

Intellectual Biography: Dorothy Smith

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ABSTRACT. Drawing from Smith's own works and other scholars' analysis of her theories, we create a comprehensive review of the work of Dorothy Smith, including insights from her personal and academic backgrounds and her major contributions to the field of sociology. Specifically, we examine standpoint theory and institutional ethnography with particular attention to influences from Smith's own life experiences. In addition, we recognize Smith's transformation of sociology to represent those who are excluded by traditional theories and methods. These academic contributions continue to influence scholars around the world both within and beyond the field of sociology.

INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Smith is a prominent figure in sociology due to her work in developing standpoint theory and institutional ethnography. Inspired by her own experiences as a woman during the 1970's feminist movement, Smith's work sheds light on the area of women's studies. Although retired, she continues to be an influential force in sociology today. As a critical theorist and feminist sociologist, Dorothy Smith was critical of the field of sociology itself for being developed and practiced mostly by men, perpetuating through academia a worldview which excludes women's experiences. She drew from various existing theories and methods, including most notably Marxism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism, to develop standpoint theory and institutional ethnography. Standpoint theory gives voices to women and promotes learning about society from women's experiences and knowledge, bridging the gap between women's experience in the real world and sociological accounts. Smith's research on institutional ethnography was significant because she argued that institutional ethnography was a "sociology for people." Smith describes how the social organizations that individuals are a part of shapes the way in which they live their daily lives, how they make decisions, and what their preferences are. In addition to her theoretical pursuits, Smith also frequently collaborates with government, activist, and women's groups. Thus, through her emphasis on the embodied experiences of everyday people, Smith has transformed the practice of sociology.

PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY: EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

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Dorothy Smith is a pioneer in the field of feminist theories and gender studies. Born in Yorkshire, England in 1926, Smith created many sociological theories still used today such as feminist standpoint theory and institutional ethnography.

Before examining her sociological theories, it is important to bring attention to her background and influences. Smith was born into an upper middle class family and had the privilege of attending boarding school and studying abroad. She was not the first in her family to be interested in studying feminism and women's rights. Deirdre Smythe has traced her ancestry back to Margaret Fell, a 17th-century feminist leader during the Quaker movement. Her mother, Dorothy Foster Place, was the main female figure in her life and Smith developed respect for the occupation of being a homemaker, describing housework as a productive force (Smythe 2009). Additionally, both her mother and grandmother were members of the Women's Social and Political Union which played a role in the women's suffrage movement in England. These two women were active in the Birkenhead chapter of the Women's Social Political Union and their work in non-violent political activism set the tone of Smith's later studies (Smythe 2009). The suffragettes perfectly characterized what it meant to be a strong and elegant woman of the early 1900s. In fact, many of their activities revolved around tasks they would do at home. For example, in order to create fundraising events, the women would often host bake sales and make the most out of their domestic skills. Smith observed her mother and grandmother cook for events and sew clothes at suffrage fairs. However, the suffragettes were not a force to be reckoned with. They also secretly burned buildings and vandalized artworks and objects around the city. Furthermore, Smith's mother was arrested when she was 25 years old for a glass-breaking campaign in Oxford Circus. However, that did not stop her from continuing to support the movement and donating to the Suffragette fund until she passed.

Existing studies point out the influence from other female figures in Smith's life. It was through the influence of both her family members and society as a whole that she was able to create standpoint theory. In addition, her theories come from her Marxist-feminist identity during the Vancouver Women's Movement during 1968 to 1977 as she had just relocated to Canada during that time (Campbell 2003). During her time developing theories and completing her Ph.D., Smith raised her children as a single mother. Her struggles trying to balance her family time and professional career further fueled her exploration into the experiences of women.

