The Missing Feminist Revolution: Ten Years Later

Is Sociology Still Missing Its Feminist Revolution?
by Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne

A decade ago, as we worked on "The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology," we joked about producing a schoolmarmsch disciplinary "report card." We had started with a question: What has been the impact of feminist scholarship (the twin strategies of starting with women's lives and experiences and using gender as a category of analysis) on the conceptual frameworks of sociology? And then, articulating a sense of promise unfulfilled, we compared sociology with other disciplines. We gave the fields of anthropology and history an "A-minus" because feminists had been successful in rethinking basic paradigms, and their innovations had been widely accepted. But feminist ideas had scarcely touched the deeply masculinist, basic conceptual frameworks of "C" disciplines like economics and political science. We ranked sociology somewhere in between; feminists had raised many valuable insights and were increasingly visible within the field, but too often the more intellectually challenging implications of our work had been evaded (e.g. by the use of gender as a variable rather than a theoretical category) and contained (e.g. feminist ideas were largely ignored or subsumed by Marxist and other social theorists). There had not, in our view, been an intellectual revolution in sociology either in the sense of a shift in theoretical frameworks, or in terms of full integration into the discipline. In our disciplinary report card, we gave sociology a "B."

The judgment of the disciplines that we made in 1985 does not now, on the face of it, seem wrong so much as facing the question of intellectual disciplinary revolutions in the wrong way. Some of the discomfort we felt about our comparative report card approach came from the unrevolutionary grounding of our question. The very formulation of a "feminist revolution in sociology," now seems oxymoronic, or at least deeply flawed, because it presumes that an intellectual revolution would move through separate disciplines and leave existing knowledge boundaries intact. To adopt contemporary parlance, we treated received disciplinary structures in an "essentialist" or "foundationalist" manner that we now question. Current academic disciplines evolved from 19th century divisions of intellectual labor, mapping the knowledge universe in ways that are as dated as other 19th century cartographic relics.

Feminist ideas have been a trans-disciplinary force in the academy, with the potential, along with allied political and intellectual movements, to reconfigure knowledge rather than simply inserting new enclaves within each province of the 19th century intellectual universe. After all, feminist theorists developed a radical critique of the androcentric and ethnocentric Enlightenment conceptions underpinning that universe--like separations between public and private, mind and body, and nature and culture, as well as a presumed universal (but actually white, heterosexual, propertied, male) rational, interest-maximizing, individual subject. Moreover, as our independent interdisciplinary journals, conferences, academic programs and publishing ventures attest, feminist "discursive" communities cross disciplinary boundaries.

Many academic feminists are now involved with overlapping, interdisciplinary interpretive communities, such as ethnic studies, queer theory, critical theory, and cultural studies. These efforts promise--or threaten--to redraw disciplinary boundaries for the 21st century. Devising the appropriate principles, domains and practices of the emergent division of intellectual labor poses a significant contemporary challenge. Because
power and knowledge are deeply entangled, projects to reconfigure the disciplines involve major institutional and material, as well as theoretical stakes.

Our 1985 comparative approach to the disciplines was also flawed in its implicitly mechanical view of intellectual revolution, similar to stage theories of social, and socialist, revolutions. It presumed a uniform structure, with theoretical transformation progressing in analogous fashion across quite diverse disciplines and subfields. However, if the disciplines mean anything at all, they are institutional structures with differing ways of generating, organizing, recognizing and responding to knowledge claims and challenges. The diverse sizes, demographics, material resources, discursive conventions and outlets, and extra-curricular circuits of influence of the disciplines help to structure, indeed to discipline, and at times to police, the ways in which their members encounter and respond to theoretical challenges. On the most mundane level, disciplines structure the ideas that their members are most likely to encounter, and the interpretive communities to which they have access. The power of established disciplines is evident in recurring tensions between the humanities and the social sciences that emerge over curriculum, hiring, and intellectual vision in interdisciplinary women's studies and ethnic studies programs.

