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AWL vocabulary is in **bold**.

Steckley, J. (2017). *Elements of sociology. A critical Canadian introduction* (4th ed.) (pp. 4–33).
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PART ONE

Foundations of Sociology

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Sociology

Feminist Theory

Two branches of conflict **theory** now **comprise** such an extensive collection of **research** and literature that they demand to be considered in their own right. These two branches are **feminist theory** and **postmodern theory**.

Feminism, it could be argued, began with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Like anything that has existed and evolved for well over two hundred years, it is difficult to pin down with a tidy, hard-and-fast definition. We can say that feminism involves correcting centuries of discrimination and male-dominated **conceptions**¹ of gender roles in order to gain and present an **accurate** view of the social condition of women. Contrary to what some male students believe, you don't have to be a woman to be a **feminist**. You do have to accept that recognizing a female **perspective** (or "standpoint") is absolutely critical to forming an **accurate appraisal**² of the roles women play in society (or so says the bearded **feminist** John Steckley).

One of the earliest sociologists to carry out a careful examination of women's roles in society was British writer and social theorist **Harriet Martineau** (1802–1876). She wrote over 6,000 articles, many of them on the social condition of women. In 1834 she began a two-year study of the United States, which she documented in the three-**volume** *Society in America* (1837) and in *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). Her **feminist** thinking can be seen in her comparison of women to slaves in a **chapter** of the former work **revealingly**³ called "The Political Non-

¹ **Conceptions:** concepts; ideas; ways of thinking

² **Appraisal:** understanding of value; judgement

³ **Revealingly:** the title reveals or shows how the author really thinks

Existence of Women.” After travelling to the Middle East, she published *Eastern Life: Present and Past* (1848), in which she briefly **departed**⁴ from her intended sociological spirit of **impartiality**⁵ to **condemn**⁶ the practice of **polygyny** (one husband with more than one wife).

Martineau’s **goal** of remaining **impartial**⁵ was in keeping with the sociology of her time. In **contrast**, most **feminist** theorists today believe that the best way to understand the social condition of women involves trying to view life through the eyes of the women they’re studying. It sounds **obvious**, but it was a revolutionary idea, and a foundational figure in the movement was a Canadian sociologist, **Dorothy Smith** (b. 1926). While doing **graduate**⁷ work at the University of California, Berkeley, Smith experienced first-hand the kind of **systemic**⁸ sexist discrimination that would become the subject of her first work. She moved to Canada in the late 1960s, when she was given a rare (for a woman) teaching opportunity at the University of British Columbia. Fortunately, as she jokes, departments of sociology in this country were “scraping the bottom of the barrel.” It was the start of a distinguished academic **career**⁹ that also includes slightly less than 20 years at the University of Toronto’s Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She is currently (2016) an **adjunct**¹⁰ professor of sociology at the University of Victoria.

Smith developed **standpoint theory** directly out of her own experience as a woman discriminated against by male colleagues in the academic **community**. Her standpoint **theory** challenged traditional sociology on two **fronts**,¹¹ both relating to sociology’s preference for **objective** (**depersonalized**¹² and distanced from everyday life) as opposed to **subjective**¹³ (**personalized** and connected to everyday life) **research** and analysis. Her first **criticism**¹⁴ attacked the traditional position that the **objective approach to research** is more scientific and therefore truthful, while the **subjective**¹³ position is **ideological**, based on biases and prejudices, and therefore distorted. According to Smith, knowledge is developed from a particular lived

⁴ **Depart:** go away from

⁵ **Impartiality:** not taking a side or a position; being neutral; not judging

⁶ **Condemn:** say that something is bad or wrong

⁷ **Graduate** work: studying for a master’s degree or Ph.D

⁸ **Systemic:** being part of a system

⁹ **Career:** a good job that you do for a long time

¹⁰ **Adjunct** professor: a university professor who is on contract for a limited time

¹¹ **Front:** the area where fighting happens in a war or argument

¹² **Depersonalize:** study people as parts of a system instead of as persons

¹³ **Subjective:** influenced by personal feelings

¹⁴ **Criticism:** saying something is bad; pointing out the problems

position, or “standpoint.” Sociology, having developed from a male standpoint, had long denied the validity of the female standpoint and overlooked¹⁵ the everyday lives of women—an oversight¹⁶ that feminist researchers today are still working to correct.

