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FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES
ON SOCIAL RESEARCH

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Feminist Approaches to Research as a *Process*

Reconceptualizing Epistemology, Methodology, and Method

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Feminist scholarship is an exciting terrain that is built on the premise of challenging hierarchical modes of creating and distributing knowledge. Feminists employ a variety of strategies for creating knowledge about women and their social worlds which often lies hidden from mainstream society. A feminist approach to knowledge building recognizes the essential importance of examining women's experience. It often takes a critical stance toward traditional knowledge-building claims that argue for "universal truths."¹ Research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance to scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social justice.

Since the "second wave" of the feminist movement in the 1960s, feminists began placing women's issues, experiences, and concerns at the center of disciplinary work (Hesse-Biber 2002). This is not to dismiss the efforts of the many courageous and talented feminists who contributed to knowledge building before the 1960s, but rather to create a point of departure for this writing. The abundant feminist writings of the 1960s and '70s are unique in that "they began a widespread call for a major reassessment of concepts, theories, and methods employed within and across the academic disciplines" (Hesse-Biber 2002, 57). During this time period, feminists began critiquing the research that was being done in those disciplines. These feminists asked why women were being excluded from knowledge-construction. They started thinking about research from the point of view of women's lives. At the time, this was a fairly novel idea—it had usually been assumed that whatever was found to be true for men would be true for women. Researchers pointed out how androcentrically (male) biased the sciences and social sciences in fact were, and, how this bias had caused women to be left out of both the research questions and their respective "answers." Feminists made experience (or experiential knowledge) an important category of research. Feminist researchers began to add explicitly women into the research equation. This signified an important shift (expansion) in what was

quantifiable patterns that can be presented through statistics on tables, charts, and graphs. The following is an example of how a positivist might approach a research problem.

Sociologists have long been interested in worker satisfaction: How satisfied people are at their jobs? A positivist might approach this issue by identifying a list of "indicators" of job satisfaction. The development of these indicators would be based on specific theories of job satisfaction as well as previous empirical research studies. Such indicators might include job attendance, job performance, rate of promotion, and so forth. Using these indicators a positivist would devise a scale to measure the degree of job satisfaction based on the combined rankings of each of these indicators. The researcher would then proceed to conduct an empirical investigation, for example, collecting data using a survey. In this instance one would administer this scale along with other pertinent questions to a preselected sample of workers and the results could be presented statistically on a graph or a chart. The results from the sample would then, most likely, be generalized to a larger population.

According to positivism the social world is ordered and thus predictable. Causal relationships between variables can be identified and measured, patterns can be revealed, and social behaviors can thus be predicted. We can predict whether or not people will be satisfied with their work based on a variety of indicators that result in overall patterns. An objective knower, the researcher, can access these knowable "facts" through the application of scientific methods of measurement and statistical methods of analysis in a value-neutral context. While this is a general description of positivist epistemology, one may have noticed how certain methods of data collection and analyses are "suited" toward these assumptions. This is a critical point. While research methods are discussed more specifically later, the relationship between epistemology and methods is a direct one. While positivist science has historically denied the relationship between theories of knowledge and the use of methods, thereby de-linking theory from methods, one can see that in fact positivism, like all epistemological traditions, is intimately connected to the selection and application of research methods.

ANDROCENTRICISM IN SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

Most socially and culturally valid undertakings, both creative and intellectual, have historically been produced within male-dominated social spheres. Science and scientific research have certainly been prime examples of this historical phenomenon. Some argue (see Keller 1978 for example) that science is more intrinsically (socially) masculine than any other human undertaking. The identification of scientific thought with masculinity is strongly rooted in Western culture and can be directly related to the dichotomy of gender stereotypes and socialization within culture (for a psychoanalytical account of this see Chodorow 1978).² The objective sciences are commonly dubbed "hard" and deal solely with facts. The more subjective sciences (usually the social sciences) are considered "soft" and deal more with interpretations and feelings. These distinctions invoke both sexual and gender metaphors—the masculine is hard and logical, the feminine is soft and emotional. Fox Keller ar-

gues that this dichotomy within science is a reflection of cultural gender stereotypes that results in masculine biased, androcentric science and research.

Some classic examples of feminists identifying androcentric bias in scientific work include the work of Emily Martin, Nancy Tuana, and Zuleyma Tang Halpin. Anthropologist Emily Martin has analyzed the sexist language used in medical journals to describe the female body and reproduction. She reveals, for example, that medical discourse used to depict the egg and sperm during conception in medical journals promotes an image of women's inferiority by using language in ways that make the "sperm" appear dominant. She uncovers a range of stereotypical terms employed in medical science and suggests the importance of uncovering these stereotypical cultural images so that we can "rob them of their power to naturalize our social conventions about gender" (Martin 1999, 25).

In a study similar to Martin's analysis of the language used to describe the process of conception, Tuana's analysis of the language used to describe reproductive theories shows how "scientists work within and through the worldview of their time" (Tuana 1988, 147). Using theories on reproduction from Aristotle to the preformationists, she provides support for the argument that science has frequently provided a biological explanation and justification for women being ritualistically treated by society in an inferior way. Both Martin's and Tuana's work ultimately highlighted that androcentric bias is rampant even within the "hard" sciences that we often take for granted as "scientific" and "objective." In fact, even medical knowledge is produced in a social environment—it is conducted by imprinted³ persons in a value-laden context.

Broadening the discussion of androcentrism in science to a bias against all minorities, Halpin links scientific objectivity with a general process of "othering." Halpin states that young scientists are taught that "science is intellect and absolute 'rationality,' and that emotions and feelings must not be allowed to play any part in the process" (Halpin 1989, 285). Yet through reading the works she cites, it becomes quite clear that emotions have played a key role in science. Science has frequently passed judgment, a process that includes referring to not only one's logic, but also one's emotions. Scientists have relegated anything that is not like them, which historically means white middle- to upper-class heterosexual Christian male, to the "other" category. Since anything "other" is different than self, it has historically been assumed to be inferior. This belief, Halpin points out, is part of the reason science has been fundamental to the maintenance of a patriarchal social order.

