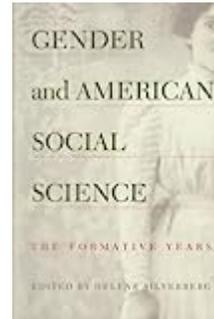




Helene Silverberg, ed. *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years*. Princeton N.J. and Chichester, England: Princeton University Press, 1998. x + 334 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-01749-5.



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Gendered Social Science

Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years, edited by Helene Silverberg, is an ambitious, multi-disciplinary collection of essays that brings the study of the social sciences, social reform, and gender together to significantly reshape our understanding of the development of the social sciences and their place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The collection is extremely well researched, and the endnotes alone (nearly 100 pages) are a gold mine of information on secondary and primary sources. All the essays make use of archival materials (both personal and institutional), journals and other published materials from the time, and a wide range of secondary materials related to individual disciplines, social sciences as a whole, and theoretical works. The introduction by Silverberg lays out the collection's multifaceted approach and its consequences. She begins with a useful historical and historiographical context for understanding how and why the development of the social sciences and social reform efforts have been seen as largely unrelated fields of study. Rather than charting the social sciences only from the perspective of their male practitioners in the universities, the authors, using gender analysis, examine together the social

sciences and the reform movements located in universities, settlement houses, government bureaus, and private foundations, such as Russell Sage and Rockefeller. The women discussed in these essays made use of science and its authority, often along with traditional gender ideologies, to claim work for themselves as newly university-educated women. In doing so, they produced vital, innovative work in government social reform and academic research that often influenced the male social scientists. It was only later, with the effects of the failure of Progressivism, the restriction of war work to men, and various post-war agendas that suppressed dissent that severely limited women's access and contribution to the social sciences.

The collection is divided into three, somewhat overlapping sections which demonstrate the many ways gender helps to understand the social sciences. The first section, "Gender as Discourse," examines how the breakdown and challenges to the Victorian gender system contributed to the development of economics, political economy, and anthropology. Mary G. Dietz and James Farr in "Politics Would Undoubtedly Unwoman Her": Gen-

der, Suffrage, and American Political Science“ and Nancy Folbre in “The ‘Sphere of Women’ in Early-Twentieth-Century Economics“ both show how these fields were male constructed in an era of increasing women’s work and agitation for female suffrage. Both fields claimed objectivity and usefulness (while opposing women’s work and suffrage) in part by embracing traditional Victorian doctrines of separate spheres where women’s contribution to the home was moral and private and men needed a “family wage.“ In economics, however, this backfired as the study of women’s and children’s work was left open to women in government bureaus, social reform movements, private foundations, and university departments outside of political economy. Their findings, based on science and its methods, advocated for reform and provided a critique of and eventually helped to undermine core assumptions of neo-classical economic theory.

Dietz and Farr show how the political scientists’ efforts to use a gendered language to create a science of state, to claim a role as educators of young (male) citizens, and oppose women’s suffrage failed because of the incoherence of the male/female imagery. Dietz and Farr effectively demonstrate the contradictions inherent in the gendered language, but their list of “incredulous questioning” takes the political scientists’ arguments out of context. For instance, to claim that it is “merely tautological” to construct the state as “manly” and then say politics would “unwoman” women may demonstrate a lack of logic, but it also dismisses somewhat the gendered world the political scientists were trying to maintain (pp. 74-77).

Kamala Visweswaran’s “‘Wild West’ Anthropology and the Disciplining of Gender“ examines how women were able to use the notion of the west as “no place for women“ and their gendered claim to civilizing (in this case the Native Americans) to popularize their writing (and the field of anthropology more generally) and to establish themselves as professionals. Yet the anthropologists’ acceptance of white Americans’ race hierarchies, which was fairly typical of European and American women going into the field/empire, [1] kept these women, according to Visweswaran, from seeing gender as a universal category of analysis that encouraged identification across class and race boundaries. Nevertheless, their efforts to understand sexual differences helped to create the notion of cultural relativism, which would in the long run destabilize these same hierarchies. In trying to show the complexities involved, Visweswaran’s own argument becomes somewhat convoluted and difficult to follow.

Secondly, gender is shown to be “constitutive of social science” by shaping “the production, organization, and uses of social knowledge (p. 24).” Several essays point out the collaboration in the 1860s of men and women in the American Social Science Association (ASSA) to develop social science in the name of social reform. As men in the universities in the late 1880s and early 1890s distanced themselves from reform under the threat of being fired for advocating radical ideas, the work of social reformers became increasingly invisible to the history of the now “objective” social sciences. Kathryn Kish Sklar’s reprinted 1991 essay, “Hull House Maps and Papers: Social Science as Women’s Work in the 1890s,” [2] helps to redress that invisibility by showing how women outside the universities were able to continue to create new work in the social sciences using concern for women’s sphere combined with innovative social science methods.

