Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber
Patricia Lina Leavy

Feminist Research Practice

A Primer

Sharlene wishes to honor her husband, Michael Peter Biber, MD, and their daughters, Sarah Alexandra Biber and Julia Ariel Biber.

Patricia dedicates this book to her father, Bob Leavy.

FEMINIST RESEARCH PRACTICE

A Primer

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber
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PREFACE

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE BOOK

Feminist research is not something that can simply be learned through written explanations. As all feminist researchers and professors know, there is much more to understanding the practice of feminist research than can be gleamed from a laundry list of methods alone. Feminist research is a complex process that intimately links theory, epistemology, and method. To make this book user-friendly for students and scholars alike, and to get inside the practice of feminist inquiry, we have included a distinct feature in this book. We introduce exciting "Behind-the-Scenes" vignettes that relate the experiences of sociologists who are navigating and exploring new levels of inquiry.

When thinking about the complexity of writing about feminist research, we quickly realized two things. First, feminism is not one thing, nor is there a feminist methodology per se. Feminism is a window onto the social reality and encompasses a wide range of perspectives and practices. As such, feminism is multivocal. With this in mind, we wanted to make sure that multiple feminist voices come through this text. One of the ways of accomplishing this was to invite contributing authors for some of the chapters of this book. We invited authors to take the lead by writing chapters where we felt they offered a special level of knowledge, insight, and experience on the particular subject.

We also wanted to make sure that multiple voices were offered in all the chapters of the book. In this vein, and inspired by Erving Goffman's notion of "front stage" and "back stage," we began to realize that the information available in many books on research methods represents the "front stage" of the research process. In other words, most books on research methods present definitions of key terms and concepts followed by descriptions of research methods and models for how to design a research project. What this kind of

approach fails to get at is the complexity of the *practice* of social research. What guides researchers' topic selection? How do epistemological beliefs and theoretical commitments come to bear on the research process? What values, issues, and motivations do researchers bring to their projects? How do ethics play out in practice? What are the emotional aspects of a research project *really like*? Why do some researchers select particular methods and how do those methods enable their research? These are critical questions and considerations in the practice of feminist research that explicitly require a synergy between the various components of the research process. In an attempt to get at some of these issues, we have invited well-known feminist researchers to contribute pieces about a range of epistemological and methodological concerns as well as "tales from the field," so to speak—experiences feminists have had employing some of the methodological options reviewed in this text. The rich texts they have generously shared with us are included throughout the book in what we call "Behind-the-Scenes" boxes. These boxes offer a glimpse behind the curtain of feminist research—a window into the feminist researcher's vantage point.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, PhD, is Professor of Sociology at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. She has published widely on the impact of sociocultural factors on women's body image, including her book *Am I Thin Enough Yet? The Cult of Thinness and the Commercialization of Identity* (1996), which was selected as one of *Choice* magazine's best academic books for 1996. She is coauthor of *Working Women in America: Split Dreams* (2005). She is coeditor of *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (1999), *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice* (2004), and *Emergent Methods in Social Research* (Sage, 2006). She is also coauthor of *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Sage, 2006). She is editor of the *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis* (Sage, 2006) and author of two upcoming books, *The Cult of Thinness* and a primer on mixed methods (forthcoming). She is codeveloper of the software program HyperRESEARCH, a computer-assisted program for analyzing qualitative data, and the new transcription tool Hyper-TRANSCRIBE (www.researchware.com).

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ONE

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 recollects 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 postcolonial, 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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PART I

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORY

TWO

FEMINIST EMPIRICISM

Challenging Gender Bias and "Setting the Record Straight"

Denise Leckenby

There is a common misconception that feminism and empiricism are incompatible. However, important research that has combined the tenets of feminism and empiricism has contributed and continues to contribute significantly to our understanding of gender and inequality.

- What makes feminist research empiricist?
- What makes empiricist research feminist?

The process of answering these two grounding questions draws us in from two distinct directions—into the terrain of feminist empiricist approaches to epistemology and their uses of methodology and method. Feminist empiricists ask many types of questions within many types of research disciplines. Unlike other feminist researchers, their work is not limited to either the natural sciences or the social sciences. Grounded in their empiricist epistemologies, they work across many methods and many research questions, affecting traditional paradigms of knowledge building in important ways. *Empiricism* refers to the position and belief that the only knowledge source available to us is that

which can be experienced and measured by our senses. For Richmond Campbell (1994), empiricism relies on "the norms of predictive success, observation independence, and explanatory power" (p. 90). Campbell uses this delineation of empiricist standards to argue against Sandra Harding's (1986, cited in Campbell, 1994) critique of feminist empiricism, stating that "if feminism were internal to empiricism, then wouldn't it contain the very contradiction that critics attribute to the concept of feminist science? For if empiricist norms by their nature demand that a researcher be apolitical in testing hypotheses, how can there be a methodology for constructing and evaluating scientific tests that is at once both empiricist and feminist?" (Campbell, 1994, p. 93). Campbell argues for an internalization of feminist political goals within empiricist research, a different tactic from arguing that empiricism research methods should be internal to feminist political goals.

Embedded in this long tradition of research inquiry, feminist empiricists seek to understand the world around them, grounding their methodologies in what their senses can know and what their methods can measure. With other empiricists, feminist empiricists are located firmly in the positivistic belief that the social and natural world at large is accessible and understandable. As positivists, feminist empiricists want to develop knowledge that is objective and truthful; they believe strongly that such knowledge is obtainable. They are remarkable in their commitment to the positivist tools of research where their work takes place within already established structures of epistemology and methodology.[1] Their work is powerful in its assertions, commanding attention because it speaks from within the establishment of positivist science.

Although located resolutely in positivism, feminist empiricists also critique the practices and products of the traditional scientific establishment. Feminist empiricist research is connected to its feminist perspective as strongly as it is engaged with positivistic approaches. In her introduction to a special issue of *Signs* on gender and science, historian of science Londa Schiebinger (2003) notes that this

> research embodies many core feminist values . . . eliminating research that leads to exploitation of nature or other humans, resisting explanations stripped of social and political context . . . acknowledging our values and beliefs, being honest in our assumptions, being responsible in our language. (p. 861)[2]

Such goals are resolutely feminist in their perspective, shaping the research in various ways yet open to effort made by feminist empiricists to

maintain their location within the positivist paradigm. Helen Longino (1990) states that "feminism is many things to many people, but at its core it is about the expansion of human potentiality" (p. 190). Such an expansion of human potentiality was impossible while women were not included in both the subject matter and the processes of knowledge building. Early on in the 20th century, women researchers began to realize and fight against the sometimes systematic and always pervasive exclusion of women and women's experiences from research questions and samples. Armed with their feminist perspective and positivist tools, they sought to create a "better" and more objective science. They have shown how traditional positivism's androcentric biases were and are built into positivism, leaving us with subjective rather than objective knowledge about our world. Committed to developing knowledge that is inclusive of women, feminist empiricists have sought knowledge that benefits the lives of women, accurately represents their experiences, and sheds light on the truth of human realities. They argue that science as a whole should aim for and achieve a better, more objective study, where the research process is more complex and factual when the political, social, and cultural implications of the research are taken into consideration.

COUNTING WOMEN IN: SEEKING IGNORED AND OBSCURED TRUTHS

Feminist empiricists, through their politically steeped epistemology, aim to include women in the questions that the social sciences and natural sciences have traditionally asked. Both part of and influenced by second-wave feminist movements, an initial task at hand for feminist empiricists was aimed at changing the face of traditional, androcentric science. Androcentric science takes into account only the masculine or the male perspective and unit of analysis in research. Such research extrapolates knowledge gained from such questions to account for the entire human population, leaving out women's voices, their experiences, and the feminine altogether. Feminist empiricists approach this problem not by radically altering traditional modes of inquiry and traditional epistemological and ontological perspectives about the nature of reality or by throwing out established methods of research. Rather, they seek to push their empirical questions and empiricist methods to address and remedy the biases that lead the traditional positivist paradigm to produce less than objective

results. They have sought to show, and prove, how women, when included in traditional research samples, often change the outcome of the research answers. Inclusion of women and gender in the research endeavor produces more truthful and less androcentric knowledge. Feminist empiricists sought and fought to show that neglecting to account for women's experiences took away from any objective goals that the sciences were trying to obtain. Positivistic science, the traditional paradigm for the social science research endeavor, built itself on the foundations of objectivity, reason, and truth seeking. As feminist empiricists began to draw women into the empirical pursuits, they began to show that traditional positivism was not objective at all.

Seeking the Truth of the Unnamed: Sexual Harassment

What does androcentric bias look or feel like? Imagine for a moment that nowhere in literature revolving around issues of sexuality and violence can you find any discussion of the realities of a particular woman's daily experiences with her male supervisor who continues to proposition her for sex. Imagine in fact that there is no name for this particular woman's problem, no term to describe this event. She cannot look for examples of her issue in legal texts. Her human resource manager does not have any policy standards by which to address her problem. This woman's experience is not studied in sociological research about the workplace. In fact those texts speak very little about her role in this company as a woman, let alone talk about what to do when sexual advances are made by male superiors or colleagues. This ongoing event in this particular woman's life is not known. Until the 1970s, sexual harassment remained unquestioned in the academic and public spheres because, "from men's perspective, sexual harassment, was neither salient nor a problem. Unhampered by sexual harassment, men had no compelling reason to distinguish it from the flux of ordinary life by naming it" (Bingham, 1994, p. 19). Imagine that a destructive and disruptive part of your work life is not even mentioned as an issue. Androcentric science begins and ends with men's experiences. In this case, androcentric science's assessment and understanding of the workplace held the nonobjective view that sexual harassment was a nonissue.

With other feminist researchers and activists, feminist empiricists identified that there was a problem that needed to be examined and understood in order to expand women's potentiality within the workplace. Uniting feminist political pursuits with a quest for empirical knowledge, feminist empiricists began to survey populations of women in the workplace to gain a more objective understanding of what was going on. Lynn Farley (1978) was the first feminist to conceptualize and theorize sexual harassment in the workplace. She built her research and theoretical concepts around consciousness-raising groups among working women, all of whom had experiences similar to our particular woman's. "The male behavior eventually required a name, and sexual harassment seemed to come about as close to symbolizing the problem as language would permit" (Farley, 1978, p. xi). Once the concept of sexual harassment had begun to be formulated, the question quickly became one of what was happening and to how many women. The absence of sexual harassment as an actual, knowable event, hidden by androcentric bias within the realm of knowledge building, was quickly being remedied in the late 1970s. The next step for researchers was to understand the who, what, when, where, and how of sexual harassment. Feminists were not the only researchers working on sexual harassment, nor were empiricists the only feminists in the field. But the contribution of feminist empiricists in the realm of sexual harassment research and policy added important and critical dimensions that grounded the knowledge we have about sexual harassment in its social and political context.

Androcentric science serves to eliminate perspectives, issues, and context that are central to producing knowledge that should accomplish positivist demands for truth and objectivity and could achieve feminist goals for expanding human potentiality. "Feminist empiricists maintain that sexism and androcentrism are identifiable biases of knowers that can be eliminated by stricter application of scientific and philosophical methodologies" (Goldman, 1999, p. 34). Feminist empiricists believe that everything that we need to gain knowledge about the objective reality of our lives is already at hand—it just needs to be used better. Imagine how a feminist empiricist would aim to gain insight into the general issue of sexual harassment. Her positivistic perspective would likely lead her down a path of deductive reasoning, whereby her knowledge and reading of the field of research already conducted concerning sexual harassment would help her formulate a hypothesis. She might notice through her literature review that androcentric biases seem to be at play in much of the research already conducted. For example, she notices that no one is thinking about or researching sexual harassment from a perspective that takes into

account the inequality of the genders. No one is working on testing how power inequality might be related to incidences and responses to sexual harassment.

Within a field of knowledge, androcentric bias does not facilitate acknowledgment of the complex context of political and social situations to be part of the research endeavor. The feminist lens through which this particular researcher views the world and the research context enables her to produce research and knowledge that is more objective. By taking into account the context of power relations and inequality between the genders in the work environment, this feminist empiricist opens up new questions concerning the objective reality of sexual harassment. Her empiricist perspective might lead her to test her newly formed hypothesis with a sociological experiment, a statistical survey, or even a series of qualitative interviews, always in pursuit of the empirical data that measure and represent reality. Androcentric biases build an environment where research and knowledge about the world at large do not objectively test or measure reality and do nothing to expand human potentiality. Feminist empiricists seek better and more objective science by doing away with androcentric science.

Seeking the Truth Quantitatively

Counting women into empirical pursuits for knowledge not only refers to elimination of the androcentric bias of science, as seen in the example of sexual harassment, but it also refers to the quantitative inclusion of women in research samples and populations. Unlike other feminist researchers, feminist empiricists have tended to be the most accepting of traditional methods of inquiry such as quantitative research methods.[3] Many feminist empiricists use quantitative methodologies and survey tools to examine questions at hand. Quantitative research methods, although only one of the tools available for research endeavors, lend themselves particularly well to empirical pursuits. Quantitative research for many feminists requires a location in a positivistic paradigm, seeking knowledge that lends itself to generalizable and quantifiably significant statements.

Many feminist empiricists have argued and demonstrated that using quantitative methods does not have to be mutually exclusive from feminist political pursuits (Jayaratne, 1983). Although feminist empiricists were eager to maintain and work with the power of statistical research design, they also brought their feminist lens and critical perspective to bear on the method to make it better. Early feminist empiricist researchers were interested in critiquing survey research biases that were built with gendered and cultural assumptions that went unnoticed by traditional positivistic science. These researchers located these biases as one problem that reduced the objectivity of the research tool (Unger, 1979). During the 1980s, feminist empiricists aimed to theorize and use methodologies and methods that were nonsexist and develop research that would not discriminate against one gender (Griffin & Phoenix, 1994).[4] By drawing gender, culture, and context into quantitative survey methods, feminist empiricists highlighted the profoundly subjective and patriarchal assumptions that were built into the tools researchers employed.

Traditional positivist survey research methods tended to make women invisible. Quantitatively including gender as a variable in survey research served to illuminate and complicate research findings in a variety of research disciplines. Conducting survey research as a feminist implies a political engagement to look at the world with attention to gender dimensions and differences. Gender and women become the visible part of the story told by the statistical truths examined by feminist empiricists. Returning to our example of sexual harassment, one can certainly imagine what a quantitative research design employed by a traditional nonfeminist positivist might look for and find. Such research would see that sexual harassment is a real, knowable occurrence affecting significant numbers of women in a variety of workplaces. Such research would likely seek to find answers and solutions to the problem of sexual harassment.

But imagine what is left out when a feminist lens is not applied to the quantitative survey questions, the data analysis, and the text produced. Without a feminist lens to this particular empirical question, it is likely that an understanding of sexual harassment as an impediment to women's advancement within the workplace would be unexamined. For example, a feminist empiricist analysis would require questions and variables in the survey's design that measure the salary and promotion rates of men and women. Such measurement and analysis would require attention to women's equality. Gender difference and questions of power would likely go unexamined within a quantitative research design that was lacking a feminist perspective.

Just because research is conducted on women's lives does not mean that it is for women. Feminist values aim to resist explanations that are devoid of

their social and political context. Feminist empiricists believe that the social and political context of the research question is measurable and observable. They also believe that the context is a pivotal piece of good research. Without the context, research produced is less than objective. Quantitative survey research may engage matters of great importance to women (such as sexual harassment), but counting women in from a feminist perspective requires that the social and political contexts of gender and power be a part of the truths told. Feminist empiricists who use quantitative research methods argue that they are particularly well positioned to create social change for women in meaningful ways.[5] They insist that statistics speak volumes to those in power. Roberta Spalter-Roth and Heidi Hartmann (1999) argue for a vision that attempts to "synthesize the views of two generations—to create research that meets both the standards of positivist social science and feminist goals of doing research 'for' rather than 'on' women" (p. 333). Feminist empiricists often begin their research from a position within the scientific and political establishment.

Counting women in refers to not only women and their concerns being reflected as part of research but also women making space for themselves in academic research settings, medical community research, or public policy debates, to name just a few. As Marjorie DeVault (1996) notes, "attention to sexism in research procedure probably often depends on the presence of feminists within research teams, where they are usually more likely than others to call attention to those biases" (p. 36). Combining their epistemological perspectives and feminist political goals, many feminist empiricists, like Spalter-Roth and Hartmann (1999), find themselves with a "dual vision of . . . research" (p. 337). Concerning their statistical public policy research on the situation for women at work and on welfare, Spalter-Roth and Hartmann (1999) remark:

> Our research reflects both dominant methodological and critical oppositional views because we employ mainstream social science techniques but filter these techniques through a feminist prism that critically examines how these techniques are likely to reproduce and legitimate relations of domination and inequality within genders, races, and classes. (p. 337)

Working within the established system of research methods, public policy demands, and traditional arenas of research criterion is a compromise that some feminists find necessary, practical, and prudent when working for social change. Such a compromise is too high of a price to pay for many other feminists, whose politics and epistemological perspective require that their research step out of the bounds of the positivist paradigm. However, feminist empiricists see that there is a need for women and feminists at all levels of epistemological inquiry, within all arenas where work for social change is going on, and in every discipline that seeks the betterment and well-being of humanity.

