

Barbara L. Marshall and Anne Witz, eds..
Engendering the Social: Feminist Encounters with Sociological Theory.

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In *Engendering the Social: Feminist Encounters with Sociological Theory* (2004), Barbara Marshall and Anne Witz bring together a considerable cast of feminist sociological scholars to critique traditional and contemporary sociological theory. The edited collection reads sociology certainly through a critical gender theory lens. But equally important, the chapters in this collection also question the explicit and implicit ways in which sex, desire, sexuality and sexual difference figure in the foundations of sociological theory.

In the introduction, Marshall and Witz argue a central feminist axiom, that key dimensions of social life (including work, politics, education, religion, social class, economics, culture and so on) cannot be understood without considering gender as a fundamental analytic component. In thinking about the founding sociological theories, sex, gender and sexuality must be considered in their ontology (do they exist, and if so, how) as well as their epistemology (are new methodologies needed to study these dimensions of social life). These ontological and epistemological concerns refute any claims that gender is merely an 'additive' to sociological theory (the 'add-gender-and-stir' approach that is, unfortunately, so common in sociology) – serious consideration of sex, gender, sexuality and sexual difference stands to qualitatively alter the sociological canon. As such, *Engendering the Social* should be included amongst the 'standard' texts adopted by undergraduate and graduate students in 'social theory' courses.

The book is divided into three sections. Part One includes three chapters that interrogate the classical sociological canon, including the writings of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber Georg Simmel and to some extent Frederick Engels. Part of the analysis entails detailing women's contribution to the lively debates around concerns of the day: primarily social order and the division of labor in society. But more than this, the chapters demonstrate how consideration of the 'woman question', while ostensibly discussed by the 'founding fathers' as much in order to move beyond (and thus dismiss) 'individual-level' concerns, was actually fundamental to understanding social relations. For example, R.A. Sydie's chapter reviews Durkheim's well-known study of suicide and reminds us that Durkheim's findings were gender-specific: women located in families were significantly more likely to commit suicide than men in families, who were less likely to commit suicide. The family was touted by each 'founding father' as a crucial site for the development of modern society (as well as feelings of stability), and women's identities were entirely relegated to the domestic domain in the service of society as a whole.

Part Two extends the arguments made in Part One. Caroline Arnit and Charlotte Müller's chapter reviews the work of nineteenth century British social scientist Harriet Martineau and French philosopher Jenny P. d'Héricourt to argue that scholars showed how women were excluded from modern society based upon essentialist arguments. Part Three moves the discussion to contemporary sociological theory, asking whether gender issues, and feminist theory more specifically, inform theory today.

The verdict is mixed: Lisa Adkins, for instance, argues that feminist theory has made headway in so far as post-structural approaches now emphasize the agency and freedom subjects have within the social; but at the same time women are 'overdetermined' within this framework. That is, the conceptualization of the modern subject in terms of reflexive action and individuality is implicitly more represented by masculinity than femininity. In consequence, women remain confined to the social in contrast to men who are able to enter a 'post-structural' realm of social relations. Anne Kovalainen explores the ways in which feminist theory has yet to be taken up in contemporary sociological enquires into social capital and trust. The book ends with a very timely discussion by Lois McNay concerning the limits of current debates between materialist and cultural feminisms. In contrast to the rest of the book, McNay examines the way the more mainstream sociology of Habermas and Bourdieu might be usefully harnessed to further feminist debates.

In the twenty-first century, including feminist critiques of the founding theories of sociology should be standard practice. *Engendering the Social* makes an important contribution to this critique. Writings that would have been largely cited and influential in debates of the time but for the fact they were authored by women are carefully detailed. The implication here is that what students come to regard as the foundations of sociological theory is a product of the silencing of the impact of both women social thinkers, and the discussions about essential sociological concerns they engendered. These discussions certainly included the 'place' of women in the social order, but also the ways in which the changing social structure might affect subjectivity, the importance of the family to new socio economic and political systems (such as neo-liberalism) and other concerns such as the 'nature/nurture' divide. Indeed, students and academics interested in a genealogy of this now contested but nevertheless hegemonic division will find rich details in this text. The collection is well-written and accessible, and is an asset to any sociological theory or gender analysis course.

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