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AN INVITATION TO FEMINIST RESEARCH

Abigail Brooks

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber

RIDING THE TRAIN WITH ALICE AND MARIE

On a recent train ride between New York City and Boston, Sharlene was struck by a conversation between two college-aged women sitting nearby. Because these young women were talking about feminists and their ideas, Sharlene couldn't help being interested in what they had to say. In the course of their talk, it became clear that these young women, whom we'll call Alice and Marie, were attending an Ivy League university and had gone to private schools most of their lives. Here is a short excerpt from their conversation as Sharlene recalls it:

Alice: I really think feminists have gone too far, they think that women are treated unfairly all the time. Just the other day, I ran across one of my high school friends and she's really changed—she wasn't wearing any makeup and she'd cut off all her hair and it was really short and her clothes, you know, she didn't look feminine at all! Anyway, she

was ranting and raving about how women are underpaid and they are harassed in the workplace. I couldn't even listen to her. You know?

Marie: These women are so ideological; they are so radical and have no facts to back them up! My friend Sally is just the same, she goes on and on about inequality. I have never been discriminated against and I feel like the women's movement is something passé. These girls just can't get over it. You know?

As we embark on the journey of this book, we can't help thinking about this train ride conversation and want to share it with you. In many ways, Alice and Marie's ideas about feminist identity and what feminism means are framed by their everyday experiences. As white middle- to upper-middle-class females who attend a highly esteemed Ivy League school, they may not have bumped up against gender discrimination in their own daily lives. Feminism does not appear to be a central aspect of Alice and Marie's world, nor does it inform the lives of individuals in their personal and familial networks. For both Alice and Marie, the issues feminists advocate are a thing of the past—feminist concerns with issues of social justice and social change for women are primarily ideological in nature and don't really exist. Alice and Marie also hold stereotypical ideas and views about feminists (no makeup, short hair, and a lack of femininity), and they view them as a single, unified category that implies all feminists come with the same political ideas as well as body image.

What would we say to Marie and Alice about feminists and feminism if we had the opportunity to engage in a conversation? We would begin by saying that feminists come in all sizes, shapes, and colors. Some dress up in high-fashion clothing from Neiman Marcus and have long hair. Some don't have enough money to buy makeup or fashionable clothing; some do not buy into these ideas of beauty and fashion. Some are married and partnered with or without children, others are single, some are straight, some are transgendered, and some are gay. Some are religious and some are not. The notion that there is a proper way to look, act, and behave in the world as a feminist is to reinforce the stereotype that distances both Alice and Marie from feminist concerns and issues.

Feminists hail from different classes, races, and cultures and have lived through different life experiences. While many share some common goals, such as gender equality, social justice for women, and an emphasis on the

concerns and issues of women and other oppressed groups, not all feminists are cut from the same cloth, nor do they share the same values, perspectives, and interests. Alice knows a feminist who has short hair, doesn't wear makeup, holds strong convictions, and is an activist. While Alice views these characteristics negatively, they can easily be understood as positive attributes, and conjure up positive associations with feminism, for another. But where Alice and Marie's conclusion really goes wrong—and requires an impossible leap of logic—is in the assumption that all feminists have short hair, wear no makeup, and hold the same views and perspectives.

Alice and Marie may not have encountered any gender-related bias, discrimination, oppression, or struggle in their own daily lives. It is imperative, however, to recognize that most feminist views and perspectives are not simply ideas, or ideologies, but *rooted in the very real lives, struggles, and experiences of women*. In fact, Alice and Marie's apparent lack of gender-related discrimination and bias in their own daily lives can be attributed, in large part, to the ongoing hard work and activism on the part of women throughout the last several decades. The gains and contributions that feminist researchers and activists have made toward overcoming widespread gender stereotypes and improving women's rights and equality across the globe are significant and should not be taken for granted. It is only in the last 25 to 35 years that many colleges and institutions of higher learning have opened their doors to women. Laws protecting women against sexual harassment in the workplace did not come to fruition until the early 1990s. Women are entering the workforce and joining previously male-dominated professions such as law, business, and medicine in increasing numbers, and gender-based discrimination in hiring and promotions has declined. On the other hand, women continue to earn only 70% of the salary men earn in equivalent positions, and they are underrepresented in the fields of science and engineering and in upper-level positions in law, business, and medicine. A lack of affordable child care and inflexible corporate environments can make balancing work and family difficult for many working women. The feminization of poverty is increasing—women and girls make up a large and growing percentage of the world's poor—and violence against women and girls continues to expand globally in new and particularly virulent forms (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005).

Thousands of women from all points on the globe face a diverse array of challenges on a daily basis, and there are many different struggles and actions that we, as women, engage with and participate in. Those described above are

only a few of the many women-centered issues and concerns that continue to motivate feminist activists and underscore the need for feminist, women-centered research. It is probably safe to say, however, that most feminists, whether activists, researchers, or both, continue to share some central concerns, goals, and commitments, including giving voice to women's lives and experiences, improving the quality and life chances and choices for women and girls, and overcoming gender inequality and the oppression of women.

