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## FEMINIST RESEARCH

### Exploring, Interrogating, and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology, Methodology, and Method

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#### FEMINIST VOICES AND VISIONS ACROSS THE CENTURIES

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This *Handbook* begins with voices, visions, and experiences of feminist activists, scholars, and researchers, speaking to us across the decades of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. They provide a legacy of feminist research, praxis, and activism. There lies within these voices a feminist consciousness that opens up intellectual and emotional spaces for all women to articulate their relations to one another and the wider society—spaces where the personal transforms into the political.

I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far

worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is. Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations. May the blessing of God rest on this imperfect effort in behalf of my persecuted people! (Harriet Jacobs, 1861/1987, pp. 1–2)

Harriet Jacobs calls for the alignment of women across their racial, class, and geographical differences to fight the abomination of slavery. Through her words, Jacobs demonstrates how the concrete lived experience is a key place from which to build knowledge and foment social change.

It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first

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understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help: he was a Beadle; I was a woman. Thus was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. (Virginia Woolf, 1929, p. 258)

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (Simone de Beauvoir, 1952, pp. xviii, xxiii)

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. . . . she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?” For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books, and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. . . . We can no longer ignore within women that voice that says: “I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.” (Betty Friedan, 1963, pp. 15, 32)

Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Friedan, speaking many decades later, express their deep feelings of exclusion from the dominant avenues of knowledge building, seeing their own experiences, concerns, and worth diminished and invalidated by the dominant powers of their society.

In some ways, the origins of feminist research’s epistemological and methodological focus draws on these insights and struggles; feminist empiricism, standpoint theories, post-modernism, and transnational perspectives all recognize the importance of women’s lived experiences to the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge. Each perspective forges links between feminism, activism, and the academy and women’s everyday lives.

Women [were] largely excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered. . . . The circle of men whose writing and talk was significant to each other extends backwards in time as far as our records reach. What men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men for men. Men listened . . . to what one another said. (Dorothy Smith, 1978, p. 281)

Feminist perspectives also carry messages of empowerment that challenge the encircling of knowledge claims by those who occupy privileged positions. Feminist thinking and practice require taking steps from the “margins to the center” while eliminating boundaries that privilege dominant forms of knowledge building, boundaries that mark who can be a knower and what can be known. For Virginia Woolf, it is the demarcation between the “turf” and the “path”; for Simone de Beauvoir, it is the line between the “inessential” and the “essential”; and for Dorothy Smith, it is the path that encircles dominant knowledge, where women’s lived experiences lie outside its circumference or huddled at the margins.

Working right at the limits of several categories and approaches means that one is neither entirely inside or outside. One has to push one’s work as far as one can go: to the borderlines, where one never stops, walking on the edges, incurring constantly the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, modifying this limit. (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1991, p. 218)

To engage in feminist theory and praxis means to challenge knowledge that excludes, while seeming to include—assuming that when we speak of the generic term *men*, we also mean women, as though what is true for dominant groups must also be true for women and other oppressed groups. Feminists ask “new” questions that place women’s lives and those of “other” marginalized groups at the center of social inquiry. Feminist research *disrupts* traditional ways of knowing to create rich new meanings, a process that Trinh (1991) terms becoming “both/and”—insider and outsider—taking on a multitude of different standpoints and negotiating these identities simultaneously.

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The history of research from many indigenous perspectives is so deeply embedded in colonization that it has been regarded as a tool only of colonization and not as a potential tool for self-determination and development. For indigenous peoples, research has a significance that is embedded in our history as natives under the gaze of Western science and colonialism. (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 87)

Feminists bob and weave their threads of understanding, listening to the experiences of “the other/s” as legitimate knowledge. Feminist research is mindful of hierarchies of power and authority in the research process, hierarchies that are so well described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005), including those power differentials that lie within research practices that can reinforce the status quo, creating divisions between colonizer and colonized.

I continue to be amazed that there is so much feminist writing produced and yet so little feminist theory that strives to speak to women, men and children about ways we might transform our lives via a conversion to feminist practice. (bell hooks, 1994, pp. 70–71)

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (Audre Lorde, 1996, p. 159)

The quotations used in this chapter contain a quality of agency that challenges dominant discourses of knowledge building, urging women to live and invite in differences, to embrace the creativity and knowledge building that lies within the tensions of difference. Difference matters. Author bell hooks (1994) implores feminists to root their scholarship in “transformative politics and practice,” pointing out that

“in this capitalist culture, feminism and feminist theory are fast becoming a commodity that only the privileged can afford” (p. 71). Audre Lorde (1996) provides a path to empowerment by urging an embrace of difference through an “interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal” (p. 159).

The tensions between opposing theories and political stances vitalize the feminist dialogue. But it may only be combined with respect, partial understanding, love, and friendship that keeps us together in the long run. So mujeres think about the carnalas you want to be in your space, those whose spaces you want to have overlapping yours. (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 229)

Indeed, it is our acknowledgment and appreciation of difference that sustains our ability to navigate uncharted terrain toward meaningful social change. Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) employs a “sandbar” metaphor to capture traversals of the difference divide:

Being a sandbar means getting a breather from being a perpetual bridge without having to withdraw completely. The high tides and low tides of your life are factors which help decide whether or where you’re a sandbar today, tomorrow. . . . A sandbar is more fluid and shifts locations, allowing for more mobility and more freedom. Of course there are sandbars called shoals, where boats run amuck. (p. 224)

Although Anzaldúa now envisions herself turning into a sandbar, her own stance on difference fluctuates between a “persistent ridge,” a “drawbridge,” or even “an island.” For Anzaldúa (1990), traversing the difference divide becomes a process—with its own range of connections and disconnections as “each option comes with its own dangers” (p. 224).

Feminist research shares some common angles of vision that are “connected in principle to feminist struggle” (Joey Sprague & Mark Zimmerman, 1993, p. 266), often with the intent to change the basic structures of oppression. But there is no single feminist epistemology or methodology. Instead, multiple feminist lenses wake us up to layers of sexist, racist, homophobic, and colonialist points of view. Some lenses provide radical

insights into knowledge building that upend traditional epistemologies and methodologies, offering more complex understandings and solutions toward reclaiming subjugated knowledge.

Feminists engage both the theory and practice of research—beginning with the formulation of the research question and ending with the reporting of research findings. Feminist research encompasses the full range of knowledge building that includes epistemology, methodology, and method. An *epistemology* is “a theory of knowledge” (Sandra Harding, 1987b, p. 3) that delineates a set of assumptions about the social world—who can be a knower and what can be known. These assumptions influence the decisions a researcher makes, including what to study (based on what *can* be studied) and how to conduct a study. A *methodology* is “a theory of how research is done or should proceed” (p. 3). A *method* is “a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence” (p. 2). Very often, the term *method* is used as an umbrella term to refer to these three different components of the research process, which can make the use of the term somewhat confusing.

Feminist research takes many twists and turns as a mode of social inquiry. In this introduction, we provide a brief overview of some of the “critical moments” in the legacy of feminist theory and praxis. We take up the dialogues surrounding issues of epistemology, methodology, and method. Feminist research begins with questioning and critiquing androcentric bias within the disciplines, challenging traditional researchers to include gender as a category of analysis. Subsequently, through this shift in perspective, we can observe the beginnings of an overall challenge to the scientific method itself and the emergence of new paradigms of thinking about basic foundational questions: What is Truth? Who can be a knower? What can be known?