There are some key works that have revealed androcentric bias in other disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Carolyn Wood Sherif outlines the androcentric history of psychology and the existence of sexist bias that was recognized by the turn of the last century. Beginning with Weisstein's 1960s thesis 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" (Sherif 1987, 38), Sherif criticizes psychology for its male hierarchy of status based upon type and topic of study within the discipline, its reliance upon and embracement of the traditional methods of biological and physical sciences, and its belief of its own objectivity. These characteristics of psychology were worsened by the fact that psy-

chology only mimicked the form of the natural sciences, not their standards. This mimicking led to false beliefs about how to pursue knowledge and limited psychology's ability to study seriously and explain women and gender.

Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo (1999) provides another classic example of androcentric bias. She underscores women's exclusion from philosophical discourse and points out that "the history of philosophy can meaningfully and nonreductively be characterized as 'male'" (Bordo 1999, 30). Her work echoes Fox Keller. The assumption is that men, who have distanced themselves from their surroundings, meaning that they practiced impersonal and apolitical research, have developed the scientific method. Millman and Kanter (1987) criticize sociology and its androcentric bias in several important ways and note for example that the field of sociology assumes "the use of certain field-defining models," which can deter exploration of new areas of knowledge building. The field also tends to focus on the "public sphere" of society to the detriment of what they see as the "less dramatic, private, and invisible spheres of social life and organization." They also stress that sociology assumes a unitary society with regard to men and women—what is true for men must be true for women. They point to the lack of taking gender as a category of analysis in its own right, and the tendency of sociology to explain the "status quo." Lastly, the field favors certain methodologies (read quantitative) that prevent the discovery of "subjugated knowledges," especially women's experiences and their interpretation of them.

Reinharz (1985, 156) notes that the context and the content of sociology itself was sexist. She supported her argument by discussing how the institutions within which sociology is often conducted (universities, hospitals, and research institutes) are male centered and by giving disconcerting examples of blatant sexism in both the contemporary classic works of the discipline and in the textbooks: "My point is that the writing of sociologists reveals their view of society, a view that sees women primarily as stupid, sexually unexciting wives or objects of sexual desire and violence" (1985, 165).

Having reviewed some classic examples of feminists revealing androcentric bias within the sciences and social sciences, it is important to return to the example of a positivist studying worker satisfaction. Sociologists have a long history of studying this topic, and, no surprise to feminists, these efforts have traditionally produced androcentrically biased knowledge.

Early positivists studying worker satisfaction excluded women from their samples and relied solely on men. It had been assumed that men work in the paid labor force and accordingly their satisfaction is sociologically important. If women do work, then what is true for men would also be true for women. Even if women were randomly included in a research sample, the data was not differentiated based on gender (Hesse-Biber and Carter 2000). Experiences unique to women at work were not recorded. This is an example of how women have been completely excluded from the research question and consequently data gathering. Likewise, when studying the private sphere and family life men have largely been excluded from research. This is because the private sphere is viewed as less important to men—their primary role is that of worker, not father and homemaker. Women who work in the home as wives and mothers have also been excluded from this research. They

simply have not been asked about their satisfaction in the home. When feminists began asking these women about their daily life experiences and satisfaction a range of issues such as depression and boredom emerged, which is precisely what Betty Friedan labeled "the problem with no name" (Friedan 1983). These examples of exclusion exemplify the complexity of gender bias within this body of research, revealing that gender serves as a master status (see Higginbotham 1992) used to produce biased knowledge. On the occasions where women have been included in job satisfaction research, androcentrically biased knowledge has persisted because of the theoretical framework imposed. When positivists have included women in their studies they have largely been working from a "social problems" model asking questions such as: "Why do women work?" (Hesse-Biber and Carter 2000, 6). The implicit assumption is that women working is an aberration from the norm—from their proper place in the home and not a subject in need of sociological research. In other words, it has not been viewed as a question of work satisfaction in the same way as research conducted on men (Hesse-Biber and Carter 2000, 6–10). The androcentrically biased knowledge that results serves to reinforce the stereotypical ways that we think about men and women, particularly in relation to their roles, responsibilities, and needs in the public and private spheres.

As more and more feminists began identifying and criticizing the androcentricism of their disciplines, the simple acknowledgment of gender was not enough. Feminists began applying their own approaches to research and ultimately began challenging the very foundation of modern science: positivism.

FEMINIST RESPONSES TO POSITIVISM AND ANDROCENTRISM

Feminist Empiricism

Initially, many feminist scholars with a commitment to eradicating sexism in the sciences became what Sandra Harding (1991) calls "feminist empiricists." These feminist scholars believed that androcentric bias can be eliminated from knowledge construction if 1) they adhere to the tenets of positivism more strictly, and 2) add women and other minorities into their research samples.

Many scholars believe that the androcentric bias in both the physical and social sciences is the result of "bad science." The biases and prejudices found in the research are a result of the guidelines, rules, and standards of science not having been implemented properly or followed closely enough. Feminist empiricists argue that sexism and all other biases can be eliminated from science if researchers would adhere strictly to the existing methodologies of science. In other words, the scientific method and positivist conceptions of objectivity can produce responsible knowledge if they are rigorously followed (see Eichler 1988).

Feminist empiricism challenges the assumptions of traditional empiricism in three ways (Harding 1991). First, in order to eliminate bias, the researcher has to examine the context of discovery (What are the research questions/problems addressed in this study?) as well as the context of justification (How is this research carried out? What methods are employed?) Researchers need to recognize that the

cultural filters through which the world is viewed are institutionalized and may not be visible to the individual. Feminist empiricists argue that the scientific method and objectivity can (possibly) identify and eliminate individual biases, but not the ones that are held culture-wide.

