

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF DOROTHY SMITH AND PATRICIA COLLINS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST SOCIOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper accounted the historical contributions and relevance of Dorothy Smith and Patricia Collins feminist sociologists leading up to the development of institutional ethnography as “a sociology for people”, sociology for women, text, fact and femininity and everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology, Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment, Fighting words: black women and search for justice and black sexual politics among many contributions. Drawing from the selected writings of Smith and Collins, the paper discusses some of the major ideas, debates and practical influences that are relevant to both scholars trajectory. Smith and Collins examine the structure of the everyday world through the lenses of feminist theory, Marxism and phenomenology. Their feminist sociology analyses derive from the premise that women are excluded from what they calls the ruling apparatus of culture which they all argued does not arise spontaneously, but rather are manufactured by those in positions of dominance-almost exclusively men. The works of Smith and Collins therefore continued to be relevant and ranked among the most important produced in the 20th and 21st century sociology. This is illustrated on how their feminism analyses were integral to their celebrated critique and re-writing of sociological method.

Keywords: Black feminist thought, Black sexual politics, Standpoint theory, Institutional ethnography, Sociological method

Introduction

Feminism is a range of social, political and ideological movements that share a common goal of defining, establishing and achieving the political, economic, personal and social equality of men and women. Feminism therefore incorporates the position that society prioritize the male and that women are treated unfairly within those societies. With this therefore, feminist theory is a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a women-centred perspective (Lengerman and Gillian cited in Ritzer and Ryan, 2010). Feminist theory is women-centred in two ways. First, the starting point of all its investigation is the situation and experience of women in society. Second, it seeks to describe the social world from the distinctive vantage of women. Feminist theory in this respect differs from most sociological theories in that; it is the work of an interdisciplinary and international community of scholars, artists and activists. Feminist sociologists for example seek to widen and deepen sociology by reworking disciplinary knowledge to account the discoveries being made by this interdisciplinary community.

From the above explanations therefore, feminist movements have campaigned and continues to campaign for women’s right and equality for holding public office, to work, to earn fair wages or equal pay, to receive education and so on. Some feminist scholars’ campaigns became the main force behind major historical societal changes for women’s rights, particularly in the west, where they are near-universally credited with achieving women’s suffrage, gender neutral language, reproductive rights for women(including access to contraceptive and abortion) and the right to enter into contracts and own property (Brunell, Laura, Burket & Elinor, 2019). Feminist theory which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women’s social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues concerning gender and inequality.

Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years and represent different viewpoints and aims. In this paper therefore, attention is made to look into the origin of feminism and to account for the contributions of Collins and Smith to the development of feminism.

The Origin of Feminist Sociology

The term feminism appeared in France in the late of 1880's by Hunburtine Auclert in her journal article where she tried to criticize male domination and to claim for women's rights in addition to the emancipation promised by the French revolution. By the first decade of the 20th century, the term appeared in English first in Britain and in the 1910's to America and by 1920's to Arab world as Niswia (Amina, 2015). Feminism is originated from the Latin word Femina that describes women's issues. Feminism is concerned with females not just as a biological category, but the female gender as a social category and therefore, feminists shared the view that women's oppression tied to their sexuality. This was because women and men's biological differences reflected in the organization of society, and based on these differences, women have been treated as inferior to men. Whether as a theory, a social movements or a political movement, feminism specifically focuses on women experiences and highlights' various forms of oppression that the female gender has subjected to in the society. This is because feminists are able to feel and experience the pain and suffering of women, they are totally convinced of what it means to be a "woman" in patriarchal societies. Feminists therefore, seek to remove the barriers to equal social, political and economic opportunities for women and object to the notion that women's worth is determined principally by her gender and that women are inherently inferior, subservient or less intelligent than male (Rampell, 2010).

Different feminist school of thoughts have offered varied explanations to the suffering of women notably among them are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism and Socialist feminism. The Liberal feminism approach emphasizes on the power of an individual person to alter discriminatory practices against women. It is considered as the most important kinds of feminism, which works within the structure of society to integrate women into it. Its roots stretch back to the social contract theory of government instituted by the American Revolution (Coolidge, 1966). The main thrust of Liberal feminism is that an individual woman should be able to determine her social role with as great freedom as does man. Feminism therefore has required removing the historic structure of patriarchal law that denied women's civil rights. The major emphasis is that equality of women before the law in education and professional opportunities, change in marriage laws, property rights. Inequitable divorce, equal pay for equal work, protection from rape, wife battering in the home and liberation from all dehumanizing forces. In summary, it aims at bringing equality between women and men in the framework of the existing social systems that do not question the underlying basis of women subordination.

Similarly, Radical feminism believes that sexism is so deeply rooted in society that the only cure is to eliminate the concept of gender. It started to emerge in the late 1960's by the famous leaders T. Grace Atkinson and Firestone. It denies the liberal claim that the lack of political or civil rights causes women oppression. Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that focuses on the hypothesis of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on the assertion that male supremacy oppresses women. Radical feminism aims to and overthrows patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and oppression of women and calls for a radical reordering of society. Radical feminism views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of man's domination, one cut across boundaries of race, culture and economic class (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Radical feminists believe that the psychology or biology is the source of women's oppression and pain and they advocated for the separatism and the independence of women from men. They equally attempt to draw lines between biologically determined behavior and culturally determined behavior in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

Furthermore, Socialist feminism also known as Marxist feminism or materialistic feminism is equally an important movement of feminism. It calls for an end to capitalism through a socialist reformation of economy. Socialist feminists view gender inequalities as intrinsic to the capitalist system which makes vast profit off women's unpaid labour in the home and underpaid labour in the workforce. Socialist feminists argue that capitalism strengthen and support the sexist status because men are the ones who have power and money. Those men willing to share power and money with other men which mean that women have fewer opportunities and resources (Amina, 2015). Therefore, they tried to eliminate the capitalist system and replace it with socialism; which collectively shares wealth created by human labour and has no economic stake in maintaining exploitation. Sexism benefits the capitalism, by providing a supply of cheap labour for

industry. Women are in low paid, low status or even no paid work. This means that socialist feminists reject the idea that liberation for women requires the abolition of child birth. They seek to analyse the subordination of women as linked with other forms of oppression, and attempt to unite the fight for socialism with that for women liberation. Under the socialist conditions, Marxist feminism believes that the restoration of women to autonomy is possible. Modern industrialization for example was in fact beginning of this liberation of women by forcing working class women into wage labour. Having equal salary for both men and women was in the top of socialist feminists' aims and demands.

The contributions of Dorothy Smith and Patricia Collins to the Development of Feminism

Smith and Collins are Feminist Sociologists that contributed a lot to the development of feminism. Both of them worked in the academics and are today Professors of Sociology.

Dorothy Smith's Contributions

Smith was born in Great Britain in 1926. She did her undergraduate studies at the London School of Economics, earning her B.sc in Sociology with a major in Social Anthropology in 1955. After completing her studies, she moved to the United States and attended Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley where she received her Ph.D in Sociology in 1963, and taught as a Lecturer at UC, Berkeley from 1964 to 1966. In 1967, she moved to Vancouver, British Columbia where she taught at the University of British Columbia and helped to establish women studies programme. In 1977, she moved to Toronto, Ontario to work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where she stayed until she retired in 1993. In 1994, she became an adjunct Professor at the University of Victoria, where she continued her work in the Institutional Ethnography (Deirdre, 1995). Smith published works for which she is well known for includes: *A sociology for women* (1979), *text, fact and femininity* (1990), and *institutional ethnography: A sociology for people* (2005) and *Everyday World as Problematic: A feminist sociology* (1987) among others. Smith was influenced by theorists such as Karl Marx, George Herbert Mead and Harold Garfinkel among others. She is mostly known as the originator of standpoint theory. She uses the notion standpoint to emphasize that what one knows is affected by what one stands in the society. Smith argued that we begin from the world as we actually experience it, and what we know of the world and of the others is conditional upon that location (Smith, 1990). Similarly, she argued that, we cannot look at the world in any way other than our given standpoint. Smith argument is that no one has a complete, objective knowledge, no two people have exactly the same standpoint and we must not take the standpoint from which we speak for granted. The goal of smith's feminist sociology is to explicitly reformulate sociological theory by fully accounting for the standpoint of gender and its effects on our experience of reality. Smith's particular standpoint as a female in a male dominated world led her to the formulation of her notion of standpoint. She underscores not only that the standpoint of men is consistently privileged and that of women devalued (Scott and Laura, 2007). Furthermore, Bert and Sydnie (2001) argued that, Smith conception of women standpoint as a critique of ruling ideological practices reformulates Marx's use of the standpoint of labour as the means of critiques of capitalism. Smith point out that it is women's work that underpins the abstracted conceptual mode of ruling done by men. For her, whether in the home or in paid labour, women mediate the abstract, conceptual actions of men and the actual concrete forms on which it depends, especially in the corporate capitalist world. Smith further argued that women have been drawn into paid labour in large numbers under corporate capitalism, but it has not produced gender equality as Marx and Engels expected.

Similarly, in her work the bifurcation of consciousness, Smith (2012) defined it by dividing or separating it into two parts or branches. In the case of the bifurcation of consciousness specifically related to standpoint theory, it refers to the separation of the two mode of being woman. For her, since sociology is a male dominated field, women must fight to push past their expected roles as housewives and mothers, moving from the local realm of the home to the "extra local" realm of society. Women therefore must split their consciousness into two in order to establish themselves as knowledgeable and competent beings within society and the field of sociology. With regard to her work on relations of ruling, DeVault (2006) argued that, Smith refers it as not simply to political organizations', but to all of the various institutions that rule, manage and administer society and for her, these institutional locations are largely the work of men supported

by the invisible, but necessary, work of women. Therefore, Smith further argued that, women are excluded from the practices of power within textually mediated relations of ruling (Scott and Laura, 2007). Smith goes on to suggest that because sociology too relies on these same kind of texts, it too is part and parcel of the relations of ruling. The subject matter and topics of sociology are those of the ruling powers. Sociological knowledge for her, receives, its shape less from actualities and the lived experiences of real individuals than from the interests in control and regulations by the state, professional associations and bureaucratization (Seidman, cited in Scott and Laura, 2007).

Patricia Collins Contributions

Collins was born in 1948 and grew up in a working-class family in Philadelphia. She earned her B.A in Sociology from the University of Brandeis in 1969 and her M.A from Harvard University in 1970. Collins returned to Graduate School and earned her Ph.D in Sociology from Brandeis University in 1984. Collins's concern on exclusion of black women from intellectual discourses became the subject of her first book on *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment* in 1990. In this highly acclaimed book, Collins illuminates the rich, self-defined intellectual tradition of black women which she argues has persisted despite formal discursive exclusion. The Black feminist thought legitimates black women's intellectual production as critical social theory (Collins, 1998 cited in Scott and Laura 2007). Other published works by Collins includes; *Fighting words: Black women and search for justice* (1998), and *the Black Sexual Politics* (2004). In *fighting words*, Collins shows not only how elite discourses present a view of social reality that elevates the ideas and actions of highly educated white men as normative and superior, but how black feminist thought remained dynamic and oppositional under changing social condition. In *Black Sexual Politics* (2004), Collins continue to firmly situate black feminist thought in the critical tradition of underscoring that antiracist African American Politics in the post-civil rights era must soundly address questions of gender and sexuality.

Scott and Laura (2007) argued that Collins work integrates elements of Feminist Theory, Standpoint Theory, Critical Theory, Afrocentrism, Post Structuralism and Post Modernism and Collins was particularly influenced by Dorothy Smith as is evident in her concept of Standpoint Epistemology, which she defined as the philosophic viewpoint that what one knows is affected by the standpoint (position) one has in society "epistemology" means how we know what we know, how we decide what is valid knowledge. Collins (2006) further extends the critical/phenomenological/feminist ideas of Dorothy Smith by illuminating the particular epistemological standpoint of black women, but specifically situates her work within the critical tradition; indeed she conceptualizes the standpoint theory and postmodernism as examples of critical theory. For Collins (2006), what makes critical theory critical is its commitment to justice for one's own group and or for the groups and critical theory illuminates the bodies of knowledge and set of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing group of people differently placed in specific political, social and historical contexts characterized by injustice.

Furthermore, race, class and gender are equally vital to Collins conceptualization of black feminist thought which like all specialized thought reflects the interests and standpoint of her creator. For her, black feminist thought is rooted in black women's intellectual tradition nurtured by black women's community. As Collins (cited in Scott and Laura, 2007), argued that when white men control the knowledge validation process, both political criteria (contextual credibility and evaluation of knowledge claims) can work to suppress black feminist thought. Therefore, black women are more likely to choose an alternative epistemology for assessing knowledge claims, one using different standards that are consistent with black women's criteria for substantiated knowledge and the criteria for methodology adequacy. Similarly, in Collins work on black sexual politics (2004), Scott and Laura (2007) argued that Collins takes more radical postmodern stance. Here, she sees the complexity of "mutually constructing" intertwined dimensions of race, class, gender and sexuality as so great that she sets her sights not "untangling" the effects of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and the like, but rather on simply illuminating them. The point of black sexual politics she argued is not to tell the world what we think, but rather it examines what we might think about. In the black sexual politics also, Collins highlights the underlying assumed witness of both feminism and academician and reminds white women in particular that they are not the only feminists. In addition,

how black feminist thought disrupts the masculinist underpinnings of Afrocentrism and Collins maintains that in the same way that European Theorists have historically prioritized gender over either race or class. Therefore, Collins appreciate the guiding principles of Afrocentrism-most important, the emphasis on reconstructing black culture, reconstructing black identity, using racial solidarity to build black community and fostering an ethic of service to black community development.

Conclusion

Both Collins and Smith were concerned with developing a theoretical stance that will be inclusive of groups previously excluded from abstract of knowledge production. The focus of these two sociologists was added to the contributions to feminist social theory made in the past by Historians, Political Scientists, Psychoanalysts and Anthropologists as well as those in feminist literary and cultural studies, all of whom have presented important challenges to the theoretical hegemony that the classical and in some cases the current sociological traditions embodies.

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