#### FEMINIST RESEARCHERS CHALLENGE ANDROCENTRIC BIAS ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

In the 1960s through to the 1980s, feminist scholars and researchers called attention to examples of androcentric bias within the sciences

and social sciences. These feminist scholars and researchers, known as feminist empiricists, embarked on projects to “correct” these biases by adding women into research samples and asking new questions that enabled women’s experiences and perspectives to gain a hearing. Margrit Eichler and Jeanne Lapointe’s (1985) research primer, *On the Treatment of the Sexes in Research*, provides a critique of empirical research as well as a checklist for the inclusion of gender as a category of analysis in social research. Their work provides many important nuggets of advice concerning what *not* to do (p. 9). These include the following:

- Treating Western sex roles as universal
- Transforming statistical differences into innate differences
- Translating difference as inferiority

Feminist empiricist researchers did much to “deconstruct” what they perceived as errors, or examples of androcentrism, across a range of academic disciplines and professional fields. Feminist empiricists’ insights into androcentrism, and their goal of eradicating sexist research, cascaded across the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, history, sociology, education, and anthropology, as well as the fields of law, medicine, language, and communication. The 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of many groundbreaking anthologies critical of androcentric research. In 1975, Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter coedited the volume *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science*. In their editorial introduction, they compare traditional knowledge building with the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” They note,

Everyone knows the story about the Emperor and his fine clothes; although the townspeople persuaded themselves that the Emperor was elegantly costumed, a child, possessing an unspoiled vision, showed the citizenry that the Emperor was really naked. . . . The story also reminds us that collective delusions can be undone by introducing fresh perspectives. (p. vii)

Sociologists Millman and Kanter (1975) criticize the androcentric bias of sociology by

noting how sociology uses certain “field-defining models” that prevent the asking of new questions. They note, for example, that the Weberian concept of rationality, used to understand an individual’s motivations and social organization, “defines out of existence, from the start, the equally important element of emotion in social life and structure” (p. ix). Their edited volume presents a range of new feminist perspectives on the social reality to “reassess the basic theories, paradigms, substantive concerns, and methodologies of sociology and the social sciences to see what changes are needed to make social theory and research reflect the multitude of both female and male realities and interests” (p. viii). The works in this volume also point out how sociology emphasizes the “public sphere” of society and “leaves out the private, supportive, informal, local social structures in which women participate most frequently” (p. xi). A stark example of this comes from a research article in their volume by Arlie Hochschild (1975), “The Sociology of Feeling and Emotion: Selected Possibilities.” Hochschild demonstrates how the frequency of specific emotions is not distributed evenly across social structures. She explores the gendered, raced, and classed aspects of emotional expression. She notes, for example, that anger tends to flow down the social structure, while love flows up the social hierarchy. In effect, those at the bottom of the social ladder become “the complaint clerks of society, and . . . for the dwellers at the top, the world is more often experienced as a benign place” (p. 296). She notes in particular the role of gender in emotional expression whereby women “receive not only their husband’s frustration displaced from the office to home, but also the anger of other women who are dissimilarly displaced upon” (p. 296). In a later work, Hochschild (1983), a prime mover in establishing the field known as “the sociology of emotions,” demonstrates how emotions are often co-opted for commercial benefit. For example, those women employed in female-dominated clerical, service, and sales occupations often find that “emotional work” is a part of their job in addition to their more formal job description. They are expected to keep things functioning smoothly by managing the emotional climate at work—by smiling and comporting an upbeat and friendly demeanor.

Dale Spender’s (1981) anthology *Men’s Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines* focuses on gender and knowledge building across the disciplines. Spender notes,

Most of the knowledge produced in our society has been produced by men. . . . They have created men’s studies (the academic curriculum), for, by not acknowledging that they are presenting only the explanation of men, they have “passed off” this knowledge as human knowledge. (p. 1)

In writing this volume, Spender hoped to draw attention to cutting-edge research across the disciplines that began to “alter the power configurations in the construction of knowledge in society” (p. 8).

Many anthologies quickly followed, including Sandra Harding’s (1987a) edited volume, *Feminism and Methodology*. In the preface to this volume, Harding raises a central issue, namely, “Is there a unique feminist method of inquiry?” She suggests that at the heart of feminist inquiry are the emergent questions and issues that feminists raise about the social reality and the practices of traditional research. She asserts,

A closer examination of the full range of feminist social analyses reveals that often it is not exactly alternative methods that are responsible for what is significant about this research. Instead, we can see in this work alternative origins of problematics, explanatory hypotheses and evidence, alternative purposes of inquiry, and a new prescription for the appropriate relationship between the inquirer and his/her subject of inquiry. (p. vii)

If we look inside Harding’s volume, we find several articles that interrogate the relationship between gender and the social sciences. Carolyn Wood Sherif’s (1987) article calls attention to androcentric research being conducted in the field of psychology. Sherif begins her analysis of bias by quoting Naomi Weisstein’s thesis of the 1960s that “psychology has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, essentially because psychology does not know” (p. 38). In seeking to raise the status of their discipline, psychologists began to emulate the theories and practices of the more prestigious hard sciences. This



reliance on biological and physical science models of inquiry invariably led to biased theories about women and gender. Bonnie Thornton Dill's (1987) article in this same volume points to the tendency of researchers, including some feminist researchers, to generalize women's social situation, leaving out differences of race, class, and cultural context. She uses the example of "femininity" and explains how the concept has been dominated by images of white middle- and upper-middle-class conceptions of womanhood. She provides alternative frameworks for analyzing the concept by taking women's race, class, and cultural context-bound differences into account. Joan Kelly-Gadol's (1987) article in Harding's edited volume provides a critique of the androcentrism of historical method by illustrating the myriad ways in which feminist research questions historical work. Kelly-Gadol focuses on historians' use of field-defining concepts such as "periodization," a particular set of events historians chose to focus on (usually those activities men were engaged in, such as diplomatic and constitutional history, as well as political, economic, and cultural history). She troubles the concept of periodization by including gender as a category of analysis that opens the possibility of asking new questions: Was the period called *the Renaissance* beneficial for women? Although the Renaissance brought dramatic changes in social and cultural life that benefited many men, a growing division between private and public life meant that most women, even those of the upper class, experienced increasing segregation from men and a loss of power and freedom in the public sphere. Kelly-Gadol's vision of including women in history challenges the fundamental way historians visualize historical periods. In addition, our understanding of social change also shifts when we conceive of women as *agents* of historical change. Kelly-Gadol does not include a specific discussion of other differences such as race, class, and sexual preference in her vision of historical method. However, by decentering white male concerns and activities as the central focal point of historical inquiry and by making sex a category fundamental to historical analysis, she (and others) paved the way for alternative viewpoints to reconfigure the historical landscape. Including sex as a category of

analysis also provides historians with a more complex understanding of history's influence on both sexes.

Nancy Tuana's edited volume *Feminism & Science* (1989a) contains a range of readings that critique the gendered nature of the sciences. In the preface to her volume, Tuana notes, "Although feminists were not the first to reject the traditional image of science, we were the first to carefully explore the myriad ways in which sexist biases affected the nature and practice of science" (p. xi). Nancy Tuana's own research article in this volume reveals the extent to which "scientists work within and through the worldview of their time" (1989b, p. 147). Tuana examines theories of reproduction from Aristotle to the preformationists and shows how these theories justify women's inferiority. She notes, "Aristotle set the basic orientation for the next 2000 years of embryological thought . . . the gender/science system is woven tightly into the fabric of science" (p. 169).

Emily Martin's (1987) monograph *The Woman in the Body*, published around the same time as Nancy Tuana's book, also provides a feminist analysis of science, but through an examination of medical discourse. Martin exposes the range of sex-biased assumptions embedded within reproductive medical texts that serve to disempower women and compares these images to women's perceptions of their reproductive lives. She discovers that medical texts employ an image of birth as "production," with the uterus likened to a "machine." Within this framework, menstruation and menopause become "failed production." Martin also finds that white middle-class women are most apt to accept these dominant images. Like Tuana's work, Martin's research underscores the androcentrism embedded in scientific literature and research and demonstrates the extent to which the "hard" sciences exist within value-laden social contexts that affect their practices and findings.

#### TURN TOWARD FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES AND METHODOLOGIES

Although we have barely touched on the range of contributions of feminist scholarship, it is clear that the decades of the 1970s and 1980s contributed to the deconstruction of traditional

knowledge frameworks—taken-for-granted knowledge across several disciplines. In contrast to this endeavor, the 1980s and 1990s saw feminists launching other important challenges to knowledge building, starting with a basic foundational question:

- What is the nature of the social reality?

*Positivism* is a traditional research paradigm based on “the scientific method,” a form of knowledge building in which “there is only *one* logic of science, to which any intellectual activity aspiring to the title of ‘science’ should follow” (Russell Keat & John Urry, quoted in Lawrence Neuman, 2000, p. 66). Positivism’s model of inquiry is based on logic and empiricism. It holds out a specific epistemology of knowing—that truth lies “out there” in the social reality waiting to be discovered, if only the scientist is “objective” and “value free” in the pursuit of knowledge building. It posits “causal relationships” between variables that depend on the testing of specific hypotheses deduced from a general theory. The goal is to generalize research findings to a wider population and even to find causal laws that predict human behavior. Positivists present their results in the form of quantified patterns of behaviors reported in the form of statistical results. Early on, the social sciences (e.g., sociology and psychology) wanted to establish themselves as “scientific” in consort with the natural sciences (e.g., biology and chemistry). Auguste Comte (1798–1857), known as the father of French positivism, sought to incorporate the primary tenets of positivism into the discipline of sociology. Comte envisioned knowledge building passing through the “law of three stages”: the “theological” or “fictitious” stage, characterized by beliefs in the supernatural; the “metaphysical” or “abstract” stage, a transitional state of knowledge building in which nature and its abstract forces are at work; and, finally, the “positivist” or “scientific” stage, the pinnacle of knowledge, through which we seek to uncover the laws that govern social behavior (Comte, 1896/2000, p. 27).