Exposing Untruths and Watching for Stereotypes

The empirical destruction of stereotypes, patriarchal ideologies, and untruths has been one major arena in which feminist empiricists have tended to work. Eliminating androcentric bias and including women in research in recent years has begun to transition itself from direct inclusion of women's lives and experiences toward a more complex questioning by feminist empiricists about how women are represented within the research itself. When feminism provides the political grounding through which an empiricist works, the researcher "must also consider the ways in which the discourse of science serves to reinforce prevailing social and cultural stereotypes, making them appear 'natural'" (Weasel, 2001, p. 30).

Drawing us into a different, real-world example, imagine again for a moment that every medical study about the experiences and effective treatments for heart disease has been conducted on male research subjects. Imagine that there is no single study that includes the question: How do women experience heart disease? Is it different from men's experience? How should women's treatment progress for the best possible outcome? Kim M. McCormick and Sheila M. Bunting (2002) examine the impact of feminist theory on nursing research. They examine recent research that has shown women's experience of heart disease as very distinct from that of men. Such research included women in the research design, questioning whether or not women's symptoms, experience, recovery, and treatment were adequate and successful when based on the universal model developed from research of men. Women were shown to have different symptoms, distinct experiences, and recovery requiring different treatments from those for men.

Yet McCormick and Bunting (2002) do not stop their discussion of feminist empiricists with the inclusion of women patients in the studies and the

illustration of androcentric bias in this body of research. For McCormick and Bunting, it is not enough to "add women and stir." They continue to comment on the difficulties of communicating and representing differences between men and women in research texts that do not further harm women's status or health care. Efforts to eliminate research that exploits women have pushed some feminist empiricists to go beyond efforts to reduce androcentric bias and into a deep questioning of the political and social implications of the research produced. They show that "the challenge for researchers has been to discuss women in a manner that allows their differences to emerge but does not depict them as inferior to men" (p. 820). McCormick and Bunting quantitatively analyze the types of representations of women in nursing literature about heart disease. Again, they are trying to provide the most objective and contextually full picture of women's representation while at the same time critiquing knowledge that does harm to women and the feminine. Seeking the truth by adding women into the research design and questions does not go far enough.

Empirical examination and problematization of concepts has become a formidable part of feminist empiricist work. Similarly, feminist archeologist Margaret W. Conkey (2003) remarks, "Yes, there are now women, but in roles, activities, and significances that are unproblematized" (p. 876). Feminist empiricists are challenging their fields of research and disciplines to attend to their representation of women. Yet feminist empiricists offer their fields and disciplines as many questions as answers.

Further elaborating on the work by feminist empiricist scholars, we might think about how representation of women in research on sexual harassment might further exploit women. Empirical research not conducted with feminist values against exploitation might tend to represent women as victims. Such research might also tend to work within specific patriarchal assumptions leading to analysis and arguments representing women as "asking for it" by dressing provocatively in the workplace or engaging in flirtatious communication styles. Conducting empirical research as a feminist requires that the representation of women in the research analysis and research text be responsible and ethical. Some feminist empiricists would argue that research findings that position the woman as a victim or "asking for it" require assumptions made by the researcher that are imbued with patriarchy, androcentric, and soundly less than objective.

In spite of such political intentions by some feminist empiricists to attend to and remedy exploitative research, many other feminist researchers from different epistemological perspectives argue that their rigorous attachment to positivism and the establishment within which it resides has to be shaken. They argue that feminist empiricists continue to "add women and stir" in spite of their good intentions, relying on the dulled patriarchal tools of the scientific establishment such that the knowledge produced can still be used to exploit women. Such critiques are usually met by feminist empiricists with the resolve and belief that with care, political perspective, and objective standards for knowledge building, feminist empiricist pursuits can overcome such issues.

The content of stereotypes about women and men is varied, vibrant, and sometimes humorous. Take, for example, the case of the anthropologist Emily Martin's (1999) groundbreaking exposure of the androcentric bias in the natural sciences. She examined textbooks that dealt with human reproduction and found that these texts tended to construct a story where romantic and gendered stereotypes about the egg and sperm were created, re-created, and enforced. She found that typically the egg was spoken about with the terms that depicted its passivity, where it "is transported," "is swept," or even "drifts." The sperms, in contrast, were typically spoken about in active, aggressive, and energetic terms, such as "velocity" and "propelling," where they can "burrow through the egg coat" and "penetrate" it (p. 17). Martin shows that so-called truthful and objective medical textbooks were infused with nonobjective stereotypes, shaping both the medical and the cultural understanding of natural events. Martin's feminist empiricist stance argues that an understandable, objective reality is out there to be known about the processes of the egg and the sperm. She argues that medical textbooks were depicting gender stereotypes through scientific language that had little basis in reality.

Martin stands with many feminist empiricists who believe that when such stereotypes are brought to light, the implications they have in society begin to lessen. The goal of exposure of stereotypes and androcentric biases is a politically charged one. Feminist empiricists reach below the surfaces of unquestioned traditional research to look at the dark spaces where women and the feminine are cast in a negative and oppressive light. Returning again to our example of our particular woman's experience with sexual harassment, imagine that her experience is examined through the positivistic lens of a researcher who holds that the stereotypical view of women as nurturing and emotional is based in fact. Regarding gender roles, this researcher also holds the stereotypical view of men as aggressive, dominant, and unable to control their

sex drives. Imagine for a moment how these untested, nonobjective stereotypes might imbue the research findings. Without the feminist intention to look beyond such stereotypes, which are themselves part of the larger social and political context in which sexual harassment resides, research findings would lean toward a cyclical reproduction of the said stereotypes. With Martin, feminist empiricists observe, examine, and test these stereotypes to differing degrees. For example, concerning sexual harassment, Jean Stockard and Miriam Johnson (1992) looked beyond the stereotypes that re-inscribe themselves into the research question and findings. They argue that women's socialization encourages them to avoid conflict (as opposed to the stereotype that women are naturally passive in the face of conflict) and affects women's patterns of reporting of sexual harassment. The empiricist intention to test and observe the answers to this feminist question leads researchers like Stockard and Johnson to provide a more objective basis for knowledge building.

Shaping new questions grounded in empirical analysis represents one strength of feminist empiricism.[6] To better understand the true impact of combining the tenets of feminism with empiricism, let's turn to an example. In the following in-depth Behind-the-Scenes piece, the renowned feminist scholar Diana E. H. Russell takes us into her quantitative rape study and the earned feminist position that guided it.

Behind-the-Scenes With Diana E. H. Russell

The Contribution of Feminism to My Research on Rape

> "You have not made it clear that rape is an important problem or just the concern of a bunch of looney women."
>
> —Gladys Handy,
> National Science Foundation, 1971

My personal experiences of child sexual abuse and my feminism both played major roles in my decision to conduct research on rape and other forms of misogynist sexual abuse and violence against females—starting in 1971 and continuing up until today. A rape trial that occurred in San Francisco in 1971 served as a catalyst for my feminist outrage at the sexist double standard that was manifested by the portrayal of the victim as the one on trial for her active sex life. In contrast, the promiscuity of her rapist, Jerry Plotkin, was used as a defense against her charge of rape. "Why would he rape a woman if he had no trouble finding consenting female partners?" his attorney asked the jury in a skeptical tone.

My anger at such discriminatory "reasoning" resulted in my joining a feminist protest outside the courthouse with women who shared my feelings about the sexist character of the trial. We handed out leaflets denouncing the "Rape in the Courtroom." Informally, several of the protesters remarked about the many women they knew who had been raped, suggesting that rape is a common male practice. I was astounded by this claim and unaware that any of the women I knew had been raped.

This experience made it clear to me how little I knew about rape from the victim's perspective, and I decided to investigate what the scholarly literature had to say about it. Once again, my feminist perspective enabled me to recognize, with shock, how sexist and victim blaming the literature was. Later, my feminist perspective enabled me to recognize the role of misogyny in the many other forms of sexual exploitation, sexual coercion, and violence against women and girls—in addition to rape.

However, I believe that a traumatic experience of sexual abuse when I was 15 years old was by far the most potent motivator for my lifelong investigation of males' sexual abuse and sexual violence against women and girls. I wasn't aware of this source of my motivation at the time. It was an insight that developed much later.

I was enraged by Plotkin being found "not guilty" by the jurors. Realizing that the jurors had been forced to listen to highly prejudicial testimony, I was determined that my study would present the *victims'* perspectives (the term *survivor* came into use much later), which I predicted would be entirely different from the way they appeared in court records and newspaper accounts.

The ignorant, disrespectful, unprofessional, and sexist response to my grant proposal on rape by Gladys Handy, a staff member at the National Science Foundation whose task it was to evaluate my proposal, is cited in the opening epigram. Dismayed by Handy's hostile reaction, I embarked on an exploratory study of survivors' experiences of rape in Berkeley and Oakland, California, without benefit of funding. I and three student volunteers conducted face-to-face interviews with more than 80 volunteer rape survivors. This study resulted in my book *The Politics of Rape: The Victims' Perspective* (Russell, 1975), in which I argued that rape was not a deviant male act but one that conformed to typical notions of masculinity in our patriarchal society.

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Because the publisher (Stein & Day) demanded the deletion of the main theoretical chapter in my manuscript, its publication was delayed for over a year. Nevertheless, it was the third feminist book to contribute to the revolutionizing of the social scientific literature on rape—and subsequently of large portions of the United States' population (Connell & Wilson, 1974, and Medea & Thompson, 1974, were the first two books published on rape; I was unaware of both these volumes when writing my book).

Having heard several feminists claim that rape was a common crime against women, in contrast to the assumption of most nonfeminists who considered it a relatively infrequent crime, I decided that it was vitally important that I try to get funding to conduct a relatively large scale scientific study of the prevalence of rape in nearby San Francisco to evaluate which of these diametrically opposed views was correct. By this time, the National Institute of Mental Health had provided funding especially for rape research. My proposed survey research project was among their first proposals to be funded in 1977.

In addition to wanting to ascertain the prevalence of rape in a probability sample of women residents who were 18 years and older in San Francisco, I also endeavored to determine the prevalence of incest, extrafamilial child sexual abuse, sexual abuse by authority figures, and the effects on the victims/survivors of all these forms of sexual violation and violence. However, this article will focus on the impact of my feminist perspective on my methodology for estimating the prevalence of rape.

Methodology

I considered subcontracting with the University of California at Berkeley's Survey Research Center to conduct the field work phase of my project. However, I learned that they would not allow me to have any input into the training of the interviewers. This was the major reason for my abandoning this idea. Here's why: one of the most basic tenets of survey research is that it is unnecessary to inform the interviewers about the subject under investigation or to select them on the basis of their attitudes to the topic—even if the topic is considered taboo in society. However, I decided that this standard survey research rule was inappropriate for my study because of the taboo nature of the topics I wanted to inquire about and the victim-blaming attitudes most people had about rape and other

forms of sexual assault at that time. Many women are likely to remain silent when an unknown interviewer asks them about their experience(s) of rape because of their feelings of shame, self-blame, and anxiety about being blamed by the interviewer, especially if the interviewer conveys, even if subtly, that victims are responsible for their victimization. Sending *supposedly* unbiased interviewers into the field without first educating them about the issues involved would have severely undermined my attempt to obtain high disclosure of rape, incest, and other forms of sexual assaults.

Hence, I decided to subcontract only the drawing of my survey sample. I hired Field Research Corporation, a well-known and highly reputable marketing and public opinion research firm in San Francisco, for this task. I ended up with a probability sample of 930 women residents of San Francisco aged 18 years and older. A team of 33 interviewers with different ethnic and class identities interviewed this sample of women during the summer of 1978 (for further information about the methodology of this study, see Russell, 1984).

The 65 hours of intensive training for the 33 interviewers included at least 10 hours of education about rape and incest. This included listening to personal rape and incest testimony volunteered by some of the interviewers and other staff, viewing a feminist movie about rape, and receiving direct instruction about rape—for example, that many women are the victims of multiple rapes. Therefore interviewers were instructed not to be surprised when they found themselves interviewing such women.

However, 10 hours of training cannot transform a bigot into an unprejudiced person. Therefore, interviewers were selected for their nonblaming attitudes toward sexual assault victims as well as for their interviewing skills. In addition, since the survey was limited to female respondents, I did not even contemplate hiring male interviewers.

I also considered it vitally important to construct an interview schedule that would avoid any hint of victim blaming. So, for example, the respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a number of statements that were intended to achieve this goal before they were asked any questions about their experiences, if any, of rape, sexual abuse by relatives and/or nonrelatives, and so on: for example, "Any woman could be a victim of rape or sexual assault"; "Most women experience some kind of sexual assault at least once in their lives"; "Given the

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right situation, most men are capable of committing rape"; and "Rape victims are not responsible for having been raped." Another statement was designed to encourage respondents to disclose their experiences: "It is usually helpful to talk about painful experiences." Conveying bias in this fashion is contrary to a basic tenet of questionnaire design requiring that researchers *avoid* showing any such bias by alternating such questions to convey "objectivity" about the topic under investigation.

My knowledge about rape caused me to avoid using this term unless there was an important reason to do so. For example, one of 38 questions on sexual assault and abuse in my interview schedule used the word *rape* to illuminate how many women conceptualized their experiences as rape—which I defined as forced intercourse, intercourse obtained by threat of force, or intercourse completed when a woman was drugged, unconscious, or physically incapacitated in some way, or attempts at such acts (this was the legal definition of rape in California at that time—except that my study included cases of wife rape). I excluded taboo terms because I anticipated that many respondents would not apply such value-laden terms to their experiences. My expectation was confirmed, as is evident in the next section.

Findings on Prevalence Rates

The wisdom of my feminist understanding of women's experiences of rape was confirmed by the unprecedentedly high disclosure rate obtained by my survey methodology. For example, 22% of the 930 respondents disclosed experiences of completed and/or attempted rape in answer to the one question that used the word *rape*.[1] When completed rape and attempted rape were combined, the standard practice of the official FBI's statistics, 44% of the sample disclosed at least one completed or attempted rape. Hence, the direct question about rape yielded only half the actual rape experiences reported by the respondents.

Conclusion

I believe that the high disclosure rates obtained by my methodology were due to my feminist understanding about rape. Following is a summary of some of the main methodological features that I believe

explain how my survey obtained such relatively high prevalence rates for rape—substantially higher than any comparable study thereafter (see Russell & Bolen, 2000):

- The use of a large range of questions in the interview schedule that helped to tap women's memories of rape experiences
- The inclusion of questions that conveyed a non-victim-blaming attitude or bias on the part of the study
- Avoidance of the word *rape* in all but one of the questions in the interview schedule
- The exclusive use of female interviewers
- Careful selection of interviewers who did not subscribe to the usual myths about rape
- Rigorous training of interviewers in both administration of the interview schedule and education about rape
- Matching the ethnicity of interviewers and respondents, as far as this was possible

For reasons unknown, no researcher in the United States has replicated some of the important methodological features of my prevalence study, except for the use of female interviewers. Is it any wonder, then, that no other survey has even approached finding the prevalence rates for rape obtained in my survey? (This statement is substantiated in Russell & Bolen, 2000.) I believe my survey demonstrates the crucial importance of employing feminist research methodology to estimate the prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual abuse and violence. Only space prevented me from including a similar description of my feminist methodology and findings on the prevalence of incestuous and extrafamilial child sexual abuse. I believe a feminist perspective will be found to be equally important when conducting research on numerous other topics.

Feminist research and analysis of rape has revolutionized the understanding of rape in Western nations and others. I am proud to be one of the initiators with a few other researchers and many courageous rape survivors who were willing to speak up about their experiences.

Note

1. Two coders and I evaluated whether or not each of the experiences respondents described as rape met the study's definitions of rape and attempted rape.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHASMS: OBJECTIVITY

Feminist empiricists aim to address issues that are neglected and thereby made invisible by the traditional positivist paradigm of research. These include women and their experiences and perspectives as the direct research subject to be questioned, examined, and known through the research process. Feminist empiricists also aim to redress problems found within the traditional positivist paradigm, including androcentric biases and reconstruction of stereotypes. Informing each of these two broad intentions of feminist empiricists are the overarching goals of feminist values. In the end, the most significant movement of the feminist empiricist that sets her apart from other types of feminist researchers is the quest for objectivity. Efforts made by feminist empiricists to address the issues laid out above are all undertaken with the aim of pursuing, defining, and using a better form of objectivity than that engaged by traditional positivists. Ignoring and obscuring women and women's experiences, for feminist empiricists, limits the objectivity of research. Similarly, androcentric biases and research filtered through stereotypes debilitate objective quests for knowledge. Feminist empiricists seek to remedy this problem within the positivist paradigm, which distinguishes them from other feminist researchers while also exposing them to critique.

How feminist empiricists approach objectivity marks them as distinct from other kinds of feminist researchers. The location of empiricism within the positivist paradigm draws us into a more abstract understanding of their grounding as thinkers and knowers. Epistemologically and methodologically, the subject/object distinction forms the root of positivist social science formulation, positioning the researcher as a detached subject. Positivism holds that there is a "real" reality to be known that is understandable and obtainable through objectivist scientific practices. This real reality to be understood is built on the distinction and separation of the knowable object of study and the subject—namely, that of the knowing researcher. Through a subject/object dichotomy the position of the knowing researcher is inconsequential and inherently dislocated from the knowable object. The influence of the researcher is denied, and the voice rising out of a knowledge-building script is one of a "'disinterested scientist' as informer of decision makers, policy makers, and change agents" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112). Empiricism approaches knowledge building with a particular form of positivism that holds that the subject/object divide can be understood and known only through the senses.