Second, the scientific method is powerless to eliminate certain biases when those biases enter the project through the identification and definition of research problems. For example, viewing women at work as a social problem in need of investigation/prevention is an example of sexism defining the research topic. The hypotheses that would challenge androcentric beliefs and encourage the production of useful and accurate knowledge about women are largely ignored in traditional empiricist research. An example of an alternative hypothesis would be asking about women's job satisfaction without applying a social problems model or asking about women's satisfaction in the home, both of which have been largely ignored in traditional empiricist research. Feminist empiricists also criticize traditional epistemologies and methodologies for not placing the research project on the same plane as the research subjects. Even if someone were to identify a research problem from a woman's perspective, if the project is placed on the plane above the subjects, the inequitable power structures of society are replicated and androcentricism comes through the project unscathed. The research merely reproduces societal relations of dominance.

And third, although feminist empiricists claim that bias and androcentricism can be eliminated, or at least mitigated from research by following the rules of the scientific method more rigorously, they at times acknowledge that traditional methods of data collection were designed by traditional scientists, men. The normative methods of scientific inquiry were designed by researchers to produce answers to the kinds of questions an androcentric society has. So while we traditionally think of a research method as merely a tool that can be applied by anyone, the origin and history of those tools need investigation.

Harding also discusses how feminist empiricists may help increase feminism's respect even amongst mainstream academics by using "traditional" methods and maintaining some use of "objectivity." Harding discusses the value of relying on traditional methods in feminist research as a strength of feminist empiricism:

[F]eminist empiricism appears to leave intact much of scientists' and philosophers' conventional understanding of the principles of adequate scientific research. It appears to challenge mainly the incomplete practice of the scientific method, not the norms of science themselves . . . it conserves, preserves, and saves understandings of scientific inquiry that have been intellectually and politically powerful. (Harding 1991, 113)

By conducting their critique of sexist research with only a minimal challenge to the fundamental logic and dominant philosophies of science, feminist empiricist critiques are more widely understood and accepted into conventional bodies of knowledge with less resistance than other forms of feminism. Feminist empiricists are able to present their research findings widely within the academy simply because their methodology is accepted and respected. By using a positivist approach these scholars, who also self-identify as feminists, are still working within the dominant system, although perhaps on the margins of that system.

Without questioning and transforming the epistemological basis on which the scientific method is employed, feminist empiricists replicate more mainstream research with women "added in." Such criticisms of the initial ways feminist empiricists attempted to eliminate sexism from knowledge construction prompted a thorough and continuous interrogation of positivism and its inextricable links to hierarchical forms of knowledge. Beyond dismantling positivism, these critical feminists have created a range of epistemological and methodological alternatives to dominant science.

Feminist Challenges to the Tenets of Positivism: The Reconceptualization of Epistemology, Methodology, and Method

Once feminists opened up a dialogue about epistemology and began adding women into research projects, an interrogation of positivism followed. Critically analyzing the major tenets of positivism, feminists began to challenge traditional notions of knowledge building and to develop new feminist epistemological approaches to the research process. Feminists were asking new research questions (with new methodologies) aimed at accessing what Michel Foucault (1980) called "subjugated knowledges." In order to understand the value added by a feminist perspective, one must review the feminist critique of positivism that spawned new epistemological and methodological approaches to knowledge building.

Feminist perspectives in social research question positivism's answers to the epistemological questions of who can possess knowledge, how knowledge is or can be obtained, and what knowledge is. Many feminists conceptualize truth differently than mainstream researchers and assert that women and other marginalized groups can possess knowledge and also recognize that people may not always gather knowledge in the same way. Because there are a variety of knowledge-gathering techniques used by researchers, many feminists do not believe one method of knowledge gathering is inherently better or worse than any other.

The overall feminist critique of positivism is multifaceted. First, feminists have contemplated deeply the notion of a "worldview" or "paradigm." A paradigm is a socially constructed "worldview that guides the researcher" (Guba and Lincoln 1998, 200). First explicated by Thomas Kuhn, paradigms are worldviews through which all knowledge is filtered (1970, 175). Epistemological questions are embedded within paradigms (Guba and Lincoln 1998, 201). If you decide to study women's satisfaction in their workplace it is because you assume it to be researchable. Accordingly, feminists have pointed out that the epistemological assumptions on which positivism is based have been shaped by the larger culture and perpetuate the hierarchies that characterize social life: patriarchy, elitism, heterosexism, and racialized modes of social power. Recognizing that positivism is both a reflection and extension of the dominant worldview and is used in the service of maintaining unequal power relations, feminists began asking a question that for years had been taken for granted: What is the nature of social reality (Nielsen 1990)? This questioning led to a critical reevaluation of the assumptions embedded within positivism, which are discussed in the Sprague and Kobrynowicz essay in this volume.

Sprague and Zimmerman (1993) outline the feminist critique of positivism by stating that positivism creates false dichotomies that bias the research process. Ap-

plying this back to the discussion of feminist empiricists one can see that if feminists employ a positivist framework on/with/through their research, even if they ask questions to and about women, the resulting knowledge may remain biased. Sprague and Zimmerman detail the major dichotomies within positivism that produce dominant knowledge and argue that researchers must integrate these dualisms in order to create a feminist methodology intended to unravel dominant relations of power rather than assist in their maintenance.

→ Positivist science assumes a subject-object split where the researcher is taken for granted as the knowing party. The researcher and researched, or, knower and knowable, are on different planes within the research process. By privileging the researcher as the knowing party a hierarchy paralleling that of patriarchal culture is reproduced. Unequal power relations between the researcher and the research participants serve to transform the research subject into an object. This is the same process of "othering" that Halpin (1989) explained resulted in the "scientific oppression" of all who didn't resemble the researcher. Positivists traditionally *seek* knowledge in a narrow self-contained way whereas feminists aim at *developing* knowledge *with* their research subjects who bring their own experiential knowledge, concerns, and emotions to the project. As Sprague and Kobrynowicz explain in their essay included in this volume, positivism tried (unsuccessfully) to produce a "view from nowhere" whereas feminists aim at producing the "view from somewhere." Feminists are concerned with accessing different voices.

