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FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES AND EPISTEMOLOGY

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Over the past 10 years of teaching courses on research methods and feminist approaches to methodologies and epistemologies, a recurring question from our students concerns the distinctiveness of feminist approaches to methods, methodologies, and epistemologies. This key question is posed in different ways: Is there a specifically feminist method? Are there feminist methodologies and epistemologies, or simply feminist approaches to these? Given diversity and debates in feminist theory, how can there be a consensus on what constitutes “feminist” methodologies and epistemologies?

Answers to these questions are far from straightforward given the continually evolving nature of feminist reflections on the methodological and epistemological dimensions and dilemmas of research. This chapter on feminist methodologies and epistemologies attempts to address these questions by tracing historical developments in this area, by considering what may be unique about feminist epistemologies and feminist methodologies, by reviewing some of sociology’s key contributions to this area of scholarship and by highlighting some key emergent trends.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the theoretical and historical development of feminist epistemologies, followed by a similar overview of feminist methodologies. The final section discusses how feminist

epistemologies and feminist methodologies have begun to merge into an area called *feminist research* and details some key pillars of contemporary and emergent work in this area.

FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES

Twenty-five years ago, Lorraine Code, a Canadian feminist philosopher, posed what she called an “outrageous question.” In asking “is the sex of the knower epistemologically significant” (Code 1981), she then went on to chart the contours of a feminist epistemological approach as distinct from traditional or Anglo-American mainstream epistemology (see Code 1991). Code was just one of many feminists who, in the 1970s, began grappling with issues of masculinity, power, and authority in knowledge creation (see Gilligan 1977; Miller 1976; Smith 1974). From the outset, these challenges were being made across many disciplines. In the natural, physical, and behavioral sciences, the emphasis was on exposing masculine bias in science as perhaps best revealed in the valuing of traditional masculine characteristics (e.g., reason, rationality, autonomy, disconnection) (see Gilligan 1982; Keller 1985; Lloyd 1983). Indeed, feminist epistemological discussions owe a great debt to feminist scientists who relentlessly critiqued the

effects of gender bias in the collection, interpretation, and organization of data on sex differences in behavioral, biological, and biobehavioral scientific research. Documenting the exclusive use of male subjects in both experimental and clinical biomedical research, as well as the selection of male activity and concomitant male-dominant animal populations, feminists pointed to the blatant invisibility of females in research protocols (Haraway 1988, 1991; Keller 1983, 1985; Keller and Longino 1998; Longino and Doell 1983; Rose 1994).

While feminist scientists and scholars were scrutinizing research in the natural and physical sciences, feminist philosophers were actively engaged with defining the relationship between feminism and epistemology. Defining epistemology as “a philosophical inquiry into the nature of knowledge, what justifies a belief, and what we mean when we say that a claim is true” (Alcoff 1998:vii), it is not surprising that feminist philosophers would find this fertile ground for investigation. Whether the question of how “feminisms intersect epistemology” (Alcoff and Potter 1993) was shared by philosophers has been another matter. As Helen Longino (1997) has pointed out, “The idea of feminist epistemology throws some philosophers into near apoplexy” (p. 19). Feminist philosophers have, nevertheless, struggled with “many of the problems that have vexed traditional epistemology, among them the nature of knowledge itself, epistemic agency, justification, objectivity and whether and how epistemology should be naturalized” (Alcoff and Potter 1993:1). While addressing these traditional epistemological questions, feminist epistemologists have done so with a focus on the role of gender. Lennon and Whitford (1994), for instance, argued that “feminist epistemology consists . . . in attention to epistemological concerns arising out of feminist projects, which prompt reflection of the nature of knowledge and our methods for attaining it” (p. 13). Yet while there seems to have been some consensus on how specific issues required feminist analysis, the question still persisted as to whether such analysis needed to also generate specifically *feminist* epistemologies or could simply work with existing philosophical approaches.

This question remained at the backdrop of feminist discussions of epistemology throughout the 1980s and 1990s. However, what marked feminist epistemologies as unique for at least a decade is a threefold characterization initially proposed by Sandra Harding (1987b): feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemologies, and transitional (postmodern)¹ epistemologies. As discussed later in this chapter, these epistemological categories have since given way to greater complexity. Nevertheless, it is useful to provide a brief overview of their central contrasting and overlapping tenets.

