



CHRONICLING FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND ITS SOCIAL

RAMIFICATIONS!

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Abstract

This paper is a primer for community psychologists on feminist research. Much like the field of community psychology, feminist scholarship is defined by its values and process. Informed by the political ideologies of the 1970s women's movement (liberal, radical, socialist feminism, and womanism), feminist scholars reinterpreted classic concepts in philosophy of science to create feminist epistemologies and methodologies. Feminist epistemologies, such as feminist empiricism, standpoint theory, and postmodernism, recognize women's lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. Feminist methodologies attempt to eradicate sexist bias in research and find ways to capture women's voices that are consistent with feminist ideals. Practically, the process of feminist research is characterized by four primary features: (1) expanding methodologies to include both quantitative and qualitative methods, (2) connecting women for group-level data collection, (3) reducing the hierarchical relationship between researchers and their participants to facilitate trust and disclosure, and (4) recognizing and reflecting upon the emotionality of women's lives. Recommendations for how community psychologists can integrate feminist scholarship into their practice are discussed.

WHAT IS FEMINISM?

The term "feminism" may bring to mind stereotypical images of Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and the "bra-burners" of the 1970s marching through the streets with signs reading "Equal Pay for Equal Work," "The Personal Is Political," and "Pass the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]." Whereas these images do convey some of the key events and leaders of the second wave of feminism in the United States, they do not do justice to the complexities of the feminist social movement. Although the activism of the 1970s has tempered, feminism, as an academic focus, has

thrived throughout the 1980s and 1990s. A primary task of feminist scholarship has been clarifying the meaning of feminism and how it can influence research in the humanities and social sciences. The term "feminism" implies that there is one feminism when, in fact, there are multiple feminisms. These feminisms are similar in that they focus on the experiences of women's lives and the oppression of women in this culture, yet they are different in how they conceptualize that marginalization. There are four main types of feminism that have been articulated in academic discourse: liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, and womanism. We define each of these forms of feminism not to debate the relative merits of each form, but rather to demonstrate how these ideologies have collectively informed the creation of feminist approaches to research.'

Liberal feminism has stressed building connections among all women to advocate for equal access to resources in our society. The liberal feminist is "one who advocates such reforms as legal equality between the sexes, equal pay for equal work, and equal employment opportunities, but who denies that complete equality requires radical alterations in basic social institutions (e.g., the capitalist economic system, the biological family, monogamous marriage, biological motherhood)" (Warren, 1980, as cited in Kramarae&Treichler, 1985, p. 280). Many of the key issues raised in the 1970s women's movement (e.g., the Equal Rights Amendment) were strongly influenced by liberal feminism.

Socialist feminism is based on the belief that the economic and class structure of our society is inherently problematic, which leads to multiple forms of oppression. Rooted within Marxist ideology, socialism has traditionally focused on classism, and paid less attention to racism and sexism. In the 1970s, women within the socialist movement were influenced by the liberal feminists' focus on gender. As a result, socialist feminism emerged: "[socialist feminists] are Marxists to our feminist sisters, and feminists to our Marxist brothers" (Petchesky, 1979, as cited in Kramarae&Treichler, 1985, p. 257). Unlike other forms of feminism that locate men's privilege and power over women as centrally problematic, socialist feminists remain focused on the inequalities created by capitalism more generally.

Socialist feminists' strategy has been to build coalitions with other humanist groups who share their critique of the capitalist system. Radical feminism, on the other hand, distinguishes itself from other forms of feminism by drawing central attention to gender oppression and calling for restructured social institutions. Radical feminists acknowledge that classism and racism intersect with sexism, but stipulate that the system-atic marginalization of women is the fundamental form of inequality. The oppression of women historically preceded the social construction of class-ism and racism, and the inequalities levelled against women are pervasive

across cultural and economic structures: "[radical feminists] are engaged in a power struggle with man, and that the agent of our oppression is man insofar as he identifies with and carries out the supremacy privileges of the male role" (New York Radical Feminists, 1969, as cited Kramarae& Trencher, 1985, p. 379). In contrast to socialist feminists, who identify capitalism as the primary source of oppression, radical feminists recognize sexism as the fundamental problem. Unlike liberal feminists, who accept the general social structure of society but not its rules for resource allocation, radical feminists argue that the entire social order must be re-examined and redefined.

REDEFINING KNOWLEDGE: FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Redefining research requires reexamining the foundation of science from square one: what is knowledge and how is knowledge obtained? Social science research begins with often unstated assumptions about objectivity and subjectivity. Before we can explore how feminists address these key epistemological questions, we must first review core terminology and classic debates in the philosophy of science.