WHAT IS FEMINIST RESEARCH?

Feminist research is primarily “connected in principle to feminist struggle” (Sprague & Zimmerman, 1993, p. 266). By documenting women's lives, experiences, and concerns, illuminating gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women's subjugated knowledge, feminist research challenges the basic structures and ideologies that oppress women. Feminist research goals foster empowerment and emancipation for women and other marginalized groups, and feminist researchers often apply their findings in the service of promoting social change and social justice for women.

Just as we cannot reduce all women to one group with a uniform experience, race, class, or culture, there is no one single method, methodology, or epistemology that informs feminist research. Feminist researchers hold different perspectives, ask different questions, draw from a wide array of methods and methodologies, and apply multiple lenses that heighten our awareness of sexist, racist, homophobic, and colonialist ideologies and practices. Some feminists use traditional methodologies but ask new sets of questions that include women's issues and concerns, while others rework, or even radically upset, traditional epistemologies and methodologies. In fact, to unearth hidden aspects of women's lives and those of other oppressed groups, and to reclaim subjugated knowledge, some feminist researchers continue to develop new epistemologies, methodologies, and methods of knowledge building altogether.

Feminist research is a holistic endeavor that incorporates all stages of the research process, from the theoretical to the practical, from the formulation of research questions to the write-up of research findings. Feminist researchers emphasize the synergy and interlinkages between epistemology, methodology, and method and are interested in the different ways that a researcher's perspective on reality interacts with, and influences, how she goes about

collecting and analyzing her data (Charmaz, 2006; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). An *epistemology* is “a theory of knowledge” that delineates a set of assumptions about the social world and about who can be a knower and what can be known (Harding, 1987, p. 3). The researcher makes decisions rooted in these assumptions that influences what is studied (based on what *can* be studied) and how the study is conducted. A *methodology* is a theory of how research is done or should proceed (p. 3). Finally, a *method* is a “technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence” (p. 2).

It is the primary task of this book to provide you with a hands-on understanding of how feminists build knowledge through the practice of research. This means introducing you not only to the theories developed by feminist researchers that inform feminist research, but also to *how feminist researchers actually go about applying these theories in their research projects*. What is the relationship between a particular theory of knowledge building, or epistemological framework, the questions a feminist researcher asks, and the methods she uses to collect her data? And how might the questions a feminist researcher asks influence her choice of research methods and shape her epistemological framework? In this book, we hope to expose you to the diverse range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks, methodologies, methods, and research questions that make up feminist research. Finally, we cannot underestimate the interconnection between feminist research and activism. In this book, you will learn about the different ways that activism forms an integral component and motivation for feminists at all stages of the research process: from questions, to methods, to findings.

THE ORIGINS OF FEMINIST RESEARCH

To discuss feminist research without any mention of feminist activism would be nonsensical, even impossible, because feminist research *originated within the context of the second wave feminist movement*.¹ As female scholars and students participated in feminist consciousness-raising groups throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, they became increasingly aware of glaring contradictions between their lived experiences as women and mainstream research models, studies, and findings. In the words of feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith, the theories and methods being taught did not apply to “what was happening” as the female students “experienced it” (Smith, 1987, p. 86). These

contradictions led early feminist scholars to illuminate a shortcoming within a range of academic disciplines and in mainstream social science research, namely the omission of women and the lack of accurate representation of women's experiences. Women were often left out of scholarship and research samples all together, and research topics consistently failed to take women's activities and experiences into account. Furthermore, mainstream theoretical and methodological frameworks often proved ineffective, falling short of fully reflecting women's perspectives. The failure of academic scholarship and mainstream research to "give voice" to women's activities, experiences, and perspectives provoked early feminist scholars and researchers to seek remedies for these omissions. These remedies included the reworking of traditional theoretical and methodological techniques and the creation of new research models altogether.

THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF POSITIVISM

By calling attention to the invisibility of their experiences in social science research and to the contradictions between their lived experiences as women and mainstream social science findings, feminists launched a powerful critique of one of the most broad-reaching paradigms in social science—positivism.² Positivism originated in the late 1800s and evolved out of the European rationalist and empiricist movements. Rationalist thought, characterized by the Cartesian mind-body split and the privileging of the mind over the bodily, subjective, and emotional realms, and empiricism, with its emphasis on objective observation and its origins in the scientific revolution, combined to form the basis for the positivist paradigm in sociology. Positivist social scientists, like rationalists and empiricists, assert the existence of an objective reality, or truth, lying out there to be discovered. They also advocate the application of particular methods for the accurate illumination of that objective reality.