The subject/object distinction forms a basic dualism on which a great deal of the positivist paradigm is built. Feminist empiricists have particular ways of negotiating the critique of this epistemological and methodological stance. The feminist empiricist and philosopher of science Evelyn Fox Keller argues that positivist formulations of objectivity are static, requiring that the subject of the research, namely, the researcher, be utterly separate from the object of the research, namely, the object of the study. Keller (1985) posits that feminist researchers should move toward a form of dynamic objectivity that "aims at a form of knowledge that grants to the world around us its independent integrity but does so in a way that remains cognizant of, indeed, relies on, our connectivity with that world" (p. 117). For Keller, object relations that require an ideology of domination over the object (nature and women) form the basis for the empirical sciences.

Traditional definitions of objectivity imply a separation of ideology and science, an observation of the world at large without the trappings of political and individual beliefs. This normative valuation of science over ideology, and its expression of either/or but not both, is what is presented on the surface of objective social science research. Feminist empiricists negotiate the tight rope of the ideological and scientific divide, arguing that acknowledging and working on the boundaries of subject/object and ideology/science distinctions is what makes their approach the most objective. Caroline Ramazanoglu (2002) remarks that feminists have long grappled with Enlightenment notions of reason and objectivity as outlined by Decartes and Kant. They have had a difficult time trying "to decide whether they can or should be 'soaring in thought' so that women can stride around the universe and dive into the nature of wo/man" (pp. 25–26).

By interrogating the boundaries between science and ideology, feminist empiricists show how biased objective science has become. As feminist empiricists look deeper below the surface of traditional positivism, they find that ideological and personal beliefs muddy the transparent waters of knowledge production. Feminist empiricists aim to negotiate the traverse between ideology and science, shaping a better science in which knowledge about women can be built. Many critiques of feminist empiricism remark that such attempts are still not knowledge for women, however. Ramazanoglu (2002) states that "feminists can be reasonable, logical and systematic in their research, without treating reason as a neutralizing force. They can (problematically) pursue truth in the sense of claiming a 'better story,' but they cannot

claim to be objective" (p. 49). In spite of such criticisms, feminist empiricists remain committed to and content with their compromises.

With feminist empiricists, the philosopher Sandra Harding (1992) critiques objectivity while not desiring to do away with the word altogether. She finds that objectivity is simply not objective enough, that it blocks and limits the representation of less distorted and less destructive accounts of the world. These accounts destroy the possibility of shaping and creating the resources that objective knowledge can bring, "such as fairness, honesty, detachment, and . . . advancing democracy" (p. 574). The hands that wield the power of the word *objective* used it from their own position and for their own gain, in structural and personal terms. Harding (1993) states that "the methods and norms in the disciplines are too weak to permit researchers systematically to identify and eliminate from the results of research those social values, interests, and agendas that are shared by the entire scientific community" (p. 52). Adding to already established methods and strengthening their power to access objective knowledge is the goal of feminist empiricists.

Where most feminist researchers from all epistemological perspectives come to critique and grapple with issues of subject/object distinction, the answers and tools they employ to deal with this issue form one distinction among them. On their path to engage, encourage, and employ the feminist goals for research, feminist empiricists are epistemologically rooted in objectivity. Their vision of objectivity, however, aims to pursue a richer, more detailed, and more vibrant reality than that of a "detached, objective reflection of a singular 'natural' reality" (Weasel, 2001, p. 27).[7] Value-free objectivity implies the efforts of traditional positivistic paradigms that seek to hold up a mirror to the world and view it for what it is.

> Value-free objectivity requires also a faulty theory of the ideal agent—the subject—of science, knowledge and history. It requires a notion of the self as a fortress that must be defended against polluting influences from its social surroundings. (Harding, 1991, p. 158)

By positioning the influences of the social surroundings as polluting, including those residing within the researcher herself, positivistic science ignores vast amounts of information, affecting processes, and valuable insights that could otherwise make research findings more objective.[8] Illusions of the detached, unemotional researcher hinder objective pursuits of truth. Such value-free objectivity is not objective enough because it seeks to be blind to

important contexts that make the knowledge gained full of intensity, clarity, and commitment.

The union of feminist political goals and empiricist approaches to objectivity can be seen in the research of Zuleyma Tang Halpin (1989), who brings her disciplinary lenses of both biology and women's studies to bear on the scientific establishment's uses of scientific objectivity at its worst. She outlines two problems with scientific objectivity that serve to reconstruct systems of oppression, subjugation, and violence toward all those who constitute the other. The first issue she addresses concerns the emotional detachment necessitated by the practice and aim of scientific objectivity. The second issue Halpin cites as reproducing systems of oppression is the epistemological separation of the object, or the one who is studied, from the subject, or the one who is producing knowledge. These two issues bring about the core dimension of feminist empiricist approaches to scientific knowledge building. Yet Halpin still advocates the maintenance of objectivity as the standard, stating:

> While true objectivity is undeniably necessary for the rational pursuit of science, the concept of scientific objectivity as commonly understood and practiced by scientists, often has been formulated in ways that are actually antithetical to truly objective and unbiased scientific inquiry. (p. 285)

The antithetical employment of scientific methods to pursue objective knowledge has required a gentle and subtle epistemological shift for feminist empiricists. This shift has drawn them not away from earlier notions of objectivity but rather in pursuit of their inherent and most basic elaborations. The practice of science, the use of positivist methods, and the aim toward truly objective scientific inquiry have empowered feminist researchers across disciplines.

What happens when awareness of and sensitivity to ideological and value-laden underpinnings are explored? To ground us back in our example, the traditional paradigms of knowledge about sexual harassment were argued to be lacking a great deal of nuance and objectivity according to feminist researchers. Nonfeminist researchers continued to hold assumptions and biases that, from a feminist empiricist's perspective, were less than objective. An assumption that carried a great deal of weight at the time of our sexual harassment example, in the 1980s, in spite of a lack of empirical data to support its claim, held that perpetrators of sexual harassment were psychologically disturbed (Hotelling & Zuber, 1997, p. 100). Extending from such

individual and psychological arguments, we find ourselves in a morass of assumptions about men's high sex drives that cause them to be incapable of controlling themselves. Boundless other assumptions permeated traditional positivist paradigmatic research, limiting the human potentiality, the possibilities for social change, and the potentiality of the research. Feminist empiricists weighed in on such assumptions, aiming to provide empirical evidence of the social context of sexual harassment.

CONCLUSION

The varied and vibrant contributions of feminist empiricists have created an environment where paradigm shifts are already taking place. These contributions are leading to better and more objective science and are often subsumed into the establishment's notions of good science, frequently leaving their feminist label behind. Feminist empiricists are hardly monolithic in their epistemology, methodology, and uses of method. But they have had a cumulative impact on the positivist paradigm. Along the many dimensions that provide the web of grounding for looking at feminist researchers, feminist empiricists tend to stay the closest to their positivistic forefathers. They critique positivist science from within, arguing and pushing for a stronger, better, more objective knowledge that can be gained when rigorous examination of the political and discursive context of knowledge building is part of the research process. They argue that the world is knowable, that truth can be found, and that much of science has built blinders that obscure the rich and colorful context of knowledge processes and reality, serving to uphold and strengthen the positivist paradigm and patriarchal constructions of the status quo. They use their dual vision of political goals and empiricist means, arguing that they have found a balanced way to access the best of both worlds.

Despite the contributions of empiricism to the larger project of feminism, as Chapters 3 and 4 of this volume show, there are many who view feminist empiricism as a case of adding women to preexisting models, stirring, and assuming things are "better." These feminists have pioneered new epistemological and methodological approaches to knowledge building, unraveling some of the "foundations" of empiricism. If we are to look at epistemological positions as existing on a continuum, empiricism might be on one end, followed by standpoint epistemology and then postmodernism, which entirely

rejects the essentialism necessary to empiricism and standpoint. In the next chapter we review standpoint epistemology as the first powerful critique of feminist empiricism, and an alternative to it.

NOTES

1. Richmond Campbell (1994) argues that in fact positivism

> concedes that political concerns could influence the "discovery" of a certain hypothesis or certain data, but insists that the question of whether this hypothesis "h" is supported by this evidence "e" is another matter. The positivist says that whether "e" confirms "h," no matter where either came from is a matter of logic, and this at least is beyond politics. (p. 90)

Campbell argues that epistemologically and methodologically we must be careful about specifying whether we are talking about politics influencing the context of discovery or the context of justification. Campbell agrees with Sandra Harding (1986, cited in Campbell, 1994), who argues that politics and social biases guide a researcher's entrance into the context of discovery, and he believes that "what ends up being confirmed, if 'e' confirms 'h', reflect[s] these biases" (Campbell, 1994, p. 95). But Campbell (1994) argues that Harding's critique of feminist empiricism goes too far, implying that "the confirmation relation taken just in itself is untouched by political concerns." Campbell argues that "the very logic of confirmation . . . depends on the context of discovery. That is, whether a given 'e' confirms a given 'h' cannot be determined independently of the context of discovery" (p. 95).

2. This edition of *Signs* provides many useful and thoughtful examples of feminist research within both the natural and the social sciences. Particularly notable are the contributors' reflexive assessments of their roles as researchers aiming to produce empirical knowledge and as feminists with political values and perspectives. Some of these contributors are discussed in this chapter.

3. In spite of the frequently debated quantitative/qualitative divide within feminist methodology literature, Dunn and Waller (2000) found that of the 1,826 gender-content articles published between 1984 and 1993, 93% were based on quantitative data. Of the 544 articles that were feminist-oriented gender content articles, 83% were based on quantitative data. Quantitative methodologies are still a dominant forum in which gender- and feminist-oriented knowledge is being built and disseminated. Interestingly, men were first authors of more gender-content articles than women.

4. For example, in *On the Treatment of the Sexes in Research*, Margrit Eichler and Jeanne Lapointe (1985) outlined specific and thorough guidelines in which survey research parameters that include gender and avoid androcentrism are laid out.

5. Marjorie DeVault (1996) notes that "one common approach to feminist quantitative work involves correcting gender and other cultural biases in standard procedure." Such approaches serve feminist objectives, for example, by pointing out "the

many ways that standard survey techniques build in unnoticed assumptions about gender and culture. Those working with survey data have begun to alter survey design and analytic procedures to lessen or eliminate these sources of bias" (p. 36).

6. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1990) cites the many questions that all feminists have contributed to their fields by way of critiquing traditional scientific endeavors as one space that feminist empiricists must address. She argues that it is not sufficient to critique, building new theories, concepts, and variables, but rather feminist researchers must work to answer the questions that they pose to their fields. Remarking on concepts such as patriarchy, sexism, and race/class/gender, she notes: "To my knowledge, no one has begun the difficult but fundamentally important job of empirically examining which of these clusters of variables is more important in maintaining (or changing) systems of gender inequity; which constitute independent and which intervening constructs?" (p. 13).

7. Although she is not a feminist empiricist in her current writings, Helen Longino (1990) elaborates on the potential richness and complexity of knowledge produced through a more objective science whereby the researcher takes into account the political context of the researcher self. She states:

> I am suggesting that a feminist scientific practice admits political considerations as relevant constraints on reasoning, which through their influence on reasoning and interpretation shape content. In this specific case those considerations in combination with the phenomena support an explanatory model that is highly interactionist, highly complex. (p. 193)

This consideration of the complex context of the research process is not the responsibility of the researcher alone. Longino goes on to require that the readers of knowledge take some responsibility in the process of scientific communication and learning, whereby

> the first step however, is to abandon the idea that scrutiny of the data yields a seamless web of knowledge. The second is to think through a particular field and try to understand just what its unstated and fundamental assumptions are and how they influence the course of inquiry. Knowing something of the history of a field is necessary to this process, as is continued conversation with other feminists. (p. 193)

8. Marianne Janack (2002) remarks:

> The connection between objectivity and truth has been an important tool for feminist and other libratory projects, but failures of objectivity are not always or only epistemic failures. The claim that there is still sexism in the world can only be denied by someone who fails to be objective. This is a failure that has two different and separable aspects to it. It is an epistemic failure, in so far as it seems to involve a willful avoidance of evidence that is all too clear. . . . It is also an instance of a theory or claim that fails to correspond to the facts. (p. 268)

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THREE

FEMINIST STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY

Building Knowledge and Empowerment Through Women's Lived Experience

Abigail Brooks

> *I have . . . striven faithfully to give a true and just account of my own life in Slavery . . . to come to you just as I am a poor Slave Mother—not to tell you what I have heard but what I have seen—and what I have suffered.*[1]
>
> —Jacobs (1861/1987, p. 242)

These are the words of Harriet Jacobs, who, after escaping and eventually winning her freedom, took it upon herself to document her years spent as a slave in the American South during the first half of the 19th century. Speaking from a position of direct experience, Jacobs's words filled the widespread silence and ignorance about the condition of female slaves and challenged many of the misconceptions about slave women that were predominant at the time. Jacobs's goal, to educate Northerners about the cruelty and injustice of slavery and the particular suffering of female slaves within it, provided

her with the courage, strength, and motivation to tell her story. She dared hope that by sharing her own life story as a female slave, by drawing on what she herself had witnessed and experienced, she would stand a chance of convincing Northerners about the brutal truths of slavery. As Jacobs (1861/1987) puts it,

> I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history. Neither do I care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings. But I do earnestly desire to arouse women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is. Only by experience can any one realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations. May the blessing of God rest on this imperfect effort on behalf of my persecuted people! (pp. 1–2)

By revealing the acute exploitation, physical pain, and mental anguish she was forced to endure as a slave, including years of sexual harassment perpetrated by her owner, Dr. Flint, Jacobs succeeded in raising awareness among Northern women. Ultimately, the heightened awareness engendered by Jacobs's words about the horrors of slavery, and about the psychic and physical violence endured by female slaves in particular, inspired Northern white women to speak out against slavery and contributed to the growth of the Northern antislavery resistance movement.

Harriet Jacobs lived and wrote nearly 150 years ago, yet we look to her for guidance as we begin our discussion of contemporary feminist approaches to research and knowledge building. Why? Because Harriet Jacobs's life story—the strategies she applied and the goals she hoped to achieve in telling it—resonates strongly with the ongoing project of feminist research. Through sharing her own experiences as a slave girl, Harriet Jacobs opened people's eyes to what had been heretofore silenced and unknown—what life was like for slave women. As a firsthand account of slavery from the female perspective, Jacobs's story offered new insight into the brutality of the institution of slavery and helped to galvanize public critique and resistance against it. Similarly, much of contemporary feminist scholarship and research strive to give voice to women's lives that have been silenced and ignored, uncover hidden knowledge contained within women's experiences, and bring about women-centered solidarity and social change. This chapter focuses on a branch of feminist scholarship and research that was explicitly founded on these goals and that maintains an ongoing commitment to achieving them—namely, feminist standpoint epistemology.

Feminist standpoint epistemology is a unique philosophy of knowledge building that challenges us to (1) see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and (2) apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change. Feminist standpoint epistemology requires the fusion of knowledge and practice. It is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of doing research—an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action.

- But how do we actually go about integrating a feminist standpoint framework into our research practices?
- What are some of the new insights and perspectives that women's life experiences reveal about the larger social world?
- How do we translate what we learn from women's everyday lives, and from the different oppressed positions women inhabit in society, into political and social action?

These questions will prove useful guides as we trace the evolution of feminist standpoint epistemology, from its origins to its ongoing development, below.

BUILDING NEW KNOWLEDGE FROM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

While many thousands of men's lives have been recognized and recorded for centuries and across cultures, women's life stories have been documented far less often, even forgotten. As Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) puts it, women's culture, history, and lives have remained "underground and invisible," relegated to the "underside" of men's culture, history, and lives (p. 10). Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, however, and as a result of feminist consciousness-raising efforts both inside and outside of academia, women began to draw attention to the omission and exclusion of their voices and experiences in multiple arenas—politics; public policy; the professions of law, medicine, and

business; and the disciplines of science, social science, and the humanities, to name a few. In sociology classrooms, for example, female students began to express frustration with the fact that the predominantly male-centered theories and concepts they were learning about failed to take their own experiences as women into account. In the words of feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987), the sociological theories and methods being taught did not apply to "what was happening" as the female students "experienced it" (p. 86). Women's growing awareness of the contradiction between their own life experiences and the research studies and theoretical frameworks they were learning about—the failure of these studies and frameworks to accurately reflect their lives—inspired them to construct new models of knowledge building. These new models, or "alternative ways of thinking," would be developed by women for women, with the goal of granting authentic expression and representation to women's lives. One such alternative model of knowledge building came to be known as feminist standpoint epistemology.