Silverberg, in her own essay, “‘A Government of Men’: Gender, the City, and the New Science of Politics,” demonstrates how middle-class, white men, after jettisoning the science of the state of earlier the political scientists, constructed political science so as to curb the power of the party machines, to devalue the political activism of women, and to “catapult their discipline to the center of American political life“ (p. 156). By promoting the civil service, the political scientists were not just embracing “better government;“ they were also positioning themselves as the appropriate government administrators, while appearing to be gender and class-neutral. They could now dismiss both party bosses with their immigrant and working-class bases and women’s activism, without having to attack either head-on. This permitted them to claim objectivity, scientific status, and greater usefulness to American political life.

Nancy Berlage’s essay, “The Establishment of an Applied Social Science: Home Economists, Science, and Reform at Cornell University, 1870-1930,” clearly articulates how gender ideologies about women and the domestic sphere were combined with academic science projects and methods to create a new applied knowledge of home economics in a university setting. Because of changing pressures, the home economists reformulated their discipline several times in order to carve out and claim independence, scientific standing, and the ability to reform society.

The collection’s final section shows how gender was harnessed in the social sciences as a means of “cultural critique,” helping to reshape gender boundaries and dis-

courses. The last of these essays—Guy Alchon’s “The ‘Self-Appraising Sincerity’ of Overreaching Theory, Biography as Ethical Practice, and the Case of Mary van Kleeck”—seems a strange essay to conclude this collection. While Alchon uses extensive archival materials to write an informative biography on van Kleeck, he cautions against using gender analysis (as too theoretical and abstract) and proclaims in opposition to it the value of biography. This claim seems particularly discordant given that two excellent biographies using gender analysis precede his essay: Dorothy Ross, “Gendered Social Knowledge: Domestic Discourse, Jane Addams, and the Possibilities of Social Science,” and Desley Deacon, “Bringing Social Science Back Home: Theory and Practice in the Life and Work of Elsie Clews Parsons.” Ross, author of *Origins of American Social Sciences*, one of the seminal works in the study of the history of the American social sciences that does not address gender, [3] examines the role of Jane Addams not just as a social reformer but as a sociologist, whose work influenced university sociology, even though it has gone largely unacknowledged. Addams’ work, unlike what the universities adopted, was relational, socially situated, grounded in personal experience, and female gendered. Her work embraced multiple vantage points, leading William James to claim Addams “simply *inhabits reality* (p. 251).” Deacon’s biography shows how Parsons developed in her life and her studies to become increasingly critical of the Victorian domestic sphere for not training women to get along in the modern world. Not content with criticism, Parsons, in theory and practice, also tried to bring about an “Unconventional Society” and a new family for new times (pp. 283-84).

Alchon, by contrast, argues that an analysis of van Kleeck’s life driven by gender would lose “much that is ironic, surprising, and otherwise inaccessible to the press of such an abstraction (p. 297).” He rejects gender analysis, in part, because he claims that the life of van Kleeck disproves the gender division of the social sciences between “soft” female reformers and “hardening,” “disciplining” male academics (p. 311). Yet the authors of this collection argue that such division was not descriptive of the reality of the day, but was a perception created when the university social scientists claimed objectivity. Alchon seems to be working, at least partially, from the position that continues to posit the validity of the objective social sciences and the necessity of keeping them separate—even immune—from the political and theoretical analysis of gender. While his caution to avoid ex-

treme imbalance and his rejection of teleological history is of course valid, he uses this claim to dismiss gender analysis as “solipsistic and ahistorical (p. 312).”

Yet, despite Alchon’s claim that gender analysis leads to “self-applauding sincerity,” the essays in this collection clearly demonstrate the vitality and insight that gender analysis, combined with careful research in political, economic, family, personal, social, and educational contexts, can bring to topics so frequently understood as unrelated to gender. The essays, while all useful within their own disciplines, together reveal a kaleidoscopic view—shedding light in multifaceted ways on the social sciences in academia and in reform movements. Even though several topics, including the settlement houses, the ASSA, various social scientists and reformers, are discussed in multiple essays, there is little direct repetition. Rather, the notion of multiple vantage points and “inhabiting reality” that Ross uses could easily serve as an explanation for how this collection looks at the formative years of the social sciences.

This work should become a crucial text for researchers, scholars, and graduate students studying either the social sciences or gender, for it demonstrates how gender analysis (and social reform) are integral to understanding the development of social knowledge and provides an excellent model for how to do gender analysis.

NOTES:

[1]. See, for instance, Margaret Strobel, “Gender, Race, and Empire in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Africa and Asia,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 3rd Edition, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Susan Mosher Stuard, and Merry E. Wiesner (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

[2]. *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880-1940*, eds. Martin Bulmer, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Kevin Bales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[3]. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See Silverberg’s introduction.

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