Finally, our 1985 argument inappropriately treated feminism as if it were a homogeneous intellectual movement and took for granted the analytical centrality of gender in feminist theory. This approach glossed conflicting theoretical and political perspectives within feminism which have continued to fragment over the last decade. If implying uniformity to feminist thought was inappropriate in 1985, it is impossible today. In addition to the proliferation of epistemological and substantive positions, after two decades of challenges by feminists of color, lesbian feminists and others unwilling to submerge their differences into the central identity category "woman," gender has been decentered within feminism. The limitations of "categorical" approaches are increasingly apparent, as is the challenge of understanding gender in the context of other fluid and complex social divisions and identities, such as social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. Feminist theory now confronts the vexing question of whether it retains any distinctive identity at all when the analytical power of the category of "gender" itself has been called into question even by some prominent feminist theorists.

In retrospect, our 1985 article seems too optimistic in its assessment of the revolutionary potential of feminism taken by itself. However, in broader context, feminism is one of several interrelated radical intellectual forces which have had profound and continuing effects on lives, institutions, and knowledge. Along with postcolonial discourse, queer theory, critical race theory, cultural studies, critical legal studies, and poststructuralist theory, feminism has been a crucial source of a more general "theory revolution" from modernist to postmodernist frameworks. Some strands of feminist thought have begun to dissolve into this broader intellectual current, while also catalyzing critical work on gender, along with race, sexuality, nation, and class. The continuing intellectual revolutionary potential of this shared and overlapping domain remains to be seen; it is currently bidding for institutional power not only within existing disciplines but beyond them, as in cultural studies programs. However, this is taking place under inauspicious conditions of economic and institutional retrenchment and political backlash.

Some of the more "modernist" strands of feminism, which retain women and gender as central categories, have continued to produce empirical work with influence in the public world. Sociologists have been especially fruitful in this vineyard, with considerable progress in terrains just opening up ten years ago, for example, in analyzing the gendered (and simultaneously classed, raced, and sexualized) nature of more public institutions like the state and organizations, and in deepening understanding of gender as a social relation, including pioneering social-historical work on masculinities.

The numbers, visibility, and resources of feminist sociology have continued to grow over the last decade, in part because of the influx of women into the field (since 1988 women have received around half of new sociology Ph.D.'s, and they have long been the majority of undergraduate majors--numbers translate into demand for books, courses, programs). The Sociology of Sex and Gender is now the largest section of the A.S.A., with all the trappings of legitimacy: named as a disciplinary specialty; the focus of Ph.D. qualifying exams in sociology departments; the subject not only of interdisciplinary, but also specifically
sociological journals like Gender & Society, and, of greatest material significance, listing in job ads.

Have our energies mostly resulted in the creation of a new subfield rather than transforming the discipline and its boundaries? Has the discipline disciplined us? Yes and no. Over the last 25 years feminist ideas have wrought many changes in sociological knowledge. While lodged within a somewhat ghettoized subfield, they have moved, albeit unevenly and often with considerable cooptation, through many subfields. In especially transformative moments, feminist perspectives have linked subjects, such as sexuality and organizations, which were traditionally set apart. However, when they diverged too sharply from mainstream conceptions, feminist insights have been dismissed as "ideological" or "not sociology." The forms of cooptation (treating gender as a variable) and containment (e.g., the continued absence of meaningful dialogue between sociological theory and feminist theory) that we identified a decade ago are still present.

In short, feminism has had an enormous impact on sociology, even to the point of generating a backlash which periodically surfaces in the pages of Footnotes, in A.S.A. elections, and in departmental personnel meetings. But impact is not the same as revolution, and that very notion--implying vast, coherent, and permanent transformation --now strikes us as unrealistic and conceptually naive, especially when most 19th century disciplinary boundaries remain intact. Internally, sociology is an unusually fragmented field, and feminist ideas have juggled with varied epistemologies, conceptual frameworks, and vested interests, changing shape in the process. At best the changes wrought by feminism, in knowledge and in society, have been partial, uneven, and contradictory. We should not have expected otherwise.

Which brings us to a final observation. Feminism emerged from a social movement whose purpose was not just to understand, but above all to change society. As feminist ideas have been absorbed into the academy, they have inevitably lost much of their political force. If feminism retains radical potential for transforming knowledge, this will not derive from a "revolution" in sociology or in any other discipline. Rather, it will depend upon the emergence and contours of a third wave social movement, of which feminism will be only, but crucially, a part.

