace and the private economy of the household.
 - c. From this pressure arises a social system encouraging individualism, competition, conflict, class divisions, excessive greed, and wealth, hand in hand with crippling exploitation and deprivation.

E. Feminism

- i. The solution to this wasteful sexuo-economic arrangement is to break up the arrangement of the sex classes.
 - a. It requires fundamental changes in gender socialization and in education, the physical development of women to their full size and strength, a rethinking and renegotiation of the personal, relational, and sexual expectations between women and men.
 - b. It requires the rational dismantling and reconstruction of the institution of the household, so that women can have freedom to do the work they choose and so that society may thus be enriched by their labor.

F. Erasure

- i. Charlotte Perkins Gilman has been systematically written out of American sociology's construction of its past.
- ii. Only a complex process of antiwoman and antifeminist bias explains Gilman's disappearance from the record of sociology and sociological theory.
- iii. Without a large population of women in the profession or a strong feminist movement in society after 1920, Gilman could be first marginalized and then allowed to disappear.
- iv. It continues along several lines—intellectual biography, cross-cultural comparisons, critiques of Gilman, especially on issues of race and eugenics; socialism and social theory.

IV. Jane Addams (1860–1935) and the Chicago Women's School

- A. Jane Addams was the focal energy of the Chicago women's school.
- B. Although connected to the men of the University of Chicago, these women formed their real professional and personal networks with each other.
- C. Settlements were communities of (mostly) young, educated people who "settled" in the poorest neighborhoods of the cities, sharing a common residence and seeking to ameliorate the lives of impoverished neighbors.
- D. It is hard to overstate the significance of this network for the women personally, for U.S. history in the Progressive Era.
 - i. Besides Addams, this network included Edith and Grace Abbott, Sophonisba Breckinridge, Florence Kelley, Frances Kellor, Julia Lathrop, Annie Marion MacLean, Virginia Robinson, Anna Garlin Spencer, Jessie Taft, and Marion Talbot.
- E. They were part of the larger women's network, and devised an astounding range of policies and associations to protect subordinate groups from classist, racist, and sexist politics.
- F. The Social Role of the Sociologist
 - i. The years from 1890 to 1914 were a golden era for the reform movement of "Progressivism."
 - ii. The Chicago women helped lead the fight for:

- a. Women's suffrage;
- b. Factory legislation;
- c. Child labor laws;
- d. Protection of working women;
- e. Aid for dependent mothers and children;
- f. Better sanitation in the cities;
- g. Trade unions;
- h. Arbitration of labor disputes;
- i. Minimum wages and minimum-wage boards; and
- j. Immigrant rights and African American rights.

G. Jane Addams (1860–1935)

- i. Addams' sociology grew directly out of her social activism, but until about thirty years ago, she was remembered only for that activism.
- ii. *The Basic Thesis*
 - a. Social ethics is Addams's most original concept and the lynchpin of her theory.
 - b. Addams defines social ethics as the practice of rules of right relationship that produce and sustain in the individual an orientation to action based on "concern for the welfare of a community" or "identification with the common lot."
- iii. *Methods*
 - a. Addams chose her life's work as an activist and social theorist after a series of experiences of "bifurcated consciousness," the awareness of a division between formal textual descriptions of life and one's own lived experience.
 - b. Her analysis was developed not so much through the crafting of theoretical generalizations as through the presentation of paradigmatic case studies from participant observation.
 - c. Neighborly relation: Addams sought something more than *verstehen*; she sought to establish what contemporary feminist theorists call for in research: an authentic, caring relation between the researcher and the subject of the research.

iv. *The Organization of Society*

- a. Addams developed the central tenet of her sociological theory on the basis of a series of implicit propositions about the fundamental organization of society, human nature, and social change.
- b. Her interest was in seeing how to make them all possess certain common qualities of social democracy, that she assumed that progress demanded.

v. *Human Nature and Ethics*

- a. Addams understood the human being to be an embodied subjectivity, that is, a mind capable of reason and emotion, in a body that materially experiences the world.
- b. On the basis of this understanding of human nature, Addams rested her argument that ethical systems are a foundational feature of social life.