Feminist standpoint epistemology requires us to place women at the center of the research process: Women's *concrete experiences* provide the starting point from which to build knowledge. Just as the reality about what life was like for slave women could come to light only through Harriet Jacobs's actual lived experience of it, feminist standpoint scholars emphasize the need to begin with women's lives, *as they themselves experience them,* in order to achieve an accurate and authentic understanding of what life is like for women today. Building knowledge from women's actual, or concrete, life experiences is acutely important, feminist standpoint scholars argue, if we hope to repair the historical trend of women's misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant knowledge canons. And only by making women's concrete, life experiences the primary source of our investigations can we succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women. As feminist standpoint scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1990) puts it, when making knowledge claims about women, we must always remember that it is women's "concrete experience" that provides the ultimate "criterion for credibility" of these knowledge claims (p. 209). But what exactly do we mean by women's concrete experience? How do feminist researchers go about uncovering women's concrete experiences? And what can we learn from these experiences? Let's turn now to some examples.

Women's concrete experiences consist of *what women do*. They are the wide and diverse range of activities that women engage in as part of their

everyday lives. Just one aspect of women's lives, previously understudied and undervalued, that feminist researchers continue to shed light on is the myriad nurturing tasks that many women perform on a daily basis. These nurturing tasks, from cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their families (DeVault, 1991), to caring for the children of others (Collins, 1990), to caring for their own children from afar (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997), are examples of women's concrete experiences. Further, from each of these concrete experiences, women have cultivated particular knowledge and unique sets of skills.

To shed light on the lives and experiences of oppressed women, and to uncover women's knowledge and skills that are hidden and/or undervalued, feminist scholars often make innovative use of research methods, develop alternative research strategies, and even construct new methodological techniques altogether.[2] For example, in her research on women's experiences of shopping, planning, preparing, and cooking food for their families, Marjorie DeVault (1990, 1991) found that simply asking questions and listening to her respondents' answers was not working. Many women had not often had the opportunity to talk about their daily activities with an interested party and struggled with how to put their thoughts and feelings about their daily activities into words. DeVault (1990, 1991) moved beyond the traditional interview format to adopt what Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack (1991) call the "interactive approach." She worked in collaboration with her respondents to "co-construct" new words that accurately reflected their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Marjorie DeVault's (1991) research documents the organizational and coordinating skills that women have developed from their work in planning, preparing, and cooking food for family members. The feminist standpoint scholar Alison Jaggar (1997) argues that through their ongoing practice as caretakers and nurturers, women have become especially skilled at expressing and reading emotion. Women's skill at expressing and reading emotion is important, because emotion serves several instrumental functions: "Emotion is necessary for human survival. Emotions prompt us to act appropriately, to approach some people and situations and to avoid others, to caress or cuddle, flight or flee. Without emotion, human life would be unthinkable" (Jaggar, 1997, pp. 190, 192).

Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) research reveals African American women's skill in community building, a skill derived from their unique role of caring for the children of extended family, friends, and neighbors. By performing a caretaking role that Collins calls "other mothering"—helping to fill in the gaps left

by unaffordable child care, economic hardship, and overworked parents by caring for children other than their own—these "other mothers," known and trusted by many, may come to play an instrumental part in bringing different members of the community together and leading the community forward. In addition to other mothering, another innovative form of mothering called "transnational mothering" reflects women's cultivation of particular skills. Through Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila's (1997) research, we learn about Latin American mothers who, separated from their children back home and often at great risk to themselves, live and work in the United States to provide financial support for their children. They send the bulk of their earnings home to ensure their children's well-being. Their earnings pay for their children's food, clothing, medical bills, and schooling. In this respect, these mothers have developed nurturing skills that lie outside of the traditional mother role of emotional support; although they do provide emotional support for their children through phone calls and letters, their primary method of nurturance becomes a financial one, a method traditionally reserved for fathers.

By making women's concrete experiences the "point of entry" for research and scholarship and exposing the rich array of new knowledge contained within women's experiences, feminist standpoint scholars begin to fill in the gaps on the subject of women in many disciplines. However, granting authentic expression to women's experiences, and to the knowledge that women have cultivated from these experiences, is not the only goal of feminist standpoint epistemology. Feminist standpoint epistemology also challenges us to critically examine society through women's eyes.

- What do women's experiences teach us about how society functions as a whole?
- Do women's experiences, and the knowledge gleaned from these experiences, offer us unique perspectives and insights into the world around us? If so, how?

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY THROUGH THE LENS OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

Like Harriet Jacobs, who pushed her readers to evaluate the institution of slavery through her eyes as a slave girl, feminist standpoint scholars encourage

us to use women's experiences as a lens through which to examine society as a whole. Let's return to Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) research on African American mothering to illustrate this point. Collins exposes us to an important, and previously understudied, aspect of the everyday lives of African American women called other mothering, a practice in which women care for children of friends, neighbors, and family members whose biological mothers are working outside of the home. Collins illuminates the practice of other mothering as an indicator of the resourcefulness of African American women; it is a unique and useful skill developed for and by women. At the same time, however, and as Collins points out, African American women's daily experience of other mothering, and their reliance on it, throws light on larger social and economic issues—namely, the lack of quality, affordable child care in the United States and the difficulties faced by many poor mothers as a result.

Alison Jaggar's (1997) scholarship provides us with another example of how women's everyday experience, and the knowledge that accompanies that experience, can serve as a helpful tool for understanding the larger social world. When women engage in daily household activities, and comply with socially dictated roles such as that of caretaker, they cultivate a unique set of expertise that coincides with these activities and roles. Jaggar (1997) identifies "emotional acumen"—a unique, intuitive ability to read and interpret pain and hidden emotions and understand the genesis of those emotions—as one such unique set of expertise (p. 192). But the utility of women's emotional acumen is not limited to the realm of home and family. Instead, Jaggar argues, if extended outward and applied to the social world, emotional acumen can have many vital functions. Women's emotional acumen can help to "stimulate new insights" in the disciplines of sociology and philosophy and generate a new set of "psychotherapeutic tools" in the field of psychiatry (Jaggar, 1997, p. 192). Probably the most profound potential application of emotional acumen, however, is one of political analysis and accountability. Because emotional acumen enables women to tune in more quickly to situations of "cruelty, injustice, or danger," it can become a powerful vehicle for exposing political and social injustices. By providing the "first indication that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with the accepted understanding of how things are," emotional acumen can empower women to make "subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo" (Jaggar, 1997, p. 191).

Alison Jaggar (1997) and Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) research demonstrates that women's experiences, and the knowledge garnered from these experiences, can be used as a means to draw attention to the inequalities and injustices in society as a whole. In fact, as we come to understand society through the lens of women's experiences—let's say, for example, through the eyes of African American other mothers—we take the first step toward constructing a feminist standpoint. A feminist standpoint is a way of understanding the world, a point of view of social reality, that begins with, and is developed directly from, women's experiences. The next step is to draw on what have learned from women's experiences, to *apply* that feminist standpoint, toward bettering the condition of women and creating social change. Women's experiences not only point to us flaws in larger economic and political systems but also offer potential solutions to these flaws. As Alison Jaggar (1997) explains, because women's experiences, and the feminist standpoints that evolve from them, offer us a deep understanding of the "mechanisms of domination," they also help us "envision freer ways to live" (p. 193).

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AS A MAP FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Harriet Jacobs's (1861/1987) personal account of the sexual abuse and exploitation she was forced to endure as a female slave energized antislavery activism in the North. On learning about Jacobs's experience, people came to understand the institution of slavery as a whole through the eyes of slave women—from slave women's *standpoint.* The standpoint of slave women—with the knowledge and understanding of slavery it revealed—served as a powerful starting point, or position, from which to fight against the brutal institution. Similarly, by granting honest expression to women's contemporary experiences of oppression, feminist standpoint scholars and researchers seek to agitate resistance against these experiences of oppression and implement solutions to overcome them. African American women's experiences of other mothering teach us that the capitalist system as a whole fails to provide adequate support for poor working mothers. Further, as we come to view the capitalist system from the standpoint of African American other mothers, we are exposed not only to shortcomings in the system but also to the need for change and new solutions—solutions such as universally affordable, quality

child care. In fact, often the very process of enabling women to articulate their own experiences of oppression raises awareness, among women and others, about the particular difficulties diverse women face and inspires movement toward change. Let's turn now to some more examples.

In her book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan (1963) wrote about what it was like to live as a middle-class (white) housewife in mid-century America. Drawing directly from her own experience, and the experiences of many other middle-class women, Friedan challenged the dominant conceptions about American housewives at the time. Behind the cheerful media and magazine images of housewives pushing vacuum cleaners, doing laundry, and exclaiming over their new refrigerators with delight, Friedan uncovered widespread feelings of discontent. Many women, Friedan found, suffered from boredom and loneliness and encountered frustration with their everyday lives. And when women sought help to try to overcome these unhappy feelings, they would often blame themselves: "When a woman went to a psychiatrist for help, as many women did, she would say 'I'm so ashamed' or 'I must be hopelessly neurotic'" (p. 389). Women had been taught to aspire to the role of housewife: Compliance with the role of housewife was to bring them ultimate contentment and fulfillment. Therefore, women who didn't feel this way were left to worry: "Is there something wrong with me?"

But eventually, even the male psychiatric industry began to doubt that women's unhappiness could be attributed to individual or psychological factors alone. The problem was too widespread. "'I don't know what's wrong with women today,' a suburban psychiatrist said uneasily. 'I only know something is wrong because most of my patients happen to be women'" (Friedan, 1963, p. 390). Betty Friedan granted a name to this "strange stirring, dissatisfaction and yearning" felt by so many women. She called it, aptly, "the problem that has no name" (p. 387). By articulating the unhappiness experienced by many American housewives, Friedan helped women realize that they didn't have to struggle with these feelings alone. Moreover, by publicly naming the problem, Friedan *inspired women to take action to overcome it.*

As women came together and shared their stories of unhappiness and dissatisfaction, they stopped blaming themselves for failing to comply with the happy housewife image. Instead, they began to critically examine society through the lens of their own experiences and to challenge the social norms and expectations of the woman-as-housewife model. From their shared knowledge of what life was really like for American housewives, women developed

a feminist standpoint—a critical perspective on reality and a position of political consciousness—that seriously questioned the legitimacy of the dominant worldview that women's natural and biological destiny was limited to the role of wife and mother. As Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) explains, "Without the conscious effort to reinterpret reality from one's own lived experience—that is, without political consciousness—the disadvantaged [women] are likely to accept their society's dominant world view" (p. 11). By drawing on their feminist standpoint, women were able to evaluate their experiences as housewives and mothers from a fresh perspective. They came to understand their experiences in the home not as an inescapable biological and natural destiny but instead as a role constructed and imposed on them by patriarchal society. This heightened awareness enabled women to resist dominant social perceptions that linked them exclusively to the roles of wife and mother and empowered them to pursue life and career paths outside of these roles.

Anita Hill's 1991 testimony about the sexual harassment she suffered from then judicial nominee Clarence Thomas, and the heightened awareness and legal protections against sexual harassment in the workforce that followed, provides another striking example of the vital relationship between granting voice to women's experiences of oppression and activating movement toward social change. In 1991, Hill articulated her experience of sexual harassment in a public hearing before the Senate judiciary committee. Humble and soft-spoken, Hill was a reluctant public witness. Yet her descriptions of the harassment she endured resonated with countless American women. On hearing Hill's story, thousands of American women came forward and told similar stories of abuse they had endured in the workplace. Women who had previously suffered in silence on the job filed a record number of sexual harassment complaints. Sexual harassment laws were rewritten or tightened in business and in government. The year following Hill's testimony, 1992, was hailed "the year of the woman," as a record number of women were elected to Congress, attributed largely to the "Anita Hill effect" (George-Graves, 2003, p. 16).

Anita Hill's testimony provided women with the courage and strength to build a critique of sexual harassment and to fight against it. As women came together and shared their stories, they stopped suffering alone and blaming themselves for the harassment they encountered. They stopped perceiving sexual harassment as a personal problem that they had to endure in private and questioning whether such harassment was a result of their own shortcomings.

Instead, drawing from their own experiences of sexual harassment, women developed a new point of view and position—a feminist standpoint—on the culture of the workplace as a whole. As women examined the workplace through the lens of their own experiences, they started to unpack connections between the harassment they suffered and several aspects of workplace structure—namely, widespread power imbalances based on gender and a blatant lack of laws prohibiting the sexual harassment of women and providing any serious recourse for women to fight against it. Thus, out of the process of sharing and articulating their experiences of harassment, women acquired a heightened level of consciousness about the issue and began to interpret their own experiences from a new perspective. This new perspective—or feminist standpoint—enabled women to locate the true root cause of sexual harassment and empowered them to do something to change it.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Feminist standpoint scholarship and research teach us that women's experiences of oppression provide a powerful lens through which to evaluate society and a base from which to change it. In this section, we explore one aspect of the lens created from women's experiences of oppression in greater detail, an aspect feminist standpoint scholars call "double vision" or "double consciousness."

We now turn to the following questions:

- What is double consciousness?
- How does it develop out of women's experiences of oppression?
- Does it offer women unique insights into society as a whole?
- What about its utility for social change?

Feminist standpoint scholars argue that women, as members of an oppressed group, have cultivated a double consciousness—a heightened awareness not only of their own lives but of the lives of the dominant group (men) as well. Often, women's daily lives and labor remain invisible to the dominant group (men). Women, on the other hand, are tuned in to the "dominant worldview of the society *and* their own minority perspective" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 10). Put differently, women have a "working, active consciousness" of both perspectives (Smith, 1990, p. 19). In some cases, women's capacity for

double consciousness grows out of their compliance with socially dictated roles, such as those of wife and mother. In other cases, women develop a double consciousness to ensure their own, and their family's, physical and economic survival.

Men do not necessarily recognize, nor are they always conscious of, the daily labor many women perform in the home and their dependence on it. But many women must attend to the everyday tasks of cooking, laundry, and child care, *and* learn to navigate, or at least become functionally familiar with, the (male-dominated) public sphere of the capitalist marketplace. In this respect, women mediate between two worlds, the world of "localized activities oriented toward particular others, keeping things clean, managing somehow the house and household and the children" and the male world of the marketplace, a world of abstraction and rationality (Smith, 1990, p. 20). Susan Ostrander's (1984) research shows, for example, that in addition to managing the household, women are often expected to be conversant in, and acquire a working knowledge of, their husbands' work activities. Familiarity with the names of coworkers and the daily goings on in their husbands' workplaces enables women to provide emotional support to their husbands, support that ultimately maintains their husbands' ongoing participation and success in the public sphere (Ostrander, 1984; Smith, 1999).

While some women develop a double consciousness as they attempt to conform to particular social roles and expectations, other women rely on their capacity for double consciousness to protect themselves and to ensure survival. As Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) explains, if a woman is in an oppressed position, it is often to her advantage to be "attuned and attentive" to the male perspective as well as to her own. To survive "socially and sometimes even physically," women must familiarize themselves with how "men view the world" and to be able to "read, predict, and understand the interests, motivations, expectations, and attitudes of men" (p. 10). Harriet Jacobs's (1861/1987) survival story serves as a striking case in point. To protect herself against the sexual abuse of her master as best she could, Jacobs had to become an expert knower of his mind and moods. As she explains, "He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes"—sometimes he had "stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue" (p. 27). Upon familiarizing herself with her master's psychology, Jacobs determined that his "quiet moods" were the most dangerous—"of the two, I preferred his stormy moods, although they left me trembling" (p. 27)—and found creative and skillful ways to avoid such moods.

bell hooks's (2004) account of growing up poor and black in Southern Kentucky provides another example of how double consciousness can develop as individuals fight to maintain survival, in particular material survival. Every day, hooks and her neighbors would cross the tracks to the white section of town where, working as maids, janitors, and prostitutes, they earned just enough money to obtain food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their families. They were permitted to work in the white section of town, with its "paved streets, stores we were not allowed to enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face," as long as it was in the "service capacity" (p. 156). However, they were not allowed to live there. At the end of each day of work, hooks and her neighbors would cross the tracks to "shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town." "There were laws to ensure our return. Not to return was to risk being punished" (p. 156). By crossing the tracks to work everyday, hooks and her neighbors developed a "working consciousness" of the white world as well as their own. Whites however, seldom crossed the tracks in the other direction.

hooks's (2004) account focuses more on African Americans as an oppressed group versus whites as a dominant group rather than women versus men. However, hooks's explanation of how double consciousness develops as individuals fight for material survival can be applied specifically to women as well. It is probable that some of the African American individuals that hooks describes were women who worked for white men and who depended on white men for their material survival. In fact, some feminist standpoint scholars draw parallels between women's capacity for double consciousness and the capacity for double consciousness among other oppressed groups, such as African Americans. Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) states:

> Given that blacks in our culture are exposed to dominant white culture in school and through mass media as well as in interaction with whites, we can see how it is possible that blacks could know both white and black culture while whites know only their own. The same might be said for women vis-à-vis men. (p. 10)[3]

It should be clear now that women's capacity for double consciousness grants them a unique perspective, or lens, through which to evaluate society as a whole. Out of their experiences of oppression and exploitation, and their

enactment of gender specific (subordinate) roles, women have developed, in hooks's (2004) language, a "mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors" (p. 156). Women are tuned in to men's activities, attitudes, and behaviors *and* to their own. But men, as members of the dominant group, are not necessarily tuned in to women's activities and behaviors; instead men's mode of seeing reality is more likely to be rooted exclusively in their own experiences. Women's capacity for double consciousness enables them to see and understand "certain features of reality . . . from which others [men] are obscured" (Jaggar, 2004, p. 60). This unique "mode of seeing," this ability to know and understand the dominant group's attitudes and behaviors as well as their own, places women in an advantageous position from which to change society for the better. To improve a given society, it is necessary to comprehend how that society functions as a whole, become familiar with the everyday lives of the dominant groups and the oppressed groups, and understand the interrelations between them. Thus, the knowledge gleaned from women's double consciousness can be applied to diagnose social inequalities and injustices and to construct and implement solutions. bell hooks (2004) sums it up best when she says that double consciousness serves both as a powerful "space of resistance" and a "site of radical possibility" (p. 156).