Response to Judith Stacey's and Barrie Thorne's Essay
by Dorothy E. Smith

Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne can speak of American sociology as I, a Canadian whose reading of contemporary US sociology is very unsystematic and partial, cannot. The picture they draw is encouraging. But it does not dissipate my general sense of dismay indeed sometimes depression when evaluate what I learn of American society, what I see of its progressive intrusions into my own and what has changed since the original Stacey/Thorne paper of, what now seems, so long ago -- indeed a different political era altogether. Being a sociologist then was part of how we were active in the women's movement; SWS was for women in society; we were connected with a radicalizing politics, a two-way street which has since then been closed off almost entirely.

I agree with Stacey and Thorne that feminism has leaked new interdisciplinary influences into sociology. Of special importance has been the poststructuralist/postmodernist formulations of difference in its applications to the racism and heterosexism of established sociological discourse, and I'd certainly like sociology to be vastly more responsive to the fundamental issues that theories of discourse and culture pose for us. But if disciplinary boundaries have been displaced, other boundaries have been created or reinstated. We can be happy that the theoretical and political dogmatisms of the seventies and eighties are behind us, but the poststructuralist/postmodern movement (to be distinguished from the various writers with whom it is identified) among the American intelligentsia has written boundaries around feminist scholarly practice which preclude mention of economy or capital and even of class (the absent third of the triad gender, race and class). Poststructuralism/postmodernism promotes epistemologies which seclude sociology from the world of activism of which feminist sociology was once part. Where once feminist sociology was deeply engaged with issues that women confront on the job and in the economy, there is a retreat into the realm of discourse. "It is ironic," my friend Leslie Roman commented, "that in the period in which public funding for the right to have an abortion, daycare, and many social welfare programs have been threatened, theoretical books on the
body proliferate."

I appreciate the men who do read feminist sociology and do not observe the gender seclusions of the past. I know there are male sociologists who do read and use feminist work. But there is also resistance: Male sociologists who view feminist work as irrelevant; a retreat from research into theory; a rooted traditional commitment to the classical US canon of theorists, Durkheim and Weber in particular. The curricula of sociology departments preserve the problematics of the past like the DNA of flies preserved in amber. What bastions of white masculinism are sustained by a disciplinary commitment to late nineteenth/early twentieth century theorists? The work of past sociological masters is deeply embedded in the male-defined problematics of their own times. Reading the world from within this canon serves to reinstate the problematics of the past rather than engaging with a dangerous if not downright terrifying present.

The retention of theories and methodologies constitutive of discursive worlds claiming knowledge that displaces people's everyday/everynight lived actualities locates a deep political rift in sociology. It is more, much more than collegial difference. Racist as was the women's movement when it first encountered the academy, its politics of commitment to the authority of women speaking from their experience committed it unaware to decentering the white, heterosexual feminist. In evaluating what might have been a feminist revolution in sociology, Stacey and Thorne underemphasize a feminist methodology which has sought to centre women as subjects rather than subordinating them. Think of Judith Stacey's own pathbreaking work, as well as the major innovations of Patricia Hill Collins, Marjore DeVault, of Barney Thorne's and Bronwen Davies's elegant ethnographies of children, of Anne Kaspar's and Sue Fisher's explorations of women's experience in health care institutions. And there are many others. Such innovations cannot be reduced or entirely assimilated to "qualitative" methods since they represent a genuine and decisive political move, a break with the methodological practices which objectify--grounded theory, for example. Opposing these are methodologies and theories which systematically discount the lived actualities of people's experience in favor of discursively ossified traditional versions of society, class, family, race, and so on. The increasingly popular rational choice theory operates as such a device, cutting off theorizing from voices speaking from the worlds that people actually live.