What Do YOU Think?

1. How does Smith’s standpoint **theory** fit with Mills’ **notion** of the sociological imagination?
2. Do you agree with Smith’s view that sociology developed from a male standpoint? Why or why not?
3. Consider the list of early sociologists and their contributions provided in Table 1.2. How might early developments in the growth of sociology have differed if the female standpoint had been given greater consideration?

Feminism’s “Waves”

Some historians have attempted to **trace** the development of feminism through successive generations, or “waves,” each characterized by a different **agenda**.¹⁷ According to this conception, first-wave feminism is associated chiefly with the **campaign**¹⁸ for **civil** and political rights, specifically the rights to vote and hold political office, which began in the nineteenth century. Canada’s “famous five,” a group of social leaders and **activists**¹⁹ who **petitioned**²⁰ to have women recognized as “persons” under British and Canadian law in the early twentieth century, are examples of first-wave feminists in this country (see Our Stories on page *** of Chapter 9 for more on the famous five).

After securing political rights in most North American **jurisdictions**,²¹ the women’s movement began to **wane**²² in the first half of the twentieth century. It gained new life during the **civil** rights movement that began in the 1960s, **fuelled**²³ by the fight for equality in the home and

¹⁵ **Overlook:** ignore; not notice or think about

¹⁶ **Oversight:** something that is missing; a gap; a mistake

¹⁷ **Agenda:** a set of goals; a plan

¹⁸ **Campaign:** a long fight to do or change something

¹⁹ **Activist:** a person who is working to change society or politics

²⁰ **Petition:** make a formal request

²¹ **Jurisdiction:** the area that is controlled by your rules

²² **Wane:** decrease slowly

²³ **Fuel:** motivate; keep going

in the workplace, including equal opportunities for employment and pay. The **activists**¹⁹ of this **generation** saw themselves as successors to the “first wave” of **activists**,¹⁹ who had won voting and other rights. Second-wave feminism differed, though, by **tackling**²⁴ not just public rights—like the right to take a **job** in traditionally male-dominated professions—but also private rights, including **reproductive rights**²⁵ and freedom from **domestic violence**²⁶ (Hunter College & Simalchik 2017).

Beginning during the 1980s, third-wave feminism is associated with the **campaign**¹⁸ for social justice for women left out of the more **mainstream agenda**²⁷ of second-wave feminism, traditionally set by white women from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds. Some critics view it as a **backlash**²⁸ against second-wave feminism. Third-wave feminism represents the interests of **LGBTI**²⁹ women, as well as women from racial and **ethnic** minorities and women living in poverty. It is closely tied to the **notion** of **intersectionality**³⁰ defined earlier in this **chapter**.

So where are we now? Many feminist **activists**¹⁹ today are using social media as a way to draw attention to issues including sexual **harassment**³¹ and violence, online **bullying**³² and shaming, media representations of women, and unethical **versus**³³ ethical **pornography**.³⁴ Some see this **millennial**³⁵-driven **activism**¹⁹ as a fourth wave. Others say it’s merely third-wave feminism carried out using the tools of **technology**. Others still argue that the idea of waves is an **outdated**³⁶ **concept** that was problematic to begin with: after all, where do you situate black feminists of the 1960s and 1970s, who were arguing that race was being left off the feminist **agenda**²⁷ (Hunter College & Simalchik 2017)? What is clear is that there are many feminisms, defined by different (sometimes competing) interpretations of the movement and its objectives.

²⁴ **Tackle:** try to change; attack; focus on

²⁵ **Reproductive rights:** a woman’s right to control when and whether she gets pregnant and gives birth

²⁶ **Domestic violence:** usually when a man attacks his wife or children

²⁷ **Mainstream agenda:**

²⁸ **Backlash:** an angry, negative reaction

²⁹ **LGBTI:** people who do not fit the usual ideas of sexuality and gender: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex

³⁰ **Intersectionality:** the way that different ascribed statuses interact

³¹ **Harassment:** behaviour that is intended to trouble or annoy someone

³² **Bullying:** repeated use of threats or violence to harm or scare someone

³³ **Versus:** against

³⁴ **Pornography:** videos, magazines, and art that show or describe sexual acts to create sexual excitement

³⁵ **Millennial:** related to the year 2000, especially people born in the 1980s and 1990s.

³⁶ **Outdated:** old