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) also aspired to make sociology more scientific. In *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim (1895/1938)

asserts that the discipline of sociology can create the same objective conditions that exist in the natural sciences. He codifies positivism by providing social scientists with specific rules and guidelines that will enable them to conduct value-free research, to separate facts from values, and to discover what he terms “social facts”—facts that “have an independent existence outside the individual consciousness” (p. 20). According to Durkheim, discarding sensation (feelings, values, and emotion) is an imperative aspect of knowledge building:

It is a rule in the natural sciences to discard those data of sensation that are too subjective, in order to retain exclusively those presenting a sufficient degree of objectivity. Thus the physicist substitutes, for the vague impressions of temperature and electricity, the visual registrations of the thermometer or the electrometer. The sociologist must take the same precautions. (p. 44)

Feminist researchers do not necessarily embrace or eschew the practice of a positivist mode of inquiry. Some feminist researchers warn that the practice of positivism can lead to “bad science.” This idea was the very motivation of *feminist empiricists* who urged scholars and researchers across the disciplines to be mindful of who is *left out* of research models’ generalized claims and to tend to issues of difference in the research process (see, e.g., the preceding critique of androcentrism and Hundleby, Chapter 2, this volume). Other feminist scholars and researchers have critiqued positivism’s tendency toward dualisms—between quantitative and qualitative research, between the subject and object of research, and between rationality and emotion. Sprague and Zimmerman (1993) argue, for example, that by setting up a subject-object split, whereby the researcher is removed from the research process and placed on a different plane, the practice of positivism promotes a hierarchy between the researcher and the researched that mimics patriarchy. Sprague and Zimmerman also challenge the positivist exclusion of emotions and values from the research process and call for an integration of quantitative and qualitative research.

On the other hand, positivism per se is not the enemy of all feminist inquiry; rather, the

adversary is how positivist principles of practice are deployed in some mainstream research projects. Some feminist researchers see positivism as having merit, especially as it adds validity to feminist research projects. Feminist empiricists continue to draw on positivist traditions (see in this volume Miner, Jayaratne, Pesonen, & Zurbrügg; Rosser; and Cole & Stewart). Additionally, some research questions may call for a positivistic framework, especially if the goal of the research project requires the testing of a specific research hypothesis across a broad spectrum of data with the aim of generalizing findings to a wider population. Some feminist social policy advocates have also argued for its inclusion. For example, Roberta Spalter-Roth and Heidi Hartmann (1996), in their social policy work on women and welfare, call for the “strategic” use of a quantitative paradigm in conjunction with a qualitative one to “heighten consciousness and to provide credible numbers that can help advocates to mobilize political support” (p. 221).

Finally, sociologist Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1999) objects to the confounding of positivism with such terms as “instrument of social control” and “masculine knowledge building.” She attributes these misrepresentations to the confusion surrounding the meaning of the term:

In part this has happened because of the erroneous confusion of this term with the kind of mindless empiricism that has marked so much sociological research. I believe that theory development and well-crafted, theoretically oriented research go hand-in-hand, and that this is in fact what “positivism” is all about. (p. 327)

According to Saltzman Chafetz (1999), there is “nothing in the view that patterned behaviors and processes exist, can be measured, and can be explained in substantial measure cross-culturally and pan-historically that automatically denigrates or controls people” (pp. 327–328). Instead, Saltzman Chafetz sees the positivistic perspective working for feminist ends.

*Feminist empiricism* made important contributions toward uncovering androcentric bias in social research by encouraging the practice of “good” science. A more radical set of feminist epistemologies and methodologies was to come,

as feminist researchers began to interrogate, disrupt, modify, and, at times, radically challenge existing ways of knowing within and across their disciplines, creating a shift in the tectonic plates of mainstream knowledge building. Beginning with a critique of positivism’s concept of scientific objectivity—and from the idea of a “value-free” science with its stress on the detachment of the researcher from the researched—the feminist movement toward alternative epistemologies began to take shape. Feminists went to the heart of some basic foundational questions, namely, who can know? What can be known?

Instead of working to improve the accuracy, objectivity, and universality of mainstream research by including women, feminists started to challenge the viability and utility of concepts like objectivity and universality altogether. Knowledge is achieved not through “correcting” mainstream research studies by adding women, but through paying attention to the specificity and uniqueness of women’s lives and experiences.

Donna Haraway (1988), Sandra Harding (1993), and Kum-Kum Bhavnani (1993) argue, for example, that objectivity needs to be transformed into “feminist objectivity.” Donna Haraway defines feminist objectivity as “situated knowledges”: *knowledge and truth are partial, situated, subjective, power imbued, and relational*. The denial of values, biases, and politics is seen as unrealistic and undesirable (see also Bhavnani, 1993, p. 96; Harding, 1993, p. 49). Historian Joan Scott (1999) disputes the positivist notion of a one-to-one correspondence between experience and social reality. Instead, she asserts, experience is shaped by one’s particular context—by specific circumstances, conditions, values, and relations of power, each influencing how one articulates “experience.” Scott ushered in a “linguistic turn” in our understanding of social reality by pointing out how experience is discursively constructed by dominant ideological structures. Tracing the discourse surrounding experience provides a method for examining the underlying mechanisms of oppression within society that, in fact, may provide new avenues of resistance and transformation.

In addition to valuing women’s unique and situated experiences as knowledge (Gloria



Bowles & Renate Duelli-Klein, 1983; Smith, 1987, 1990; Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, 1983), some feminists make the case for validating the importance of emotions and values as a critical lens in research endeavors (Alison Jaggar, 1997; Sprague & Zimmerman, 1993). Alison Jaggar recognizes emotion as a central aspect of knowledge building. According to Jaggar (1997), it is unrealistic to assume emotions and values do not surface during the research process. Our emotions, in fact, are an integral part of why a given topic or set of research questions is studied and how it is studied. The positivistic dualism between the rational and the emotional becomes a false dichotomy:

Values and emotions enter into the science of the past and the present not only on the level of scientific practice but also on the metascientific level, as answers to various questions: What is Science? How should it be practiced? And what is the status of scientific investigation versus nonscientific modes of enquiry? (p. 393)

Sandra Harding's (1993) concept of "*strong objectivity*" is a specific example of how to practice the basic premise of "feminist objectivity." Harding critiques the traditional, or positivist, concept of objectivity because its focus resides only on the "context of justification" in the research process—how the research is carried out and making sure that the researcher's values and attitudes do not enter into this process. What is left out of consideration is the extent to which values and attitudes of the researcher also enter into the "context of discovery," that part of the research process that asks questions and formulates specific research hypotheses. Donna Haraway (1988) characterizes this positivist tendency as the "god trick," and notes that it is "that mode of seeing that pretends to offer a vision that is from everywhere and nowhere, equally and fully" (p. 584). By contrast, Harding (1993) argues that throughout the research process, subjective judgments on the part of the researcher are always made "in the selection of problems, the formation of hypotheses, the design of research (including the organization of research communities), the collection of data, the interpretation and sorting of data, decisions about when to stop research,

the way results of research are reported, and so on." And to practice strong objectivity requires all researchers to self-reflect on what values, attitudes, and agenda they bring to the research process—strong objectivity means that "the subjects of knowledge be placed on the same critical causal plane as the objects of knowledge" (p. 69). How do a researcher's own history and positionality influence, for example, the questions she or he asks? It is in the practice of strong self-reflexivity that the researcher becomes more objective.

Feminist philosopher Lorraine Code (1991), in her book *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, offers yet another viewpoint regarding positivism's "objectivity" claim. She argues for a "mitigated relativism" that avoids charges of "objectivism" and "relativism."

I prefer to characterize the position I advocate as a *mitigated relativism*, however, or the freedom it offers from the homogenizing effects of traditional objectivism, in which differences, discrepancies, and deviations are smoothed out for the sake of achieving a unified theory. With its commitment to difference, critical relativism is able to resist reductivism and to accommodate divergent perspectives. Mitigated in its constraints by "the facts" of material objects and social/political artifacts, yet ready to account for the mechanisms of power (in a Foucauldian sense) and prejudice (in a Gadamerian sense) that produce knowledge of these facts, and committed to the self-critical stance that its mitigation requires, such relativism is a resourceful epistemological position. (pp. 320–321)

By disclosing their values, attitudes, and biases in their approaches to particular research questions and by engaging in strong reflexivity throughout the research process, feminist researchers can actually improve the objectivity of research. Feminists have forged new epistemologies of knowledge by incorporating women's lived experiences, emotions, and feelings into the knowledge-building process. We now turn to take a more in-depth look at the branch of feminist epistemology that centers on women's experience as a primary source of knowledge.