Ontology. What is the form and nature of reality, and what can be known about reality? (seeGuba& Lincoln, 1994). Although these issues are far more complex than what we can cover here, the primary ontological decision point for researchers is to clarify whether they accept or reject the notion that there is a single, objective, real world. If one accepts the premise of objective reality, then the goal of science is to discover the structure and function of that singular world. If one does not accept this premise, then the goal of science is to understand how we construct and interpret our realities.

Epistemology. What is knowledge, how can knowledge be obtained, and what is the relationship between the knower and what can be known? (seeGuba& Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology is intertwined with ontology. For example, if one accepted the ontological notion of an objective reality, then the knower (i.e., the scientist) must assume a position of objective detachment, free from bias so as to be able to capture that reality accurately. By contrast, if a researcher rejected that notion of objectivity, then it is not necessary, or even desirable, to conduct research in a detached, dispassionate manner. In order to understand how reality is constructed and interpreted, the social scientist and his/her inherent subjectivities (e.g., values, beliefs, emotions) are centrally involved in the research process. Within the social sciences, there are four primary epistemological theories that clarify the nature of knowledge: positivism, realism, critical theory, constructivism. These theoretical traditions differ in how they resolve the ontological debate of what constitutes reality and what can be known about reality.

Positivism. Positivism is rooted in the ontological assumption of an objective reality (see Guba& Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, the goal of science is to explain, predict, and ultimately control

that reality. Hypotheses about objective reality are generated, tested, and verified, primarily through experimental methods. Throughout the process of research, the scientist must engage in a distant, objective stance to remain free from biases that could interfere with obtaining knowledge. To the positivist, the identity of the "knower" (i.e., who the scientist is) is not especially relevant, as proper use of the scientific method—by anyone—should capture objective reality (and not the knower). As a result, some feminist epistemologies do not substantially re-define the practice of science, but others do indeed fundamentally reconceptualise how we constitute knowledge.

Feminist Empiricism. Feminist empiricism reflects a union of post positivist realism and liberal feminism. Because neither of its traditions call for structural changes in either science or society, this epistemological framework focuses on how to make our theories of knowledge less susceptible to gender bias. Feminist empiricism is based on the ontological assumption that a real, objective world does exist; therefore, the goal of the scientist is to capture and explain that social world in such a way that does not reflect gender biases. Denmark et al. (1988) presented examples of how and when sexism enters the research process, and offered nonsexist solutions. First, when formulating research questions, scientists should examine the questions for sexism to make sure that gender stereotypes do not dictate hypotheses. Second, in designing studies, a proper sample must be selected (e.g., research participants are not limited to one sex based on "convenience") and fair research methods utilized (e.g., gender stereotyped measures are not used). Third, in data analysis and interpretation, serendipitous sex differences should not be overemphasized nor should sex similarities be ignored. Finally, the conclusions must follow from the methods. For example, researchers cannot generalize to both sexes unless both sexes were studied. Practically, the feminist empiricist orientation is identified by the use of traditional research methods and designs (e.g., experimental methods, quasi-experimental methods, survey methods) with careful attention paid to identifying and removing sources of gendered bias (see Eichler, 1988, for a handbook on nonsexist research methods).

REDEFINING THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH: FEMINIST METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

To create feminist approaches to research, feminist scholars have not only had to redefine the nature of knowledge (epistemology), they have also had to reconsider the process of conducting research (methodology). In many respects, feminist approaches to research are most clearly identifiable by the processes used to construct knowledge. Although the term "feminist methods" runs throughout feminist literature, it is something of a misnomer insofar as it suggests there is a set of specific techniques that are uniquely feminist (see also Riger, 1992). More often than not, "feminist methods" are familiar methods of data collection (e.g., interviewing, focus

groups, ethnography) that are adapted to be consistent with feminist ideology. Reinharz (1992) noted that some "feminist methods" do appear new and unique (e.g., consciousness raising as a method of inquiry, group diaries, multiple person stream-of-consciousness narratives, associative writing), but only because their application is new to our academic fields, which have traditionally relied on experimental and survey designs. These "new" methods typically bring women together and collect data within those groups. It is perhaps more accurate to speak of "feminist approaches to research" or "feminist methodologies" as opposed to "feminist methods." The overarching goal of feminist research is to capture women's lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge. In other words, the process of research is of as much importance as the outcome. In this section, we will examine four defining features of this research process and illustrate each with examples from feminist psychology and sociology: (1) expanding methodologies to include both quantitative and qualitative techniques, (2) connecting participants for group-level data collection, (3) minimizing the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and her/his participants to facilitate trust and disclosure, and (4) recognizing and reflecting upon the emotionality of women's lives.'