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AND STRONG OBJECTIVITY

Some feminist standpoint scholars argue that women's subordinate status in society, and their capacity for double consciousness that evolves from it, places them in a privileged position from which to generate knowledge about the world. This feminist standpoint concept, sometimes called "strong objectivity,"[4] teaches us that women are more capable of producing an *accurate, comprehensive, and objective* interpretation of social reality than men are. As Alison Jaggar (2004) explains, women's "distinctive social position" makes possible a "view of the world that is more reliable and less distorted" than that available to the "ruling class" (or men; pp. 56, 57). Furthermore, some feminist standpoint scholars argue that research that begins from women's everyday lives as members of an oppressed group will lead to knowledge claims that are "less partial and distorted" than research that begins "from the lives of men in the dominant groups" (Harding, 1991, p. 185). Why? We turn now to a more detailed explanation, with examples.

In many societies, feminist standpoint scholars argue, knowledge is produced and controlled by the ruling class. Therefore, in a given society, the prevailing interpretation of reality will reflect the interests and values of the ruling class. Because of its commitment to maintaining power, the ruling class seeks to conceal the ways in which it dominates and exploits the rest of the population. The interpretation of reality the ruling class presents will be distorted such that the "suffering of the subordinate classes will be ignored, redescribed as enjoyment or justified as freely chosen, deserved, or inevitable" (Jaggar, 2004, p. 56). The positions of power and privilege that members of the ruling class inhabit allow them to separate and insulate themselves from the suffering of the oppressed, and to be more easily convinced by their own (distorted) ideology. Members of the ruling class experience the "current organization of society as basically satisfactory and so they accept the interpretation of reality that justifies that system of organization. They encounter little in their daily lives that conflicts with that interpretation" (p. 56).

Members of the ruling class are satisfied with the status quo and have no cause to question the prevailing interpretation of reality. The daily suffering faced by members of the oppressed groups, on the other hand, presents a series of "particularly significant *problems to be explained*" (Harding, 1993, p. 54) and demands further investigation. Sometimes the dominant (ruling-class-authored) ideology succeeds in temporarily convincing oppressed groups to accept their pain, to self-blame, or to deny it altogether. But ultimately, the pervasiveness, intensity, and relentlessness of their suffering push oppressed groups toward a

> realization that something is wrong with the social order. Their pain provides them with a motivation for finding out what is wrong, for criticizing accepted interpretations of reality, and for developing new and less distorted ways of understanding the world. (Jaggar, 2004, p. 56)[5]

Women, as members of an oppressed group, have no cause or motivation to misconstrue reality. Unlike men, who, as ruling class members, have constructed a distorted interpretation of reality to protect their interests and maintain their power, women's subordinate status means that they are likely to develop a "clearer and more trustworthy understanding of the world" (Jaggar, 2004, p. 62). Let's start with the example of Harriet Jacobs. If we

examine the institution of slavery from her standpoint, through her eyes and her own lived experience of it, we obtain an interpretation of the institution that differs greatly from the dominant interpretations at the time. Slave owners constructed a paternalistic discourse about slavery: Slaves were helpless, weak minded, even subhuman, and masters were kindly father figures who took care of them and provided for them. Slave women were often portrayed as animal-like, hypersexualized, and in need of being "tamed" by the Victorian virtues and morals of their white mistresses. From Harriet Jacobs, we learn the truth about the widespread cruel and brutal treatment of slaves by their masters, and we learn about the humanity, suffering, and courage of slave women in particular. By exposing the reality of the sexual violence and exploitation that many slave women were forced to endure, Jacobs succeeded in challenging the (distorted) ideologies about slave women that held sway at the time.

Betty Friedan's (1963) research on American housewives in the 1950s and 1960s provides another example of how women's subordinate status in society places them in an advantageous position from which to build knowledge—to construct a more accurate picture of social reality. As we learned about in an earlier section, dominant ideologies and media images of the 1950s portrayed women as happy housewives—women's true and only calling in life was that of wife and mother. But in reality, many women were feeling unhappy, dissatisfied, and limited by that role. And these feelings of emotional pain and frustration motivated women to come forward and challenge the widespread happy housewife ideology. Women were able to successfully question the validity of an accepted interpretation of reality—that of the happy housewife—based on *their own knowledge and lived experience as housewives.* Finally, by overturning that (distorted) happy housewife ideology, women were free to step outside the boundaries and restrictions of the housewife role, to pursue other goals, interests, and skills—in short, to construct a new reality that more accurately reflected the full range of their potential as human beings.

In sum, the feminist standpoint concept of strong objectivity teaches us that the representation of reality from the standpoint of women is "more objective and unbiased than the prevailing representations that reflect the standpoint of men" (Jaggar, 2004, p. 62). Strong objectivity stems from women's oppressed position in society and from their capacity for double consciousness that evolves from that position. Because women can know and

understand the dominant groups' behaviors and ideologies as well as their own, starting research from women's lives means that "certain areas or aspects of the world are not excluded" (Jaggar, 2004, p. 62). As Sandra Harding (2004b) puts it, "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order" (p. 128).

NEW COMPLEXITIES AND MULTIPLE STANDPOINTS

As we have learned above, some feminist standpoint scholars argue that women's subordinate status in society, combined with their capacity for double consciousness, grants them a kind of "epistemological privilege" (Jaggar, 1997; Narayan, 2004) from which new and critical research questions arise. These new and critical questions, if explored, may produce a less "distorted" and more "reliable" understanding of social reality (Harding, 1993; Jaggar, 1997, p. 192). Further, and perhaps most important, because research that starts from women's lives yields a more accurate picture of how a given society functions, it also uncovers the *necessary ingredients for social change.* Only by exposing the intraworkings of society as a whole do we learn about which elements require modification and reconstruction such that a more just, humane, and equitable society can be constructed. As Alison Jaggar (1997) explains, because research that begins with women's lives grants a more accurate and "reliable appraisal" of society, it *also* grants us a "better chance" of "ascertaining the possible beginnings" of a new society, a society in which all members can equally thrive (p. 192).

More recently, however, some feminist standpoint scholars have begun to challenge and rework the claim of women's capacity for a more complete understanding of social reality and the potentiality of producing more "objective" results by beginning research from the lives of women. As Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) puts it, feminist standpoint claims to accuracy and objectivity are both "promising and problematic" (p. 25). One the one hand, feminist standpoint scholars remain committed to the "liberating effect" of these claims and the goals of social justice and social change that accompany them. After all, the main purpose of attaining a more accurate, more complete understanding of society is to be able to change it for the "betterment of all" (p. 25). On the other hand, many object to the very notion, implicit within these feminist

standpoint claims to accuracy and objectivity, that the experiences and perspectives of one group (in this case women's) are more "real (better or more accurate) than another's" (p. 25).

Beyond the difficulties of establishing that women as a group, unlike men as a group, have a unique and exclusive capacity for accurately reading the complexities of social reality, it is equally problematic to reduce all women to a group sharing one experience and a single point of view, or standpoint, based on that experience. This form of essentialism is a double-edged sword. Notions of objectivity, and the "more accurate" or "more reliable" standpoint of women, become increasingly difficult to negotiate as a diverse array of women's experiences are taken into account.

- How is the nature of feminist standpoint epistemology changing as racial, cultural, and class-based differences between women are exposed?
- As feminist standpoint scholars recognize women's multiple social realities, do they lose the capacity to produce truthful and meaningful research findings?
- Do the experiences and standpoints of some women offer a more objective and accurate assessment of social reality than those of others?
- If so, what are the criteria for determining the experiences and standpoints that are the most or the least reliable?

Let's turn to these critical questions in greater detail.

Most feminist standpoint scholars now acknowledge that women "occupy many different standpoints and inhabit many different realities" (Hekman, 2004, p. 227). In short, they take differences between women seriously. However, while the claim that women can be categorized into one group with uniform characteristics and a single standpoint has been discarded, feminist standpoint scholars continue to debate how best to incorporate women's differences into the research process. A range of strategies has been suggested. Sandra Harding (1991, 1993, 2004a) has proposed several, two of which are highlighted here. The first requires the consideration of women's different standpoints but at the same time maintains that some standpoints may generate more truthful, objective knowledge claims than others. Specifically, this tactic suggests that the higher the level of oppression, the more objective the account: The standpoint of the most oppressed group of women will generate the most truthful research findings. As Harding (1991) explains,

> It should be clear that if it is beneficial to start research, scholarship and theory in white women's situations, then we should be able to learn even more about the social and natural orders if we start from the situations of women in de-valued and oppressed races, classes and cultures. (pp. 179–180)

In this approach, Harding urges researchers and scholars to engage in a process of "critical evaluation" to determine which social situations "tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims" (Harding, 1991, p. 142).

In a second approach, Harding (1993, 2004a) calls for heightened attention to be paid to the differences and even the conflicts between women's standpoints:

> Feminist knowledge has started off from women's lives, but it has started off from many different women's lives; there is no typical or essential woman's life from which feminisms start their thought. Moreover, these different women's lives are in important respects opposed to each other. (Harding, 1993, p. 65)

In this approach, Harding (2004a) emphasizes that it is precisely in the differences, diversity, and even conflict between women's experiences that we can learn the most about society at large. As she explains,

> Each oppressed group will have its own critical insights about nature and the larger social order in order to contribute to the collection of human knowledge. Because different groups are oppressed in different ways, each has the possibility (not the certainty) of developing distinctive insights about systems of social relations in general in which their oppression is a feature. (p. 9)

And yet, despite Harding's call to recognize difference—the "subjects/agents of feminist standpoint theory" are "multiple, heterogeneous, and contradictory"—she continues to emphasize the fact that the experiences of the oppressed, no matter how diverse, produce more accurate accounts of the social order than the accounts of the dominant groups. She states, "Nevertheless, thought that starts off from each of these different kinds of lives can generate less partial and distorted accounts of nature and social life" (Harding, 1993, p. 65).

In contrast to Harding's concept of a "maximally objective" standpoint, but in resonance with Harding's recent emphasis on difference, other feminist scholars also focus on the *diverse array* of knowledge found within a

multiplicity of standpoints. Instead of attempting to find tactics that reduce all standpoints to the "least distorted one," or to generate universal knowledge claims from an additive model of multiple standpoints, these feminist scholars question whether it is possible, or even desirable, to "produce a single, unified and complete description of the world" (Longino, 1999, p. 339). Each woman's standpoint presents a unique lived experience and perspective and *should be valued as such.* According to these feminist standpoint scholars, paying attention to the distinctive characteristics of each woman's standpoint, and the diversity among and between women's experiences, does not interfere with our capacity to build knowledge. In fact, it is precisely within the distinctive characteristics of a particular standpoint, or the uniqueness of a particular woman's experience, that we can hope to find new knowledge.

Donna Haraway (1991) and Helen Longino (1999) argue that knowledge grows out of women's unique lived experiences, and the specific interpretations of social reality (or standpoints) that accompany those experiences. Instead of attempting to glide over differences between women, Haraway (1991) points to the invaluable insights gleaned from the differences between women's standpoints and the "elaborate specificity" of each (p. 190). Similarly, Longino (1999) asserts that women's knowledge is located in "particular places, in particular times" (p. 333). Women have different standpoints, and embody different knowledges, depending on how they are oriented toward, and interact with, their environments. In this way, each woman's unique experience and standpoint directs our attention to details and features that we might otherwise overlook (p. 335).

By applying the knowledge-building strategies proposed by Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, and Helen Longino to some of the women's lives that we have become familiar with throughout this chapter, we gain a clearer understanding of how each of their strategies actually work in practice. According to Sandra Harding's first tactic, for example, the lives and experiences of poor African American women (highlighted by Patricia Hill Collins's, 1990, research) potentially offer a more accurate and complete picture of social reality than the lives and experiences of white middle- and upper-middle-class housewives (highlighted by Betty Friedan's, 1963, research). The implication is not to deny any oppression or suffering experienced by white women. However, because the oppression and suffering experienced by African American women as a group tends to be greater than that of white women, it is by starting from the lives and experiences of

African American women that we achieve a more objective standpoint on society as a whole.

According to Donna Haraway (1991) and Helen Longino (1999), we can learn more by paying close attention to the unique perspective, or standpoint, on social reality that the experiences of African American women and white women offer us. Each of these women's experiences teaches us something different and valuable about society. By starting with the everyday lives of poor African American women, we learn about society from the perspective of women who have to work outside the home to make ends meet. We learn about low wages; the lack of quality, affordable child care; and the creative alternative child care strategies that African American women have developed. By starting with the everyday lives of white middle- and upper-middle-class housewives on the other hand, we learn about society from the perspective of women who do not have to work outside the home to make ends meet. We learn about the dissatisfaction and isolation these women experience as they perform their daily housekeeping and nurturing tasks in the home—and about the falseness of the happy housewife imagery and ideology. We also learn about women's desires to expand their lives beyond the roles of wife and mother—to enter the outside world of work.

OVERCOMING RELATIVISM

If, as Donna Haraway (1991), Helen Longino (1999), Sandra Harding (1991, 1993, 2004a, 2004b), and others encourage, we value the unique perspective on reality—or standpoint—produced by each woman's lived experience and respect the diversity of knowledge generated by women's many different experiences, do we also give up the opportunity for political activism?

- Is it possible to value a diverse range of women's perspectives and lived experiences *and* come together and create an organized force for social change?

Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) characterizes this dilemma as follows: "Once one rejects objectivism, the alternative seems to be a kind of relativism that is not very satisfying" (p. 28). It is difficult to combine women's many experiences

into one universal standpoint without risking the repression of differences between women or the reduction of all women to a single group with uniform characteristics. On the other hand, by valuing the diversity of women's experiences and perspectives equally, feminist standpoint scholars must be careful to avoid a kind of paralysis that hinders women from moving forward together and taking a stand on social issues. If all groups produce "specialized thought and each group's thought is equally valid" and no group can claim to have a "better interpretation of 'the truth' than another" (Collins, 1993, p. 625), do we risk a state of apolitical relativism, a state of "being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally" (Haraway, 1991, p. 191)? It seems clear that if women are going to work to influence, change, and create new social policies, it is imperative that they develop some common ground or shared perspectives to meet with success. As Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) explains,

> One could argue that there is no need to determine one view as more correct, that plurality of views could prevail. But at some point—such as when important decisions have to be made—some view of social reality must be endorsed. To develop a policy about abortion, for example, one would have to take a stance in an area where there are conflicting, seemingly irreconcilable views. (p. 27)

But how can we facilitate the coming together of women with different lived experiences and unique perspectives and encourage the bridging of standpoints needed to wage a successful battle for social change without also suppressing the diversity and uniqueness of each?

Many feminist standpoint scholars emphasize the need for open dialogue between women and across different perspectives as a first step toward building the kinds of allied networks or solid bases needed to fight from. Helen Longino (1999) encourages the development of sites of "critical discourse" both within and between communities. In these sites, community members freely express their own perspectives *and* engage in dialogue with other communities whose "shared background is different" (p. 343). Similarly, bell hooks (1990) declares the need for "meaningful contestation and constructive confrontation" between different perspectives and urges the creation of safe spaces "where critical dialogues can take place between individuals who have not traditionally been compelled . . . to speak with one another" (p. 133).

The kind of dialogue that feminist standpoint scholars encourage is one in which every woman's unique lived experience and the perspective, or

standpoint, based on her experience gains a hearing. Indeed, some feminist standpoint scholars argue that through the very process of constructing a space that is open to dialogue across women's different experiences and standpoints, a space where a multiplicity of women's voices are granted equal air time, we actually build *community.* Patricia Hill Collins (1990) urges us to hearken back to the African call and response tradition, whereby everyone must learn to speak and to listen to ensure membership in the community: "Everyone has a voice, but everyone must listen and respond to other voices in order to be allowed to remain in the community" (p. 625–626). In the context of such a community, a community that serves as a gathering site on which multiple standpoints converge, and where respectful listening and dialogic interchange is encouraged, we can begin to imagine the potential for increased understanding among and between women from different backgrounds and cultures and from different life experiences.

Patricia Hill Collins (1993) describes the potential for community-driven growth of empathetic understanding between groups who hold different standpoints as follows:

> Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is unfinished. Each group becomes better able to consider other groups' standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups' partial perspectives. (p. 626)

In this way, through communal dialogue, a multiplicity of views are shared and listened to. It is precisely because each community member is able to trust that her own unique perspective will be heard and respected that she is able to fully hear and respect the views of others. Such communal dialogue may enable us to reach a point at which, as Elsa Barkley Brown puts it, "all people can learn to center in another's experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own" (cited in Collins, 1993, p. 625). But beyond facilitating empathetic understanding across women's standpoints *and* respecting the diversity and uniqueness of each, can such communal dialogue enable active alliances between standpoints?