FEMINIST STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY:  
FEMINIST RESEARCH GROUNDED IN THE  
EXPERIENCE OF THE OPPRESSED

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Feminist standpoint epistemology borrows from the Marxist and Hegelian idea that individuals' daily activities or material and lived experiences structure their understanding of the social world. Karl Marx viewed knowledge as historically constructed and relative because it is based on a given "mode of production." Elites (owners of the "means of production") shape knowledge and ideology to justify social inequality. For both Marx and Hegel, the master's perspective is partial and distorted, whereas the worker/slave's is more complete because the worker/slave must comprehend his or her own world and that of the master—the worker/slave must know both worlds to survive. Feminist standpoint scholars argue that it is a woman's oppressed location within society that provides fuller insights into society as a whole; women have access to an enhanced and more nuanced understanding of social reality than men do precisely because of their structurally oppressed location vis-à-vis the dominant group, or men. Dorothy Smith (1987), an early proponent of the standpoint perspective, stresses the necessity of starting research from women's lives: taking into account women's everyday experiences through paying particular attention to and finding and analyzing the gaps that occur when women try to fit their lives into the dominant culture's way of conceptualizing women's situation. By looking at the difference between the two perspectives, the researcher gains a more complex and theoretically richer set of explanations of the lives of the oppressors and the oppressed.

Early critics of standpoint epistemology argued that it collapses all women's experiences into a single defining experience and pays little attention to the diversity of women's lives, especially to the varied experiences of those women who differ by race, class, sexual preference, and so on. Still others raised questions such as the following: If knowledge starts out from the oppressed, how does one ascertain who is the most oppressed? Feminist standpoint scholars and researchers have responded to these concerns, and standpoint epistemology has undergone

many different iterations over time. The concept of multiple standpoints has been introduced. Later versions of standpoint are open to comparing and understanding the interlocking relationships between racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class oppression as additional starting points into understanding the social reality (see Harding, Chapter 3, this volume; Wylie, Chapter 26, this volume). The current dialogue (Harding, 2004), ongoing development, and diversity of approaches to feminist standpoint epistemology notwithstanding, by calling attention to women's lived experiences of oppression as the starting point for building knowledge, feminist standpoint scholars and researchers provided a new way to answer two epistemological questions: Who can know? and What can be known?

FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES AND  
METHODOLOGIES: THE CHALLENGE AND  
POSSIBILITIES OF THE POSTMODERN TURN

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We can think of postmodernism as a theoretical paradigm that serves as an "umbrella term" for a variety of perspectives from critical theory to post-structural theory to postmodern theories. What creates unity among these perspectives is their concern for highlighting the importance of researching difference—there is an emphasis on including the "other" in the process of research (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 18). The perspectives contained within this umbrella term call for, in a range of degrees, the transformative practices of research that lead toward both challenging dominant forms of knowledge building and empowering subjected understandings. But there is also variation and contestation among and between perspectives within this umbrella term. For example, critical theory is especially cognizant of the role that power plays in producing hegemonic knowledge. Critical theorists seek to expose dominant power relationships and knowledge that oppress with the goal of "critical emancipation"—creating an environment in which oppressed groups "gain the power to control their own lives in solidarity with a justice-oriented community" (see Joe Kincheloe & Peter McLaren, 2000, p. 282). However, some might consider critical theory's emphasis on emancipation to be inconsistent

with the tendency of postmodern and post-structural theories to deconstruct dominant discourse. These variations in postmodern perspectives are compared and contrasted in more detail in Gannon and Davies (Chapter 4, this volume). Gannon and Davies point out how labels such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, and critical theory are often confusing, and how practitioners of these perspectives don't always agree on what these terms mean. They note,

These frameworks are, however, quite slippery and hard to pin down. . . . There is, then, no orderly, agreed upon, and internally consistent set of ideas that sits obediently under each of these headings. But each of them, along with the disputed ground between them, has produced new ideas that have helped feminists break loose from previously taken-for-granted assumptions. (p. 65)

In *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research* (2004), Patricia Leavy, Michelle Yaiser, and I point out the affinity of postmodernism with feminist research pursuits. We note that postmodernism's emphasis on bringing the "other" into the research process

meshes well with the general currents within the feminist project itself. Feminists from all traditions have always been concerned with including women in their research in order to rectify the historic reliance on men as research subjects. This is a general feminist concern. (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004, p. 18)

In addition, postmodernism's emphasis on the empowerment of oppressed groups is congruent with feminists' emphasis on social change and social justice. This congruence is also particularly the case with postmodern feminists, including postcolonial feminists who seek to explore "political cultural resistance to hierarchical modes of structuring social life by being attentive to the dynamics of power and knowledge" (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004, p. 18).

Although postmodern and post-structural perspectives invigorate feminist theory and praxis, there is also a tendency for them to destabilize it (Barrett & Phillips, 1992). For example, post-structural theorists have challenged essentialist categories: women, sex, gender, and the body. Michèle Barrett and Ann Phillips (1992), in

*Destablizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, note,

The fear now expressed by many feminists is that the changing theoretical fashions will lead us towards abdicating the goal of accurate and systematic knowledge; and that in legitimate critique of some of the earlier assumptions, we may stray too far from feminism's original project. (p. 6)

Christina Gilmartin, Robin Lydenberg, and I point out in our book *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology* (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin, & Lydenberg, 1999) how the destabilizing of these binary categories served to polarize feminist theory:

French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (1986), Luce Irigaray (1991), and Julia Kristeva (1986) were accused by social constructionists of biological essentialism, of establishing the female body and maternity as foundational and symbolic sources of woman's psychic and sexual difference. . . . post-structuralist critics, like Judith Butler, expose even the materiality of the body as "already gendered, already constructed." Extending her argument that gender and sex are the result of the "ritualized repetition" of certain behaviors designed to render the body either "intelligible" (normative, heterosexual) or abject (unthinkable, homosexual), Judith Butler asserts that the body itself is "forcibly produced" by power and discourse (Butler, 1993, p. xi). (Hesse-Biber et al., 1999, p. 4)

The challenge for feminism is to dialogue around these tensions and to be open to different points of view. Gannon and Davies (this volume) examine the opportunities that open up for feminist theory and research when the postmodern meets the feminist terrain of theory and praxis.

#### FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES AND METHODOLOGIES: THE TURN TOWARD DIFFERENCE IN FEMINIST THEORY AND PRACTICE

The positivist paradigm assumes the viability of the *value-neutral and objective* researcher, who can obtain generalized findings or universal

truths. Based on these assumptions, positivism has very specific answers to epistemological questions. Certain types of “knowledge” are not considered scientific knowledge, certain ways of obtaining knowledge are not valid, and certain people may not possess knowledge. Because positivism was the dominant paradigm in social science for many years, certain people, knowledge, and methods have been excluded from social science research. These “others” and the knowledge they possess are not considered valid or valuable.

Feminists initiated their critique of positivism by (1) calling attention to the fact that women had been left out of much mainstream research and (2) valuing the perspectives, feelings, and lived experiences of women as knowledge. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, some feminists warned against the tendency to reduce all women to one category with shared characteristics. Yes, it was important to give voice to women who had been left out of mainstream research models and to recognize women’s life stories as knowledge. But which women’s stories were being told—whose life experiences were included, and whose were left out? Through feminism’s interaction with postcolonialism, post-structuralism, and postmodernism, there occurred a turn toward difference research. Feminists became increasingly conscious of the diversity of women’s experiences. They argued against the idea of one essential experience of women and began to recognize a plurality of women’s lived experiences.

Feminist research on difference stressed issues of difference regarding race, class, and gender. Feminists of color critiqued the failure of early feminist research to explore the important interconnections among categories of difference in terms of gender, ethnicity, and class (see, e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 1990; Mohanty, 1988). As Hirsch and Keller (1990) observed, “Feminists of color have revealed to white middle-class feminists the extent of their own racism” (p. 379). Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) stresses the significance of black feminist thought—“the ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women” (p. 37). Listening to the experiences of the “other” leads to a more complete understanding of knowledge. Black women, argues Collins, are “outsiders within.” To navigate socially within white society, black women have to cope with the rules of the privileged

white world, but, at the same time, they are constantly aware of their marginalized position in terms of their race and gender. In contrast, sociological insiders, because of their privileged positionality, are “in no position to notice the specific anomalies apparent to Afro-American women, because these same sociological insiders produced them” (p. 53). Along with this epistemology, Patricia Hill Collins develops a “matrix of domination” framework for conceptualizing difference along a range of interlocking inequalities of race, class, and gender. These factors affect each other and are socially constructed. It is only through collectively examining the intricately connected matrix of difference that we can truly understand a given individual’s life experience. Feminists of color challenged and changed white feminist scholarly research and the conceptualization of feminist standpoint epistemology by asking this question: Which women? For example, Patricia Hill Collins’s conception of “standpoint” as relational, and including multiple systems of oppression, forced white feminists to examine white privilege as an element of oppression (see McIntosh, 1995).