Within the positivist paradigm, it is the external or objective reality that serves as the basis of "fact" and "truth" and it is within this objective reality that pure, invariable, and universal knowledge must be sought after and potentially realized. The classic sociologist Émile Durkheim (1938/1965), following within the positivist tradition, distinguishes facts from values: values stem from individual consciousness and thus are mere interpretation, riddled with variability, whereas facts lie "outside of the human mind," have

an “independent existence outside of the individual consciousness,” and are therefore objective, unchanging, and free from contamination. In other words, facts, “far from being a product of the will . . . determine it from without” (p. 20).

In promoting the discovery of “facts” to increase knowledge of objective reality and universal, unchanging truth, positivists advocate the use of objective and neutral instruments of measurement as applied by the objective and value-free researcher. John W. Murphy states, “Positivism implies that methodological techniques are value-free. . . . By following certain techniques, interpretation can be overcome and facts revealed” (Murphy, 1989, p. 38). In *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim (1938/1965) provides us with a set of guidelines, or methods, that must necessarily be applied to conduct objective, value-free research and will ultimately lead to the discovery of universal truth, absolute knowledge, or in Durkheim’s words, “social facts.” The methods advocated by Durkheim are largely quantitative in nature, and positivism continues to provide an epistemological grounding for quantitative research. Quantitative researchers often use survey data and statistical analysis to test hypotheses and causal relationships, to measure and predict large-scale patterns, and to produce findings that are considered generalizable.

By starting from women’s previously invisible experiences, exposing the underrepresentation of these experiences within the positivist research paradigm, and finally, highlighting the ways in which women’s experiences often contradicted mainstream research findings, feminists posed a serious challenge to the so-called value neutrality of positivistic social science. Feminist scholars and researchers’ illumination of women’s experiences disrupted the positivist claim to universal knowledge, and the so-called objective methodologies that accompanied and justified that claim. Indeed, feminists exposed the dominance of the positivist paradigm as stemming not from its objectivity or its universality, but from its privileged location within a historical, material, and social set of patriarchal power relations. In short, despite all claims to the contrary, knowledge building was never value-free, social reality was not static, and positivism or social scientific inquiry in general did not exist outside of the social world.

The following Behind-the-Scenes piece consists of an excerpt from an interview with renowned feminist scholar and philosopher Sandra Harding, titled “Starting from Marginalized Lives: A Conversation with Sandra Harding” and conducted by Elizabeth Hirsch and Gary A. Olson (1995). In it,

Harding challenges positivist claims to objectivity and value neutrality and critiques the traditional standards and methods that accompany these claims. She illuminates the various ways that women have been excluded and marginalized from dominant Western knowledge canons throughout the course of history. However, unlike some feminist researchers and scholars, Harding does not reject the concept of “objectivity” altogether. Instead, she reclaims, redefines, and renames it “strong objectivity,” such that the experiences and voices of marginalized others, including women, are not only incorporated but serve as the starting point for building knowledge. Researchers and scholars who practice “strong objectivity” do not begin from a position of so-called value neutrality. They have a clear political and social commitment to strengthening the truthfulness and objectivity of knowledge claims—in other words, to taking the voices and experiences of the silenced and marginalized into account.

Behind-the-Scenes With Sandra Harding

Q. In many of your works you have argued that “maximizing objectivity in social research requires not total value neutrality, but instead, a commitment by the researcher to certain social values.” You then demonstrate that “social research directed *by certain* social values can be more objective than research in which these values play no role.” Would you elaborate on this notion of “strong objectivity”?

A. For one thing, there’s a certain range of social values (if you want to talk about it that way) and interests that the conventional standards for objectivity have no way of getting at—namely, the values or interests that are shared by an entire, let me put it in these terms, “scientific community.” This is not a problem that feminism or, certainly, that I have invented. It’s one that Kuhn is talking about when he’s discussing paradigm shifts; it’s the problem of the episteme. There’s a long history by now, three decades or more, of suspicion in the West that the objectivity that the West prizes so highly has been flawed and that the standard ways of trying to maximize it in fact have not been effective. Again, I’m trying to indicate it’s not just the “radical” groups that have raised this; it’s somebody like Richard Bernstein, for instance. In his *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, he reviews the problems in a variety of different social science and philosophic tendencies that are associated with a notion of objectivity, and in each case it seems to come down to pretty much the same thing: the paradigms, the conceptual

frameworks, within which methods are defined. Those methods can't then turn around their lens and look at the conceptual framework that generated them in the first place, right? And that, of course, has been the kind of argument that's been so powerfully mounted in feminism and antiracism and so on. The issue is not the sexism of individuals; it's the androcentric assumptions of the conceptual schemes of philosophy, of sociology, of economics.

