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# SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

WINTER TERM 2024



Why is Gilman a sociologist?

Theoretical dimensions of Gilman's theory


(1860-1935)

# Charlotte Perkins Gilman





Gilman as sociologist:

1. identified herself as a sociologist
  2. identified by others
  3. taught sociology courses
  4. wrote sociological books and articles - published *American Journal of Sociology*
  5. a charter member of the American Sociological Society
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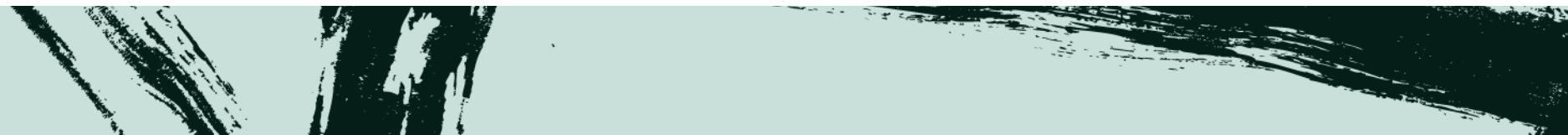
# INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS

social Darwinism, Marxism, symbolic interactionism



## MULTIDIMENSIONAL THEORY OF GENDER INEQUALITY:

- Marxist emphasis on the economic and political basis for gender inequality
- Symbolic interactionist emphasis on the process of socialisation (fundamental for gender social roles)
- Emphasis on evolutionary advantages or roots of gender differences





*But the person habitually wearing a corset does not feel these evils. They exist, assuredly, the facts are there, the body is not deceived; but the nerves have become accustomed to these disagreeable sensations, and no longer respond to them. The person “does not feel it.” In fact, the wearer becomes so used to the sensations that when they are removed,—with the corset,—there is a distinct sense of loss and discomfort. (Gilman 1898/1998:40)*

*In the course of social evolution there are developed individuals so constituted as not to fit existing conditions, but to be organically adapted to more advanced conditions. These advanced individuals respond in sharp and painful consciousness to existing conditions, and cry out against them according to their lights. The history of religion, of political and social reform, is full of familiar instances of this. The heretic, the reformer, the agitator, these feel what their compeers do not, see what they do not, and naturally, say what they do not. The mass of the people are invariably displeased by the outcry of these uneasy spirits. In simple primitive periods they were promptly put to death. (Gilman 1898/1998:41)*



# Questions for discussion

One of Gilman's main points is that women cannot be equal to men unless they are economically independent. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Use concrete examples to explain and support your point of view.

Discuss the specific advances in gender equality that have occurred since Gilman's day. What specific issues highlighted by Gilman do you consider still problematic, and which problems do you consider "eradicated" (at least in the United States)?

Compare and contrast Gilman's theory as to the oppression of women in patriarchy with Marx's theory as to how and why workers are oppressed under capitalism. What similarities do you see in their arguments? What are the differences in these two theories of oppression?