I understand that the early formative times of passion and pain could not last forever and that institutionalization happens, but we should not ignore its political dimensions, nor that there has been and is active repression. Our universities, both in your country and in mine, institutionalize a politics that has actively inhibited the building of connections between making knowledge and the needs of women in the community. The "ivory tower" is a political construction; faculty who sought to put their knowledge at the disposal of the less powerful have been penalized; McCarthyism was as repressive in the academy as in the state department; the passion and pride of the 1960s was responded to repressively in the quiet ways that deans and presidents know how. And in these times, there is repression and rumor of repression: The University of California abjures affirmative action; young untenured sociologists are made fearful of addressing issues of race and gender or even of the use of non-quantitative methodologies associated with feminism; a university dean challenges the validity of the use of feminist methods in a dissertation already accepted by the candidate's department. In a surrounding climate becoming more deeply conservative and more deeply committed to sustaining the power of the wealthy over the people, it is difficult for the academy to sustain the independence on which feminist sociology has relied. Present technological and managerial transformations of the academy may subdue altogether the values of enlightenment and freedom in the academy which enabled feminism to struggle to the level of success which Stacey and Thorne celebrate.

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The Power of Feminism
by Michael Burawoy

Revisiting their widely discussed and debated paper on the missing feminist revolution in sociology, Stacey and Thorne retreat from their earlier messianic vision, arguing that, although feminism has had enormous impact, a revolution could never take place within antiquated, disciplinary boundaries. Feminism, they say, has been fragmented, diluted and even
dissolved into other discourses --postcolonial, queer, poststructuralist, cultural theory, and critical race theory. They don't regret this move, they embrace it. In their view feminism migrates to a transdisciplinary world because that's where it finds its most congenial home.

Stacey and Thorne seem to be in flight not just from disciplinary revolution but from disciplinary warfare. It is as if, having noted the progress they helped engineer, they can escape to a safe transdisciplinary planet and forget their junior sisters imprisoned on earth. While a Judith Butler or a Donna Haraway, a Judith Stacey or a Barrie Thorne, may inspire feminists from different fields, the renewal of feminism still depends on day to day combat within disciplines. Before lifting off into a transdisciplinary orbit Nancy Chodorow engaged Talcott Parsons and Dorothy Smith engaged Alfred Schutz, to take two prominent examples from sociology, just as today graduate students and assistant professors have their own icons to engage and vanquish. Feminism moves forward on two legs -- the glamorous and public transdisciplinary discourses and the less visible and arduous androcentric everyday world of the disciplines.

With the transdisciplinary Stacey and Thorne also imply the multidisciplinary in the sense that feminism becomes imbricated with other discourses and loses its distinctive identity. They, thereby, lose sight of specifically feminist contestation within disciplines, within sociology, for example, over hegemonic views of the state, family, education, economy, and work. It is in the disciplines that power resides, so it is in the disciplines it has to be contested. Syncretic discourses may inspire but they also depend on a network of antinomian feminisms, charged and recharged in the trenches of disciplinary life.

It perhaps takes an outsider to reiterate this antinomian power of feminism. The very success of feminism leads its partisans to focus on problematic features, internal contradictions, specific anomalies, thereby losing sight of feminism's appeal to the neophyte and its encounters with androgeny. Here I propose to capture feminism's subversive moment by comparing it to marxism's correlative challenge to sociology -- a challenge which began by announcing a future beyond capitalism, renouncing what is in favor of what could be, and defending the centrality of political economy, class and exploitation. But in the end what has happened to marxism? Within sociology, marxism seems to have fared much better than feminism. Perusal of recent issues of The American Sociological Review reveals an amazing absorption of seventies marxism into nineties sociology -- theories of the state, work, development, and stratification. And yet there is something missing. ASR marxism loses that critical edge. We hear much about the effect of classes on voting patterns but not the elimination of classes, about the transformation of work but not the degradation of work, about state autonomy but not the statization of power. Not for the first time -- indeed here lies the secret of its longevity -- marxism's strength as a science neutralizes its power as critique.

Feminism cannot be so easily domesticated and therefore it has less of a presence in the commanding heights of the profession. But here lies it strength not its weakness. The following eleven theses propose to explain why feminism is more threatening than marxism, and therefore more resolutely repressed but ultimately all the more irressipable than marxism, and why disciplinary warfare is worth pursuing. Of course, my generalizations require qualifications. There are many feminisms and many marxisms but if the labels mean anything we should also be able to talk about them in the singular. Finally, I make no apologies for romanticizing feminism since my intention is to counter the jaded disquisition of Stacey and Thorne.

I
Feminism, in contrast to marxism's treatment of class, does not postpone the challenge to male domination into some utopian future. Even lesbian separatism is a vision that is enacted in the present. Feminism confronts domination in the here and now. It bears neither the justificatory burden, the explication distraction nor the normalizing danger of a utopia.

II
Feminism, therefore, unlike marxism, has no need to counter utopianism with science. Where marxism needs to show that communism is a real utopia which is the product of the inevitable collapse of capitalism, feminism dispenses with any law about the inevitable disappearance of patriarchy. Feminism has no need to periodize history into some ascending order of modes of patriarchy. Women make no eschatological claim that history is on their side. They know that patriarchy will be modified only
through struggle in the here and now.

III
Feminism's subaltern politics are relatively clean. It has not been turned into a ruling ideology. Feminism may be charged with racism but it does not have to contend with marxism's deep association with state repression. Marxists respond to their inglorious history by retreating from politics, while feminists never leave the political plane of vibrant contestation. Marxism after communism tries to interpret the world while feminism still wants to change it, although different feminisms what to change it in different ways.

IV
Feminism has no essential locus for male domination, as the workplace is for class. Those who claim that gender originates in the mother-child relation look for such profound, timeless sources precisely because patriarchy is ubiquitous. It is transversal, constituted and reconstituted in every arena. There is no avoiding it, even in lesbian communities, and certainly not in academic quarters. Whereas marxism makes of academia a site from which to criticize the world outside, feminism does not mark the separation between a protected neighborhood inside and a war zone outside. Feminism is as unremitting in its critique of the structures of academia as it is of the family.

V
Whereas for marxism the state holds society together and therefore politics takes the state as its objective, for feminism there is no separation between public and private. The most intimate personal relations are as political as the seizure of state power. This explains why feminism makes least inroads in disciplines most closely associated with state power, namely economics and political science, and makes the greatest advance in anthropology and the humanities. Sociology lies in between.

VI
Feminism has no honorable place for men, especially straight white men, who if they enter feminist discourse are strictly patrolled and regulated. For feminism intellectuals never escape their gender whereas for marxism they can escape their class. Marxism allows exploiters to fall into the exploited, and allows intellectuals to occupy "contradictory class locations", from where they can choose their class allegiance, while feminism condemns all men as the ever-potential agent of domination. As sociology becomes feminized, feminism becomes more threatening and therefore the more heavily repressed, or diverted into inter-disciplinary studies.

VII
Feminism starts out from but also never gives up its defining moment -- a woman's lived experience, ultimately her inescapable, embodied existence. Marxism starts out from proletarian life but lifts itself into an orbit of universal discourse. Feminism relentlessly criticizes discourses that deny women their gendered experiences. When it leaves those experiences behind it too loses its political edge.

VIII
Strands of feminism can be coopted but it cannot be swallowed whole. Cootpation at one level gives rise to contestation at another. Male domination is multi-layered and success against the outer layers inspires struggle against inner layers. Feminism is anchored to multiple inter-connected nodes of power. Class domination, on the other hand, is single stranded, based on economic exploitation, and compatible with class compromise. For feminism concessions intensify gender struggles whereas for marxism they diminish class struggle.

IX
Feminism's challenge to sociology, gives marxism a "good" name. Sociology discovers marxism in its own tradition and harneses it to anti-feminism, compounding feminism's hostility to marxism. The scientization of marxism, once a potential ally, hardens feminism's critique of both marxism and sociology.

X
Passionate commitment to feminism among women intellectuals is self-sustaining, while the enthusiasm for marxism is dependent on external stimuli. Divisions notwithstanding women can regenerate feminism out of their own lives and recognize one another as participants in a common project. It can live on as a subterranean stream of networks between and beyond disciplines, while marxism withdraws into science without connection to movements outside the academy. So long as women cannot be pushed back into the home, so feminism cannot be domesticated.
XI

By its example feminism excites others to rediscover the experiential moment of oppression. If feminism was originally inspired by marxism, marxism must now be inspired by feminism. The decay of marxist feminism and the rise of autonomous feminisms invites a feminist marxism -- a marxism that would be more difficult to swallow.