Let me give some pointed examples from my own discipline. Look at the dominant conceptions of human nature in philosophic traditions. Aristotle says that man is a rational animal, and yet women have been persistently described, by him and everybody else all the way up, as emotional, as concerned with their passions, as irrational. So we would say that you can't add "women as rational animals" to a conceptual scheme that in the first place has been defined *against* the feminine. It ends up that a rational woman is in a certain sense a contradiction in terms of that conceptual scheme. But that's an assumption that escapes notice until you try to bring into that category a group that's been excluded from it. Aristotle also says that what's distinctive about man is that he's a political animal—he constructs his way of life through public discourse, public meetings—and yet women have been excluded from participation in the public realm. We could pretty much go through every definition of what's distinctively human and notice that women have been excluded from it. The "worker" that Marx is particularly concerned with: women have been excluded from positions in wage labor of the sort that Marx had in mind when he was looking at the nineteenth-century proletariat. Then we could come to "humans as language users," and yet a good woman is like a child: seen but not heard. Women have not been permitted public speech. We could look at sociology's ways of defining community as constructed by public and visible and dramatic actors rather than the informal and less-visible and less-dramatic ways in which women and other minority groups have in fact contributed to community organization. We could look at any discipline and see that the standard methods for maximizing objectivity are unable to get at these large widely shared assumptions and interests that in fact define the conceptual framework of the field. Another way to put the issue is that the way scientific method in any discipline tries to identify and eliminate social factors is by repeating observations across individuals—you repeat the experiment, having somebody else test out the validity of your claims—but if all the people who are repeating the experiment share

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the same values, as members of any culture would do, then that method is flawed. So, a strong objectivity is an attempt to develop stronger standards. Feminists and antiracists and other members of the new social movements have certainly criticized the notion of objectivity in a variety of ways, but for the most part they want *more* objective accounts. We need more objective accounts of how our bodies work, how the international political economy works, what causes environmental destruction, what effects industrialization is going to have on the environment and on the social structure, and so forth. We don't need *less* objective accounts, and we don't need subjective accounts. The problem is that we've *had* subjective accounts—or ethnocentric accounts, I guess we could call them. So, strong objectivity is an issue, to put it in an extremely simplistic way, of learning to see ourselves as others see us. (What's that Robert Burns said, "Oh, would some power the gift give us/To see ourselves as others see us!";?) It's an argument for stepping outside of the conceptual framework, starting off research projects, starting off our thought about any particular phenomenon, from outside the dominant conceptual framework. Marginal lives are at least one good place, one good strategy for doing that. Starting off thinking about Western conceptions of rationality from the lives of people who have been excluded and who are claimed to be constitutionally unable to exhibit that rationality—racial minorities, the working class, lesbians and gays, women of ethnic groups of various sorts—is a good way to be able to identify those widely shared values and interests that have framed the dominant ways of thinking about the notion of rationality.

SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from Hirsch and Olson (1995).

In many respects, feminist empiricism (discussed in the next section) embodies the practice of "strong objectivity." Most feminist empiricists remain committed to the achievability of objective research findings. However, they critique the claims to objectivity and value neutrality within traditional, positivist research methods and findings because such methods and findings fail to take women's lives and experiences into account. Feminist empiricists seek to produce stronger, more objective, more truthful results through including women in their research studies and by documenting women's lives and experiences that have been previously marginalized or left out of dominant knowledge canons altogether.

FEMINIST MODIFICATIONS TO THE POSITIVIST PARADIGM

Some feminist researchers continue to find affinity with the basic epistemological and methodological characteristics of positivist research (that objective, value-free knowledge exists and is attainable through the application of neutral, value-free instruments of measurement) but advocate reworking traditional positivist approaches to include women's experiences. Other feminist researchers discard positivism altogether and focus on the development of alternative epistemological and methodological frameworks, and they may favor qualitative research as more consistent with their research objectives and guiding epistemological beliefs.

Feminist researchers who remain committed to the basic tenets of positivism, such as the potential application of value-free research methods and the attainment of objective research findings, are often termed *feminist empiricists*.³ However, feminist empiricists have sought to improve the accuracy and objectivity of positivist research by modifying traditional positivist methods to take women's activities and experiences into account. They have also pushed for the inclusion of women in research samples, guided research toward topics and issues that hold relevance for women, and remodeled some traditional, positivist methods to ensure greater reflection of women's experiences. Some feminist empiricists assert that these new positivist research techniques, inclusive of women's activities and experiences, increase the potential for neutral, objective, and generalizable research findings.

New empirical data gathered by feminist researchers have contributed to "setting the record straight" by revealing the previously silenced or forgotten experiences of many women. Feminist researchers have also drawn on the strengths of empiricism to document the social construction of gender roles and to garner new empirical evidence that challenges dominant norms of femininity. For example, the archival research conducted by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (1991) teaches us about the courage and skill of an American midwife practicing in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Joan M. Jensen (1977) uses archival data to document the political power and control wielded by the Native American women of the Seneca tribe in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Ruth Milkman's (1987) archival content analysis documents the American media's radical reconstruction and deconstruction of women's roles during and immediately after WWII, while Emily Martin's (1991) narrative

analysis reveals a prevalence of gender stereotypes and biases imbedded in the descriptions of reproduction in mainstream medical and biology textbooks. These are just a few examples of the wealth of empirical data collected by feminist researchers that expose previously unknown and/or repressed experiences of women and disrupt traditional, essentialist beliefs pertaining to women's capacities and behaviors. By collecting new empirical data, feminist researchers continue to remedy the shortcomings and omissions, and even to improve the objectivity and empirical accuracy, of mainstream research studies, models, and findings. The vast contributions of feminist empiricists are reviewed in Chapter 2 of this book.

FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES TO THE POSITIVIST PARADIGM

As noted above, many feminist researchers, feminist empiricists among them, continue to rework and modify aspects of the positivist paradigm such that women's experiences are included *while adhering to* the basic positivist principles and goals of objective, value-free research methods and the potential for neutral, generalizable research findings. Other feminist scholars and researchers (including, more recently, some feminist empiricists) have embarked on a more fundamental critique of the positivist paradigm, challenging the methodological techniques that accompany it and the epistemological assumptions that inform it. Instead of modifying positivist methods to improve the potential for conducting value-free research that yields objective, universal findings, many feminists openly question the viability and utility of neutral, value-free research methods and the positivist concept of objectivity itself. They ask, Can so-called value-free research give full voice to women's knowledge and experiences? Finally, the methodologies that flow from positivism often rely on a strict separation between the knower and that which is conceptualized as knowable. Put differently, there is a sharp divide between the subject and object, the researcher and the researched. In positivist research models, the researcher may be privileged as the knowing party and placed on a higher plane than the researched. Many feminists question the utility and ethics of such a design.

These feminist researchers and scholars argue that to more fully illuminate women's knowledge and experiences, we must engage in what Dorothy

Smith terms an “alternative way of thinking” (Smith, 1990, p. 20) about research and knowledge building.⁴ This alternative way of thinking refutes the positivist notion that there exists a fixed and unchanging social reality, or some truth lying “out there” to be discovered, and the viability of the objective researcher and neutral, value-free tools of empirical observation. Most important, however, this approach incorporates interpretation, subjectivity, emotion, and embodiment into the knowledge-building process, elements historically associated with women and excluded from mainstream, positivist research. Indeed, many feminist researches and scholars have begun to illuminate potential new sources of knowledge and understanding precisely *within* the lived experiences, interpretations, subjectivities, and emotions of women. Instead of viewing these aspects as contaminants or barriers to uncovering *the objective truth*, feminist researchers explain how paying attention to the specific experiences and situated perspectives of human beings, both researchers and respondents alike, may actually become a *tool* for knowledge building and rich understanding.

Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990), Donna Haraway (1991), Alison Jaggar (1997), and Helen Longino (1999) are just a few of the feminist scholars and researchers who continue to expand the potential for new and meaningful forms of inquiry outside the positivist, empirical framework. Joyce McCarl Nielsen calls our attention to the fact that all researchers carry their particular worldviews, histories, and biographies with them into their research projects, while Donna Haraway explores the situated aspects of knowledge building. According to Nielson, worldviews are not necessarily corrupters of knowledge or truth, but instead can be understood as “maps” that guide researchers to particular research topics with which they find affinity, or to particular respondents with whom they share rapport. Similarly, Haraway argues that our situated location—our particular biography, history, and positionality—does not have to be perceived as a barrier to achieving knowledge or truth but instead can offer each of us a unique way of seeing the world, a “focusing device” so to speak, through which we may be able to catch, see, and/or understand phenomena in ways that others cannot.

Helen Longino and Alison Jaggar illuminate the interconnections between knowledge and the body and knowledge and emotion. By reclaiming the bodily and emotional realms as sources of knowledge, Longino and Jaggar actively refute the rationalist, Cartesian mind-body split (for Descartes, the body was associated with irrationality, emotion, and deception—it was only

the mind, or the “disembodied self,” that could perform acts of pure reason) and the positivist, empirical tradition of the detached, objective, value-free observer. Longino (1999) argues that knowledge *is* “possible for the embodied subject” and that our bodies are situated in “particular places, in particular times, oriented in a particular way to their environments” (p. 133). The situated locations of our bodies serve not as contaminants to building knowledge but instead as potential “cognitive resources” that direct our attention to “features . . . that we would *otherwise overlook* [italics added]” (p. 335). On a similar note, Jaggar urges us not to cleanse ourselves of our emotions to achieve some notion of objective truth or knowledge but instead to pay closer attention to our emotions and listen to them more carefully. For Jaggar, emotions are a “necessary feature of all knowledge and conceptions of knowledge” (Jaggar, 1997, p. 190). Emotions give our lives meaning and contribute to our survival—they prompt us when to “caress or cuddle,” when to “fight or flee” (p. 191).