→ Positivism also encompasses a rational-emotional dualism. This facet of positivism assumes the researcher to be value-neutral and objective. Sprague and Zimmerman explain that this assumption, in conjunction with the subject-object split, has sustained patriarchal modes of knowledge building. The denial of values, biases, and politics is unrealistic and undesirable. Emotions and values often serve as the impetus to a research endeavor (Jaggar 1989; Sprague and Zimmerman 1993). For example, a researcher may be interested in studying women's satisfaction at their workplace because they want to help women to be empowered in their work environment or they want to produce knowledge that validates women's unique work experiences. Likewise, a researcher may wish to study working fathers' satisfaction in the home in order to validate these long silenced experiences. Additionally, when we move beyond the standard methods available to positivists and begin to consider qualitative methods such as oral histories, in-depth interviews, and ethnography, it becomes clear that many methodological choices rely on the creation of relationships between researchers and research participants. These data-yielding relationships may be emotional by necessity. In sum, positivism is based on a dichotomous research event whereas feminist research is a process that occurs on a fluid continuum.

Haraway (1988 and 1993), Harding (this volume), and Bhavnani (this volume), believe objectivity, encompassed in the subject-object and rational-emotional dichotomies, needs to be transformed into "feminist objectivity." Both Harding's and Bhavnani's articles in this section of the volume use Donna Haraway's definition of this term: "Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges" (Bhavnani 1993, 96; Harding 1993, 49). Feminist objectivity changes the strong dualism of objectivity and subjectivity into a dialectic. The nature of knowledge and truth

is that it is partial, situated, subjective, power imbued, and relational. Feminist objectivity combines the goal of conventional objectivity—to conduct research completely free of social influence or personal beliefs—with the reality that no one can achieve this goal. All research occurs within a society. The society's beliefs, ideologies, traditions, structure, etc., all impact the research in multiple ways. Feminist objectivity acknowledges the fact that the researcher is going to bring the influences of society into the project. It also recognizes that objectivity can only operate within the limitations of the scientist's personal beliefs and experiences. Positivists recognize the context of discovery and the context of justification as the two phases of scientific research. The context of discovery is the process through which researchers develop research questions such as studying women's satisfaction in their workplace. The context of justification is the process through which the research questions are tested. Both Harding (1991) and Sprague and Zimmerman (1993) critique positivism and objectivity because objectivity is only applied to the context of justification. Researchers disclose *how* they studied their topic, but not *why*. Positivism is not designed to rationally explain the context of discovery because it is a "seemingly idiosyncratic and mysterious process" (Sprague and Zimmerman 1993, 259). Acknowledging the fact that objectivity is limited by the researcher's situation and is absent from the context of discovery actually strengthens objectivity, according to Harding. Conventional objectivity does not concern itself with the context of discovery, thus "it is too weak to accomplish even the goals for which it has been designed . . ." (Harding 1993, 51). By disclosing *why* sociologists study a topic, and the decisions that went into conceptualizing research design, one gains a better understanding of the varied issues pertaining to the topic and how one can continue to create reflexive research projects (research that is attentive to the complexity of power relations) in order to create larger amounts of contextualized knowledge.

Harding's work is a significant contribution to the reevaluation of scientific objectivity and so we have included her essay in Part I. Harding's concept "strong objectivity" examines not only the context of justification but also the context of discovery. It is a process of disclosing the histories, positions, influences, beliefs, morals, etc. of the researcher at every step of the research project. In other words, the researcher is obligated to disclose her own subject position throughout the research process. The subject as well as the object of knowledge is to be critically examined. Feminist objectivity is applied to the research questions and the researcher, not just the methods.

This feminist critique has linked positivistic sociology with social dominance in two ways: (1) the conduct of research is carried out through social relationships of differential power with the attendant risks of exploitation and abuse; (2) research is inherently political in facilitating particular structures of power within the larger society, either those already in existence or those through which the currently oppressed are empowered (Sprague and Zimmerman 1993, 260). Feminists state that during the actual research process, positivism makes the subject of the study an object of dominance, thus reproducing the experience of the oppressed or marginalized in the social world. In positivistic research, the subject's only input into the research is the answers she or he gives in response to the researcher's questions. The

questions asked, the variables and their conceptualization, the design of the research project, and the judgment criteria used by the researcher are all an expression of a specific viewpoint or belief held by the researcher. Research is thus inherently value-laden and reflects the power structures within which the researcher operates.

The feminist critique of positivism is the starting point for many feminists to develop alternative methodologies and methods. The basic premise of almost all of the feminist methodologies is the epistemological belief that women can possess and share valuable knowledge and thus research can start from the perspective of women's lives (see Smith 1974 and 1987; Harding 1993). There is no universal truth in a hierarchical society but rather partial and context-bound truths that can be accessed through relationships with our research participants. The knowledges produced are then less generalizable; feminists aim for partial truths rather than engaging in a process of scientific distortion. Conceptualizing women as a starting point for research not only validates their knowledge and includes them in a process from which they have long been excluded, but also attempts to upend the power relations that are reproduced in traditional, positivistic, scientific research. This is also true when starting research from any traditionally "othered" position, not just the position of women, and acknowledging the complexity of positionality that shapes people's experiences and attitudes based on the intersectionality of a variety of characteristics such as race, class, gender, nationality and sexuality (see Dill 1983; King 1988; Mohanty 1988; Sandoval, 1991; Higginbotham 1992; Collins 1999).

Feminists have specific ideas about the entire research process from the formulation of the research question to the reporting of the results. One must not confuse methodology with method. The distinction between the two terms is very important. People working within the social sciences often use the terms *method* and *methodology* interchangeably. According to Harding, this lack of distinction or preoccupation with method can lead to the mystification of the most interesting aspects of feminist research processes. While Harding is quick to point out that method and methodology are not interchangeable, she also cautions that they do interact together in a dynamic process and are thus intimately linked.