vi. *Social Production and Ethics*

- a. The human being is located in a society that is always evolving or changing, but this process of change is one that humans must now control through the collective exercise of mind.
- b. She viewed materiality and ideas as mutually interdependent; ethical systems must be aligned with the social relations of production, but will in turn determine the forms of those relations.

vii. *The Social Ethic*

- a. Much of Addams's sociological theory is devoted to analyzing how to transform democracy from a political creed, enacted occasionally in elections, into a social creed informing all human interactions

viii. *Belated Ethics*

- a. A *militaristic* ethic is one in which people feel their ethical responsibility should be to a hierarchically organized group which participates in approved collective violence.
- b. The *belated* ethic of individualism endorses people following their personal sense of right and wrong without negotiation with others.

ix. *Situated Vantage Points*

- a. Addams presented the failure of an elite class to understand the real and valuable ethics of the poor, the lack of a general ethic that understands the world of multiple viewpoints.
- x. *Learning the Social Ethic*
 - a. Addams offered many strategies for establishing democratic social ethics as the necessary complement to industrialization.
- H. The Chicago Women's School
 - i. Addams's core belief—that society needs not individual but collective action realized in democratic association—is clearly visible in the relationships, work, and sociology of the circle we call “the Chicago women's school.”
 - ii. The Organization of Society and Social Role of the Sociologist
 - a. Four major propositions:
 1. Interdependence.
 2. Acting collectively.
 3. Basic critical position of “equity.”
 4. The role of the social scientist.
 - iii. Methods
 - a. The Chicago Women invented an array of techniques for discovering and reporting their evidence using both primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data sources.
 - iv. Collective Action and Social Change
 - a. The most daring explorations of collective action by Florence Kelley:
 1. Kelley argues that all bourgeois philanthropy, no matter how well intended, is really only a palliative, a restitution to the working class, the real creators of wealth, of what has been taken from them.
 2. Kelley attempted to give consciousness to a new social category, “consumers.”
 - b. The essential principles of the sociology of the Chicago women are all in this statement:
 1. That social science must act for change;

2. That all citizens, including women still denied suffrage, are nevertheless morally responsible for the welfare of the country;
3. That every action ties a person to other people;
4. That effective personal virtue today must be done through associations because it is only in associations that people can gain the knowledge and the power.

V. Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964) and Ida Wells-Barnett (1862–1931)

A. Anna Julia Cooper and Ida Wells-Barnett were African American women of the same generation as Gilman, Addams, and many of the Chicago women sociologists.

B. Cooper and Wells-Barnett both consciously drew on their lived experiences as African American women to develop a “systematic consciousness of society and social relations.”

C. They lay the foundation for a feminist sociological theory based in the interests of women of color.

D. Methods

- i. Wells-Barnett’s method is a pioneering adaptation of secondary data analysis that uses the oppressor’s own reports as the main source.
- ii. Cooper, in contrast, was explicitly engaged in theoretical work; she sought to describe the patterns of social life and to situate herself in that work of theoretical creation.

E. *The Lens of Race Relations*

i. *Groups and Power*

- a. Power: A group’s ability to influence social outcomes affecting its members, ranging from ongoing negotiations among groups (equilibrium) to a constant ability to produce outcomes seen as being in a particular group’s interest (domination).
- b. Race, then, is at the center of both women’s social theories; the power relations between whites and blacks in Western history and contemporary American society give them their paradigm of domination and of stratification.