In fact, as feminist standpoint scholars point out, communal dialogue that fosters interaction between women while also maintaining respect for the diversity of women's perspectives sets the stage for intragroup connections

and enables the growth of alliances that are needed to wield power and forge social change. As women's diverse standpoints are shared, respectfully listened to, and validated, connections may be made "where none existed before" (Walker, cited in Collins, 1993, p. 625). As a woman shares her story of being sexually harassed in the workforce or being denied access to a safe and legal abortion, for example, other women who have not experienced these same events but have encountered gender-based exploitation and feelings of powerlessness in other contexts will probably connect to her experience.

These connections do not have to be made at the expense of diversity, nor do they risk the denial of women's different and unique lived experiences. Instead, women can connect with one another through identifying a "common thread," or a "unifying theme through immense diversity" (Walker, cited in Collins, 1993, p. 625). Let's say, for example, that working women from a range of socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds came together to share and listen to each other's experiences and perspectives on work and family issues. Without denying or disrespecting each other's differences, they could probably unite around some common problems and join together to fight for some common goals, such as equal pay to men, better maternity leave programs, more affordable and quality child care, and better protections against sexual harassment in the workforce. Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) describes this process as a "fusion of horizons": "With communication across and among a diversity of women's standpoints, each standpoint may be enlarged, enriched, or broadened such that a fusion, or synthesis, between standpoints may occur" (p. 29).[6]

By coming together and sharing their unique experiences and perspectives, women can build alliances, develop a common position, and take a stand on a particular issue without compromising their differences. Achieving a shared position, or standpoint, on a particular issue promotes the most promising course of action for social change—a solid base from which to fight. At the same time, we must also remember that women's experiences, perspectives, and the issues they face are constantly evolving and changing across space and time. Therefore, it is important that dialogue between and among women does not *end* with the achievement of a particular alliance, or shared standpoint. Instead, as many feminist standpoint scholars point out, dialogue must be *ongoing*. We must work to find ways to incorporate continuous listening and interchange into our communities of women—or, more simply, to construct *community* in Patricia Hill Collins's sense of the word. Such ongoing dialogue

and debate, if successfully integrated into our communities, also drives, and even guarantees, a built-in process of healthy evaluation, a process Helen Longino (1999) calls "socializing justification." Maintaining a safe space for ongoing dialogue and debate—and for the creation and re-creation of new alliances and standpoints among and between women—remains acutely important as new issues arise and as women's struggles for justice take on new shape and form.

In many respects, committing to ongoing dialogic interchange and evaluative processes between and among women's standpoints is one and the same with committing to the ongoing struggle for women's empowerment. After all, women's struggles are not uniform or stagnant but ongoing and subject to change. For example, take the issue of women and work. In the 1960s and 1970s, women fought just to gain entry into the workforce.[7] Then, there were the struggles for equal pay. Now women are fighting for better maternity leave policies and more affordable quality child care.[8] The fact that women's experience, and their standpoint on reality that evolves from that experience, may change and evolve across space and time does not make it any less real or legitimate. As Linda Alcoff (1989) argues, women can achieve a positionality, or standpoint, that is simultaneously "determinate" *and* "mutable" (p. 325). In other words, we can treat women's standpoints on a particular issue or set of issues as legitimate, as serious, as grounded in social reality while also acknowledging these standpoints' location within a "moving historical context" (p. 325). Indeed, by highlighting "historical movement and the subject's ability to alter her context" (p. 325), we take women's standpoints seriously without reducing all women to a universal group with the same experiences, needs, and characteristics.

CONCLUSION

Feminist standpoint epistemology is an innovative approach to knowledge building that breaks down boundaries between academia and activism, between theory and practice. Feminist standpoint scholars seek to give voice to members of oppressed groups—namely, women—and to uncover the hidden knowledge that women have cultivated from living life "on the margins." Feminist standpoint epistemology asks not just that we take women seriously as knowers but that we translate women's knowledge into practice, that we apply what we learn from

women's experiences toward social change and toward the elimination of the oppression not only of women but of all marginalized groups.

Feminist standpoint epistemology has become more complex and multifaceted and continues to evolve over time. Feminist standpoint scholars no longer talk about *the* experience of women or conflate all women into one oppressed group. They recognize instead that women hail from a diverse range of class, cultural, and racial backgrounds, inhabit many different social realities, and endure oppression and exploitation in many different shapes and forms. As a result, the theoretical development of feminist standpoint epistemology is multidimensional and ongoing, and scholars working within the feminist standpoint framework continue to apply new and innovative research methods to capture the diversity of women's lives and experiences. Some of these methods will be explored in other chapters in this volume. Finally, while feminist standpoint scholars understand and recognize differences between and among women—different experiences of oppression and different standpoints, or perspectives, based on those experiences—they also continue to emphasize the importance of dialogue between and among women, the need for empathetic understanding, and the potential for achieving alliances. After all, alliances between and among women are possible—*without risking the repression of difference*—and *necessary*, if we hope to fight for more just societies and to improve women's condition within them.

NOTES

1. This is excerpted from a letter written by Harriet Jacobs to her publisher in 1857. In it, Jacobs describes her motivation for writing her autobiography, titled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself.*

2. It is important to note that although feminist research methods are not the explicit focus of this chapter, feminist research methods were employed in many of the studies on women's lives and experiences that are cited throughout. The discussions of women's lives and experiences in this chapter are concerned more with content than with method. However, because many of the women's lives and experiences highlighted here would not be known about except for the application of new and innovative feminist methods, the importance of such methods is implicit. After all, the framework of feminist standpoint epistemology demands that women's lives and experiences, "hitherto denied, repressed, and subordinated" (Smith, 1990, p. 12), break out and gain a hearing. To gain access to and uncover women's lives and experiences, new and innovative feminist methods are often required. Feminist interviewing, autobiography, oral history techniques, and institutional ethnography are examples of the feminist methods used to acquire the information about women's lives and experiences cited in this chapter. These feminist methods, among others, will be discussed in greater detail and serve as the primary focus of later chapters in this volume.

3. The philosopher G.W. F. Hegel's (1967) concept of the "master-slave dialectic" easily applies here but transferred to the case of women and men. Hegel explains that the master is only able to have an illusion of independence, the illusion of an independent consciousness, precisely because of his dependence upon his slave. Without his slave's emotional and material labor, he would not be free to engage in "independent pursuits." While the slave, to ensure his own survival, must remain aware not only of his own world but the world of his master as well, the master, due to his privileged position, is able to remain unaware of the world of his slave. Indeed, just as many men remain unaware of their dependence upon women's labor (labor which sustains their dominance) so too is the master unaware of his dependence upon the slave.

4. The concept "strong objectivity" was developed and named by feminist standpoint scholar and philosopher Sandra Harding. For more from Harding on strong objectivity, see the first Behind-the-Scenes piece in Chapter 1 of this volume. See also Harding's book *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Harding, 1991) and her chapter "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity?'" in *Feminist Epistemologies* (Harding, 1993) and, in updated form, in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (Harding, 2004a), edited by Sandra Harding. Please also note that "strong reflexivity," an important aspect of Harding's "strong objectivity" that bears relevance to the method and practice of research, is not the focus of our discussion here. Strong reflexivity demands that researchers actively acknowledge, and reflect on, how their social locations, biographical histories, and worldviews interact with, influence, and are influenced by the research process. For more from Harding on strong reflexivity, see the second Behind-the-Scenes piece in Chapter 1 of this volume. Finally, some manifestations of strong reflexivity—namely, practicing reflexivity about one's own social location, biographical history, and worldview throughout the research process—are discussed in Chapter 5 of this volume.

5. In some instances however, while women's suffering plays a large role, it is not their pain alone that motivates them to begin to critique and challenge the status quo. As we have learned about in the case of American housewives of the 1950s or from the women who suffered from sexual harassment in the early 1990s, sometimes a process of consciousness-raising also needs to occur. As women come together and share their stories and begin to understand that they are not suffering alone, they stop blaming themselves for their own suffering and are empowered to look outward, toward society, and challenge the societal norms and dominant ideologies that are oppressing them. In this way, women's critical point of view—their position of political consciousness—their feminist standpoint—has to be *achieved* (Hartsock, 2004) through a process of consciousness-raising, as opposed to stemming directly and unproblematically from their pain and suffering.

6. Another hypothetical example of Walker's (cited in Collins, 1993) concept of a "unifying theme through immense diversity" and Nielsen's (1990) "fusion of horizons" is as follows: If a group of women get together to discuss abortion rights, each woman's standpoint may be deepened or broadened as she learns about other women's experiences, concerns, and perspectives. A woman who is socioeconomically privileged may focus solely on the legal right to choose to have an abortion. A woman who is from a rural area may also be worried about a literal lack of access to doctors' offices or clinics in her area that perform abortions. Finally, a poor woman may express concern about whether she can afford to pay for a safe and legal abortion. Through sharing and listening to each other's different concerns, these women might formulate a more complex, more developed standpoint on abortion rights—moving from a straightforward pro-choice position to a pro-choice position that demands a certain number of available clinics per region *and* governmental assistance to help ensure that poor women can obtain safe and legal abortions.

7. That is not to deny the many thousands of women who had been tilling the land and working in service, industry, education, and medicine prior to the 1960s and 1970s. After all, for hundreds of years many women across the globe have had to work to maintain their own, and their families', survival.

8. It is also important to note that each of these struggles are ongoing: Women still do not equal men's numbers in the higher-ranking professions, for example, and continue to make less money than men make in equivalent positions.

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FOUR

FEMINIST POSTMODERNISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Patricia Lina Leavy

When "The Repressed" of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before.

—Cixous & Clément (1996, p. ix)

Efforts of subversion . . . are conceived within culture, within the languages which speak us, which we must turn to our own purposes.

—Du Bois (1988, p. 188)

I don't know about the term "postmodern," but if there is a point, and a fine point, to what I perhaps understand better as poststructuralism, it is that power pervades the very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms, including the subject position of the critic; and further, that this implication of the terms of criticism in the field of power is not the advent of a nihilistic relativism incapable of furnishing norms, but, rather, the very precondition of a politically engaged critique.

—Butler (1992, pp. 6–7)

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Feminist empiricism is often viewed as one end of the continuum on which feminist research is grounded, postmodernism is the other end. Although postmodernism is often talked about as a theoretical perspective, I believe that it reflects an epistemological position. Perhaps one of the reasons that postmodernism has been the subject of so much conflict is that it takes feminist concerns out of the realm of methodology and into the realm of epistemology. That is, postmodernism asks vital questions about the nature of knowledge and knowledge building. This epistemological grounding is the focus of this chapter.

While it is later in this chapter that I review feminist postmodernism in detail, thus differentiating it from feminist empiricism and standpoint epistemology, it is important to explain how feminist postmodernism sits on the epistemology continuum in relation to these other positions. Postmodern feminist researchers explain that, in their own ways, both feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint epistemology ultimately revert to essentialist claims in the way they use "women" as an identity category. In this vein, postmodern feminism posits a "false divide" between feminist empiricism and standpoint, both of which have failed to end women's oppression and both of which rely on the same essentialism, which has caused the oppression feminists seek to do away with (Cosgrove, 2003). In short, both feminist empiricists and feminist standpoint epistemologists revert to essentialism by viewing gender as an independent variable (add women and stir into preexisting models) in the former, and as an inherent trait in the latter (Cosgrove, 2003; Hekman, 1999). The postmodern critique of feminist empiricism focuses on the extent to which feminist empiricism relies on positivist science which has ultimately failed to bring about gender equality. In this regard Lisa Cosgrove (2003) writes,

> The continued focus on gender difference research, together with the failure to address how gender is symbolized and produced, have contributed to the belief that differences between men and women are essential, universal, and ahistorical. (p. 91)

According to postmodern feminism, while standpoint theory has alerted researchers to their location within the research project, which could potentially "radicalize" the research process, standpoint does not go far enough and resorts to essentialist claims like "women's voice." For example, drawing on the work of Layton (1998, p. 217), Cosgrove (2003) explains that there is a fundamental difference in saying that women are relational and that "femininity is symbolized as relational" (p. 89). Standpoint does the former without looking at how gender is produced within the symbolic realm. Standpoint theorists' focus on "voice" often deters a closer examination of difference and "disidentification" (Cosgrove, 2003; Pujal, 1998). Cosgrove (2003) sums up the limitations of standpoint as follows:

> The issue is not with standpoint theory or with the metaphor of voice per se. Rather, the problem is that the implicit assumptions made about gender, experience, and identity—do not allow for an analysis of the complexity of power relations of which gender, identity, and experience are embedded. (pp. 89–90)

Feminist postmodern theory has developed as an alternative to these two approaches, which are often presented as polarized views but in actuality resort to the essentialist logic from which women's oppression has flowed. Postmodern feminism is thus at the other end of the feminist epistemology continuum while also problematizing the polarization of feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint epistemology.

Postmodern theory has perhaps garnered more criticism within academia than any other movement in recent history. Furthermore, within feminist scholarship the relationship between feminism and postmodernism has been a source of major division and consternation for fear that just when women are beginning to be included in the research process and have been given "voice," this new view on knowledge building threatens to undermine the success feminism has achieved. In some ways, the strongest critique of postmodern feminism has come from within feminism. However, while this critique is important, it all too often overshadows feminist postmodern epistemology. In this vein, I will begin by discussing some background in the development of postmodern thought followed by a review of feminist interpretations of postmodernism. After establishing what postmodernism is and how feminists have contributed to this grounding, I will review the major critique of feminist postmodernism, which centers on issues of political pragmatism, identity, subject position, and agency.

It is also important to mention upfront that postmodernism is an umbrella category that has been used to categorize disparate theoretical and epistemological viewpoints. Alcoff (1997) refers to postmodernism as "an inherently fractured term" (p. 6). Oftentimes, scholars have the label postmodern placed on them but would not define their work as such. Other times, the views that

are considered postmodern are so different that a binding thread is difficult to discern. Some in fact wonder if postmodernism refers to a historical moment, a theoretical framework, an epistemology, or a certain set of concerns. Given the unprecedented and impassioned criticism that postmodernism has drawn within feminism and the larger research community, the grouping together of theories under the rubric of postmodernism becomes more important than one might assume. Butler has been particularly outspoken on the lumping together of a variety of theoretical and epistemological positions under the rubric of the "postmodern" and questions the political intent of doing so. For example, when disparate views are falsely joined together to create a "whole" theoretical framework, any of the pieces of the whole (any individual theories) can be used to represent "postmodernism." This is highly problematic in Judith Butler's (1992) view and itself represents a violent reduction. Butler begins her famous essay "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'" by asking about postmodernism. She then writes,

> Who are these postmodernists? Is this a name that one takes on for oneself, or is it more often a name that one is called if and when one offers a critique of the subject, a discursive analysis, or questions the integrity or coherence of totalizing social descriptions? (p. 3)

Butler, herself applying a postmodern perspective, then goes further by looking at how power shapes the umbrella category of postmodernism and whose interests are served by this classification.

> But if I understand part of the project of postmodernism, is to call into question the ways in which such "examples" and "paradigms" serve to subordinate and erase that which they seek to explain. For the "whole," the field of postmodernism in its supposed breadth, is effectively "produced" by the example which is made to stand as a symptom and exemplar of the whole . . . we have then forced a substitution of the example for the entire field, effecting a violent reduction of the field to one piece of the text the critic is willing to read, a piece which, conveniently, uses the term "postmodern." In a sense, this gesture of conceptual mastery that groups together a set of positions under the postmodern, that makes the postmodern into an epoch or a synthetic whole, and that claims that the part can stand for this artificially constructed whole, enacts a certain self-regulatory ruse of power. (1992, p. 5)

While Butler's point is important in the debate of postmodernism that persists within the academy, I do not find this debate particularly fruitful for the purposes of this book and as such will limit my engagement with it. However, I must acknowledge that I am guilty of using the term *postmodernism* as an umbrella category and even using it to describe work that some scholars themselves might not define as such. Some of the work I mention is perhaps better described under the smaller category of poststructuralism and perhaps yet some does not fit either of these categories. In this sense, I fully acknowledge that I am not doing justice to the range of work and disidentification within the field of "postmodernism." Furthermore, because the term is used so broadly, there is a great deal of work that I will not be able to highlight in this chapter. In this sense, there is a selection process that results in the privileging of some feminist postmodern thinkers over others, but this choice has to be made to present an overview of the main contributions of postmodern thinking to feminist praxis.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSTMODERN THOUGHT: AN OVERVIEW

Postmodern theory emerged largely in response to the limitations of modernism and the grand theories, or metanarratives, produced by modernists. Lyotard (1984) uses *modernism* as the term to denote any science that self-legitimates with reference to a grand theory (and thus the theory is reified by virtue of a tautology). The theory thus retains its own discursive grounding and cycles within itself. In other words, grand theories are definitive statements about how something is—they are self-legitimating explanations and their claims go unchallenged. These grand narratives become taken-for-granted explanations about social reality. Postmodernism points to the social construction of reality and how some interests may be served by particular constructions (Layton, 1998). This is useful to feminist researchers who are concerned with the social construction of gender, gender difference, and so on. For example, many feminists are concerned with culturally and historically specific notions of femininity and masculinity, particularly how they have come to be and who is served by these dominant and taken-for-granted understandings of gender. I will elaborate on this when I discuss the blending of feminism and postmodernism.