In her introduction to *Feminism and Methodology*, Harding defines method as follows:

A research *method* is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence. One could reasonably argue that all evidence-gathering techniques fall into one of the following three categories: listening to (or interrogation) informants, observing behavior, or examining historical traces and records. (1987, 2)

All researchers use a method or a variety of methods while conducting their research. Feminist researchers may use a wider variety of methods in a single project or use methods that may be considered unique to feminist research, but anyone may use the methods used by feminist researchers. Feminists even employ methods that have been used by androcentric researchers as evidenced by feminist empiricism. Many feminist research projects have used survey methods and quantitative data analysis—two traditionally androcentric methods—to produce women-centered results. Methods such as intensive interviewing, the collection of oral histories, and qualitative content analysis are often labeled feminist methods by "traditional" so-

ciologists; however, studies conducted by "traditional" sociologists have also relied on these methods. One of the things that makes feminism unique is that feminists employ so many different methods and often combine quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to create multi-method designs that gather knowledge in different forms and from different perspectives. Methods are a step-by-step process for collecting data. Methods are tools that aid research. Any researcher, female or male, may follow the steps. Thus, methods can be neither gendered nor labeled feminist/nonfeminist.

Scholars create a feminist methodology by arguing against the mainstream ways research has proceeded and how theory has been applied to research questions and to data. In other words, feminists explicitly link theory with methods. A methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed (Harding 1987, 3). A primary principle of feminist methodology, according to Sprague and Zimmerman, is that it retains a commitment to the empowerment of women and other oppressed people: "Thus, feminist research is connected in principle to feminist struggle" (Sprague and Zimmerman 1993, 266).

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology and Methodology

Feminist standpoint epistemology begins with research questions (methodologies) rooted in women's lives (the researched)—women's everyday existence. Standpoint theorists explain that a hierarchical society will produce different standpoints, or vantage points, from which social life is experienced. Standpoint is based on the Hegelian idea that the oppressed have developed a dual perspective: their personal perspective developed through experience and their perspective of their oppressors, which they develop to survive. Structural difference thus creates difference in experiences and beliefs. Drawing on Hegelian and Marxist theory of the master/slave relationship, Nancy Hartstock (1983) asserts 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. Members of the dominant group on the other hand, were thought to only have a partial viewpoint based on their privileged position. Standpoint is thus an achievement—it is earned based on one's position in the social order. Dorothy Smith (1987), a pioneer of women's standpoint epistemology, asserts that a way of knowing must start from women's lives, and stresses the importance of women's own understanding and experience in creating knowledge (1987, 107). Standpoint epistemology, of course, is not without its own set of challenges regarding issues of knowledge building. If knowledge should start out from the oppressed, how can one determine who is the most oppressed? Can only women understand women? Why do those at the margins have a less distorted viewpoint and how does this happen? Moreover, is the viewpoint of those historically marginalized less distorted or differently distorted?

Critics of feminist standpoint epistemology feel uncomfortable with giving up positivism's claim of universal truth. Feminist researchers, after all, embrace multiple subjectivities. Does that lead to relativism? Chaos? No. By starting with the lives of marginalized people, standpoint theory not only critically examines the marginalized groups as done in the past, but also critically examines the lives of the

dominant groups. It centers on the relationship between politics and knowledge. By using the marginalized position as the starting point, *objectivity is maximized*. Knowledge can be produced for marginalized groups, rather than about marginalized groups for the use of dominant groups to maintain hierarchical power relations.

Starting research from the standpoint of the oppressed is valid because it is often the lives and experiences of oppressed people that provide significant insight and perspective. Complex human relations can become visible when research is started at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Starting at the top of the hierarchy, as traditional science has often done, can actually hide some of the daily processes, events, and experiences that occur within society. When feminists began to employ feminist standpoint epistemology and methodology research shifted, new questions were asked, new topics emerged—social scientific inquiry changed. For example, the daily lives of women who worked in the home in both paid and unpaid labor (housewives, mothers, domestic workers) had long been ignored within our culture and the academy. Standpoint theorists began to research these neglected facets of social life by beginning with the perspective of women. This research has contributed greatly to our knowledge of the hidden aspects of “women’s work,” such as housework, feeding the family, and mothering (see for example Smith 1987; Devault 1991).

Standpoint theory is often employed in feminist methodology because women, having been dominated by men, have formed this dual perspective.⁴ They know the workings of not only the female world, but also much of the male world. Problems that women face on a daily basis are often invisible to, or ignored by, the male eye. It is these problems that are of interest to many feminist researchers. Accordingly, many feminist researchers use standpoint epistemology as a part of feminist methodology and it has become an important approach to socially just research (see O’Leary 1997).

Issues of Difference

Standpoint Theory and many other feminist theories have not historically been sensitive to issues of difference beyond gender. Feminists have complicated the idea of a single “women’s experience” and now stress the importance of difference even beyond the differences in conceptualizing standpoint detailed in the articles included for Part I. Standpoint has been challenged and expanded in other important ways in an effort to deessentialize women’s experiences and account for gender as an attribute that directly intersects with other socially constructed categorizations that *together* comprise one’s standpoint (be it researcher or researched).

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) has been at the forefront in challenging white feminist definitions of standpoint in order to resist the false notion that gender simply subsumes other characteristics within patriarchal culture. This notion merely reflects the position of racial privilege white feminists occupy—a status that long went unrecognized within the white feminist movement and the academy. As opposed to essentializing on the basis of gender, which is, ironically, a systemic practice in patriarchal culture, feminists must complicate their definition and application of standpoint and actively resist the tendency to assume the existence of a “universal woman”

or woman’s experience. Patricia Hill Collins calls for an “afrocentric” feminist standpoint epistemology which looks at the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in defining a person’s standpoint, thereby shaping their experiences, viewpoints, and perceptions. As Patricia Hill Collins rightfully explains, social power is not simply dichotomous within Western culture. The social order is a complex web of power relations (Foucault 1980). She refers to this as a “matrix of domination” where race, class, and gender are overdetermined in relation to each other. She conceptualizes race, class, and gender as “interlocking systems of oppression” (Collins 1990, 234; see also Dill 1983; King 1988). Perhaps returning to the example of worker satisfaction will help elucidate this critical insight.