Smith completed her undergraduate studies in 1955 at the London School of Economics where she received a B.S in Sociology with a Major in Social Anthropology (Dillion 2020). She then moved to the United States where she received her Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley in 1963. Surprisingly, she did not complete her doctoral thesis on any of the theories she had come up with. Instead, she wrote about the state of mental institutions as she was inspired by Erving Goffman, her PhD supervisor. Smith went on to become a lecturer at Berkeley for two years after her graduation. Smith's teaching did not stop there. She moved to Canada in 1967 and taught at the University of British Columbia. Here she founded and helped establish the Women's Studies Program, one of the firsts of its kind. Smith then moved to Toronto in

1977 and worked at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She had one final teaching role in 1994 as an adjunct professor at the University of Victoria. Smith currently serves on the advisory board for *Signs*, a feminist journal.

Smith was motivated to study feminist theories as she believed the world of education was very male-dominated and little respect was given to women. Her point of view comes from her life experiences as a mother, a wife, and a woman. Smith's work advocating for developing sociology for women is the origin of standpoint theory. It was all based on everyday experiences that seemed too mundane for other sociologists to study, but Smith found value in this area. Therefore, during this essay we will examine how Smith has made numerous contributions to sociology through standpoint theory, institutional ethnography, and how her work is still making a lasting impact on society and academia today.

INTELLECTUAL TRAJECTORY

Dorothy Smith can be considered a sociologist of critical theory, which is characterized by combining elements of various sociological paradigms while simultaneously aiming to understand how they perpetuate unequal power dynamics. Smith says of someone who were to follow her approach to sociology: "So although she doesn't take up the standpoint of any particular theoretical enclave (structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, survey methods, Marxism, or whatever), she has any or all of these to draw on *as they come to hand*" (Smith 1997:820). Smith was concerned that becoming overly absorbed in a specific theoretical approach confined the researcher and prevented them from seeing the full picture of how things work (Campbell 2003). Thus, she viewed existing theories and paradigms as tools to modify and apply to her findings. Patricia Hill Collins describes her approach as "using the best of sociological traditions to challenge the notion of sociological tradition" (1992:74). Consistent with the hallmark of critical theory, Smith criticized how sociology was itself a mechanism used to perpetuate and justify dominant knowledge production and the marginalization of other perspectives of the world.

More specifically, Smith is a feminist sociologist, and used the theoretical frameworks of her choosing, including elements of Marxism and phenomenology, to critique societal structures which center around men's experiences, including the field of sociology itself. She committed to challenging the practice of sociology to reflect people's (especially women's) actual lived experience. The aim of this section is to illustrate some of the most important influences of established paradigms on Smith's sociological approach, and highlight the ways in which she criticized and revolutionized the field of sociology to become more representative of marginalized people's experiences.

One of Smith's main criticisms of traditional sociology was that "Sociological procedures legislate a reality rather than discover one" (Dillon 2020:314). By this, she means that the methodology of sociology as a field plays a role in how a particular issue is constructed and understood. The resulting knowledge, Smith claims, is not truly representative of the lived experiences of the people being studied. "Established

sociology is interested in explaining people's behavior. By contrast, the sociology I'm interested in aims at explaining society to people" (Smith 1997:819). Smith wanted her sociological construction of various issues to reflect people's actual experiences, and help people understand how forces of society affect their daily lives. Smith's belief that the traditional approach is harmful to women and those outside of the dominant narrative of society, which has been constructed by white men, led to her development of standpoint theory and institutional ethnography, which are explained in more detail later.