Feminist empiricism was a response that emerged largely from feminist scientists and feminist critiques of science. Rooted in diverse philosophical traditions (e.g., Giere and Richardson 1996; Quine 1966, 1969), feminist empiricists have considered how feminist values can

inform empirical inquiry, and how scientific methods can be improved in light of feminist demonstrations of sex bias in traditional positivistic practices of science. At the risk of simplifying a very complex set of arguments, feminist empiricism has three key elements. The first is the view that all observation, “facts,” and “findings” are value tinged and that value judgments play a critical role in rigorous empirical inquiry: “There is a world that shapes and constrains what is reasonable to believe, and . . . it does so by impinging on our sensory receptors” (Nelson 1990:20; see also Campbell 1998; Longino 1990).² The second key element is the notion of empiricism as a “theory of evidence” and, further that “all evidence for science is, in the end, sensory evidence” (Longino 1990:21). Third, “knowers” are not individuals but are rather communities and more specifically science communities and epistemological communities. “Communities, not individuals ‘acquire’ and possess knowledge” (Longino 1990:14; see also Campbell 1998; Longino 1993, 2002; Nelson 1990, 1993; Walby 2001).³

While feminist empiricists are linked to postpositivist assumptions around different communities of knowers battling for truths and legitimacy in knowledge making, feminist standpoint epistemologists have challenged the differential power that groups have to define knowledge, and they argued that marginalized groups hold a particular claim to knowing. At the core of standpoint epistemology is their assertion that they represent the world from a particular socially situated perspective, which represents epistemic privilege or authority. This epistemic privileging is located in the standpoint of the marginalized or disadvantaged, and all women, regardless of social location, occupy this position. “Women’s experiences, informed by feminist theory, provide a potential grounding for more complete and less distorted knowledge claims than do men’s” (Harding 1987b:184; see also Hartsock 1983, 1985).⁴ Standpoint epistemology has continually emphasized how knowledge must begin in women’s “everyday/everynight world” (Smith 1999:5; see also Smith 1987) and how women’s lives are the “places from which to start off knowledge projects” (Harding 1991:61). Standpoint feminists have also been at pains to point out that these experiences, everyday/everynight worlds, or standpoints must also be located, and analyzed, within broader relations of ruling or social structures (Smith 1987, 1999). As Nancy Hartsock (1998) has made clear, a standpoint is “achieved rather than obvious, a mediated rather than an immediate understanding” (p. 110). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (1997) has highlighted that standpoint is about “historically shared, group-based experiences.”

While very diverse as a theoretical strand, postmodernism’s impact on feminist epistemologies has been profound for a number of reasons. First, it has critiqued the notion of “woman” as a unified *object* of theorizing and as a unified *subject* of knowing (Lugones and Spelman 1983). Second, the strong claim for socially situated knowledges translates into a greater attention to the

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concept of reflexivity and to the role of the researcher in constructing knowledge. Third, drawing on Jane Flax's (1990) characterization of postmodernism as "the death of history," the "death of meta-narratives," and the "death of man" (p. 204), the intersections between feminism and postmodernism have led to the articulation of a plurality of perspectives, none of which can claim objectivity or transcend into a "view from nowhere" (Haraway 1991). On the negative side, postmodernism can also be associated with a lack of feminist analysis, judgment, politics, or theorization. As described by Seyla Benhabib (1995), "A certain version of postmodernism is not only incompatible with but would undermine the very possibility of feminism as the theoretical articulation of the emancipatory aspirations of women" (p. 29; Brodribb 1992; but see Elam 1992).

While initially cast as three fundamentally contrasting frameworks, Harding's tripartite distinction between feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemologies, and transitional (postmodern) epistemologies has faded in the last 20 years. Indeed, Harding herself predicted this blurring (Harding 1987b, 1991, 1998). More recent debates have focused on how to characterize each strand of feminist epistemology, and indeed whether these are best named as theories, methodologies, or epistemologies (Collins 1997; Hartsock 1998; Smith 1999). Moreover, these oft-cited three categories of feminist epistemologies are clearly inadequate to reflect the wide variety of feminist research since much of it falls between and joins elements of two or three frameworks (see Fraser 1995; Fraser and Nicholson 1990; Haraway 1988, 1991). For example, since postmodern and postcolonial critiques have highlighted the importance of multiple or fragmented perspectives, feminist standpoint has moved in a pluralistic direction, acknowledging many situated standpoints (Collins 1997, 2000; Harding 1993b, 1998; Harding and Norberg 2005; Reynolds 2002; Smith 1999, 2005). At the same time, the focus on empirical evidence and "experience" and an emphasis on communities, rather than individuated knowers, has always signaled at least some convergence between feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint.