Early standpoint theorists began asking women questions that had not previously been asked. For example, standpoint researchers have long conducted research on women’s satisfaction in the private sphere, as mothers and homemakers. This research was important as it probed into otherwise underresearched areas and validated the experiences of many women; however, this work initially did little by way of addressing the multiplicity of experiences *and* the issues of import from the perspectives of women with varied backgrounds in terms of race, social class, and sexuality. Not all women have the same issues, concerns, choices, and views on family/work. For example, it has been suggested that an overall solution to the work/family issues for working women is the expansion of day care. This, on the surface seems like a good idea. But the solution raises problematic issues regarding who is going to deliver these services and who will benefit from them. Glenn (1992) notes that historically women of color and new immigrants provided such labor, often at exploitative wages, while white middle-class women received the benefits. What seemed like a good idea for one group of women may not necessarily be of immediate benefit for another group. Recognizing the diversity of women’s experiences and how these are shaped not only by their gender, but also by their racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual preference, age, and economic background is crucial in guarding against a unidimensional view of the category *woman*. Likewise, not all women experience gender as their socially defining characteristic in terms of perceived impact on daily life. Patricia J. Williams (1991) eloquently describes how within her workspace (she is a law professor at a top university) there are times when the experience of her standpoint shifts its center, from woman to African American and vice versa, based on the context in which she finds herself.

Not only is one’s achieved status multidimensional, it is also fluid. Understanding how difference is generated within the research process utilizing such concepts as Patricia Hill Collins’s (1990) “matrix of domination” will enable feminist researchers to compose research questions and techniques aimed at generating new knowledge. Nancy Naples (1999) uses a “multidimensional” standpoint in order to develop a method for exploring women’s political activism. Standpoint, she notes, is not only located within specific individuals but also within communities as well as in “how things are put together” in the actualities of women’s lives (49). These are “the social relations embedded in women’s everyday activities” (45). She believes a multidimensional standpoint provides useful information on how communities are structured politically and how their members promote or inhibit political activism. By understanding these processes, we can uncover the weaknesses of sys-

tems of oppression and thereby "account for the possibility of resistance—a central goal of feminist praxis" (Naples 1999, 48). Part II of this volume takes up the issues of difference in research in more detail.

Emerging Epistemologies and Methodologies: Postmodern Feminisms

Standpoint epistemology is not the only philosophical grounding from which feminists work. Critical, post-structural, postcolonial, and postmodern theories (postmodern being the umbrella category) have converged to create a new moment in scholarship that focuses on interdisciplinary practice (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). The growth of the postmodern theoretical paradigm has served as the impetus for the emergence of new epistemological and methodological practices. Feminists have been and will continue to be an integral part of these new approaches to the research process. Feminists' widespread affinity to the practice of postmodernism is easily understood when paralleling the main tenets of postmodern epistemology to feminism itself. For some contemporary feminists, postmodern theory and practice is simply congruent 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. Postmodern scholars are unified in their concern for bringing the "Other" into research, which some contemporary feminists thus see as an extension of the feminist project. Postmodern scholars emphasize an oppositional politics aimed at empowering previously subjugated peoples (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Postmodern research is thus a "transformative endeavor" practiced in order to denaturalize and transform oppressive power-knowledge relations with the intent of creating a more just world (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). In particular, postmodernism uses the voice of the "Other" in highly reflexive and politically imbued ways in order to deconstruct "metanarratives" (overreaching stories) used in the domination of some over others (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Reflexive practice is that which accounts for the dialectical and reciprocal workings of power, including: the changing position of the researcher within the research process, the sociohistorical context, and the changing relations of power within which the research participants operate. This is a different tradition than "giving voice" to the marginalized, as feminist scholars working from other epistemologies (such as standpoint) are engaged in. The postmodern framework embodies a goal of emancipation that unifies some feminist researchers, although other feminists, as discussed earlier, aim at including women in research but not transforming the larger power structure that colonizes them. Feminist researchers have drawn on the tenets of postmodern epistemology in order to develop unique methodological approaches aimed at producing research inclusive of difference.

The interface between critical and postmodern theory has been significant in developing new forms of feminism. Postmodern feminism and other forms of critical theory including postcolonial feminism aim at creating political cultural resistance to hierarchical modes of structuring social life by being attentive to the dynamics of power and knowledge. Postmodern feminism is the umbrella term we are using to discuss these emergent forms of feminism; however, it is important to re-

alize that this is a generalization. Postcolonial feminists are primarily concerned with de-colonizing the Other from the social and political forces that colonize, subjugate, disempower, and even enslave those deemed Other in a global context. Post-structural feminists are concerned with critical deconstruction as a method of exposing and transforming oppressive power relations. Critical feminists who often also share these post-structuralist practices are wary of privileging one truth over another and thus resist recreating hierarchies by privileging their own knowledges. All of these concerns and practices are a part of the larger term *postmodernism* and so we are using the umbrella term *postmodern feminism* as a way of encompassing these feminist methodologies. Postmodern feminists often use texts (in varied forms), the products of dominant culture and signs of postmodernity, in conjunction with the view of the oppressed, as the starting point of cultural interrogation. Some of these postmodern feminists have directly drawn on French post-structural theory (which can be viewed as a current within postmodernism), and engaged in a process of critical deconstruction. Feminist scholar Luce Irigaray was at the forefront of this endeavor and details a method of "jamming the theoretical machinery" (1985, 78) not in order to reconstruct another view of the social world (an exercise in power and colonization) but rather to unravel the social processes and relations that have constructed the social world in hierarchical ways. This process of critical interrogation, or "jamming," creates resistance within the system thereby altering power-knowledge relations in an organic way. This practice is a new form of political creation that occurs by creating resistance to dominant knowledge and then allowing that resistance to disrupt the social system thereby necessitating change.