> Metanarratives are organizing stories or narratives which create a unification of ideas and methodologies which may be used to understand all aspects of the social world. (Hepburn, 1999, Postmodern Politics section, para. 5)

The focus on metanarratives that characterizes modernism under this perspective has also served as an "exclusionary force" that fails to consider difference and disidentification (Hepburn, 1999). Linked to the weariness surrounding metanarratives, postmodernism rejects the positivist conception of knowledge building based on objectivity, neutrality, causality, patterning, and the scientific method opting for highly reflexive and power-sensitive practice (Haraway, 1991; Pfohl, 1992). Instead of grand narratives and truth claims, postmodernism proposes an expansive study of difference and the inextricable relationship between power and knowledge. Postmodernists even go further than the "situated knowledges" of standpoint theorists by looking at the social world in flux. Postmodernism also rejects the binary thinking that has dominated during modernism. For example, as reviewed later in this chapter, postmodernists resist artificial splits between mind and body, male and female, subject and object. Beyond resisting dichotomous thinking, postmodernism provides entirely new ways of conceptualizing long taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of the subject, the knower, and knowledge.

In addition to concerns with modernism's grand theories, postmodernism also developed to merge theory and practice in the era of global capital. Feminist scholar Poovey (1992) outlines the major changes to postmodernity as follows:

> Not just observable alterations in the U.S. economy and welfare system but transformations in the global economy . . . technological innovations in the electronic storage, retrieval, and transmission of information; medical advances in genetic research and synthetic proteins; and the steady march of new diseases across the planet. (p. 39)

So it can be said that postmodernism denotes a shift from the modern era into the postmodern era that Frederic Jameson (1984) defines as the "cultural logic of late capitalism," which constitutes a new pervasive form of social power complete with major changes in the economy and technology/communication. In this new era, there has been an implosion of media forms, creating what Jean Baudrillard (1999) famously refers to as a "hyperreality" in

which "the real" and "the imaginary" have become blurred almost beyond (re)cognition.

> It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal . . . the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of limitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real. (pp. 1–2)

In this context, how is the symbolic constructed? How do symbolic constructions serve particular interests? These questions are of course critical to feminists who might ask more specific questions like:

- How are symbolic constructions of femininity and masculinity created? Who is served by these particular constructions? Is patriarchy served, and if so, how?
- How are symbolic constructions of difference (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) created? Are these particular constructions of difference used in the service of inequality or oppression? Who is served by these particular constructions?
- What are the dimensions to symbolic constructions of gender and the above (i.e., extreme imagery, caricatures, fragmented bodies, particular language constructions, and so on)?

Foucault and Derrida's Influence on Feminist Thought: Power-Knowledge, Deconstruction, and Discourse Analysis

Michel Foucault (1978), whose body of work has largely influenced feminist thought, has radically altered the way many scholars conceptualize power. Foucault was principally interested in the micropolitics of power and he theorized that power and knowledge are inextricably linked in a complex web of power-knowledge relations. Put differently, Foucault's work professes that all knowledge is contextually bound and produced within a field of shifting power relations. Researchers in this tradition may interrogate cultural texts to unravel marks of the power relations that produced them, including traces of the dominant worldview embedded within the text as well as the "silences." Specifically, researchers in this tradition examine the discursive practices

embedded in the text, referring to the specific ways that language is used within texts. Foucault proposed an archeological method of investigation to unravel how a text came to be as it is (Prior, 1997). This method, grounded in an epistemological view of power and knowledge, relies on tracing the texts process of production and distribution. A force in the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, Stuart Hall (1981, cited in Storey, 1996) explains that it is within cultural texts that hegemony is enacted. Hall goes on to explain that popular texts also have an "oppositional" possibility and within texts hegemony is also contested, resisted, and challenged. Texts are thus an active, dynamic part of shaping social reality or "hyperreality."

Jacques Derrida (1966) has been at the forefront of developing poststructural theory. A key facet of poststructural theory is the research tool of deconstruction (again illustrating the link between developing theory and methods). Derrida coined the term *deconstruction* as a method of performing an *internal critique* of texts. Deconstruction is based on the notion that the meaning of words happens in relation to sameness and difference. In every text, some things are affirmed, such as truth, meaning, authorship, and authority; however, there is always an "other," something else, that contrasts that which is affirmed. That which has been left out or concealed, the "other," appears missing from the text but is actually contained within the text as a different or deferred meaning (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Derrida theorized that through the process of deconstruction, these different and deferred meanings can be exposed. The aim of deconstruction is to displace assumptions within the text. Feminist scholar Luce Irigaray (1985), whose work I address in the section on "French Feminist Postmodernism," posits deconstruction as a way of "jamming the theoretical machinery" (p. 78). These theorists show that the meaning of a text is never single or static.

In addition to deconstruction, postmodernists also often employ discourse analysis.

> Influenced by poststructuralism, ethnomethodology, and linguistics, discourse analysis is a strategy employed when one is concerned with the social meanings within language and discursive practices. In other words, discourse analysis is concerned with the process of communication. For Foucault, discourses are practices that are comprised of ideas, ideologies, and referents, that systematically construct both the subjects and objects of which they speak, and thus discourses are integral to the construction of social reality. Many researchers perform discourse analysis when studying texts in order to reveal the hidden ideas embedded within written language. Researchers can investigate how the dominant discourse is produced, how it is disseminated, what it excludes, how some knowledge becomes subjugated and so forth. This kind of research is rooted in the postmodern and poststructural conceptualization that language reflects power. Moreover, the structure of society is embedded within language (and representational forms). (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 293)

Feminist researchers influenced by postmodern theory might be interested in studying the gendered discursive fields in which people operate and how patriarchal and male-centered ways of looking at the world are communicated via discourse, including language, symbols, ideology, and so forth.

POSTMODERN FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY: THE FLIGHT FROM METANARRATIVES

As seen in the last chapter on standpoint epistemology, feminist approaches to knowledge building have at times developed as a counter to positivism and interwoven conceptions of objectivity and truth. Postmodern feminism has also, in some ways, developed in contrast to the main tenets of positivism and like perspectives on knowledge construction. First and foremost, postmodernism looks at the knowledge-building process as one of creation versus the traditional science model of "discovery." As discussed earlier, Lyotard (1984) posits that modernism created self-referential grand narratives that were inattentive to difference and ultimately excluded those ideas and experiences that did not mesh with the particular theory. Herein lies a major intersection between feminism and postmodernism: a weariness as to how marginalization occurs as grand theories are produced and in turn become self-legitimating. Grand theories have historically been oppressive for women and all minorities because they do not account for difference in a nuanced way nor do they challenge the assumptions on which they rest (which are themselves the products of complex relations of power).

Lisa Cosgrove (2002) offers an example of how feminist psychologists have, at times, upheld the positivist assumptions about the social world that have oppressed women. As Cosgrove explains, to address androcentric bias and include women in research questions, some feminist psychologists have relied on and even championed concepts such as "women's experiences" and

"sex roles" without working through the assumptions built within these concepts. In this way the notion of gender as something "one has" goes unchallenged, in fact, unnoticed. As a result, gender and experience both become "foundational" concepts upon which theory and data are built. For example, Cosgrove might want us to consider the following questions:

- On what assumptions is the term *women's experiences* based?
- When researchers refer to a concept like *sex roles* or *gender roles,* in what ways are they assuming gender or sex to be fixed?
- When we as researchers account for women and try to rectify sexist bias by adding "women's perspective" to the mix, do we reify the concept of gender in ways that are consistent with positivism?

The concepts that comprise grand theories have to be explored and challenged in social science research if women and others are to become more than an add-on to existing models of knowledge construction. Postmodernism offers feminist researchers an epistemological grounding from which to view knowledge building differently. Feminist author Hepburn (1999) writes the following regarding metatheories:

> These certainties re/create a "violence to the other," the marginalization of certain sectors of the population—e.g. women, children, ethnic minorities—leading to their consequent powerlessness. . . . It follows that a postmodern analysis of participants' discourse, in being sensitive to the ways that power can operate through metanarratives, can give us as feminists the tools we need to challenge the big stories that organize our lives. (Postmodern Politics section, para. 6)

In this way feminist postmodernism is very attentive to how totalizing theories have been complicit in the marginalization of women and other minorities, as well as the essentializing of difference. Postmodernism offers a method of deconstructing totalizing categories, including those of particular interest to feminists, like gender. Feminist postmodernism thus can challenge, for example, cultural narratives about femininity and masculinity that may otherwise go unchallenged, although examination reveals how varied ideas or parts of the narrative operate to reinforce each other.

Butler has been at the forefront of feminist theorizing in this area. Her work challenges the theoretical underpinnings of grand narratives while

offering a powerful alternative for feminists, which at its core considers the contingency on which subjects are constituted.

POSTMODERN FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY: THE SUBJECT

Feminist scholars influenced by postmodern approaches to knowledge building, particularly the French school of thought, have drawn on the idea of the "death of man," which calls into question the subject-centered epistemology of modernism. The modernist subject derived from Cartesian philosophy is based on binary categorizations, such as mind/body and male/female, and this view of the subject has constructed women as inferior to men. Many postmodern feminists have held that until our conception of the "subject" changes, we cannot change the inequality inherent in modern social scientific knowledge building. As such, postmodern feminists view changing our conception of the subject as a vital undertaking if the goals of feminism are to be achieved. While the postmodern thinkers reviewed in the last section all have posed similar challenges to the Cartesian subject, the majority of this theorizing has done little by way of considering gender and, thus, feminist postmodern thinkers have added enormously to the literature by adding gender to the postmodern critique of the subject (Hekman, 1991, p. 46). Interest in conceptualizing the subject is not a new feminist concern. For decades, feminists have asked questions such as "How are women formed and informed by social, economic, political, and other conditions?" As Hekman (1991) notes, Simone de Beauvoir devoted much of her famed book *The Second Sex* (1972) to exploring such questions. Certainly standpoint epistemologists have also long been concerned with the subject and how in particular the female subject gains particular life experiences, vision, and voice based on occupying a disadvantaged social status. Despite feminists' long history of recognizing the centrality of conceptions of the subject, feminist research, postmodern thinkers argue, has not theorized a reformulation of the subject that ultimately dismantles Cartesian logic, which is based on binary constructions that have long oppressed women (and other minorities). Drawing on developments in postmodern theory (and psychoanalytic theory), feminists have posited a significant challenge to former views of the subject and offered multiple reformulations consistent with the tenets of both feminism and postmodernism. Hekman (1991) notes the influence of postmodernism on recent feminist scholarship in this area:

> Several feminist theorists have turned to the theories of postmodernism to articulate a new approach to the subject. Postmodernism rejects the dichotomous epistemology of modernism by arguing that oppositions are only apparent, that the alleged polarities inhabit each other. The conception of language and meaning espoused by postmodernism entails the dethroning of the modernist subject and the dichotomies it has spawned. Postmoderns reject the notion that meaning derives from a connection between words and the world, positing instead that meaning is a product internal to the mechanisms of language. They argue that meaning derives from the interplay of sign and signified within the discursive formations of language. One of the consequences of the postmodern conception of language and meaning is that the subject is decentered as the origin of meaning and truth. Postmoderns emphasize the way in which subjects are constituted within discursive formations. But they do not replace the constituting subject with the constituted subject. Rather, they advance a conception of the subject that explodes the polarity between constituted and constituting by displacing the opposition. (p. 47)

In other words, in various ways, feminists influenced by postmodernism have developed new conceptions of the subject that typically view the subject as largely constituted (instead of constituting), although, as we will see, this does not negate agency. Butler (1992) encourages feminists not to fear the postmodern claim that the subject is "dead" as necessarily dangerous to the project of feminism, but rather to consider how subjects are produced and how a traditional conception of the "subject" may actually serve to oppress.

> There is the refrain that, just now, when women are beginning to assume the place of subjects, postmodern positions come along to announce that the subject is dead. . . . Surely there is a caution offered here, that in the very struggle toward enfranchisement and democratization, we might adopt the very models of domination by which we were oppressed, not realizing that one way that domination works is through the regulation and production of subjects. Through what exclusions has the feminist subject been constructed, and how do those excluded domains return to haunt the "integrity" and "unity" of the feminist "we"? And how is it that the very category, the subject, the "we," that is supposed to be presumed for the purpose of solidarity, produces the very factionalization it is supposed to quell? Do women want to become subjects on the model which requires and produces an anterior region of abjection, or must feminism become a process which is self-critical about the processes that produce and destabilize identity categories? (pp. 14–15)

French Feminism and the Postmodern Subject

French feminists inspired by the backdrop of French postmodern and poststructural theory have been at the forefront of radically exploding and reconstructing the subject. Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva have all developed important theories of the subject, but due to space limitations I will focus on the work of Kristeva. Influenced by semiotics, poststructuralism, linguistics, and psychoanalysis Kristeva has been a leader (and a controversial one at that) in radicalizing the subject. Following a Lacanian tradition, Kristeva (1980) proposes that there are subjects (plural) that are constituted by different kinds of discourse. She writes,

> The subject never is. The *subject* is only the *signifying* process and he appears only as a *signifying practice,* that is, only when he is absent *within the position* out of which social, historical and signifying activity unfolds. There is no science of the subject. Any thought of mastering the subject is mystical: all that exists is the field of practice where, through his expenditure, the subject can be anticipated in an always anterior future. (p. 215)

In other words, subjects are not constituting but are, rather, constituted by a host of discursive practices. This is a radical departure from the Cartesian subject who creates knowledge, is a knower, a producer, and master of his knowledge. For Kristeva, the subject is a product of culture, and in particular, multiple discourses construct subjects. This is particularly important for feminists who grapple with the idea of whether there is an innate "femininity" (and if so, who gets to define it and for what purposes). Kristeva argues against this form of essentialism and consistent with the rest of her theory explains that the "feminine" is constructed through a multiplicity of discourses. She refers, then, not to the "subject" as a fixed entity but, rather, to "subjects in process." This is a critical component of her theory, as it allows the determined subject to retain revolutionary potential, that is, political capability, resistive possibility, indeed, agency. I will return to the politics of postmodern feminism later in this chapter and for now continue with feminist postmodern epistemology.

Feminist Postmodern Epistemology and Experience

Given the dismantling of the Cartesian subject that has shaped knowledge building for centuries, it is not surprising that postmodernism has inspired

feminist researchers to rethink "experience" as a category of knowledge building.

- What is experience?

For the discursively constituted subject, who is no longer the center of knowledge building and the bearer of "truth," what is experience?

Feminists long concerned with the absence of "women's experience" in knowledge building (and society building more broadly) have gone to great lengths to account for women's experience(s) as evidence of women's unique standpoint in a hierarchically structured society and/or to provide evidence of women's situations, thoughts, feelings, and so forth. In short, experience is for many feminists the bedrock on which their work rests. Postmodernism and the conception of the "subject in process" problematizes this view of "experience" and has lead to the emergence of alternative ways that feminists can consider experience.

Joan Scott (1992) posits that by constructing experience as the central point of knowledge building, feminists have unwittingly rendered invisible the historical and discursive processes that serve as the base *for* that experience. Much like the discursively constituted subject, experience is shaped by discursive practices, and the "meanings" that we create from the telling of our experiences cannot emerge without a process of signification—experience is inextricably linked with discourse. Scott summarizes her position as follows:

> It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. (pp. 25–26)

When the Cartesian subject is called into question and dismantled and the subject is no longer the center of knowledge building and truth claims, then our view of experience also shifts. Experience in the feminist postmodern sense is part of the discursive field in which subjects are formed and transformed. Furthermore, Butler's theory of performativity posits that gender is something that is performed within discursive fields.

The connection between postmodernism and feminist goals is clear to some, but to others there seems to be a disjuncture between the two as

postmodernism rejects the essentialist categories, such as "women's experience," that have been so useful to many feminist activists. In this vein, there has been great debate among feminists about the place of postmodern theory within their work. These concerns are countered in the next section, which discusses the political possibilities of postmodern feminism. However, before we get to that, it might be helpful to hear from a postmodern feminist who finds the marriage of postmodernism and feminism seamless in her psychological research. We now go behind-the-scenes with renowned feminist psychologist Lisa Cosgrove as she jumps right into this debate, talking about her early academic training, the larger epistemological debate among feminists, and an empirical research example, and ultimately beautifully illustrating that "postmodern feminism" is not an oxymoron and "the only way out is through."

Behind-the-Scenes With Lisa Cosgrove

"The Only Way Out Is Through" (Alanis Morissette)

When confronted with the difficulty of doing human science research, many feminists rely on tried and true methods. Simply put, when in doubt, count. The assumption is that "valid results" can only be obtained by designing studies in which multivariate statistical methods are used. If you can name drop—causal modeling, orthogonal rotation, linear regression, and so on—you must be a "real" researcher. Over the last two decades, a growing number of feminists have taken issue with this assumption, maintaining that qualitative, rather than quantitative, methods are more appropriate for studying gendered experiences. Numerous journal articles, countless essays, and probably hundreds of conference presentations have been devoted to the heated debate over how best to study women's experiences.