We can understand a lot of Dorothy Smith's criticism of traditional social theory by thinking about her role as a feminist scholar. It is important to note that Smith was beginning her career during the 1960s and 1970s. This context of the emergence of the so called "second wave" of the feminist movement contributed to her interest in gender inequality and social justice for women as well as giving her an eager audience and an opportunity to be a more public intellectual and really emphasize the need for change within society and sociology. She criticized sociology, as well as other social structures, for being thought of and created through the perspective of men. Men have historically had power over women in society, and this includes having the power to construct the social world itself. We see this critique through Smith's study of ruling texts. Smith presents the idea that many of the texts which guide social practice and ideas, including written documents like the Bible or Constitution as well as images and everyday discourse, were written or created by men or through the lens of male thought. These texts objectify a certain way of thinking about gender and other concepts, a way which privileges men (Dillon 2020). "To explain what women in the 1970s were recognizing as their subordination, she argued that women's exclusion from the positions where society and culture were put together accounts for how social life is ordered by knowledge that doesn't fit women's realities" (Campbell 2003:14). Smith's work challenged male domination of discourse and knowledge in society as she sought to study women's lives from their own perspective. This includes her critique of sociology itself. The ruling texts in sociology, namely the institutionalized empirical practices which generate supposedly objective knowledge, have historically been dominated by a white male perspective, which means the knowledge generated is not, in fact, objectively true. Social relations are far more complex and varied than represented through positivist sociological research, so Smith proposed an alternative way of studying sociology which allowed for the study of the intricacies of everyday social life (Dillon 2020) (Smith 1974).

Closely tied with the feminist perspective of Smith's work is how she uses a Marxist framework to understand subordination of women to men in society. A Marxist perspective is especially prominent in Smith's work during the 1970s, but would remain a significant aspect of her intellectual works (Campbell 2003). Our society is hierarchical, and Dorothy Smith saw that in addition to society being controlled by the ruling economic class, it is ruled by a certain gender - (white) men. "Using Marx's methodology for examining commodity relations under early capitalism, Smith investigates discourse and ideology as social relations essential to contemporary capitalism" (Collins 1992:75). This comes back to Smith's study of ruling texts and how knowledge in sociology and many other fields is primarily produced from a male

perspective. In addition, Smith drew from Marx's emphasis on exploitation and the division of labor. "She and other feminists saw that men work as they do because women are there to provide for them. In feminist politics, this insight motivated women to redefine domestic relationships and try to change the division of domestic labour" (Campbell 2003:15). This parallels Marx's basic theory that the working class is exploited by the ruling capitalist class, and it is laborers' excess work from which the capitalist profits. In the same way, women's domestic work supports men's professional success and associated increase in status. The division of labor, including that of domestic work, can also be alienating because the work being done is done for someone else (Dillon 2020). Additionally, as women reach out into academia and the workforce, they must adapt to the existing male centered standards (Campbell 2003). This perpetuates the oppressive system just as in Marxist theory, the laborers in a capitalist system contribute to the system which exploits and alienates them (until the alleged class revolution). Though Smith recognizes the limitations of Marxist theory, including the lack of discussion of gender and that there are social and institutional processes like the relations of ruling which prevent widespread revolution, she uses the important themes of power and oppression to apply Marxist theory to feminist sociology.

Erving Goffman was Dorothy Smith's thesis advisor when she studied for her PhD at UC Berkeley, and while she did not take up his dramaturgical approach, the importance of everyday face to face interactions which is the crux of symbolic interactionism was not lost on her (Campbell 2003). Smith aimed to understand how people's regular social relations were organized (Smith 1997). For example, the gender roles constructed by ruling texts influence how we present ourselves in everyday social situations. Smith studied the discourse of femininity prescribed in the media and other ruling texts which influences both how women present themselves and how others view them and interact with them (Dillon 2020). While the original symbolic interactionist theories paid little attention to gender and power dynamics, Smith uses its framework to apply it to these very issues, once again demonstrating her ability to pull from various sociological paradigms and build upon their weaknesses.