Throughout the 1990s, the emphasis on three epistemologies became partially replaced by reflections on the processes of "knowing, knowers and known" (Hawkesworth 1989). Particular questions framing subjectivity and issues of representation and legitimation have come to take center stage in feminist epistemological discussions. Such questions include the following: "Who can be a knower" (Code 1991), "What can be known" (Alcoff 1998), and "How do we know what we know?" (Alcoff 1998). As far back as 1993, Alcoff and Potter recognized that while feminist epistemology had "named recognition," its referent was becoming increasingly obscure (see also Longino 1997).

Any clear "referent" to feminist epistemology was also eroded by the growing influence of postmodern, poststructural, and postcolonial thinking that quashed the idea that

there could be a feminist or even several feminist "ways of knowing." In this vein, feminists working on epistemological questions have found themselves facing the same crises as nonfeminists charting similar terrain. As Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2000) suggest, researchers have begun to face a profound triple "crisis of representation, legitimation and praxis" (see also Atkinson 1992; Clifford 1986; Denzin 1997; Lather 1991; Marcus and Fisher 1986). Often referred to as the "reflexive turn" or the "narrative turn," as found mainly in postmodern and poststructuralist critiques, these crises have created a sense of uncertainty as increasingly complex questions have been raised concerning the status, validity, basis, and authority of knowledge claims (Geertz 1988; Hollway 1989; Richardson 1997).

In light of this backdrop, the question of whether feminists need their own epistemologies began to be reviewed more critically. There were many variations on this question: Would a feminist epistemology simply reverse androcentric epistemology to a gynocentric epistemology? (Duran 1991:14–15). Is "feminist knowledge" or "feminist science" a "contradiction in terms?" (Harding 1987b:182). "What does feminism require of an epistemology?" (Fricker 1994:95). Louise Antony addressed this issue succinctly when she asked, "Do we need in order to accommodate these questions, insights, and projects, a specifically feminist alternative to currently available epistemological frameworks" (Antony 1993:187). Her answer was a resounding "no." Meanwhile, parallel discussions were occurring for feminist researchers, particularly those working with qualitative research projects.

FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

Just a few years after Code's "outrageous question," Sandra Harding queried in a well-cited piece: "Is there a feminist method?" While Harding was careful to distinguish between method as "techniques for gathering evidence" and methodology as "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (Harding 1987a:2–3), the question of feminist versions of each of these has been asked. That is, are there methods that are specifically feminist? Furthermore, what is it that makes feminist approaches to methodology unique?

Feminist sociologists have made important contributions to this debate as they began to criticize positivism as a philosophical framework and, more specifically, its most acute methodological instrument—that of quantitative methods for its practice of detached and objective scientific research and the objectification of research subjects (Graham 1983b; Reinhartz 1979). These methodological critiques were well placed against a backdrop of feminist scholarship struggling to find a place for alternative values within the academy. Such concerns emerged out of a sense of despair and anger that knowledge, both academic and

popular, was based on men's lives, male ways of thinking, and directed toward the problems articulated by men. Dorothy Smith (1974) argued that "sociology . . . has been based on and built up within the male social universe" (p. 7) while further lamenting in her seminal work, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987), that the lives of women were largely left to novelists or poets. This rendered invisible, within the knowledge academies, women's lives and female-dominated domains such as domestic work and the care of children, the ill, and the elderly (see Finch and Groves 1983; Graham 1983a, 1991). Subsequently, and not surprisingly, where women's lives were studied and theorized, this occurred within male stream lenses. In this vein, British sociologist Hilary Graham (1983b) eloquently asked, "Do her answers fit his questions?" when she observed that women's experiences were being measured within surveys designed on the basis of men's lives. A decade later, and again in Britain, Rosalind Edwards observed that attempts were still being made to fit women's lives into male theories, like trying to "fit a round peg into a square hole" (Edwards 1990:479).

A noteworthy piece by British sociologist Ann Oakley (1981) still stands as one of the most cited articles within this discussion. Challenging the masculine assumptions of "proper interviews" that dominated the sociological textbooks of the time, Oakley argued that some methods were better suited to feminist aims and that these could be viewed as feminist methods. Oakley suggested that, contrary to an objective, standardized, and detached approach to interviewing, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing was "best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (p. 41).⁵ Drawing on her interviews with mothers, she maintained that her own identity as a mother came to act as a leveler against a power hierarchy in the interviewee-interviewer relationship:

Where both share the same gender socialization and critical life-experiences, social distance can be minimal. Where both interviewer and interviewee share membership of the same minority group, the basis for equality may impress itself even more urgently on the interviewer's consciousness. (Oakley 1981:55; see also Finch 1984; Stanley and Wise [1983] 1993; Rheinharz 1992)

These perspectives have since been criticized and deconstructed. To name a particular method, methodology, or theory as feminist calls for standards of judgment, which may exclude work that does not fit such criteria. Moreover, feminists have contested notions of mutuality and equality in interviews, highlighting how differing, as well as shared, structural characteristics can impede mutuality and reciprocity (Coterill 1992; Edwards 1990; Glucksmann 1994; Ramazanoglu 1989; Ribbens 1989; Song and Parker 1995). Catherine Reissman (1987) highlighted that "gender and personal involvement may not be

enough for full 'knowing'" (p. 189; see also Ribbens 1998) while Rosalind Edwards (1993) cautioned that

if . . . we accept that there are structurally based divisions between women on the basis of race and/or class that may lead them to have some different interests and priorities, then what has been said about woman-to-woman interviewing may not apply in all situations. (P. 184)

Reflections on the inevitability of power differentials within research have extended into discussions of the "dangers" of the illusion of equality in research relationships, the ethical dilemmas involved in conducting research with disadvantaged or marginalized women, as well as larger epistemological issues involved in attempting to "know" others. Sociologists have been particularly vocal on the first issue of the potential dangers associated with trying to be "friendly" in interviews. Pamela Cotterill (1992), for example, has drawn attention to the "potentially damaging effects of a research technique which encourages friendship in order to focus on very private and personal aspects of people's lives" (p. 597; see also Stacey 1991). While Western-based social scientists have "worried" over such issues (Fine and Wiess 1996:251; see also DeVault 1999), such dangers have perhaps been best articulated by feminists working in contexts where inequalities are acute, such as in low-income communities and in Third World countries. For example, in her preface to her edited collection on *Feminist Dilemmas in Field Work*, Diane Wolf (1996) discusses how her research inadvertently exacerbated the inequalities between herself and her research subjects in Java, Indonesia:

My research was an attempt to analyze and depict their lives, their situation, and the grueling work of factory jobs. . . . I would go on to finish my dissertation, get a Ph.D., get a job based on a talk about this research, make enough money in one month to sustain an entire village for several, publish, and, I hoped, make a career. The money I gave to people of the organizations I contribute to will not be able to change much in the lives of those I worked with. Despite my good intentions, I was making a situation for myself based on structures of poverty and gender inequality. (P. x; see also Hale 1991; Patai 1991; Zavella 1993)

Ironically, criticisms of male stream theories that excluded women began to haunt feminists trying to come up with alternative methodologies that could also marginalize women, albeit inadvertently. Gesa Kirsch (2005) eloquently articulates this point when she writes,

It is perhaps ironic, then, that scholars are discovering that methodological changes intended to achieve feminist ends—increased collaboration, greater interaction, and more open communication with research participants—may have inadvertently reintroduced some of the ethical dilemmas feminist researchers had hoped to eliminate: participants' sense of disappointment, alienation, and potential exploitation. (P. 2163)

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By the late 1980s, many feminists opposed the idea of there being distinctive feminist methods or methodologies. Instead, they suggested that many feminists were “simply” doing “good” research. For example, in 1990, feminist criminologist Lorraine Gelsthorpe acknowledged the “difficulty of distinguishing between feminist research and simply ‘good’ research” and asked, “Is feminist research merely ‘old wine in new bottles’?” (Gelsthorpe 1990:105).

While others have concurred that feminist research should be “good” research that provides alternatives to mainstream research, it is also the case that, over the past decade, a large body of scholarship has laid out some key underlying principles that are central to much feminist research.

FEMINIST RESEARCH

While it is difficult to argue that there is a specifically feminist method, methodology, or epistemology, it is the case that feminist scholars have embraced particular characteristics in their work. First, feminist researchers have long advocated that feminist research should be not just on women, but *for* women and, where possible, with women (DeVault 1990, 1996; Edwards 1990; Fonow and Cook 1991, 2005; Neilsen 1990; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Reinharz 1992; Smith 1987, 1989, 1999; Stanley and Wise [1983] 1993). Second, feminist researchers have actively engaged with methodological innovation through challenging conventional or mainstream ways of collecting, analyzing, and presenting data (Code 1995; Gelsthorpe 1990; Lather 2001; Lather and Smithies 1997; Mol 2002; Naples 2003; Richardson 1988, 1997). Initially, this involved challenging positivist frameworks and the dominance of quantitative methods and experimenting with novel ways of documenting and representing women’s experiences or everyday worlds. More recently, however, quantitative methods have been accepted and adopted (McCall 2005; Oakley 1998). Indeed, feminist methodological challenges include a diversity of methodological and epistemological approaches (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:2). Third, feminist research is concerned with issues of broader social change and social justice (Fonow and Cook 1991, 2005). According to Beverly Skeggs (1994), feminist research is distinct from nonfeminist research because it “begins from the premise that the nature of reality in western society is unequal and hierarchical” (p. 77). In a similar way, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) note that “feminist research is imbued with particular theoretical, political and ethical concerns that make these varied approaches to social research distinctive” (pp. 2–3).