Bonnie Thornton Dill and Marla Kohlman (Chapter 8, this volume) expand and elaborate on the early work of scholars like Hill Collins with a focus on analyzing the interconnections of differences among race, class, and gender. They employ the term *intersectionality* to “[emphasize] the interlocking effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality, highlighting the ways in which categories of identity and structures of inequality are mutually constituted and defy separation into discrete categories of analysis.” Their chapter traces the impact of diversity on disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship over the past several decades and charts some future directions for knowledge building that embody a vision of intersectionality within academic institutions.

#### FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES AND METHODOLOGIES: THE TURN TOWARD GLOBALIZATION

Feminist scholars and researchers continue to engage issues of difference across gender, ethnicity, and class. As Bonnie Thornton Dill (1987) reminds us, “Our analysis must include critical

accounts of women's situation in every race, class, and culture—we must work to provide resources so that every woman can define problematics, generate concepts and theories” (Dill, 1987, p. 97). In the first decade of the 21st century, feminists expanded their focus on difference to include issues of sexual preference and disability, as well as nationality and geographical region. There is also a growing awareness among feminist researchers of the importance of women's experiences in a global context with respect to issues of imperialism, colonialism, and national identity (see the chapters in this volume by Bhavnani & Talcott, Mendez & Wolf, and Dill & Kohlman). Frequently, analyses that incorporate race, class, and gender differences ignore the diversity among women with regard to their particular geographical or cultural placement across the globe.

- How do we conceptualize and study difference in a global context?
- What research frameworks serve to empower and promote social change for women?

Feminists doing international research, who attempt to speak for “the other/s” in a global context, should be particularly mindful of the inherent power dynamics in doing so. In what sense does the researcher give voice to the other, and to what extent is that privilege one that is taken for granted by “the other/s”? Postcolonial feminist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) notes:

On the other side of the international division of labor, the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for them to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in shadow. (p. 894)

Historian Deniz Kandiyoti (1999) discusses the tendency of some Western feminist researchers to “universalize” disciplinary concepts, ignoring the ethnocentrism that lies deep within constructs such as patriarchy. Kandiyoti also calls for the employment of a historical-comparative lens to strengthen our understanding of the cross-cultural context of conceptual meaning across Western and non-Western societies (Mohanty, 1988).

Feminists working in a global context call for a heightened attention to power and difference. But what about the potential for women to come together across difference and to forge social change? Some feminist researchers call for employing a type of “strategic essentialism” in their research projects (Spivak, 1994). Susan Bordo (1990) encourages the strategic use of essentialism for women to promote their political agenda (see also Spivak, 1990, p. 10). She argues that “too relentless a focus on historical heterogeneity . . . can obscure the transhistorical hierarchical patterns of white, male privilege that have informed the creation of the Western intellectual tradition” (Bordo, 1990, p. 149). Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1999) also employs the strategic use of essentialism, using three case studies of third world women involved in the global division of labor. Mohanty shows how ideologies of domesticity, femininity, and race are employed by capitalists to socially construct the “domesticated woman worker”—the dominant perception of women as “dependent housewives” allows the capitalist to pay them low wages. By having women identify with each other as “women” and through their shared material interests as “workers,” they are able to overcome differences of nationality, race, and social class. These identifications across difference provide a rethinking of third world woman as agents rather than victims. Mohanty argues for political solidarity among women workers as a potential “revolutionary basis for struggles against capitalist re-colonization” (see also Hesse-Biber, 2002).

Locating the intersections where women's differences cross is a way that some feminists have begun to research difference in a global context and to empower women's voices. Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Molly Talcott (Chapter 7, this volume) suggest the need to look for *interconnections* between women, and they do not believe that using an “intersecting” metaphor works well to empower women's lives. In fact, the concept of an “intersection” implies the image of a crossroad, whereby those who meet are coming from and going to a given destination, which is defined by the route that these roads take. This metaphor does not provide a way for a new road to be charted. A race-d/gender-ed person



stands at the crossroad (that point where race and gender routes intersect), yet, as Bhavnani and Talcott note,

A crossroads metaphor . . . directs the gaze to the intersections of the roads and the directions in which they travel and meet. . . . This matters because, if we are not only to analyze the world but to change it, then the easiest way to imagine the shifts in the relationships between race/ethnicity and gender is to imagine the roads being moved to form new intersections.

They suggest that a more empowering metaphor might be to think of these roads as

*interconnections that configure* [which] connotes more movement and fluidity than lies in the metaphor of intersection, as well as offering a way of thinking about how not only race and gender but also nation, sexuality, and wealth all interconnect, configure, and reshape each other.

Much of the theorizing and many research studies on the concerns of women in a global context, however, remain fragmented. Black feminists, third world feminists, and global, postcolonial, or transnational feminists often remain uninformed about each other's theories, perspectives, and research (see Mendez & Wolf, Chapter 31, this volume). What remains a challenge for feminist research is the creation of links between these strands of knowledge building so as to gather a more complex understanding of the workings of racism, imperialism, and neocolonialism across historical and cultural contexts. What are the models of knowledge building that will allow feminist researchers to study these interconnections? To do this requires an understanding of how feminists carry out their research practices and of what overarching principles guide their work.

The journey we have only briefly outlined thus far opens a window into feminist thinking on issues of epistemology and methodology. Feminists have employed new ways of thinking and have modified our understanding of the nature of the social world—providing new questions and angles of vision by which to understand women's issues and concerns. Feminist epistemology and methodology directly affect feminist praxis.

## FEMINIST PRAXIS: A SYNERGISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRACTICE OF FEMINIST RESEARCH

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Feminist praxis refers to the varied ways feminist research proceeds. Feminist perspectives challenge the traditional research paradigm of positivism, which assumes a unified truth with the idea of testing out hypotheses. There is little room for the exploration of personal feelings and experiences, given the strict observance of objectivity as a basic tenet of positivism. Yet, as we have seen, new theoretical contributions from feminist standpoint theory (Harding, Chapter 3, this volume; Wylie, Chapter 26, this volume), postcolonial theory (Bhavnani & Talcott, Chapter 7, this volume; Mohanty, 1999), and postmodernism (Gannon & Davies, Chapter 4, this volume), for example, ask *new* questions that call forth getting at subjugated knowledge, particularly as this relates to issues of difference. Early on, feminists saw the need to make a radical break in positivism's traditional research paradigm. Helen Roberts's (1981) edited volume *Doing Feminist Research* asks the question "What is feminist research?" Roberts's pathbreaking volume puts a feminist sociological lens onto the research process and notes, "The accounts in this collection point to the theoretical, methodological, practical and ethical issues raised in projects where the investigator has adopted, or has at least become aware of, a feminist perspective" (p. 2). Ann Oakley's (1981) now classic article "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms?" in Roberts's volume, demonstrates the importance of breaking down the hierarchical power relationship between the interviewer and the researched that she views as characteristic of a positivist research paradigm and antithetical to the view of women as agents of social change with their own set of experiences. She argues that interviewing is "not a one-way process where the interviewer elicits and receives, but does not give information" (p. 30).

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise's (1983) visionary volume *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research* calls for feminist researchers to "upgrade the personal as an object of study." They argue for a "naturalist" as opposed to a "positivistic model" of research to study women's experiences, or what they term "feminist

consciousness,” in which “feeling and experience” are the primary guideposts for feminist research (p. 178). For Stanley and Wise, there is no demarcation between “doing feminism” and “doing feminist research.” Patti Lather’s (1991) book *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy Within/In the Postmodern* takes up the issue of power in research and teaching practices. She combines insights from feminism and postmodernism with the goal of “emancipatory” knowledge building, during which the researcher and researched cocreate meaning through “reciprocity and negotiation.” She is interested in what research designs, teaching practices, and curricula produce “liberatory knowledge” and “empower” the researched and the pedagogical process.

Other works on the intersection of feminism and methods quickly followed and span the next several decades. Some of the most notable volumes, to name only a few, are Patricia Hill Collins’s (1990) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; Joyce McCarl Nielson’s (1990) *Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in the Social Sciences*; bell hooks’s (1990) *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*; Liz Stanley’s (1990) *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory, and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*; Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook’s (1991) *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*; Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai’s (1991) *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*; Shulamit Reinharz’s (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*; Mary Maynard and June Purvis’s (1994) *Researching Women’s Lives From a Feminist Perspective*; Sandra Burt and Lorraine Code’s (1995) *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice*; Diane L. Wolf’s (1996) *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*; Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragone, and Patricia Zavella’s (1997) *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life*; Marjorie L. DeVault’s (1999) *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*; Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*; Elizabeth A. St. Pierre and Wanda S. Pillow’s (2000) *Working the Ruins: Feminist Poststructural Theory and Methods in Education*; and Nancy A. Naples’s (2003) *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis,*

*and Activist Research*. Each volume highlights how feminist researchers create a tight link between the elements of the research process—epistemology, methodology, and method. We see this linkage unfolding by looking at how feminists engage with the research process—starting with the research questions they devise, how research methods are practiced, and the special attention given to issues of power, authority, reflexivity, ethics, and difference in the practice, writing, and reading of feminist research.

In all these volumes, feminist epistemologies and methodologies inform research practices. A feminist empiricist perspective on knowledge building informs the practice of survey methods by interrogating the male bias of some survey questions as well as the power differentials between the researcher and the researched in the survey interview. A feminist standpoint epistemology questions whether the research sample and research questions of a particular method are responsive to issues of difference and whether the findings are interpreted in a way that includes the experiences of marginalized populations. Increasingly, feminists are tweaking old methods and inventing new methods to get at women’s experience. We see this most vividly in how feminists practice interview methods. In Marjorie DeVault’s (1999) volume as well as in her coauthored chapter with Glenda Gross, “Feminist Qualitative Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge” (Chapter 11, this volume), there is an awareness of the importance of listening during the interview process:

One of feminism’s central claims is that women’s perspectives have often been silenced or ignored; as a result, feminist researchers have been interested in listening for gaps and absences in women’s talk, and in considering what meanings might lie beyond explicit speech. (p. 217)

By listening through the gaps in talking and by attending to what is not stated, but present—such as the hidden meanings of terms like “you know?”—DeVault suggests one can get at “subjugated knowledge.” What each of these books also demonstrates is that feminists use a range of methods, and some even employ multiple methods within the same, concurrent, or follow-up research projects, to answer complex and

often novel questions. Feminist research, then, can be qualitative or quantitative or a combination of both.

Shulamit Reinharz (1992), in her classic text *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, notes that “feminism supplies the perspective and the disciplines supply the method. The feminist researcher exists at their intersection” (p. 243). Although feminist research is multiple, complex, quantitative, and qualitative, nevertheless, if we were to examine *inductively* the range of research studies and topics cited in these works and within this volume, which are by no means exhaustive of the population of feminist research, we could discern some common principles of feminist research praxis.

### **Feminists Ask New Questions That Often Get at Subjugated Knowledge**

The women’s movement of the 1960s, as well as increasing globalization, forged new feminist theoretical perspectives (see Part I of this *Handbook*). Feminist standpoint theory (Harding, Chapter 3, this volume; Wylie, Chapter 26, this volume), postcolonialism (Bhavnani & Talcott, Chapter 7, this volume; Mendez & Wolf, Chapter 31, this volume), postmodernism, ethnic studies, queer studies, critical theory, and critical race theory (Gannon & Davies, Chapter 4, this volume) serve to upend traditional knowledge by asking new questions that expose the power dynamics of knowledge building. “Subjugated” knowledge is unearthed and issues of race, class, sexuality, nationality, and gender are taken into account. These types of questions are different from those questions feminist empiricists ask in that they go beyond correcting gender bias in dominant research studies. In asking new questions, feminist research maintains a close link between epistemology, methodology, and methods.

### **Feminist Praxis Takes Up Issues of Power, Authority, Ethics, and Reflexivity**

Feminist praxis builds on the understanding of difference and translates these insights by emphasizing the importance of taking issues of power, authority, ethics, and reflexivity into the practice of social research. Feminist researchers

are particularly keen on getting at issues of power and authority in the research process, from question formulation to carrying out and writing up research findings (see Roof, Chapter 25, this volume). Focusing on our positionality within the research process helps to break down the idea that research is the “view from nowhere.”

Feminist research practitioners pay attention to reflexivity, a process whereby researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice. Practicing reflexivity also includes paying attention to the specific ways in which our own agendas affect the research at all points in the research process—from the selection of the research problem to the selection of method and ways in which we analyze and interpret our findings (see Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, Chapter 27, this volume). Hesse-Biber and Leckenby’s (2004) work on the importance of self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher notes,

Feminist researchers are continually and cyclically interrogating their locations as both researcher and as feminist. They engage the boundaries of their multiple identities and multiple research aims through conscientious reflection. This engagement with their identities and roles impacts the earliest stages of research design. Much of feminist research design is marked by an openness to the shifting contexts and fluid intentions of the research questions. (p. 211)

Ethical discussions usually remain detached from a discussion of the research process; some researchers consider this aspect of research an afterthought. Yet, the ethical standpoint or *moral integrity* of the researcher is a critically important aspect of ensuring that the research process and a researcher’s findings are “trustworthy” and valid. The term “ethics” derives from the Greek word “ethos,” which means “character.” A feminist ethical perspective provides insights into how ethical issues enter into the selection of a research problem, how one conducts research, the design of one’s study, one’s sampling procedure, and the responsibility toward research participants. Feminist ethical issues also come into play in deciding what research findings get published (see Preissle & Han, Chapter 28, this volume).

### **Feminist Researchers Often Work at the Margins of Their Disciplines**

Feminist research, while breaking out of the traditional circle of knowledge building, remains on the margins of discussion within mainstream methods texts. In 1962, Thomas Kuhn published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which he argued that science is enmeshed in a particular mode of thinking—a paradigm or worldview—that tends to dominate a given field of science. Those insiders who practice within a reigning paradigm do get recognition and gain legitimacy for their work through a range of institutional structures—from promotions and tenure committees within the academy and mainstream journals within their field to monetary rewards from granting agencies and foundations. For feminist epistemologies and methodologies to gain greater recognition and rewards in and outside the academy and to harness these gains into social policy changes for women, feminists must work at multiple levels. Work must be done within and outside the circle to ensure that women’s scholarship is recognized and rewarded as legitimate scholarship within their disciplines and within the social policy initiatives of funding agencies:

Feminist researchers may need to be strategic about their mission and goals concerning how to organize as a research movement toward social change for women. Issues of difference in the research process need to be carefully addressed as this discussion proceeds. Issues dealing with power and control both within the research process and discussions of differences and similarities among different/competing feminist epistemologies and methodologies would be productive and energetic beginnings toward raising the consciousness of the feminist research communities. (Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, p. 225)

### **Feminist Research Seeks Social Change and Social Transformation**

Sandra Harding (1991) speaks of “emancipation” as one important goal of feminist research; knowledge building in pursuit of this goal does not lean in the direction of the dominant groups but instead toward democratic ends (Hesse-Biber

and Leckenby, 2004, p. 221). As the articles in this *Handbook* demonstrate, most feminist researchers seek to connect their research to social transformation and social change on behalf of women and other oppressed groups. Patti Lather (1991) notes that feminist researchers “consciously use . . . research to help participants understand and change their situations” (p. 226).

We begin the *Handbook* with a historical grounding in the diverse range of theoretical and epistemic perspectives that make up the history of feminist engagement with research. We provide an overview of historical contributions of feminists to the knowledge-building process.

### **Part I. Feminist Perspectives on Knowledge Building**

This section traces the historical rise of feminist research and begins with the early links between feminist theory and research practice. We trace the contours of early feminist inquiry and introduce the reader to the history of, and historical debates within, feminist scholarship. This section also explores the political process of knowledge building by introducing the reader to the links between knowledge and power relations. Several questions guide our selection of theoretical and research articles for this section:

- How have feminist scholars redefined traditional paradigms in the social sciences and humanities?
- What new theoretical and research models guide their work?

In this section, we will explore the nature of methodologies, frameworks, and presumptions dominant within the social sciences and humanities. We will point out what we think are the critical turning points in feminist research: “adding women and stirring,” feminist standpoint theory, the inclusion of difference, and the debates surrounding method, methodology, and epistemology. Feminist research endeavors often began by pointing out the androcentrism in the sciences. This research approach is often referred to as feminist empiricism, as we shall see in philosopher Catherine Hundleby’s chapter “Feminist Empiricism.” Here, she explores the specific challenges feminists pose for traditional



models of knowledge building. She investigates the concept of “objectivity” in the research process and how some feminist researchers have developed alternatives to traditional objectivity. Feminist empiricists work within a positivistic model of knowledge building with the goal of creating “better” science. This better and more objective science is achieved through the application of more rigorous practices, incorporating difference into the research process, and more strictly following the basic tenets of positivism.

Sandra Harding’s article, “Feminist Standpoints,” looks at the origins of standpoint theories, which grew out of feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s, and examines the antipositivist “histories, sociologies, and philosophies of science” emerging in Europe and the United States. Harding provides us with a history of the development of the standpoint perspective, which begins with research questions (methodologies) rooted in women’s lives—their everyday existence. Drawing on the Marxist theory of the master-slave relationship, Nancy Hartsock (1983), for example, argues that, because of women’s location within the sexual division of labor and because of their experience of oppression, women have greater insights as researchers into the lives of other women. Dorothy Smith (1987) stresses the importance of creating knowledge based upon the standpoint and experience of women. In this volume, Harding also takes up the critiques against a standpoint perspective. Some critics are uncomfortable with giving up positivism’s claim of universal truth. If, as standpoint theory suggests, there are multiple subjectivities, won’t this perspective lead to chaos? Others charge that standpoint theory is too essentialist and Eurocentric in that it distills all women’s experience into a single vision (Western, white women’s).

The following five chapters address a range of issues, including understanding the diversity of women’s experiences and the feminist commitment to the empowerment of women and other oppressed groups. Susanne Gannon and Bronwyn Davies (Chapter 4, this volume) discuss postmodern, post-structural, and critical perspectives regarding cultural theory. They look at how some feminist theorists, such as Butler, Grosz, and Braidotti (as cited in Gannon & Davies, this volume) incorporate the insights

of these perspectives into their own theoretical work and research. Gannon and Davies also illuminate several feminist critiques of these perspectives, such as relativism, a lack of a political vision, and a tendency to reinforce the status quo.

Aiding Mary Hawkesworth’s exploration of feminist epistemology (Chapter 5, this volume) are analyses of feminist methodology. Working through notions of objectivity and truth in terms of the feminist critiques that have been raised against them, Hawkesworth considers their implications for feminist research. Feminist empiricists, standpoint theorists, postmodernists, science studies scholars, and those who are interested in the “posthuman” have all thought through objectivity and truth and developed their possibilities within feminist research projects.

Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Molly Talcott (Chapter 7, this volume) are specifically concerned with the emergence of the visibility and audibility of women’s experience in feminist research. Using a global feminist ethnographic approach, Bhavnani and Talcott ask, “Which women’s lives are being analyzed, interrogated, and even evaluated?” Accounts of difference, this chapter argues, should be reconceptualized and broadened within a global context. By pointing to studies on women and development, Bhavnani and Talcott emphasize the importance of transnationality and the utility of a global perspective in examinations of oppression. Feminist researchers are better able to approach the full range of women’s experience by widening their field of inquiry to include global perspectives.

Elizabeth Anderson’s and other feminist researchers’ and scholars’ claim that “gender . . . ought to influence our conceptions of knowledge” is controversial (2011; cited in Koertge, Chapter 6, this volume), and Noretta Koertge (Chapter 6, this volume) argues that gendering epistemology may not always be beneficial to feminist research. Taking into account the influence of gender on inquiry and challenging the works of Andrea Nye, Sandra Harding, and Helen Longino, all of whom conclude that a feminist epistemology is necessary, Koertge warns against gendered epistemology.

Bonnie Thornton Dill and Marla Kohlman (Chapter 8, this volume) offer an account of intersectionality as a conceptual tool within feminist theory and practice. For research that



sets out to look at, for example, intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality within identity, intersectionality is particularly appropriate because it assumes difference and recognizes that such concepts are mutually constitutive and inseparable. Intersectionality as a conceptual model has provoked debates about its theory and practice, and this chapter seeks to both trace the development of intersectionality and speak to its future in feminist research.

Feminist perspectives on knowledge building have pushed against the dominant circles of knowledge, cautious about re-creating hegemonic knowledge of the past, sometimes stumbling, but committed to pushing past the boundaries of traditional knowledge. Feminists do not always agree on the specific paths to travel, and there remain significant tensions among feminists concerning how best to research and represent women's issues and concerns, as well as how to confront the power dynamics that continue to reinforce hegemonic forces that serve the status quo. What is clearly needed from examining the range of perspectives feminists offer onto the landscape of knowledge building is a dialogue among feminists. Where are the points of agreement? Disagreement? How can we foster a more transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building? How do we construct a climate where feminist theorists and researchers listen to each other? How tolerant are feminists of each other's points of view? These are the issues that we address in Part I of this *Handbook*.

## Part II. Feminist Research Praxis

Part II of this *Handbook* debates the issue of whether or not there is a unique feminist method. What makes a method feminist? What are the unique characteristics feminists bring to the practice of this method? What are the strengths and challenges in practicing feminist research? What is gained and what is risked? This section looks at how feminists use a range of research methods in both conventional and unconventional research studies. Many feminist research projects have used survey methods and quantitative data analysis—two traditionally androcentric methods—to produce very women-centered results. Methods such as intensive interviewing, the collection of oral histories, and qualitative data analysis are often labeled feminist methods

by traditional sociologists; however, these methods have been tweaked and modified in various ways to uncover women's issues and concerns. The labeling of certain methods as traditional or feminist by social scientists and the use of specific methods by feminist researchers are the focus of Part II.

This section also stresses the idea that feminist researchers come from a variety of epistemological positions. Feminist researchers use multiple tools to gain access to and understanding of the world around them and may use multiple methods within the same study. The selections chosen for this section are not exhaustive of all feminist research or all the methods feminists use. These selections do, however, provide a broad context within which to examine feminist research. Deborah Piatelli and I provide a detailed introduction and theoretical and research context for Part II in our chapter, "The Synergistic Praxis of Theory and Method."

Part II starts off with a look at ethnographic methods, as Wanda S. Pillow and Cris Mayo (Chapter 10, this volume) put forth the history and development of feminist ethnography in order to locate their examples of feminist ethnographic research. Issues of definition and method in terms of women's lives remain at the forefront of Pillow and Mayo's presentation of feminist ethnographic research. In addition to promoting the challenging practice of feminist ethnography, this chapter accounts for its current status and its future in research endeavors.

The interview has been used frequently by feminist research as a way for researchers and participants to work together to illuminate experience. Marjorie L. DeVault and Glenda Gross (Chapter 11, this volume) discuss the complexity of the interview encounter and how the interview has been implemented in feminist research projects. Specifically paying attention to how identity, social location, reflexivity, and active listening operate in the interview, DeVault and Gross suggest ways of engaging in ethical, collaborative interviews. Ethicality is significant in this chapter, as DeVault and Gross emphasize the accountability and responsibility of the interviewer to the participants and to social change.

Structurally different from the interview, the survey can play an important role in feminist research projects. In their chapter regarding quantitative data, Kathi Miner, Toby Epstein

Jayarathne, Amanda Pesonen, and Lauren Zurbrugg (Chapter 12, this volume) point to the survey as offering useful applications to feminist research. The history and criticisms of survey research are presented, as are the influences of feminism on survey practices. Miner et al. flesh out the survey method and how feminist perspectives may be best applied to survey research.

The fact that the scientific community has come to accept that its practices are biased by values (gender being only one) is evidence, for Sue Rosser (Chapter 13, this volume), of feminism's contribution to the areas of science, technology, and medicine. Rosser explores the impact of feminist theories on different stages of the scientific method. To illustrate feminism's effects on scientific practice, she highlights theories that have incorporated feminist viewpoints to modify their experimental methods.

According to Sharon Brisolaro and Denise Seigart (Chapter 14, this volume), feminist evaluation is still an emerging and developing model within feminist research. In order to understand feminist evaluation fully, these authors single out and highlight contributions to research projects that use multiple theoretical models. Among its possibilities for feminist research projects, evaluation research can allow for new questions to arise regarding its aims, methods, and results by paying attention to, for example, its ethics and possible biases.

Deboleena Roy (Chapter 15, this volume) delves into the development of feminist research practices within the natural sciences as influenced by feminist engagements with ontological and ethical questions. The feminist researcher should, as this chapter argues, consider questions of ethics and ontology while practicing the scientific method. Proposing the inclusions of "playfulness" and "feeling around" in feminist research, Roy suggests that the feminist laboratory researcher may work to connect himself or herself with the research at hand and with other researchers.

Not only looking at participatory action research (PAR) in terms of feminist usage in recent research, Brinton Lykes and Rachel Hershberg (Chapter 16, this volume) also summarize the origins of this research method, which is a resource for critical inquiry in working toward improving social systems and ameliorating social inequalities. PAR is deeply bound up with issues of

relationships between coresearchers, processes of reflection, and change for communities and policy. PAR is manifested in many different ways, and Lykes and Hershberg analyze work that is characteristic of feminist PAR while identifying its limitations and possibilities.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has emerged in research praxis, and Elizabeth Cole and Abigail Stewart (Chapter 17, this volume) discuss how such combinations contribute to feminist research. They identify various ways of mixing methods in order to demonstrate the many possibilities of combining qualitative and quantitative methods and to emphasize how widely such combinations may be applied. Cole and Stewart propose that feminist research may benefit from the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Situational analysis, an extension of grounded theory, brings notions of post-structuralism to feminist theories in order to highlight difference and power. Adele Clarke (Chapter 18, this volume) expands upon the definition of grounded theory and emphasizes its intrinsic links to feminist theory. Clarke shows how grounded theory's ties to feminism have been transformed from implicit to explicit by feminist research projects, and then she shows how situational analysis, similarly, is feminist.

Social movement research, Sarah Maddison and Frances Shaw (Chapter 19, this volume) believe, can benefit from further connections to feminist epistemology and methodology. While feminist social movement scholars have brought a gendered focus to social movement scholarship and theory, research on collective identity can further incorporate feminist standpoints in order to reconfigure its analytic method, and Maddison and Shaw use a case study to show the intersection of feminism and social movement research.

Lynn Weber and Jenn Castellow (Chapter 20, this volume) present, first, feminist research bent on working against health disparities and then, strategies for better locating feminist intersectional health research in dialogues around health science and public policy. Looking at recent scholarship that refines feminist critiques of health science research and policy and at developments in feminist health theory and practice, Weber and Castellow examine the contributions and influences of feminist research on health

science practices and policies. Studies relating to recent health developments (e.g., the HPV vaccine and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010) help to show how feminist engagement with health-related policies and practices are able to draw attention to power hierarchies within social relationships.

Dialogues about feminist research within the social sciences have also failed to include social work, argue Stéphanie Wahab, Ben Anderson-Nathe, and Christina Gringeri (Chapter 21, this volume). Drawing attention to examples of feminist research within the realm of social work, Wahab et al. suggest that social work praxis may beneficially influence feminist research projects in the social sciences generally. Further, a social work engagement with feminist theory may help to disrupt the assumptions of knowledge that social work often makes.

By closely looking at writing practices within feminist research reports, Kathy Charmaz (Chapter 22, this volume) is able to answer questions about the construction of feminist research writings and about the strategies that feminist researchers employ in their written reports. Carefully reading feminist research reports is significant, Charmaz argues, because the writing strategies employed contain the researchers' views and values. Certain writing patterns, used consciously or not on the part of the writers, contain specific meanings and judgments, and so the process of writing itself becomes central to the conveying of research data. Charmaz reinforces the importance of written method and concludes by offering advice on the writing process.

Specifically using climate change research as an example, Kristen Intemann (Chapter 23, this volume) argues that research principles praised by feminist science scholarship can benefit scientific research. Intemann proposes that scientific communities should include diverse researchers (in terms of experiences, social positions, and values), allow for critical reflection on the chosen methodology and methods, assume the perspective of the marginalized, and work toward a multiplicity of conceptual models.

### **Part III. Feminist Issues and Insights in Practice and Pedagogy**

Judith Roof's chapter, "Authority and Representation in Feminist Research," provides

a historical context for looking at how feminist researchers have framed issues of power and authority and argues that feminists are "trading between the authority of science and the power of experience." In particular, she notes the tensions between "the impersonal practices of generalization and the more problematic questions of rhetoric and representation" (Roof, Chapter 25, this volume).

Alison Wylie (Chapter 26, this volume) is concerned with how scientific practices are carried out by feminists. Carefully noting the fact that the credibility of a scientific research project may be damaged or compromised by an explicit feminist approach, Wylie believes that a reconfiguration of standpoint theory may offer a way out of this problem. Wylie provides an overview of specific practices that will combat this challenge to credibility and affirms that feminist theory and scientific research can coexist to produce generative research projects.

Judith Preissle and Yuri Han's chapter, "Feminist Research Ethics," examines feminist challenges to traditional Western approaches to ethics. They conceptualize feminist ethics as an "ethics of care" and discuss the implications of a feminist ethical approach for the practice of social research. What are the specific ethical practices feminist researchers employ across the research process? Preissle and Han note that a feminist perspective on ethics is a double-edged endeavor, which will "likely generate as many issues as they may help either avoid or address. This is particularly evident in trading a detached, distant, and hierarchical stance for an intimate, close, and equitable position. Distance and intimacy create their own problems" (Preissle & Han, Chapter 28, this volume).

The relationship between feminism and transgender, transsexual, and queer studies is elucidated in Katherine Johnson's chapter (Chapter 29, this volume). Central debates within queer studies are set forth in order to identify theoretical points that have particular relevance to feminist researchers. Feminist research, Johnson argues, should adopt practices that take into account a variety of identity positions. Exploring definitions, terminology, and areas for coalitions to emerge across identity borders, for example, Johnson looks both at the dialogues between feminism and transgender, transsexual, and queer studies and at how the fields may work together to produce better research.

Deborah Piatelli and my chapter (Chapter 27, this volume) stresses the need for a holistic approach to the process of reflexivity that runs “from the formulation of the research problem, to the shifting positionalities of the researcher and participants, through interpretation and writing.” We provide specific research examples and strategies for implementing “holistic reflexivity” in the research process.

Attention to difference is often found in feminist research. Diane Reay (Chapter 30, this volume) looks at how feminist research addresses difference and how difference affects research praxis. Reay provides examples of how differences are navigated and handled by drawing on research that accounts for differences such as social class, ethnicity, political commitment, sexuality, and age. This chapter also puts forth research practices that may be successful at incorporating feminist theory.

Jennifer Bickham Mendez and Diane Wolf (Chapter 31, this volume) question how feminist research can better account for globalization. Mendez and Wolf suggest that global considerations may allow for the reconfiguration of analytical categories and models and may also allow for productive change in research practice. Awareness of the global community may enable researchers to better understand certain forms of women’s oppression in globalized power structures and, furthermore, provides the opportunity for feminist researchers to forge transnational research bonds. Feminist dialogue and research, Mendez and Wolf believe, will be expanded and enriched by a consideration of globalization.

An experiential account of feminist pedagogy is offered by Debra Kaufman and Rachel Lewis (Chapter 32, this volume), who analyze the ways in which their feminist perspectives have influenced their methods of teaching in the classroom. Kaufman and Lewis demonstrate how classroom learning may benefit from the use of feminist theory, as they view the classroom as a space in which knowledge across disciplines can be decentered and reworked. Approaching questions of knowledge production within the classroom illuminates the hierarchical structures that position knowledge. Kaufman and Lewis conclude with the possibilities for incorporating feminist perspectives in academia as well as the possible dangers of doing so.

With similar interests in the role of feminism in teaching, Daphne Patai (Chapter 33, this volume) asks what it means to apply the term “feminism” to research and pedagogical practices. She views feminist politics as possibly incongruous with teaching and research. Teaching, for Patai, requires a perspective different than that offered by feminism, which introduces a political project. Patai’s chapter troubles the links between knowledge and politics.

The intersection of feminism and teaching again arises in Debjani Chakravarty, Judith A. Cook, and Mary Margaret Fonow’s chapter (Chapter 34, this volume). In order to develop and distribute feminist methodology, it must be taught. Training in feminist research methodology should teach a feminist researcher to create and execute a research project while considering its multiple and varied effects (e.g., ethical, social, transnational, political). Feminist research, this chapter argues, has always held the workings of power structures as a central focus, but new to feminist research are trends of technological development and the expansion of feminist methodology into other realms.

Abigail Brooks and I provide a fuller context and discussion of these articles in the introductory chapter to Part III, “Challenges and Strategies in Feminist Knowledge Building, Pedagogy, and Praxis.”

## CONCLUSION

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It is my hope that this *Handbook* provides you with a set of unique knowledge frameworks to enhance your understanding of the social world, especially the range of women’s lived experiences. The *Handbook* contributors explore a range of feminist issues, themes, and questions including a commitment to the empowerment of women and other oppressed groups. Although the *Handbook* is by no means exhaustive, its authors take an in-depth look at a broad spectrum of some of the most important feminist perspectives on how a given methodology intersects with epistemology and method to produce a set of research practices. Our thesis is that any given feminist perspective does not preclude the use of specific methods but serves to guide how a given method is practiced. Whereas each perspective is distinct, they sometimes share elements with other perspectives.

The ground underneath the theory and practice of feminist research is ever evolving, and it is the shifting of these tectonic plates of knowledge that provides an opportunity for what Teresa de Lauretis (1988) suggests as “not merely an expansion or reconfiguration of boundaries, but a qualitative shift in political and historical consciousness” (pp. 138–139).

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