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Impact is Not the Same as Revolution
by Kum-Kum Bhavnani

"Impact is not the same as revolution" say Stacey and Thorne -- and that endpoint represents the fact that their earlier desire for a transformation in sociology -- as a consequence of feminist work -- has not (yet?) been achieved. They suggest that despite impacts such as increases in the number of courses and specialties that include feminist work, despite the strength of the Sex and Gender section of the ASA and the strength of Gender & Society, "the changes wrought by feminism, in knowledge and in society, have been partial, uneven and contradictory. We should not have expected otherwise." They are right, of course. But while impact is not the same as revolution, it is a crucial stage on the way to a revolutionary shift. What I will do in this short commentary is see if, perhaps, these partial changes could be harbingers of a revolution in sociology in the future.

One change is that feminism has contributed to a partial yet significant epistemological shift within sociology. I am not simply thinking about the broader acceptance of qualitative methods among "mainstream" sociologists, although that is certainly important. For me, feminist epistemology suggests both that women's experiences are considered central and that gender is viewed as a productive entry into diverse sociological topics. Further, by definition, epistemology also demands discussions about what constitutes knowledge, and the role of the knower's experience in that constitution, and it is in that regard that feminist theory has been a driving force for sociology. In other words, the epistemological foundation of at least some of North American sociology has been expanded to take account of feminist work. This constitutes a significant impact, because the philosophical underpinnings of any discipline guides its future.

Indeed, the 1985 article by Stacey and Thorne, in drawing attention to the missing revolution, itself opened up spaces within sociology for a gap to be filled by concerns emanating from feminist work. That gap was being filled at their time of writing, and continues to be filled --through the work of, for example, Jessie Bernard, Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock and Patricia Hill Collins in sociology, and feminist theorists such as Sandra Harding, Aida Hurtado, Donna Haraway and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

I am not saying that feminist epistemologies are hegemonic in sociology -- far from it. We have only to glance at the ASR and AJ/S to see that there is no inkling of a struggle over the epistemological meaning of sociology. I am suggesting though that feminist ideas have had an impact on epistemological discussion in sociology -- through research projects conducted, courses offered, and, just as importantly, through affecting what readings are considered necessary for sociologists. It is for all of these reasons that I see the feminist epistemological impact as being a key element in the shift towards a revolution in sociology.

It is a shift towards a revolution, because revolutions take place as improvements occur, as an impact gains momentum. Revolutions -- in this case a feminist revolution in sociology--occur as ideas are circulated, discussed, debated and (perhaps most importantly) questioned--within the mainstream as well as on the margins. Revolutions demand an ideological shift and eventual transformation, and that shift is part of current developments in sociology, and, in part, because of feminism.

While feminist ideas have had an impact on North American sociology, and are certainly familiar, in however limited a way, that impact is as yet a precursor to a deeper structural change. There is a sense in the discipline that feminist ideas are legitimate, and yet, Stacey and Thorne are right -- there is not a revolution. What is to be done?

For changes to be genuinely transformative they must lead to major shifts in discourse--and it is those changes that have not yet been achieved. It is not only in journals such as the AJ/S or the ASR that rarely engage with feminist thought, it is also that feminist thought is usually not part of the main body of sociological theory -- what Stacey and Thorne refer to as "continued absence of meaningful dialogue.
between sociological theory and feminist theory."

That lack of a dialogue occurs, in part, because feminist theory is itself so wide ranging--so interdisciplinary, and at times, contradictory -- that many sociologists simply do not know how to do that work of dialogue. For example, while sociological analysis can easily engage with feminist writings on the relationship between the private and public spheres, it is unable, because of its disciplinary straitjacket, to engage with feminist work that theorizes sexuality as being about pleasure and danger simultaneously. Why should that be the case? Because, as Stacey and Thorne note, the boundaries of the discipline have not been transformed and therefore, the culture of sociology has not yet shifted.