To these well-established key features of feminist research, we add two further issues—power and reflexivity—which we suggest have become critical within feminist discussions of methods, methodologies, and epistemologies.

Power: Knowing and Representing Others

Feminism’s most compelling epistemological insight lies in the connections it has made between knowledge and power. (Lennon and Whitford 1994)

As discussed above, early feminist discussions took an optimistic view on power relations between the researcher and the researched. Feminist researchers argued that power differentials in research could be minimized by developing nonhierarchical and “friendly” relationships with respondents (e.g., Oakley 1981). Later feminists critiqued this position, pointing to the inevitability of power imbalances in research. Feminist sociologists now recognize that researchers and respondents have a “different and unequal relation to knowledge” (Glucksmann 1994:150) and that within most research projects, “The final shift of power between the researcher and the respondent is balanced in favor of the researcher, for it is she who eventually walks away” (Cotterill 1992:604; see also Reinharz 1992; Stacey 1991; Wolf 1996). The focus of much current feminist scholarship has moved on from the question of *whether* there are power inequalities between researchers and respondents, to consider *how* power influences knowledge production and construction processes.

Questions about who produces knowledge, “Who can be a knower?” (Code 1991), “Whose knowledge?” (Harding 1991), and “Who speaks for whom? (Code 1995; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991) have become critical in contemporary feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial climates. Women of color working within Western contexts and feminists working in Third World settings have highlighted “otherness,” exclusion, racism, and ethnocentrism. Key issues have included the interrelatedness of race and selective entitlement to theory production (Hunter 2004; Sandoval 2000a, 2000b); intersections of global capitalism and feminist transnational identities (Ferguson 2004; Schutte 1993, 1998, 2000; Shohat 2001), the question of whether feminists in dominant cultures can ever *know* subaltern cultures (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Ladson-Billings 2000; Mohanty et al. 1991; Oyewumi 2000; Spivak 1993), the challenges of knowing transnational lesbian and gay identities (Bunch 1987; Gopinath 2005), and the role and representation of subordinate “others” in the production of knowledge (Bernal 2002; Christian 1996).

Issues of power are also present in our attempts to come to know and represent the intimate details of others who live in close proximity to us. Even where researchers and respondents share structural and cultural similarities of, for example, gender, ethnicity, class, and age, this does not guarantee knowing, or “better” knowing. Being an “insider”—whatever this actually means—is not a straightforward route to knowing (Narayan 1993; Olesen 1998; Stanley 1994; Zavella 1993). Feminists have emphasized, and reflected on, the “tensions” and “dilemmas” (e.g., Ribbens and Edwards 1998; Wolf 1996) involved in coming to know and represent the narratives, experiences, or

lives of others. They have questioned how “voices of participants are to be heard, with what authority, and in what form?” (Olesen 1998:315). They have asked *whether* and *how* the “experience” (Scott 1992, 1994) or “voice” (Beiser 1993; Charmaz 1993; Wilkinson 1994) of another can be accessed. They have noted the dangers of presuming to know, speak for, or advocate for others. Lorraine Code (1995) echoes the views of many feminist researchers grappling with power dilemmas around knowing, representing, and advocating for others. She writes,

Only rarely can we presume to understand exactly how it is for someone else even of our own class, race, sexual orientation and social group. These issues become exacerbated when feminists claim to speak for others across the complexities of difference, with the consequences that the politics of speaking for, about, and on behalf of other women is *one of the most contested areas in present day feminist activism and research* [italics added]. (P. 30)

As the site where research participants’ voices, accounts, or narratives become “transformed” into theory, we have argued that the interpretation stages and processes of empirical research are critical to feminist concerns with power, exploitation, knowing, and representation (Doucet and Mauthner 2002; Mauthner and Doucet 1998, 2003; see also Glucksmann 1994). With the exception of participatory research or collaborative research processes (e.g., Code and Burt 1995; Davies et al. 2004; Ristock and Pennell 1996; Siltanen, Willis, and Scobie, forthcoming), the analysis and interpretation of others’ narratives usually take place “back in the office,” in isolation from our respondents, research users, and colleagues. Both the analytic processes and the “raw” narrative transcripts tend to remain hidden and invisible. This, we suggest, compels researchers to be reflexive about these processes of interpretation and power and how methodology and epistemology intertwine during this phase of research. We argue for accountable and responsible knowing and emphasize the critical importance of being reflexive and transparent about our knowledge construction processes (see Doucet and Mauthner 2002; Mauthner and Doucet 1998, 2003).

While feminists have long debated issues of power vis-à-vis research respondents “in the field,” only recently have they turned this critical reflexive gaze onto their practices and relationships with collaborators “in the office,” and the influence of institutional power dynamics on what becomes “known” and how (Gillies, Jessop, and Lucey, forthcoming; Mauthner and Edwards, forthcoming). One of the challenges feminists face is how to create egalitarian and collaborative research practices and relationships, within the context of “new managerialist” hierarchical higher education institutions (Mauthner and Edwards, forthcoming). The personal, political, and ethical dilemmas that arise in negotiating the dynamic relations of power that structure and sustain the institutions and practices through which research knowledge is produced is becoming a key issue within feminist research debates.

Reflexivity

The issue of reflexivity and the ways in which “our subjectivity becomes entangled in the lives of others” (Denzin 1997:27) has concerned sociologists, anthropologists, and cross-disciplinary feminist scholars for decades and philosophers for even longer (Kuhn 1962; Quine 1969; Rorty 1969). Feminist sociologists have been particularly vocal on this point, and reflexivity has come to be regarded as one of the pivotal themes in discussions of feminist research (DeVault 1996; Fonow and Cook 1991, 2005; Gelsthorpe 1990; Naples 2003; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Most feminist researchers openly reflect on, acknowledge, and document their social location and the roles they play in co-creating data and in constructing knowledges (Harding 1993a; Hertz 1997; Wolf 1996). In this expanding area of scholarship, four key areas have attracted the attention and commitment of feminist researchers.

First, while reflexivity is largely a point of consensus for feminist researchers, recent attention has underlined theoretical diversity within the concept itself. Nancy Naples (2003:214), for example, argues for the use of the term “reflective practice” since it indicates a more thoughtful process and does not invoke the often-unconscious responses to stimuli associated with reflex.⁷ Others have pointed to “strong” and “weak” reflexivity as ways of accounting for its varied degrees of reflexivity as well as its links to “strong” objectivity⁶ (Harding 1993a, 1998; Wasserfall 1994). Reflexivity has also been linked to “accountability,” as a way of accounting for the knowledge produced (Code 1995; Doucet and Mauthner 2002; Hurtado 1996; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Recent discussions have drawn attention to the constraints on reflexivity, owing to our partial awareness of the range of influences impacting on our research, and the unpredictable ways in which our work will be read (Bordo 1997; Grosz 1995; Mauthner and Doucet 2003; Mauthner, Parry, and Backett-Milburn 1998). We have suggested the notion of “reflexivity in retrospect” as a way of viewing research and the knowledge produced as a continuous and open-ended process that changes as researchers revisit their data and as new researchers reanalyze old data sets (Mauthner and Doucet 2003).

A second theme within feminist debates on reflexivity concerns the partial, provisional, and perspectival nature of knowledge claims. The production of theory is viewed as a social activity, which is culturally, socially, and historically embedded, thus resulting in “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988). The “reflexive turn,” combined with the “extensive ‘turn to culture’ in feminism” (Barrett 1992:204), has, however, created a sense of uncertainty and crisis as increasingly complex questions are raised concerning the status, validity, basis, and authority of the author and their knowledge claims (Bordo 1997; Grosz 1995; Richardson 1988, 1997). This has particular implications for feminist emancipatory goals in that feminists

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have been left to grapple with how to make “real” political claims from their work (e.g., Benhabib 1995; Lazreg 1994; Sellaer 1988; Smith 1999).