These feminist scholars and researchers profess that by discarding positivist assumptions of the value-free researcher, the actuality of an objective reality, and the realizability of universal, fixed, and objective truth, we do not lose the ability to build knowledge. In fact, rather than dismissing human emotions and subjectivities, unique lived experiences, and worldviews as contaminants or barriers to the quest for knowledge, we might embrace these elements to gain new insights and understandings, or in other words, *new knowledge*. After all, why do researchers who could study any number of topics, from any number of angles, end up selecting a particular topic? A researcher’s personal experience, emotions, and worldview may serve as the impetus for the creation of a research project or guide the choice of a research topic. For example, if domestic violence or disordered eating has touched your life in some way or you feel compelled to work toward the equality and safety of women or girls, this may be an area you are particularly interested in studying. Rather than being removed from your passions, your research project may be derived from them, or at least from your interests, which have been shaped by many things.

This feminist epistemological framework offers a *new* form and application of inquiry that is necessarily inclusive of, and pays close attention to, elements such as personal experience, subjectivity, positionality, worldview, and emotion. As Helen Longino explains, this new form of feminist inquiry

is at once “*honest and value laden*” (Longino, 1999, p. 349). But how do feminist researchers actually go about collecting their data within this new feminist epistemological framework? And how do issues of experience, positionality, subjectivity, emotionality, and embodiment interact with the feminist research process and influence the kinds of questions feminists ask and the methods they use? Here we can draw from Dorothy Smith’s (1990) statement about sociology—“If sociology cannot avoid being situated then sociology should take that as its beginning and build it into its methodological strategies” (p. 22)—and apply it to the multiple disciplines within which feminists are conducting research. In this book you will be introduced to feminists’ new and innovative use of interviewing, oral history, and ethnography techniques. For instance, we will explore collaborative interviewing styles whereby the “interaction” between researcher and respondent “produces the data” (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Charmaz, 1995, p. 9) and the researcher draws from her own lived experience to “co-construct” new words that more accurately reflect her respondents feelings and experiences (DeVault, 1990). Indeed, feminist researchers are increasingly open about their own positionalities, perspectives, and worldviews and engage in collaboration with their respondents throughout *all phases* of the research process, from data gathering and analysis (Borland, 1991) to writing and authorship (Horne & McBeth, 1998).

Most of the feminist scholarship and research discussed in this section indicates a shift away from goals of value neutrality and claims to objectivity in the research process. The researcher is encouraged to openly acknowledge, and even to draw from, her situated perspective in the course of her research project. In the following Behind-the-Scenes piece (also excerpted from the interview conducted by Hirsch & Olson 1995), Sandra Harding revisits the concept of strong objectivity. Many feminist scholars and researchers challenge the viability and utility of objectivity for the feminist research project. However, Harding illuminates another aspect of strong objectivity—called “strong reflexivity”—that resonates with the feminist emphasis on situated knowledge described above. Strong reflexivity is the manifestation of strong objectivity through method. It requires the researcher to be cognizant and critically reflective about the different ways her positionality can serve as both a hindrance and a resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research process.

Behind-the-Scenes With Sandra Harding

Some people are coming to understand that maximizing objectivity requires a stronger method, a more expansive notion of method, and what that is is a production of strong reflexivity. That is, it's coming to see that the fact that the observer changes, interacts with the object of observation, with what he or she's looking at, is not necessarily a negative, having a negative influence on the results of research, but can be used in a positive way. That is, it's understanding that we can use the resources of the particular place from which we speak in order to gain stronger method and stronger objectivity; strong reflexivity requires that.

Now, what does it mean to have socially situated knowledge, to use the place from which we speak as a resource, a part of the method, a part of the instruments of inquiry? Let me take myself as an example. Everybody writes about reflexivity in all kinds of different ways, but it's hardly ever seen as a resource. It's seen as a problem or a dilemma or something to be gotten around, or it's seen stoically: "Alas, there's nothing you can do about it." Consequently, the way it's enacted frequently is as a confessional: "I, a white woman from Newark, Delaware. . ." You do the confession, and then you do the analysis as if your confession takes care of it. . . . That doesn't even begin to get at the problem. It leaves all the analysis up to the reader. It leaves the reader to ask, "Well, what is the relationship between the fact that Sandra Harding is a white woman, an academic from Delaware, and her analysis? And she's a philosopher, and a feminist, and so forth; what effect does *that* have on her analysis?" The point is for the author, the observer, to make that analysis, to do that work. It's lazy and irresponsible to leave that work up to the audience. It pretends that it doesn't matter at all. The feminist standpoint theory which I've been a part of developing enables us to see the value of that. Strong objectivity asks us to take a critical look at the conceptual schemes, the frameworks, that *comprise* our social location. What are the assumptions I'm making as somebody who comes from Anglo-American analytic philosophy at this moment in history and who's trained in logical positivism? How does that lead me to frame questions and projects that are actually less than maximally objective, that are constrained by my particular social location? So the first set of questions to enable one to strengthen reflexivity, to use reflexivity as a resource, is to do that analysis, to look at a field's conceptual frameworks. It's not so much, "I, Sandra Harding, white woman. . ." but that's an issue.

The question is, "How have the conceptual frameworks that I'm using been shaped to fit the problems of white women in the West more generally?"

So the first step is to do the kind of critique the various new social movements in fact are doing of the conceptual frameworks of the West and its disciplines, its political policy, and its philosophy. But there's a step beyond that, and that's to try and rethink how one's social location can nevertheless be used as a resource in spite of the fact that we're members of dominant groups. There's been a tendency to think that only the dominated, only the marginalized can use their social location as an instrument of the production of knowledge. They certainly *can* use it and *do* use it, but it's also the case that the people in the dominant groups can learn how to use their position (as a white woman in my case; for another, say, as a white man) to ask the kinds of questions and think the kinds of thoughts that would make use of the resources of that particular position. For example, I'm very familiar with Western philosophy; insofar as I don't ask questions about those assumptions, that's an obstacle to my gaining a less Eurocentric perspective on the world and on philosophy. But I also know that tradition fairly well, so if I *do* turn the critical lens on it, I can learn; I'm in the place to be able to do that. And it's something that I have an obligation to do. I'm using my position in a way that somebody who comes from another tradition might not. Why should they spend all *their* time criticizing Western philosophy? I don't think we should leave to the victims of the West the burden of having to do the whole critique of the West. That's a resource that we have an obligation to use; we're familiar with it so we should learn to do that critique ourselves. Those of us who are in these dominant positions *are* in dominant positions: our voices have a lot of power, and that's a resource. It's unfortunate that the world is hierarchically organized, that we do have power relations; but given that we do, I think that those people who do have classrooms to teach in, and whose papers do get accepted in journals read all over the world, and whose publishers do publish their books, are a local resource that we can use in scientifically and politically progressive ways.

SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from Hirsch and Olson (1995).

Sandra Harding urges all individuals, including women, in the dominant groups to be self-critical and to use their power in "politically progressive ways." In the next section, we hear from women in the less-dominant groups. We are reminded to be mindful and respectful of differences between women,

to be aware of the multitude of ways that race, class, and gender intersect in an individual woman's lived experience, and to be cognizant and watchful of power dynamics and differentials throughout the research process.

THE TURN TOWARD DIFFERENCE IN FEMINIST THEORY AND PRACTICE

Early feminist scholars and researchers called attention to the invisibility and misrepresentation of women in academic scholarship across many disciplines and in mainstream social science research. Revealing and correcting this widespread androcentric bias became the primary work of many feminist researchers. Other feminist researchers and scholars began to ask new questions and develop new epistemological frameworks and research methods that took women's lives and experiences into account and that valued women's life stories as knowledge. But which women's stories were being told? Whose experiences were included and whose were left out? Without denying the importance and significance of these early feminist contributions, it is also important to note that many pioneering feminists focused on women as a universal category and overlooked the diversity among and between women's lives and experiences. In this way, much of this early feminist research focused on the issues of importance to white, middle- and upper-class women and neglected the issues of import to women of color and working-class women.

Feminists of color exposed the shortcomings of early feminist research and prompted white feminists to examine white privilege as a form of oppression (McIntosh, 1995). As Hirsch and Keller (1990) put it, "Feminists of color have revealed to white middle-class feminists the extent of their own racism" (p. 379). Feminists of privilege have come to realize that by listening to the experiences of the "other," and engaging in dialogue with poor women and women of color, they gain a more complete, accurate, and nuanced understanding of social reality. Black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues, for example, that to survive and flourish in an overwhelmingly white society, black women must navigate the rules of a privileged white world while negotiating their own marginalized social position—a position that reflects race, class, and gender. Through understanding these aspects of black women's lives, it becomes abundantly clear that the privileged, academic positionality of sociological insiders places them "in no position to notice the

specific anomalies apparent to Afro-American women, because these same sociological insiders produced them” (Collins, 1990, p. 53).

Feminist researchers and scholars of color also illuminate vast interconnections among categories of difference concerning gender, ethnicity, race, and class (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984, 1990; Mohanty, 1988). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) stresses the complex interlinkages between race, class, and gender—or what she terms the *matrix of domination*. Collins’s matrix of domination can be applied to conceptualize difference along a range of interlocking inequalities of race, class, and gender. These socially constructed factors inflect each other, and it is only through collectively examining the intricate connections between them that we can fully understand a given individual’s life experience.

By asking the questions “which women?” and “whose experiences?” feminists of color have broadened the scope of feminist research. Feminist researchers and scholars of color continue to develop new theoretical frameworks and methodological strategies that take a diverse range of women’s lives, experiences, and cultures into account. In the chapter on feminist standpoint epistemology in this book (Chapter 3), you will learn about how feminist scholars of color have problematized the concept of the standpoint of women, arguing instead that women hold multiple standpoints across a diversity of classes and cultures. For example, Patricia Hill Collins illuminates a standpoint of and for black women and emphasizes the interrelations between race, class, and gender that contribute to the construction of that standpoint (Collins, 1990). In the chapter on interviewing techniques (Chapter 5), you will learn about some of the issues and dilemmas, the possibilities and the dangers, that confront feminist researchers in the context of studying across difference. What can we learn, for example, from the research and scholarship of feminists of color about studying difference? Are there particular interviewing strategies that are more respectful and work better at building connections across difference than others?

THE CHALLENGE AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH

In many respects, feminist research goals and pursuits find affinity with postmodern and poststructural perspectives. Due in large part to the scholarship and

research of feminists of color, but also to feminism's interaction with post-colonial, poststructural, and postmodern perspectives, most feminists have discarded the notion of one essential experience of women in favor of a plurality of women's lived experiences. The postmodernist emphasis on bringing the "other" into the research process also "meshes well with the general currents within the feminist project itself," as 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" (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 18). Like many feminists, postmodernists challenge social science research paradigms such as positivism and reject notions of universality, objectivity, and truth with a capital "T" in favor of multiple, situated, and constructed interpretations of social reality. Finally, the postmodernist emphasis on empowering oppressed groups finds resonance with the feminist commitment to "political cultural resistance to hierarchical modes of structuring social life" and with feminists' attention to "the dynamics of power and knowledge" (p. 18).

Postmodern and poststructural perspectives can invigorate feminist theories and praxis. However, some feminists worry that the postmodern emphasis on social construction, interpretation, multiplicity, plurality, and difference may dilute and diffuse the feminist commitment to social change and social justice for women. Some feminists ask, "With so much attention being placed on multiple interpretations of social reality, and difference between and among women, do women lose the capacity to identify commonalities, to engage in dialogue, and to come together as an organized force for social change?" Other feminists wonder, "Can we take seriously, and fight, women's very real, material experiences of oppression if we adhere to the postmodern privileging of interpretation and social construction?" As Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Christina Gilmartin, and Robin Lydenberg (1999) point out, there are some potential risks, dangers, and losses that come with an increasing fragmentation and polarization among and between feminist theorists, researchers, and activists. According to Michelle Barrett and Ann Phillips, the fear now expressed by some feminists is that with the "changing theoretical fashions [postmodernism among them] . . . we may stray too far from feminism's original project" (Barrett & Phillips, 1992, p. 6). The utility and affinity of the postmodern perspective for feminist research, and the struggles and debates among and between feminists about the advantages and limitations of postmodernism and poststructuralism will be thoroughly reviewed in Chapter 4 of this book.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Our primary goal in writing this book is to provide you with a grounded understanding of the principle epistemological, theoretical, and methodological approaches that inform feminist research. The organization of the book reflects feminist holistic practice and highlights the synergy between the epistemological and methodological strands of the research process. Part I of the book focuses on the major epistemological and theoretical groundings that guide many feminists in their research and includes chapters on feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism. In Part II, we review a diverse array of research methods employed by feminist researchers and address the linkages between particular methods and feminist epistemological frameworks and perspectives. You will learn about how particular methods have been used to serve feminist research agendas and how different methods and methodologies are useful at different times and in different contexts. We even include a chapter on multimethod designs to illustrate how feminists sometimes merge qualitative and quantitative paradigms in the service of feminist research goals. Examples of empirical research will be provided. Part III of the book examines the feminist practice of analysis and interpretation of research findings.

We hope that in reading this book, you will come to realize the many different ways that feminist research can serve as a vehicle for women's empowerment. Data collected by feminist empiricists challenge gender biases and "set the record straight." Feminist archival, content, and narrative analyses document the social and historical construction of gender roles. Feminist ethnographers illuminate the links between dominant, constrictive notions of femininity, women's everyday experience, and larger systems/structures of power. Formally silenced and disenfranchised women speak out through the forum of feminist oral history and intensive interviews. These are just a few examples of the many ways that feminist research empowers women.

We extend to you our personal invitation to make this exciting journey with us!

NOTES

1. This is not to dismiss the work of the many courageous and talented women who contributed to knowledge building before the 1960s. However, our point here is

that feminist research—as a new branch of theories, methodologies, and methods—was consciously named and constructed as part of, and resulting from, the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

2. A *paradigm* implies a particular worldview, model, or approach to knowledge building. The positivist paradigm includes an epistemological set of assumptions, in other words an approach to knowledge building or inquiry, and the theoretical and methodological models that accompany that approach. (See Kuhn, 1962; Nielsen, 1990, for a more detailed explanation of our application of the term *paradigm*.)

3. *Empiricist* implies an empirical approach to knowledge building, one based on the traditional scientific method of objective, neutral (sensory-based) observation.

4. While Dorothy Smith uses this phrase, or concept, in the context of discussing the discipline of sociology, we find it useful to apply this concept to social science research and knowledge building more generally. Please see Dorothy Smith (1990, pp. 19–24), *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*, for more explanation and analysis.

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