Building on postmodernist principles and this initial feminist post-structuralist scholarship, postmodern feminists have detailed specific methodologies to fit their unique research objectives. Adrien Katherine Wing (2000) highlights another important emerging epistemology called "global critical race feminism." Feminists working from this epistemology are creating a new feminism of difference drawing on postmodern conceptualizations of power and knowledge in a global and increasingly interconnected context. Wing explains that feminists working in this new tradition must account for the context of global postmodern forms of power when considering the nature and impact of intersectionality, which is the standpoint created based on a combination of locations within the social structure (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality, geography, etc.). Drawing on the work of feminist critical scholar Audre Lorde, Wing explains the "holistic nature of identity" (2000, 10). Wing goes on to adopt Mari Matsuda's term *multiple consciousness* in order to elucidate the complexity of positionality within a global context. Multiple consciousness implies that intersectionality creates people that possess understandings of multiple locations within the social hierarchy, not just within one's culture, but also with the potential of a global awareness of difference of interconnected systems of power. The term can then be employed by feminists in order to create, implement, and move forward new politics of liberation. Many feminist scholars share the position that the feminist agenda has changed from a simple question of equality to a "feminism of difference" (Oliveira 2000, 4; Sandoval 2000; Wing 2000). This means that feminists working in this tradition are not simply interested in giving women the same "rights" as men, but accounting for the differences amongst us in terms of gender,

race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality and creating a social structure that is congruent with such differences and the corresponding perspectives yielded. The term *multiple consciousness* then goes farther than the double-consciousness contained within standpoint epistemology, making this an important emergent feminist tradition.

Postmodern feminist scholar Chela Sandoval (2000) also acknowledges the importance of multiple consciousness, and, drawing on the tenets of postmodern theory goes farther by asserting that scholars must gain access to "oppositional consciousness." The implication within her term is important as it indicates that not only does the Other develop a multi-perspective based on their complex location(s) within the social structure, but that the resulting consciousness is in opposition to the dominant culture in which they are oppressed. Resistance to colonizing hierarchical forms is thus built into the vision of those Othered by such systems. Accordingly, Sandoval develops a unique methodology aimed at accessing differential consciousness. She names her methodology "a methodology of the oppressed," which is a methodology of "emancipation" from hegemonically structured modes of power. Not only is Sandoval's framework the product of her attention to postmodern epistemology, but also a result of the postmodern world in which research is now conducted. Sandoval explains that feminists must conduct research that emancipates those who are Othered by "neocolonizing postmodern global formations" within our hyperreal context. In other words, postmodern feminists must decolonize with specific attention to new and emerging formations of domination and subjugation that are particular to postmodernity. She asserts that languages of "supremacy," which are either taken for granted or, in Denzin and Lincoln's term "misrecognized" (1998), must be "ruptured" through reflexive power-attentive methodological practice. In other words, narratives of domination may be intentionally misunderstood and accordingly must be ripped apart through the research process. The feminist agenda thus involves the "decoding" of postmodern languages of "domination and resistance" (Sandoval 2000). Through interdisciplinary research feminists must "deregulate" the postmodern global system of domination and subjugation. Sandoval's methodology of the oppressed involves the reflexive application of five techniques: 1) semiotics, 2) deconstruction, 3) meta-ideologizing, 4) democracies, and 5) differential consciousness (2000).

Kum-Kum Bhavani's article (this volume) is an important piece of feminist scholarship because it discusses the complexity of women's standpoint by drawing on standpoint epistemology, postmodernism, and third world feminism. Encompassing many of the strategies Sandoval details Bhavani explores the relationship between history and "oppositional consciousness" (Perez 1999; Narayan and Harding 2000; Sandoval 2000).

Bhavani draws on the post-structural strain in postmodern feminist thought by focusing on how feminists can use history within their research as a way of "jamming" the system, or, creating apparent tensions in hierarchically informed knowledge. In this vein history can be integrated into feminist scholarship as a method of creating resistance. Sandoval explains that this "new historicism" creates new analytical spaces that are informed by world history (2000, 8). In her article in Part I Bhavani argues that the strength of feminist research, and its potential to continue

to transform the way we think about the social world, lies in the feminist pursuit of thinking about knowledge construction historically while accessing "oppositional consciousness." Feminist research must contemplate historical differences *between* women and focus on the historical relationships between "science and society." Bhavani, like the other scholars presented in Part I, emphasizes that knowledge is both partial and situated but this does not mean that the knowledge we produce must be "disembodied." On the contrary, Bhavani calls for a historicization of knowledge in order to more fully account for difference, especially differences among women. She is concerned that feminist epistemologies not erase or deny the often differing interests or standpoints some women may hold on a given issue or interest. Uma Narayan, an Indian social scientist, for example, points out that even the selection of positivism as a major "target" of feminists' critique of knowledge building may be problematic for non-Western feminists. She suggests that there are many "non-positivist frameworks" within non-Western societies that are more politically oppressive to women, and central among these is religion:

Most traditional frameworks that nonwestern feminists regard as oppressive to women are not positivist, and it would be wrong to see feminist epistemology's critique of positivism given the same political importance for nonwestern feminists that it has for western feminists. Traditions like my own, where the influence of religion is pervasive, are suffused through and through with values. We must fight not frameworks that assert the separation of fact and value but frameworks that are pervaded by values to which we, as feminists find ourselves opposed. (Narayan 1989, 260)

It is clear that feminists working from these emergent traditions employ a variety of epistemologies and methodologies. Attention to the Other within the social system, be it local or global, and the complexity of consciousness as a product of conceptualizing identity in a holistic way are two themes within these varied emergent practices. Overall, these emergent feminist traditions provide new insights into social reality. Feminists working from these epistemological positions are providing additional strategies for getting at knowledge building and as a result they are creating new knowledge with valuable social and political components. Interestingly, it is within the political feminist agenda that many other feminists pose challenges to these emergent postmodern feminists.