Trained as a clinical psychologist, I have conducted both quantitative and qualitative research, and I believe that epistemological issues are what's really at stake (see, e.g., Ussher, 1999) when we find ourselves arguing over the merits of either approach or even when we think we've solved the problem by saying, "Ok, both quantitative and qualitative methods should be used." There is no simple solution, the only way out of these epistemological deadlocks is to muddle through them; we must grapple with the inherent messiness and complexity of what it means to try to "do feminist research . . . and create empowering research designs"

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(Lather, 1991, p. 71) in an unjust world. I have found postmodernism to be useful in terms of responding to the complicated issue of generating knowledge in an unjust world. By no means however, do I believe that postmodernism is "the" answer.

I was introduced to postmodern scholarship early on in my training, for unlike most clinical psychology programs, mine had a strong philosophical focus. The exposure to postmodern scholarship both helped and confused me as a feminist researcher. Specifically, I found the emphasis on the impossibility of value-neutral science to be congruent with feminist principles. Interests are always being served and the distinction between facts and values, politics and science, are artificial distinctions. Postmodernism has been described as a project that reveals the socially constructed nature of reality and the varied interests that are served by particular constructions (Layton, 1998, see also, Fairfield, Layton, & Stack, 2002). Postmodern scholars take seriously Nietzsche's contention that when someone asserts a truth, he or she should ask, "What's in it for me?" Thus, postmodernists maintain that it is impossible to discover universal truths about human behavior, and they question the very categories, such as mental disorder or gender, which social scientists hold dear. In this way, postmodernism brings epistemological, methodological, and political issues to the foreground.

From this brief description you may be thinking that there is a great congruence between feminism and postmodernism. And there is; both feminists and postmodernists recognize the richness and often contradictory character of experience, the importance of resisting easy answers, and the complexity of power and power relations. But there are also some major points of contention and these areas of conflict are not readily resolved. For example, it's one thing to contest the idea that "mental disorder" is a universal category that can be empirically defined and measured, but it's quite another thing to contest gender. Gender is, after all, the classic example of a dichotomous (vs. continuous) variable in an undergraduate methods class. To suggest that gender is not innate, that it's not an independent variable, but instead is best understood as a performance, as something we do rather than have (see, e.g., Butler, 1993), well isn't that going a bit too far? And if there are no universal truths, how can you argue for feminist principles? In other words, won't adopting a postmodern perspective depoliticize a feminist research agenda? Without denying the fact that there is an ambivalent relationship between feminism and postmodernism, in the next section I'll discuss why I've come to the conclusion that "feminist postmodernism" is not an oxymoron.

A few years ago I, along with some of my graduate students, began conducting menstrual cycle research. Specifically, we were interested in the relationship between constructions of feminine gender identity and experiences of menstrual distress. Well aware of the debate over the validity of "PMS"—some women argue strongly that PMS is a distinct clinical entity, a "real" disorder, while others argue that "PMS" does not exist—we wanted to design a study that avoided making that either/or choice. That is, we did not want to pathologize women's bodies and reproductive functioning, nor did we want to invalidate the experience of women who claim that they suffer from PMS. Taking a postmodern perspective helped us avoid this false binary because it is a perspective that emphasizes the constructed or mediated nature of experience; PMS is constituted or produced through the language of the medical model.[1] Women position themselves and are positioned by various practices (e.g., magazine with articles such as "Do you have PMS?"; drugs such as Prozac/Sarafem to "treat" PMS), metaphors (e.g., menstruation as shameful, dirty, etc.), and discourses (e.g., the medical model discourse of PMS). A postmodern framework helped us see that the question "Is PMS real?" is not the most useful research question to ask. This framework focused our attention on the ways in which women interpret their physical and emotional distress within the dominant discourses of femininity and PMS. In other words, rather than try to get at some underlying or universal truth about women's experience, we tried to design a study that addressed the sociopolitical context of that experience.

Therefore, we took as our starting point the idea that the meaning of "having PMS" is negotiated within dominant metaphors of both femininity and menstruation. One of the most striking aspects of our study was that PMS discourse has gained such cultural currency that women expect to have PMS; it is normative rather than atypical. Moreover, participants described their experience not only in terms of having PMS but also in terms of being a different self. That is, the PMS self was positioned as "bad" or problematic in some fundamental way in contrast to a woman's true or nonpremenstrual self. Feeling "irritable" or "angry," the two main emotional responses women identified as being symptomatic of their premenstrual selves, was not experienced as a valid emotional response that deserved attention. It is interesting to note that normative femininity requires a serene comportment

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uncontaminated by the presence of negative emotions; it is virtually impossible to be both feminine and irritable. Positioning oneself in PMS discourse allows one to continue to live up to idealized representations of femininity. The "real me" or non-PMS self is the one who lives up to the ideal, while the PMS self is the disordered aberration. In this way, PMS discourse encourages women to disavow the negative affective experiences that disrupt culturally sanctioned representations of femininity (i.e., "I'm not truly angry; it's just my PMS"). Thus, the use of a postmodern approach helped us study women's experience without reifying or essentializing gender.

As I hope this brief example demonstrates, incorporating postmodern ideas into feminist research politicizes and enhances our work. It politicizes our research because we shift from intra-individual explanations of experience to structural and sociopolitical ones. Postmodernism enhances our work because it encourages us to resist dichotomous thinking, to reexamine our implicit assumptions, and to realize that the only way out is through.

Note

1. We were not trying to invalidate the experience of women who say that they experience distress prior to or during menses, nor were we suggesting that hormonal changes cannot ever have a negative impact. Indeed, it is not antifeminist to ask if women's hormones vary throughout the menstrual cycle. However, it *is* antifeminist to assume that the body is a natural object, "a relatively independent variable rather than a dependent ideological variable" (Zita, 1989, p. 200).

Cosgrove provided a powerful example of how postmodernism and feminism can be a part of the politicization of research, counter to many misinformed critiques. In this vein I move into a discussion of postmodern feminist activism and its various components.

POSTMODERNISM AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM: AGENCY, SUBVERSION, AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE/REVOLUTION

> Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today. (Cixous & Clément, 1996, p. 6)

Perhaps Sarah Herbold (1995) put it best—to some, postmodernism and feminism appear to have antithetical objectives. Feminism seeks to end women's oppression via identity politics, and postmodernism seeks to deconstruct terms like *women* as a falsely totalizing category (p. 85). I believe that the loud critique of postmodernism within the feminist community is a result of these seemingly divergent aims and a belief that they cannot be bridged. The central critique of feminist postmodernism centers on this question: Given postmodernism's view of the subject in process, and its position against essentialist categories, is postmodernism congruent with feminist political commitments?

The fear guiding this question is

- Will postmodernism set feminist activism backward?

For postmodern feminist researchers, the answer is a resounding no. In fact, postmodernism is deeply consistent with the political goals of feminism and complicates identity politics but doesn't abandon the work of feminist pioneers.

There is no doubt that feminists have made a great deal of progress via what is commonly referred to as *identity politics*. The critique and much larger fear of postmodern theory, beyond the intricacies that make it challenging to learn, is that somehow postmodernism denies women voice and for practical and pragmatic reasons essentialist categories such as "women's experience" have been useful in feminist struggles and thus feminists are concerned about letting go of what has been effective. Postmodern feminists are quick to warn that a reliance on categories such as "women's experience" seeks to reinforce hegemony and normalize dominant conceptions of gender without paying attention to the discursive fields in which gender becomes articulated. Postmodern feminism allows researchers to deconstruct gender norms rather than reifying or regulating them (Cosgrove, 2003). In this way, research conducted from a postmodern feminist perspective challenges the essentialism of feminist empiricism and standpoint epistemology. Postmodernism offers feminist scholars new ways of creating solidarity.

As discussed earlier, Foucault's work articulates that it is power and the discursive fields in which we operate that produce the subject. Butler (1993) extends this work and explains that gender identity is produced in a discursive matrix where femininity is an "idealized presence" (p. 232). It is possible to create a unifying feminist politics that views gender identity as a result of power effects, and identity as contingent (which does not make it less "real" in people's experiences of it). In this way, feminists can really begin to unravel the very ideas about gender that become dominant and shape individual subjects.

> If there is a fear that, by no longer being able to take for granted the subject, its gender, its sex, or its materiality, feminism will founder, it might be wise to consider the political consequences of keeping in their place the very premises that have tried to secure our subordination from the start. (Butler, 1992, p. 19)

I have decided to conclude this chapter in perhaps an unconventional way, which I feel is congruent with the presentation of some postmodern scholarship. What follows is a Behind-the-Scenes piece from noted feminist scholar Patti Lather.

Behind-the-Scenes With Patti Lather

Front-Stage/Back-Stage: What Performance Where?

What follows are extracts from my 1996 to 1997 correspondence via e-mails and letters with Elliot Mishler, Professor of Social Psychology, Harvard Medical School, to whom I had sent a copy of a publication on the validity of angels (Lather, 1995) and the desktop published version of *Troubling the Angels* (Lather & Smithies, 1997). His response to the book was "cranky and testy," and I was not at all sure if "productive dialogue" was possible given his "discomfort with the book." A single-spaced four-plus-page letter delineated his "negative response." I do not believe I ever sent the following letter, although Elliot and I met for coffee in Columbus a few years later and he continued to send me "angel clippings," as he "hadn't exactly sworn an oath not to."

My title comes from Judith Butler (1990) who, in *Gender Trouble*, asks "What performance where?" in terms of subverting gender binaries (p. 139). It also comes from Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical account of ethnography but inverts its assumptions that behind the scenes lies the more truthful and authentic. Extending the analogy to talk about a book, if "backstage" is where the unrehearsed, private performance not intended for public consumption takes place, then "front stage" is what gets published. Yet still very much playing to an audience in what I have staged in the following, my claim is not more truth or authenticity than the front-stage performance of *Troubling the Angels*, which is already quite replete with self-reflexivity. Instead, what I offer here is but another layer with the purpose of gesturing toward the limits of performances of self-reflexivity and what Foucault notes as the price we pay to tell the truth about ourselves. My goal is to "perform" the postmodern in this gesture of

simultaneously using and troubling a concept or framework that we think we cannot think without: under erasure. (For the classic unpacking of deconstruction, see Gayatri Spivak, 1976; for an update, see Caputo, 1997; for an extended example, see Lather, 2007.)

Dear Elliot,

In reading your reading, I want to remain engaged with uncertainty, allowing no one reading to own the book. In a way that is very different than the self-criticism of modernism, I am trying to attend to how the book falls back into what it must refuse. So I thank you for your frank engagement.

It was the mawkish, banal and self-indulgent I was trying to avoid. To not be afraid of stirring up big emotions, but to do so responsibly, I frequently felt this task beyond me and perhaps I am not writer enough to carry it off. My ambitions for the book were many layered and I was very much up against my limits with a keen sense of the risks I ran with, for example, the angels. Perhaps I over-reached, embarrassed myself, the field, whatever, with some leaky feminist thing, a going too far. Having just sent final revisions off (October, 1996), I am mostly into the failures of the text to accomplish its ambitious goals and at a sort of peace with this. "Ruined from the start," as I have come to think through reading Walter Benjamin, it is what it is, "too much, too little, too soon, too late" to quote myself from the book.

You write that the book "presses readers to assent to its argument," full of "Ozhio" dimensions of "Chris and Patti skipping down the yellow brick road to see the Wizard, with added angel wings." This is similar to dance critic Arlene Croce (1994/1995), regarding Bill T. Jones's *Still Here*, where she writes of how a nonbeliever perspective is denied legitimacy regarding "oppression" art which positions a dissatisfied reader with no viable subject position.[1]

You particularly found the theological rhetoric coercive. It is my most Catholic book for sure, but I interrupted that with "god as an available discourse" and "post-wiccan spiritual sensibility." And I was very much invested in using the angels to interrupt our "disguised theologisms": progress, secular salvation through "knowledge as cure," the science that takes the place of god, etc.

You see angels as a mark of "facile transcendentalism" (Bloom, 1996). I use Benjamin and Rilke to try to do something else, some defamiliarizing move based on Benjamin's love for the Paul Klee painting *Angelus Novus* that Benjamin described as facing backwards the catastrophe of the past, wanting

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to make whole what has been so broken, but caught up in the violence of the storm of progress that propels the angel into the future (Benjamin, 1968).

The key to Benjamin's angelology is what Paul de Man (1986) notes as Benjamin's tendency to both use familiar tropes and displace them to signal the all too human appeal that they make to us. He particularly used messianic appeals toward displacing our sense of what is human, destabilizing the original, translating beyond the original, keeping the text in circulation, decanonizing it by making us aware of certain disjunctions, disruptions, accommodations, weaknesses, cheatings, conventions (p. 97). Perverting familiar images to undo the claim that is associated with them, Benjamin works to desacralize. This is the paradoxical work of the angel: enacting how language cannot not mean and how it leads to identification, subjectification, and narrative, I use the angel not to recuperate for a familiar model but to deconstructively stage the angel as palimpsest, a failure at containing meaning. I wanted to empty out narrative in advance and make it generate itself over its impossibility.

In what you see as a "millennial decade lousy with angels," Bloom's point is not angels but what we do with them. I have also wrestled with this use of religious and spiritual themes in exploring Benjamin's juxtaposition of theology and Marxism in his theory of language and materiality. To situate the angel as a fraud, a staging that allows transcendence its final word only as "an emblem of illusion" (Rosen, 1977, p. 38), is to foreground the unavoidable discrepancy between a visual sign and its image or meaning. In this, I am following Benjamin in his attempt to appropriate what was left of a moribund religious culture, especially the largely untouched mystical strains, giving them a secular form, making them once again available via translation of their ruins.

I found it so interesting that it was research note in story series 3 that drew you in and on, what I saw as perhaps the most conventional scholarly move of the book, the "theorizing" of the lives of others, the "situating" them within a literature review, etc. This was a sort of "analysis under erasure" move. By presenting fragments from the interview transcripts woven together into a fiction of shared space and "emergent themes," the snippets from interview transcripts produce a parody of unmediated text, a representation by imitation. Filling with silence the interstices where researcher commentary is expected, as a strategy for resisting the authority

of "expert testimony," and, then, juxtaposing this with some parts of the running subtext where Chris and I do, indeed, "say what things mean," we mime the forms of expert testimony, putting them under erasure, putting the gaze on display, making it accountable.

You raise concerns about not being able to follow the same person, a fragmentation where the women become anonymous, where we overwhelm their voices as "real" persons, the "press release" nature of their accounts. My effort here was to substitute a theory of deferral for one of essence. As a work of deferral rather than depiction, the book is irreducible to the terms of the real. A thinking of deferral, a complication of the language of presence: this is a terrible intellectual ambition that calls for a necessary indirectness, a detour and delay to interrupt the quest for presence. It is an imposition of radical complications for any story that promises to deliver a message to its proper receiver—surrendering the claim to the simplicity of presence. Without a center, what would such a thing look like?

My goal was a practice that exceeds both authorial intent and reader interpretive competence to produce non-mastery. Complex and ambitious, it is a place of ghosts and ruins versus consciousness. In this ambition, I worried about standards so exalted that work never actually gets made.

In assessing its effectivity, I presume we are delivered from certain loosely positivist questions. Making representations only to foreground their insufficiencies, my central message is how nothing can deliver us from our misrecognitions. This cannot be set aside, only recognized and wrestled with and in, figures we cannot read in the settled ways we'd like, perhaps, at best, shifting registers. Whatever detachment I had/have is in the work's separation from itself.

I hope for readers something other than a reading that can only find what it is looking for, perhaps a reading that surprises, a place where disjunction occurs, obliged by the text to see how we see, out of the over determined habits of reading, a reading that is other or more than we should like it to be, always more and other, protean.

In hearing readerly reactions, my goal is to be neither apologetic nor ironic in trying to map something of both the global and the body. Many risks were taken and embarrassments risked in the effort to enact interpretation's desire for mastery in the face of the recalcitrance of the object to be fully grasped by our interpretive machinery and a world that, partially, won't let us

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in. Maurice Blanchot's "This work is beyond me" (1982, p. 126) was my mantra. Always feeling unable to do the subject justice, trying to block impulses to romanticize, I saw my central task as being purposefully not intelligible within standard frames in order to produce a book about multiple, shifting realities, a stubborn book that rubs against the desire for interpretive mastery and implicates an audience rather than persuades or seduces.

I see myself as a willful presence in the book rather than an authoritative knower of what can be said and done. Risking something "like a glory or a crime" (Melville, 1996, quoting Stanley Cavell), the stakes are a science constructed in a kind of materiality that recognizes the absence of things and the noninnocence of our efforts to know.

Note

1. Bill T. Jones's dance production *Still/Here* is about living with death-threatening illness. Arlene Croce (1994/1995), dance critic for the *New Yorker*, ignited a firestorm by refusing to review what she called "victim art." Unfortunately, what could have opened up interesting issues of how to position oneself in response to bone-shattering testimony was deflected by her decision to take her stand without seeing the production.

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PART II

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY