The Women Founders
Sociology and Social Theory
1830-1930

Patricia Madoo Lengermann
Jill Niebrugge-Brantley
The history of sociology’s theories is conventionally told as a history of white male agency...
History of Sociology’s Theories

This history is presented as an account of the natural way things occurred, a chronicle beyond the powers of human tellers to change.
A sociology is a systematically developed consciousness of society and social relations.  
--Dorothy E. Smith
Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People (2005)
Mothering for Schooling -- with Alison Griffith (2004)
Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations (1999)
The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology (1987)
Feminism and Marxism: A Place to Begin, A Way to Go (1977)
Women Look at Psychiatry: I'm Not Mad, I'm Angry -- Collection edited by Smith and David (1975) Press Gang Publishing
Three Claims

• #1: Women have always been significantly involved in creating sociology.
• #2 Women have always made distinctive and important contributions to social theory.
• #3 Women’s contributions to sociology and social theory have been written out of the record of the discipline’s history.
Women’s contributions to sociology and social theory have been written out of the record of the discipline’s history.

Politics of Gender

Politics of Knowledge
Focus on the lives and work of 15 classical female theorists.
Harriet Martineau
1802-1876
Jane Addams
1860-1935
Charlotte Perkins Gilman
1860-1935
Anna Julia Cooper
1858-1964
Ida B. Wells-Barnett
Beatrice Potter Webb
1858-1943
The Chicago Women’s School of Sociology
The Chicago Women’s School

Edith Abbott 1876-1957
Grace Abbott 1878-1939
The Chicago Women’s School

Sophonisba Breckinridge 1866-1948
The Chicago Women’s School
Florence Kelley 1859-1932
The Chicago Women’s School
Frances Kellor 1873-1952
The Chicago Women’s School
Julia Lathrop 1858-1932
The Chicago Women’s School
Annie Marion MacLean 1870-1934
The Chicago Women’s School
Marion Talbot 1858-1947
Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley
Invisibility vs Erasure

**Invisibility**
- Not being seen
- Never having one’s presence acknowledged as significant

**Erasure**
- Having once been a presence and then having been written out
Argument for Erasure

#1

Almost all these women were well-known public figures in their lifetime.
Argument for Erasure

#2

...They created social theory and did sociology in the same times and places as the male founders.
Argument for Erasure

#3

They were widely recognized by their contemporaries, including male sociologists, as significant social analysts.
Argument for Erasure

They all acted as members of a sociological community.
Erasure

[This] erasure can be understood in terms of a series of power processes involving the conferral or denial of authority, understood as ‘a form of power that is a distinctive capacity to get things done in words.’

The Politics of Erasure

Politics of gender

Politics of knowledge

The politics of erasure
Politics of Gender

...women’s tenuous hold on authority in a man-made culture.
Politics of Gender
“...women’s tenuous hold on authority in a man-made culture.”

Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley’s feminist application of Alfred Schutz
Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley’s Feminist Application of Alfred Schutz to the Politics of Gender

- Woman as diminished stereotype
- Woman subsumed by assumptions of patriarchy
- Women as other/ women as less than
- Face to face/
  - Consociate
- Mental constructs
typifications
- Contemporary
- Predecessor/ artifacts
Politics of Knowledge

Sociology as advocacy

Sociology as objectivity
Politics of Knowledge

Sociology as advocacy
- Women theorists
- Conflict theorist
- Activists

Sociology as objectivity
- Functionalists
- Conformists
- Institutional legitimacy
Politics of Knowledge

Securing and expanding this work site meant that the sociological community became permeated by academic expectations and power arrangements.

The university, whether private or public, depended on the economic support of powerful corporations and governmental groups aligned with capitalism.
The Resulting Sociology

Value-neutral expertise

- Ranking and publishing prestige
- Academic rhetoric
- Established canon
- Standardized Credentials
...the operative canon in modern sociology is a social construction, not a natural development. This canon ‘...is conceivable only because of the earlier marginalization of the women founders.’