A third area where feminist sociologists have given significant attention concerns issues of reflexive positioning in research projects (see, e.g., Hertz 1997; Letherby 2002; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). This reflexive positioning tends to take the form of positioning in terms of subject positions such as gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and geographical location. This predominant approach to reflexivity has, however, been criticized. By focusing on the researcher’s own subject positions, the discussion of reflexivity tends to remain fixed at the level of the researcher and how their subjectivity—especially in fieldwork and in writing up—influences research. An illustration of this weakness is Shulamit Reinharz’s (1997) piece, “Who Am I,” in which she reflects on her “20 different selves” (p. 5) and their influence on the research process, particularly fieldwork. These reflections may be useful in underlining the complexity of “self” in practical terms during research, but their inadvertent consequence is that the researcher—the privileged, often white, often middle class, and First World researcher—takes center stage. While engaged in dialogues about decentering the West, feminist researchers from Western industrialized countries simultaneously put themselves at the center while marginalizing the Third World narrator (Hale 1991). A further critique is that naming subject positionings does not address the question of *how* these subject positionings affect knowledge construction. As Daphne Patai (1991) argues, these gestures at self-positioning are often “deployed as badges”; they are meant to represent “one’s respect to ‘difference’ but do not affect any aspect of the research or the interpretive text” (p. 149). While social locations are important, reflexivity also means *actively reflecting on* personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological, and ontological influences on our research and interpretive processes. That is, how do these reflexive positionings actually shape research practices and the knowledges that are ultimately produced?

While feminist researchers have recognized that reflexivity is important in data analysis, and in knowledge construction more generally (Mason 2002; Olesen et al. 1994; Pidgeon and Henwood 1997), the question remains as to how researchers can “do” reflexivity within the context of empirical research practice, and particularly the analysis and interpretation of narratives. As well stated by Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002): “Feminism has been stronger on honourable intentions for accessing power relations than on effective skills and strategies to enable

researchers to overcome limits of understanding, and the difficulty of seeing ourselves as others see us” (p. 119).

CONCLUSIONS

Over the past three decades, there have been multiple intersections between feminism and the fields of methodology and epistemology. While initially claiming a particular privileged place around the names of “feminist methods,” “feminist methodologies,” and “feminist epistemologies,” greater attention to diversity and complexity in feminist efforts to research and “know” the lives of others, whether across the globe or within one’s local community, has meant that feminists have come to see themselves, and be seen by others, as key contributors to these burgeoning bodies of scholarship. Feminist research has become a well-used term for the work that feminists do when they take on either qualitative or quantitative research that is driven by, and aimed toward, a desire to challenge multiple hierarchies of inequalities within social life. Feminist scholars have made significant contributions to both mainstream and alternative thinking around issues of power, knowing, representation, reflexivity, and legitimation in methodological and epistemological discussions. Feminist sociologists have been particularly prominent in their participation in advancing such knowledge.

While the rich multidisciplinary feminist scholarship on methodologies and epistemologies and the development of a specific field of scholarship under the name of “feminist research,” has been nothing short of overwhelming in the past few decades, several areas of work still require attention. Such areas include the challenges for feminists in making sense of, and theorizing, men’s experiences (Doucet 2004; Grenz 2005; Presser 2005; Taylor and Rupp 2005); grappling with power in the internal workings of the research process, especially hierarchies of inequalities within feminist research teams and collaborations (see Mauthner and Edwards, forthcoming); greater attention to linking “knowing and doing” (Letherby 2002) and methodologies and epistemologies (e.g., Code 1995; Holland and Ramazanoglu 1994; Maynard 1994; Naples 2003; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002); and actualizing what it means to “do” reflexivity, or to enact what Harding has called “strong reflexivity” (1993a) and “robust reflexivity” (1998). In the words of Lorraine Code, feminist researchers must continue in their efforts to reflect on and write about what it means to “know responsibly, to “know well” (see Code 1984, 1988, 1993, 1995) and to “create exemplary kinds of knowing” (Code 1993:39). Feminist sociologists are well positioned to lead such efforts.

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feature that the subsequent repair marks as the trouble source, such as “I had wanted to.” Through a repair the speaker may achieve an alternation of a conveyed meaning even if the original item was not false in any independent sense. Sometimes a distinction is drawn between repairs and corrections that handle errors having an independent existence (see Schegloff et al. 1977).

Chapter 4. Humanist Sociology

1. Although Max Weber and Georg Simmel offered alternatives to positivism, they did not, except as private citizens, embrace a moral imperative.

2. An irony here is that although Sumner was an ordained minister and a practicing Christian, his sociology was devoid of any religious or moral underpinnings.

3. Jane Addams was baptized at the age of 27 and saw this as more of a joining of a community than as a religious commitment (Linn [1937] 2000).

4. Deegan (1988:161) offers the interesting interpretation that although Park and Burgess’s quarrel was with the religiosity of the early male Chicago sociologists, they did not openly confront them on this point and instead attacked Jane Addams and the women of Hull-House as unscientific social workers.

5. Although Small and Giddings were at odds regarding the direction that sociological research should take, and there is evidence of personal animosity between them (see Bannister 1987), neither wavered in his commitment to a Christian-based sociology and its use in spreading the social gospel.

6. Space limitations preclude the inclusion of such others as Luther Barnard (1881–1951), Robert Lynd (1892–1970), Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968), and Willard Waller (1899–1945), who also kept the humanistic tradition alive.

7. Mills’s B.A. and M.A. from the University of Texas were in philosophy. He chose to do doctoral work in sociology at the University of Wisconsin because the sociology department offered him a larger fellowship than he was offered in philosophy (Scimecca 1977).

8. Lee also was a cofounder of another sociological association, the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), in 1953. In addition, he was elected to the presidency of the American Sociological Association in 1976 as a write-in candidate.

Chapter 5. Feminist Methodologies and Epistemology

1. Although Harding refers to the third stream as “transitional” epistemologies in her earlier work (Harding 1987b), she later refers to this category as “postmodern” epistemologies (see Harding 1991).

2. Empiricism is the view that experience provides the sole, or at least the primary, justification for all knowledge. From the classical empiricists to some early twentieth-century theorists, empiricists held that the content of experience could be described in fixed, basic, theory-neutral terms—for example, in terms of sense data. Philosophy was regarded as a discipline that could provide a transcendent or external justification for empirical or scientific methods. Quine (1969) revolutionized empiricism by rejecting both these ideas. Quine argued that observation is

thoroughly theory laden. It is cast in terms of complex concepts that cannot be immediately given in experience, all of which are potentially subject to revision in light of further experience.

3. Part of the problem with understanding feminist empiricism is that Harding initially provided such a slim and distorted picture of what this was. Indeed as argued by sociologist Gregor McLennan (1995), “Given her initial characterization of what empiricism involves, it comes as no surprise that Harding can find no real life advocates of feminist empiricism” (p. 394). In her later work, Harding (1991, 1993a) distinguished between the “original spontaneous” feminist empiricism and a recent philosophical version as found, she notes, in her fellow authors (Longino 1993; Nelson 1993) in the collection titled *Feminist Epistemologies*. Here, she acknowledges that Longino and Nelson “have developed sophisticated and valuable feminist empiricist philosophies of science” (Harding 1993a:51).

4. The difficulty with describing feminist standpoint is that there are many versions of it (Harding 1987b, 1991, 1993a; Hartsock 1983, 1985; Jaggar 1983; Rose 1983; Smith 1974, 1987, 1999) and it has been widely critiqued (e.g., Flax 1990; Hekman 1997; Walby 2001). Feminist standpoint epistemology has been criticized for implying there is an essential woman (Collins 2000), for giving epistemic privilege to gender oppression over other kinds of oppressions (Bar On 1993), for prioritizing the “unique abilities of the oppressed to produce knowledge” (Harding 1991:57), and for assuming that the “standpoints” of the oppressed have not been tainted by dominant ideologies (Flax 1990; Hawkesworth 1989; Holmwood 1995).

5. Ann Oakley (1998, 2000) has since qualified her views on this.

6. Harding (1991, 1993a) writes about the links between “strong reflexivity” and “strong objectivity” in the construction of feminist epistemologies. Specifically, she argues,

A notion of *strong objectivity* [italics added] would require that the objects of inquiry be conceptualized as gazing back in all their cultural particularity and that the researcher, through theory and methods, stand behind them, gazing back at his own socially situated research project in all its cultural particularity and its relationship to other projects of his culture—many of which . . . can be seen only from locations far away from the scientist’s actual daily work. (Harding 1991:163)

Chapter 6. Feminist Theories

1. As Eldridge et al. (2000) point out, feminism is not the only social movement to have challenged sociology’s partial standpoint: for example, “as sociology became the chosen discipline for members of disenfranchised groups entering the academy, its own partisanship was unmasked” (p. 4).

2. Stories of their appearances, their experiences, their demands, and the resistance to those demands are legion, though for the most part unwritten (Laslett and Thorne 1997; Hamilton 1984, 2003).

3. This is, of course, similar to all theoretical traditions, though not always as acknowledged as in Alan Sica’s (1995) recent comment: “Theoretical action . . . it’s in that part of the Magical Theory bibliothèque where history, philosophy, aesthetics, nonexperimental psychology, aesthetics, nonexperimental psychology, ethics, economics, and politics share some common turf” (p. 6).

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