Standpoint epistemologists, feminist empiricists, and many other feminist researchers have been unified in their use of the category "woman" as a political tool. In other words, feminists have traditionally used the category "woman" in order to effectively fight for women's rights by urging social policy changes and so forth. The essentializing of women for the purpose of improving women's lives through social activism has long been a part of the feminist agenda; however, this form of essentialism is neglectful of the complexity of intersectionality within a global world characterized by postmodern global forms. Accordingly, feminists working within these emergent traditions often reject even the strategic use of the category "woman." So while using the Other as a focal point of inquiry is perhaps a general feminist theme, the way in which this is *conceptualized* differs greatly and creates tensions between postmodern feminists and feminist scholars working from other traditions.

CONCLUSION

With the development, growth and, transformations in feminist epistemologies, feminist researchers draw on a wide range of research methods to conduct their work. From narrative analyses to in-depth interviews, ethnographies and content analyses, oral histories and discourse analyses, surveys and experiments feminists apply a particular methodology when conducting their research that reflects their unique vision. They view research holistically—as a process, and thus pay attention to the synergy between the context of discovery and the context of justification. Feminists have changed conceptions of what truth is, who can be a knower, what can be known. By creating situated and partial knowledges, by attending to the intersection of gender and other categories of difference such as race, class and sexual preference in its analysis of social reality, feminist research is open to new knowledge—asking new questions. As we will see throughout this volume, this is accomplished in many ways. There are multiple feminisms, not simply one.

Mostly, feminists conduct research for women. Whether it be by seeking knowledge from and about women in order to record their valuable life experiences, or to change women's lives through social policy, a feminist methodology aims at creating knowledge that is beneficial to women and other minorities (DeVault 1999, 31). In this vein many feminists are social activists seeking to use their research to better the social position of women. While feminist scholarship varies in epistemological position and research a feminist approach to research helps give voice to the experiences, concerns, attitudes, and needs of women. Feminists working in and developing emergent traditions seek to go farther than giving voice to Others and actually aim at disrupting social systems of oppression by utilizing the complex standpoints cultivated by such systems.

NOTES

1. As you will see later in this essay not all feminists concur on this point. For example, Chafetz wrote a paper titled "Some Thoughts by an 'Unrepentant Positivist' Who Considers herself a Feminist Nonetheless" in which she argues that positivism and feminism are not mutually exclusive.

2. Feminists rely on the psychological theories of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan to understand the problems with positivism claims to rationality, more specifically scientific claims to objectivity—the idea of the split between subject and object. Nancy Chodorow's work provides feminists with an understanding of the maleness of science and the scientific stress on objectivity. Why is it that objectivity as a tenet of positivism is so deeply embedded within the scientific model? Using "object-relations theory," Chodorow offers a psychological explanation for gender differences orientation to self. Mothers relate to their daughters in a way that allows them the ability to be more emphatic—seeing themselves in relation to others. In contrast, they raise their sons to be separate from others, in essence training them to be "more objective." Carol Gilligan's research is also interested in the relationship between self and other and supports Chodorow's research. Gilligan (1997) asserts that women's experience within society gives rise to gender differences in behavior. She stresses gender differences in "moral" development. In her view, women experience a different type of so-

cial reality from men that centers around issues of attachment and separation. Women's sense of self is focused around "an ethic of care" and women see "themselves in relations of connection." Their sense of moral development revolves around the premise of taking moral responsibility. And note that in making moral decisions women are more aware of the "limitations of any particular resolution" (149) and are concerned with the conflicts that remain unresolved from such a decision.

3. The term *imprinted* refers to how each individual is impacted by her or his cultural environment.

4. The idea of double consciousness is also in the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, which complicates the notion of men dominating women by focusing on the domination of racial minorities by whites and the double consciousness the oppressed develop. This implies that such a dual perspective is the product of a system of domination and is not only specific to social hierarchies based on gender.

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Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology

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1. The women's movement has given us a sense of our right to have women's interests represented in sociology, rather than just receiving as authoritative the interests traditionally represented in a sociology put together by men. What can we make of this access to a social reality that was previously unavailable, was indeed repressed? What happens as we begin to relate to it in the terms of our discipline? We can of course think as many do merely of the addition of courses to the existing repertoire—courses on sex roles, on the women's movement, on women at work, on the social psychology of women and, perhaps somewhat different versions of the sociology of the family. But thinking more boldly or perhaps just thinking the whole thing through a little further might bring us to ask first how a sociology might look if it began from the point of view of women's traditional place in it and what happens to a sociology which attempts to deal seriously with that. Following this line of thought, I have found, has consequences larger than they seem at first.

From the point of view of "women's place" the values assigned to different aspects of the world are changed. Some come into prominence while other standard sociological enterprises diminish. We might take as a model the world as it appears from the point of view of the afternoon soap opera. This is defined by (though not restricted to) domestic events, interests, and activities. Men appear in this world as necessary and vital presences. It is not a woman's world in the sense of excluding men. But it is a women's world in the sense that it is the relevances of the women's place that govern. Men appear only in their domestic or private aspects or at points of intersection between public and private as doctors in hospitals, lawyers in their offices discussing wills and divorces. Their occupational and political world is barely present. They are posited here as complete persons, and they are but partial—as women appear in a sociology predicated on the universe occupied by men.

But it is not enough to supplement an established sociology by addressing ourselves to what has been left out, overlooked, or by making sociological issues of the relevances of the world of women. That merely extends the authority of the existing sociological procedures and makes of a women's sociology an addendum. We cannot rest at that because it does not account for the separation between the two worlds and it does not account for or analyze for us the relation between them. (At-