There is also a clear influence of phenomenology and ethnomethodology in Smith's approach to sociology. Phenomenology "focuses on the significance of everyday reality and everyday experiences on how individuals construct knowledge of their social world and the practical implications of such knowledge" (Dillon 2020:282). Ethnomethodology aims to describe how individuals create an ordered social reality through their everyday activities, "recognizing and making sense of their experiences in ways that fit with the shared norms of order and reasonableness in society" (Dillon 2020:293). The study of everyday reality is an absolutely essential characteristic of Dorothy Smith's approach to sociology because her main criticism of traditional sociology is that it fails to examine the complex nuances of people's everyday lives and how they relate to the larger society. She uses the idea that societal discourse is pervasive in what she calls our "everyday/everynight worlds" to address the experiences of women navigating both domestic and public spheres which are overlooked by male constructed knowledge (Dillon 2020). Again, Smith's analysis of how ruling texts influence how people think and act demonstrates the influences of these fields because it illustrates that the way people

think and act everyday are both shaped by and used to perpetuate an already existing set of norms and power structures. The theoretical roots of ethnomethodology and phenomenology in the importance of everyday experiences are evident in Smith's development of standpoint theory and practice of institutional ethnography as she aims to ground her research and understanding of women's experiences in their day to day realities and create a set of knowledge which acknowledges the presence and significance of multiple perspectives.

Smith's intellectual trajectory is characterized by a combination of many existing sociological ideas to create an approach which gives a voice to women by committing to observing lives how they are actually lived, and using this knowledge to understand the constraining institutions and structures in society on the subjects of study. Her criticisms of traditional sociology allow other theorists, such as prominent sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, to build off of her work and apply standpoint theory and institutional ethnography to women of color as well as other marginalized groups. Over the course of her career, Dorothy Smith has laid the foundation for sociology for all people.

CONTRIBUTIONS: STANDPOINT THEORY

The historical root of standpoint theory came from Georg Hegel and Karl Marx's dialectics. Hegel argued that in the master/slave dialectic relationship, the oppressed slaves could have a better insight and consciousness of oppression and injustice through their daily struggle than their masters. Inspired by the master/slave relationship, Karl Marx came up with the dialectical bourgeois/proletariat relationship, in which proletariats had a superior starting point of understanding capitalism.

Learning from dialectical standpoint theories of Hegel and Marx, Smith suggested that women's voices have disappeared in history and in current society. However, the standpoints of women and other marginalized groups could become "sites of epistemic privilege and thus productive starting points for enquiry into questions about not only those who are socially and politically marginalized, but also those who, by dint of social and political privilege, occupy the positions of oppressors" (Bowell). Smith explained it in her book *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*: "The only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within. We can never stand outside it" (1990:22). Therefore, women's everyday/everynight experiences and their firsthand knowledge of these experiences provided them an understanding different from men's. It was women's exclusion from the relations of ruling that gave women knowledge about how experience was determined (Clough 1993:173). Starting off research from women's experiences and knowledge did not mean to create a matriarchal sociology which was also partial and distorted but to generate an objective discourse and impartial accounts of all human beings and the whole society. Therefore, feminist standpoint theory gave voices to women and focused on learning society from women's experience and knowledge, bridging the gap between women's experience in the real world and sociological accounts.

The contribution of feminist standpoint theory was not only to suggest a new analysis perspective, but challenged the current claims of sociology “to be a value-neutral, object science” (Collins 1992:73). Under the context of the 1960s, gender, class, sexuality and race presented new social changes and challenged the mainstream understanding of society. However, sociological academia “remains strangely untouched by the changes buffeting the remainder of the discipline” (Collins 1992:73). In addition to the slow reaction to current social changes, sociological theory had long ignored or neglected marginalized groups’ accounts. Even though women’s experience and knowledge had been excluded from the set of scientific procedures and scientific discipline of sociology, sociology presented its knowledge “as a universally true, objective account of the world” (Dillon 2020:313).

In addition to neglect, current sociological accounts protected males’ dominated position in the ruling relations. Smith argued that people’s epistemic knowledge--what we know, how we know and the limitation of what we are able to know--is defined by their location: gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. These locations are closely related with the ruling relations. Sociology was “written from the standpoint of men located in the relations of ruling our societies” (Smith 1987: 1). Men wrote texts and controlled the way people should understand the world, although they could not share marginalized groups’ location and knowledge. Current sociological knowledge was not only partial, but also “protect[ed] the ruling apparatus” through texts (Collins 1992:76). It became an echo room, preventing males from thoroughly understanding society and secluding marginalized accounts from sociology. The relations of ruling structured and shaped knowledge, but that socially-situated knowledge which was embedded in ruling relations should not be understood as subjectivity; rather, it could help sociologists understand society through a more objective lens and ameliorate the objectivity of sociology as a discipline.