F. Intersections: Race, Gender, Class

- i. Cooper analyzed gender inequality between white women and men and between African American women and men.
 - ii. Wells-Barnett looked at an even more explosive interaction of race and gender, exploring the interplay of those issues around sexuality.
 - iii. Both women further expanded the theme of social inequality to class relations.
- G. The Organization of Society
- i. Cooper gave serious attention to the cultural themes of masculinity and femininity and to the outcome of those themes for personality and for societal functioning.
 - ii. Her criterion for a critical evaluation of society was whether it was characterized by equilibrium or domination, not whether it was free of conflict.
- H. Vantage Point and “the Singing Something”
- i. She inserts herself into sociological analysis by speaking from her distinctive vantage point as a black woman—the claim for which she is best known.
 - ii. This claim of vantage point is based in Cooper’s understanding of human nature, an understanding she shared with Wells-Barnett.
- VI. Marianne Schnitger Weber (1870–1954)
- A. The Standpoint of Women
- i. She saw the human being, in the tradition of German Idealism, as an individual who wants to control his or her own destiny and to become all he or she is created capable of becoming.
 - ii. She claimed that there is a women’s standpoint that in all its possible iterations differs from that of men.
 - iii. She developed three major themes around this central concern:
 - a. The need for autonomy for women equal to that of men;
 - b. The significance of women’s work in the production of culture;
 - c. The situated differences of standpoint among women.
- B. Gender and Power: Authority and Autonomy
- i. For women, the tension then may be construed not as one between coercion and authority but as one between autonomy and domination, between a free exercise of one’s will in action and subordinating one’s will to another.

- C. Gender and Culture: Objective Culture, Personal Culture, and the “Middle Ground of Daily Life”
 - i. Weber pointed out that there is much about women’s work in the household that is not spiritual but intensely practical, instrumental, and objective.
 - ii. She questioned Simmel’s claim, arguing that it is more useful to think of a common nature and of typical maleness and femaleness as circles intersecting within the common space.
- D. Differences Among Women
 - i. She contrasted the life experiences of women in agricultural work, paid domestic employment, factory work, and professional employment.
 - ii. The interaction of capitalism and patriarchy creates barriers to the attempts of women, especially non-elite women, to seek full autonomy.
 - iii. She saw that housework for most women is an area of incessant drudgery, that women who stay at home, whatever their class, are oppressed by economic dependency and by patriarchal male authority.
- E. Social Change
 - i. Weber discussed legal reforms such as spousal rights, job training for women as a route to better employment and more meaningful lives, and, most radical of all, various formulas that would provide monetary independence for the housewife.
 - ii. A reformed, that is, nonpatriarchal household, was one setting in which women could find vocation and self-actualization.

VII. Beatrice Potter Webb (1858–1943)

- A. Webb became a leading British socialist; a solid empiricist, she was nevertheless moved to her descriptive and analytic studies by what she called “a consciousness of sin.”
- B. The problems she focused on were economic inequality, the causes of poverty, and ways to reform the capitalist economy.
- C. Method: Natural Experiments
 - i. Her experiences led her to the insight that the best way to understand how to reform the capitalist economic system was to find examples of working-class people successfully organizing to create alternative economic systems.

- ii. Webb outlined how economic equity could be arrived at through democratic decision making by showing how a British working-class buyers' co-operative functioned.
- D. Social Change: Permeation
- i. The Webbs were guided by three main principles:
 - a. Marx is wrong in his prediction of the “withering away of the state”;
 - b. Inequality has advanced to such a point of social crisis that such intervention is inevitable;
 - c. It is possible for socialists to advocate gradual rather than revolutionary reforms because gradualism is inevitable.
 - ii. Webb’s vision of society was, above all, of *the working out of processes between the structures in which people are contained*—structures such as state, class, trade unions, and sweatshops.
 - iii. She pointed to the vast increase in the interventions of government in the conduct of the economy as her prime proof.
- E. The Social Role of the Sociologist
- i. Webb’s saw the primary role of the sociologist as providers of the information on which a reformist state could be established and make policy.
 - ii. Webb’s sociological significance has not received the attention it deserves.
- VIII. Contemporary Applications
- A. Martineau is now recognized as amongst the first to have produced a clear sociological method.
 - B. Gilman is recognized as a major feminist sociologist of the turn of the century and her books *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Herland* are regularly read in college classes.
 - C. Ida B. Wells is studied as a heroine of the African American civil rights movement both as an in-your-face activist and for her methods of analysis and presentation—especially her unflinching descriptions of the crime of lynching.
 - D. Anna Julia Cooper is central to Black feminist writing across the disciplines; her pioneering descriptions of the experience of intersectionality lay the ground work for one of the key concepts in contemporary Black and Feminist sociology.

- E. In this present moment of national and global crisis, Addams's theories and actions are being turned to with a new urgency and respect.