Expanding Methodologies

To understand women's lives, feminist researchers recognize that a variety of methodological techniques are necessary. In early writings on this topic, traditional methods were sharply criticized, and the feminist methodology literature was dominated by proqualitative sentiments. Some feminist writers argued that quantitative methods attempt to translate women's experiences into predetermined categories, which can result in distorting or silencing women's voices (Keller, 1985; Mies, 1983). By contrast, qualitative methods were favored because they were seen as correcting biases in quantitative methods (Keller, 1985; Mies, 1983). Because qualitative data are organized and evaluated subjectively in terms of themes, categories, and new concepts, not statistical significance, they have been seen as more useful in capturing women's stories and legitimating those experiences as sources of knowledge (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). However qualitative methods are not without their problems. For instance, Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung (1991) noted that because it is primarily white, middle-class individuals who typically volunteer for these in-depth, self-reflective studies, qualitative research is quite susceptible to racial and social class biases. By the 1990s, the quantitative vs. qualitative debate tempered as many scholars concluded that neither methodology can guarantee bias-free research, neither is "more feminist" than the other, and both are necessary for understanding social phenomena (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Stanley & Wise, 1983). As a result, contemporary feminist scholarship embraces both qualitative and quantitative

methodologies. An example of integrating qualitative and quantitative methods is Campbell and Salem's (1999) use of concept mapping (see also Kitzinger's 1986 work with the Q-sort technique). To examine how community agencies could be more receptive to the needs of rape survivors, Campbell and Salem convened a group of rape victim advocates to brainstorm how social systems could better serve victims. This qualitative discussion was followed with quantitative analyses (i.e., multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis, which yielded a set of clusters organized as a conceptual map). These quantitative analyses were then shared with the participant group for qualitative discussion and interpretation. Concept mapping is a useful tool for feminist scholars not only because it integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, but also because it embodies other defining features of feminist research (e.g., connecting women, reducing hierarchy).

Connecting Women

Feminist scholars have argued that the task of understanding women's lives may be best achieved in group settings. Consciousness-raising groups were a common tactic for organizing during the 1970s women's movement (Faludi, 1991; Sarachild, 1969, 1978). Drawing on these political successes, MacKinnon (1982, 1983, 1989) proposed consciousness-raising as a method for academic scholarship. Bringing women together to discuss their lives brings attention to the myriad of ways gender oppression affects the day-to-day experiences of being female. In fact, for many women, it is only through their discussions with other women that they are able to find ways to describe the events of their own lives (Sarachild, 1969, 1978). Yet ironically, this approach has been critiqued for socially constructing problems: If a woman did not interpret her experiences as problematic before talking with others, then, to some, this begs the question of whether there really is a problem (see Lamb, 1999, for an example of how this debate unfolded in victimology research). Feminist researchers acknowledge that as with all group-level methods, group dynamics will undoubtedly affect individual perceptions and argue that the possibilities for new insights far outweighs the risk of "bias" (Fonow & Cook, 1991).

In practice, feminist researchers have noted that group settings help individuals find language for talking about existing, not "created," issues. For example, Fine and Macpherson's (1992) "critical and collaborative group interviews" illustrate how research methods can connect women to reveal new information. To understand female adolescent development, Fine and Macpherson eschewed traditional interviews, surveys, and focus groups, and instead brought together four young women from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds for dinner and conversation (several times over several months). By creating such a setting for connecting and sharing, Fine and Macpherson unearthed struggles of gender, class, and race in adolescent

development not often discussed in the academic literature. Thus, feminist research combines group-level analysis with individual level work to capture how the synergy of group process illuminates women's experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we presented an introduction to the key epistemological and methodological tenets of feminist social science. Feminist research is rooted in the political activism of the women's movement. The critiques of society at-large that emerged from the 1970s women's movement provided a model for reanalysis of social science. Throughout the 1980s, feminist scholars articulated how androcentric biases have severely limited what we know about human behavior (e.g., Harding, 1987; Keller, 1985; Mies, 1983). Quite simply, the traditional theories and methods of social science do not effectively, nor very accurately, capture the experiences of women. Feminist methodologists outlined a model of nonsexist research, and we recommend that social scientists who are unfamiliar with this approach review the works of Denmark et al. (1988), Eichler (1988), and McHugh et al. (1986). These resources provide practical suggestions for uncovering and removing sexist bias in research.

All signs show that feminism, as a new social thought in the world, has greatly promoted the progress and development of mankind. Especially for female liberation, it has made an indelible contribution. At the same time, feminism, as a new right framework ideology and spiritual position, has enriched the spiritual level of mankind in many aspects such as society, economy, culture, and politics, and has become a necessary prerequisite for the harmonious development of mankind.

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