Although feminist standpoint theory gained popularity and developed fast in the past decades, there were critiques raised toward it. One of the common criticisms is false universalism, seeing women as a oneness, proposing “a single, monolithic feminist standpoint” (Bowell N.d.). Because women were the “primary organizer of an emerging political discourse” (Smith 1990:11), one criticism claimed that feminist standpoint theory over generalized to all females, “[denying] the differences within and between women, a fantasy of unity against oppression” (Clough 1993:174). To answer this criticism and improve standpoint theory, Smith and later feminist standpoint theorists, such as Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding, argued and further explained that standpoint was an achieved collective consciousness, not “merely a perspective that is occupied simply by dint of being a woman” (Bowell N.d.). Everyone could generate a perspective based on their location, context, and historical background. Perspectives were individual lens to see the world. Their perspectives could provide them a starting point for research and the emergence of a standpoint. However, a standpoint could only be earned through social, political or economic struggle and oppression. By acknowledging others who shared the same struggle and oppression, women in particular formed a standpoint different from men. Sandra Harding explained the formation of standpoint in her book *Whose Science/ Whose Knowledge?*:

Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. This need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by 'opening one's eyes' (1991:127).

In addition to overgeneralization, some claimed that false universalism raised the question whether every woman was similarly excluded from the relation of ruling. In other words, it criticized that Smith did not pay enough attention to women with different race, sexuality, class and age. However, as standpoint theory developed, other feminists complemented it to make the theory adjustable for women with different locations and experiences. For example, Patricia Hill Collins presented Black women's standpoint theory to address the intersectionality between gender, race, and class. Following Smith's feminist standpoint theory, Collins argued that sharing the formative experience of slavery, black women generated a standpoint different from that of white women. She pointed out that "the split between the (white) domestic and public sphere did not become a defining part of the black experience" (Dillon 2020:324). After the end of slavery, black women continued to live in black communities and "combine work and family to help ensure a sufficient family household income" (Dillon 2020:324). Different from white women's inequality, black women also suffered from discriminatory controlling images and stereotypes.

Today, researchers use standpoint theory to explore and promote diversity. Standpoint theory as an epistemological tool helps us understand why people may have different views and perspectives towards the same event or the same institution. In her class "Diversity in the Media," Professor Barbara Barnett discusses how the mass media challenge or reinforce social norms of race, class, sex, sexual identity, age, and physical abilities etc. She encourages students to take different ways to experience situations, respect people's expertise gained from their lived experience, and critically question the notion of subjectivity and dualism (Barnett 2009). The modern application of standpoint theory illustrates its vitality and its great contribution toward sociological academia.

The pluralism within standpoint theory had gone beyond the white females' and a single standpoint, solving the problem that it lacked attention to different female groups. Smith's standpoint theory laid the foundations for other sociologists to bring marginalized groups' experiences into the forefront and give voice to them. She brought a new epistemological perspective to the discipline of sociology, leading sociological academia and the world to a more equal level.

CONTRIBUTION: INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Smith's introduction to institutional ethnography helped pave the way for the Marxist feminist approach that shapes our society. Smith's research on institutional ethnography helps explain how things work together, the way in which individuals view social organizations, and why individuals view organizations in this way. Through analyzing

the texts of an organization, researchers need to be able to interpret any patterns that may come up in the field and make connections as to why individuals are impacted by society in the way that they are. This is accomplished by examining the categories used in the texts and looking at an individual's experiences and how they interact with one another within their social organizations. Smith's groundwork allowed individuals to have a new and unique perspective on the impact of social organizations and our Marxist feminist approach is a prominent result of her studies.

Smith was greatly influenced by Marxist theory, which is noticeable as she unpacks her own beliefs regarding how things are related to one another. Her fascination with Marx's work led to the creation of her first notable book, "Feminism and Marxism: A Place to Begin, A Way to Go," which conveys her feminist thinking in regards to a suppressive society (Smith 1977). Smith's development of institutional ethnography was revolutionary because she emphasized how feminist movements were closely related to how norms in society were formed in the first place. That being said, rather than solely focusing on the inequities that women faced in society, Smith took a different approach and made the argument that *all* people are impacted by the stereotypical roles placed on them by society and how we unintentionally reinforce these standards everyday. By doing so, Smith claimed that institutional ethnography was a 'sociology for all people,' which challenged the belief that her work was exclusively focusing on liberating women (Campbell 2003:17). This was far from the truth, and Smith made it clear that all people are connected in one way or another and our actions and decisions greatly impact the way social organization's function.

Institutional ethnography is so impactful because it helps individuals begin to understand their daily routines through examining the social organizations that they are involved in. Likewise, the concept of ruling relations helps bring clarity to understanding what power means in society and why some individuals have power over others. Smith explains that individuals may not be fully aware that their own choices and preferences are shaped by forms of knowledge and interests that *originate* from the social organizations that they are a part of. Individuals may make decisions based on what they believe is 'rational,' however, what they believe is 'right' is inherently being dictated by an institutional force. In turn, all of the social organizations that individuals interact with are leading them to reinforce their daily routines. Smith would argue that it is important to look at the individual's experiences as well as their practices in local sites and wider processes of ruling and governing. Moreover, understanding the particular mechanisms that impact the way in which individuals interact in their social spaces is crucial to understanding the process of institutional ethnography.

Smith's institutional ethnography pioneered the emphasis on standpoint theory, the starting point for a study, which influenced other theorists such as Sandra Harding who built upon this concept. In addition to emphasizing an individual's experience, Smith noted that researching from a particular location was paramount to understanding sociology for women; however, it is not limited to a woman's experience. For Smith, the importance of location was synonymous with understanding that all individuals' experiences in the world are vastly connected to the way in which they view and interact

within social organizations. This makes logical sense because depending on where individuals are in relation to one another this would impact how they see things work together in society. Depending on our unique lens in which we view the world, this greatly affects how we personally view social organizations and therefore, affects how we believe things function (Deveau 2008:14). Likewise, individuals tend to interact with other people who have similar backgrounds to them and therefore, they presumably have comparable interpretations of the organizations to which they belong.

Smith was not only interested in studying peoples' experiences at face value, but also understanding the processes and procedures in the institutional context, which shapes these experiences. Smith describes how the social organizations that individuals are a part of shapes the way in which they live their daily lives, how they make decisions, and what their preferences are. Smith argues that this influences the way individuals see the impact of said organization because everything is connected by the preconceived notions individuals have already placed on society. In order to understand how things work together, we need to examine all individuals' unique narratives, which can be achieved by inspecting the texts of a given social organization. The significance of this is that institutional ethnography relies on individuals' experiences and it is no wonder that Smith's research was so crucial to the critique of traditional sociology that takes precedence today.

In addition, in order to understand how impactful Smith's work on institutional ethnography is, it is important to examine studies that utilized this methodology. Many current sociologists and researchers have found institutional ethnography to be a great approach to studying research in the health professions education area (Kearney et al. 2019). Nichols et al. (2015) used institutional ethnography to examine how parents can support the well-being and health of their children within the realm of family health work. The researchers used qualitative data from focus groups with parents, all from various socioeconomic backgrounds, to learn about social determinants such as the individual, social, cultural, and structural factors that influence the well-being of their children. This study was used to address critical public health concerns that will help healthcare professionals design better programs to properly address various needs for more diverse family types (Nichols et al. 2015). This study is just one example among many that demonstrates the practicality and efficacy of institutional ethnography.

Although Smith's introduction to institutional ethnography helped future researchers and sociologists understand the relationship between individuals and society, there are still individuals who claim that Smith's work was flawed. For instance, Smith argues that the transcripts of individuals in ethnographic research may need to be 'reassembled' in order to draw conclusions. By looking for recurring themes and data in individuals' transcripts, this may lead to a biased outcome because this allows for researchers to confirm their original beliefs. This may lead to a slippery slope especially in regards to keeping the original story and perspective of the individual as accurate as possible. Moreover, this may compromise the authenticity of a study because the last thing that should occur is false representations of individuals, which would completely alter the truth of how individuals see themselves in relation to social organizations and how they

work (Walby 2013:147). Smith's institutional ethnography technique can be improved with the refinement of data analysis and the ways in which researchers make conclusions about how things work together without making implausible generalizations.

That being said, the generalizations that institutional ethnography makes are used as a framework to discern the commonalities between individuals' experiences. The texts that are used in institutional ethnography are extremely helpful because they trace any patterns that individuals share within their given location. We need to keep in mind that the location of individuals is very telling of their unique experiences, and therefore, their perceptions of the world. Similarly, it is common that individuals will have different experiences depending on where they live, who they are surrounded by, and the traditions of their social organizations that they are involved in. By coming to terms with the idea that individuals have a unique perspective on the world, and therefore, they view social organizations in a different light, this will help researchers better understand the way in which things work together. This is accomplished through interpreting patterns that multiple individuals share with one another and making a connection between the stereotypes that society unduly places on individuals and how this affects their perception of organizations. We also need to be aware that there is not only one system or specific set of patterns that all researchers look for when they are making conclusions about individuals and their experiences. Researchers are merely making observations that come up in the field, which help shape interpretations of why individuals behave in a certain way, make decisions and follow routines, and how social institutions are formed and maintained.

Smith is a notable figure in sociology due to her immense contributions to how individuals frame their current beliefs as well as her ability to challenge people to think about different perspectives. Her research on institutional ethnography helped explain the biases that society has toward women in contrast to their male counterparts and how current beliefs need to be confronted in order to live in a more equitable community for all people.

CONTRIBUTIONS BEYOND SOCIOLOGY: SMITH AS A SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST

Smith's work draws together different approaches to oppression and knowledge production: second-wave feminism, ethnomethodology, and Marx's framework from *The German Ideology*. Her scholarship is considered a breakthrough in Canadian Sociology as Smith moved beyond theories that originated in and centered the United States, and instead worked to study everyday people, specifically women (Carroll 2010). In addition to her contributions in Marxist feminism, standpoint theory, and institutional ethnography, Smith has been active in other related disciplines. In "Feminist Reflections on Political Economy" (1989), Smith offered critiques of knowledge production in the field of political economy. Here, she used the same ideas that characterize her sociological work – feminism, Marxism, epistemology, and the ruling apparatus – in order to reflect on the ways scholars were developing theories of political economy. Referring to the tendency to reduce class struggle to trade unionism, she writes, "To treat 'trade unions' as a textual stand-in for class is an illustration of the kind of centripetal pull of the 'main business' and its marginalization of women that I'm

explicating here. Though the political economist may recognize class as gendered, in practice, when the point of production is treated as the exclusive site of class and class struggle, major dimensions of women's lives are dropped from view," (Smith 1989:53). In this article Smith also cites *Orientalism*, revealing that postcolonial scholars like Edward Said are a strong influence on her theoretical development. For critiquing the ways in which disciplines like political economy attempt to conceal the power structures that characterize their scholarship and distance themselves from everyday experiences of oppression, Smith, in her own words, "got into deep, deep trouble" and was dropped from the board of the *Studies for Political Economy* (Carroll 2010:18).

Smith's work has gained wide prominence both within and outside of the field of feminist sociology. Throughout her academic career, Smith has consistently challenged the male perspective that characterizes traditional forms of sociology. As Patricia Hill Collins writes, Smith believes that sociology is "incapable of analyzing its relations to its underlying social conditions because its procedures objectify and separate people from their knowledge," (1992:75). Some scholars have called Smith's approach to the socially constituted nature of all knowledge better than even Durkheim's (Hart and McKinnon 2010). Hence, Smith's work has influenced a whole generation of feminist scholars. In *Thinking Through: Essays, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*, Himani Bannerji (1995) builds on Smith's Marxist and feminist standpoints by questioning the conceptualizations of race, class, and gender as distinct issues and instead emphasizes how these social relations are embodied. Pulling from ideas about the ruling apparatus, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) draws attention to decolonial and postcolonial theory (DeVault 1996). Campbell & Manicom's work (1995) compiles together a wide variety of research in which ideas central to Smith's methodology are further elaborated and developed by other theorists. These essays include discussions of the AIDS epidemic, multiculturalism and ideology, the British empire, homosexuality and sexual policing, children's development, education, urban planning, and photography among others – testament to the relevance and significance of Smith's work across contexts and disciplines.

Dorothy Smith's contributions also extend far beyond the theoretical realm. During her time at the University of British Columbia, Smith was involved in the formation of a women's action group with the objective of changing the status of women throughout all levels of the university (Carroll 2010). In 1973, she helped found the Women's Research Center in Vancouver that worked to provide research assistance to women's organizations. She also began teaching sociology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), where she and other women scholars helped introduce progressive transformations. At the University of Toronto, she founded and directed the Center for Women's Studies in Education. Not only has Smith published pioneering scholarship throughout her career but she has also partnered with various activist groups and unions to understand the mechanisms of oppression in order to build progressive social movements and create social change. Here, her work includes collaboration with the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Committee on the Status of Women, and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (Carroll 2010). However, Smith does not consider these involvements extraneous. In fact, her theories and

scholarship are very much grounded in her collaboration with women's and activist organizations. She writes, "We thought we would reverse the normal flow of information and inquiry that transfers knowledge about people to the institutions which produce knowledge for the ruling of society, namely, to universities and academic discourses. We thought of a women's research centre as a means of producing knowledge for women, making the stored-up knowledge and skills of academe serve the people who are usually their objects," (Smith 1989:37). In this manner, Smith challenged and reinvented the relationship between social scientists and their objects, and thus, radicalized the ways in which sociological knowledge was being produced at the time. For Smith, epistemology is not reserved for academics and social scientists, but that "the social act is already epistemological practice," (Hart and McKinnon 2010).

As a feminist sociologist, Smith emphasizes the study of social relations and structures of power in which practices are embedded. In her pursuit to examine the everyday worlds in which women are situated, she offered social scientists a radical approach to knowledge production, thereby transforming sociological research forever. While her contributions influence a diverse range of scholars across contexts, Smith takes her approach beyond the theoretical realm to center and support everyday people, especially marginalized groups. For her theory and praxis, Smith has been recognized and awarded by academic associations, universities, activist groups, and governments.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For her multidimensional theories that blend feminist, neo-Marxist, phenomenological, and ethnomethodological ideas, Smith is a world-renowned scholar. Influential British sociologist John Scott writes, "By developing the [institutional ethnography] approach and helping to ensure that it is embedded in the set of methodological approaches adopted by sociologists, Smith has made a distinctive and important contribution to the discipline," (2007, 204). Smith's contributions have been recognized as revolutionary through awards like the Jessie Bernard Award for Feminist Sociology in 1993 and the American Sociological Association's Center of Distinguished Scholarship award in 1999 (Scott 2007:204). IE as a methodological approach also has wide and far-reaching impacts: the Society for the Study of Social Problems created an Institutional Ethnography division as a space to further extend Smith's framework and elaborate on its impacts and usefulness. Smith's wide contributions across contexts have recast her methods of standpoint theory and institutional ethnography from a "sociology for women" to a "sociology for people" and transformed the field of sociology to be able to represent those who are excluded by traditional theories and methods.

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