There are many strategies for effecting such a shift within sociology and feminist thought--some of which have been suggested by writers such as Bonnie Thornton Dill, Dana Takagi and Vilma Ortiz. Nevertheless, although feminist thought is attempting to engage with "difference" at the level of theory and practice -- that is, the categories of gender, sexuality, identity, desire, and material worlds are being substantially reviewed so that new discursive spaces can be opened -- sociology in North America is still unwilling (although others may claim it is unable) to engage with "difference" within its own conceptual categories such as those of inequality, stratification, social movements, and globalization.

My point is that sociology can take a leaf from feminist work -- and attempt to examine how "difference" affects its own categories, conceptual schemes, and its very identity as a discipline. For example, this could lead to an acknowledgement in practice, that there are many identities, and thus many sociologies deserving of disciplinary recognition. Examining the discipline through the lens of difference could also facilitate stronger links between sociology and other disciplines.

Perhaps Stacey and Thorne have been a little too pessimistic on the possibilities for change within sociology. Their comment "We should not have expected otherwise" suggests disappointment with, and inevitability, and is not a standpoint I share. If impact can be seen for what it is, which includes creating a familiarity with feminist ideas, it is then possible to see that the partial changes they point to have created possibilities for new discursive spaces to be born.

But I do have a disappointment--with both feminist studies and sociology -- which may best be captured by arguing that what is missing is a permanent revolution. This is where change is a fixed part of the landscape, and where mass movements -- movement from below that brought about the revolution -- remain just that. Permanent revolution means that movements for change do not become movements of the center, but remain as movements of the margins. In this way, situations are constantly assessed for their contradictions, uneven-ness and partiality, in order to suggest possibilities for a move forward and are not to be seen as situations of retrenchment or regression. Perhaps the problem is not that sociology is missing its feminist revolution, but, rather, that permanent revolution is no longer on our agenda.▼

"You've Come a Long Way Baby...or...the Revolution Will Not Be Televised!"
by Chrys Ingraham

To theorize feminism in terms of revolution is to romanticize both revolution and feminism. In this era of postcoloniality and multinational corporate capitalism where illusion and image frequently obscure real material conditions, we must be careful not to participate in our own demise. Feminism has not escaped the forces of commodification and cooptation any more than any other social movement.

To establish revolution as the standard by which the success of a social movement (feminism) should be measured theorizes revolution as a time-limited and "permanent" outcome rather than as a complex process of change. When a movement does not reach this imaginary goal, it is constructed as a failure--thus the need to defend the movement as having had merit. Anti-feminist conservatives use this strategy all the time by claiming that feminism is a failed revolutionary politic.

The forces of late capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy (unfashionable concepts in some contemporary theoretical circles) are complex, global, and ever-changing. To pursue a revolutionary politic in this historical moment and under these conditions requires a diligent, persistent, fluid, creative, multiple, and critical focus.
Without question, feminism has been all of these things and has had significant impact, as Thorne and Stacy argue. But, they say, impact is not revolution. It is, however, crucial to the revolutionary process. If we understand revolution as the transformation of dominant institutions that exercise power through the distribution of economic and cultural resources, feminism has successfully intervened in these arrangements, more so at some moments than at others. But power, being what it is, will always shift and change to secure itself. One need only witness the current backlash against feminism to see that power at work but also to realize how successful feminism has been.

I agree with Thorne and Stacy that feminist sociology has lost its political edge, particularly in relation to previous historical moments and other areas of the academy. But, feminism, as a revolutionary process, holds the promise for continuing this work. Within a field of inquiry which takes as its focus all that counts as the social, sociology potentially represents one of the most powerful sites for intervention.

Among the major contributions of feminism are its emphasis on process, critique, coalition, and social change. Within sociology, feminism has challenged theoretical starting points as well as methodology for the ways they participate in "relations of ruling (Smith)". Since the 1960s, the very assumptions and processes by which we think and do sociology have come under scrutiny for the ways in which they reproduce gender inequality. To re-read the archive of work produced over the past 25 years is to realize the importance of feminist sociology in preparing the field for further discovery. And, it's instructive to see what has been accepted or allowed and what has been dismissed, trivialized, and erased.

As we celebrate our arrival in the ASA it comes with a cost. What feminist sociology has gained is legitimacy it has lost in critical action and political momentum. Gender studies has been gradually canonized and, more than that, the founding concept of feminist sociology, gender, has come to be taken as obvious. The vast majority of textbooks, research studies, and theory take gender as a given with little or no debate over what is meant by gender. We take the posture: Done that, been there. We've stopped asking the questions characteristic of a revolutionary feminist critique: What interests does gender serve? What's missing in our conceptualization of gender? What is the relationship of gender to heterosexuality? How does heterosexuality work as an institution and what social arrangements does heterosexuality preserve?

While we may be impatient with the outcomes, as we should be given the consequences, feminism has displaced many assumptions and practices but cannot and will not "arrive" at a place where we can comfortably sit back and claim success. The history of social movements has taught us that the forces of cooptation are ever-present and that transformative social change requires continual and adaptive efforts which attend to the historical and material necessities of any period.

As power seeks to erase the contribution of feminism, the critical legacy of feminist sociology has been in opening up possibilities. Feminist sociology has lost some of its political edge, but its significant contribution to theories and research on gender remain among the most dramatic interventions of second wave feminism. Without this history, our ability to imagine possibilities would be severely limited and our ability to pressure boundaries would be constrained. I would never have been able to take the risk of theorizing the heterosexual imaginary or heterogender without feminist sociology. Areas such as queer theory, gay/lesbian studies, cultural studies, materialist feminism, critical race theory would not have achieved the advances they've made today without this critical legacy and the understanding that feminism does not operate in isolation but derives strength from its linkage to other movements and issues.

Feminist sociology has unmasked and foregrounded the role of the political in all arenas and has pressured many taken-for-granted assumptions, particularly those organizing business-as-usual in sociology. Feminist sociology not only promises to advance the theoretical reach of sociological inquiry, but can increase the revolutionary or activist orientation of the discipline. But this, too, will come with a price. It requires creative and innovative thinking, political commitment, and a relentless dedication to pressing boundaries, wherever they may occur.

While I agree with Thorne and Stacy that feminism's "radical potential for transforming knowledge...will not derive from the 'revolution' IN sociology or in any other discipline," it is part of the process. To assume we must wait
for the "emergence" of a third wave
social movement is to participate in
the dominant way of making sense of
social movements: there one minute,
gone the next. The legacy of the
women's suffrage movement
contributed to the possibility of
second wave feminism, as did
abolition for civil rights, and
Garveyism for black power. And, all
of these movements created
possibilities for each other. The third
wave social movement is fomenting
now and we are playing a part in
developing its "contours.

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Our special thanks to all who contributed
to this forum. Any responses can be
directed to the editors.

Reminder---
The 91st Annual Meeting of the
American Sociological
Association: "Social Change:
Opportunities & Constraints"
August 16-20, 1996
New York Hilton and Towers
Sheraton New York Hotel &
Towers: New York City
Early registration deadline:
6/19

The next issue of Perspectives:
(Winter '96) will feature a
symposium on Sociology and
Ethics.

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ANNOUNCING A
MINICONFERENCE
ON
PROBLEMATICOS OF CULTURE
TO BE HELD AT
THE NEW SCHOOL
FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

August 15, 1996

On the occasion of the ASA meetings in
New York City, we invite participation in
a one-day conference to address vital
concerns of the university world and
public life in civil society. Speakers will
deal with attacks on culture in the public
sphere, rise questions about culture as a
sociological field and pitfalls of its
mainstreaming, and the purported
abandonment of culture by important
parts of the American public. Among
some of the specific topics the
participants will confront are the standing
of the NEA and the NEH in America and
their relation to intellectual life and the
arts today, multicultural debates,
postmodernism, transformations of
cultural creation and practice.

The morning panel is entitled:
CULTURE/MULTICULTURE
Principal speakers:
Craig Calhoun, Marshall
Berman, Todd Gitlin.
The afternoon panel looks at recent
research:
THE ABANDONMENT OF CULTURE?
Participants:
Judith H. Balle, Joni M.
Cherbo, and Rolf Meyersohn.

All sessions will take place at the
Graduate Faculty of the New School,
at 65 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY
10003.
For information, contact Vera Zolberg -
fax (212) 229-5595 or
zolberg@newschool.edu
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