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Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy

In 1991, we coedited *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Fonow and Cook 1991b), an anthology that addressed the challenges and dilemmas of feminist research practices. Our interest in feminist methodology began when we were sociology graduate students at Ohio State University in the 1970s, where, under the direction of our dissertation advisor, Laurel Richardson, we struggled to understand what feminist research should look like (Richardson, Fonow, and Cook 1985). In our graduate seminars, we critiqued the prevailing methodological wisdom, debated the usefulness of “using the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house,” questioned the assumptions of science, and analyzed the politics of knowledge creation—in essence, challenging the very epistemological foundations of what constituted knowledge. Our goal was to reveal what had previously been hidden about women’s lives, experiences, and contributions and, in the process, to produce the kind of knowledge that would liberate them. In retrospect, it all sounds more than a little grandiose. Decades of doing research have tempered our claims and those of most other feminists we know, but we were, at the time, and we remain, part of a broad movement for social change, trying to imagine a better world.

Once we became professionals, we began to ask more pragmatic questions. Could we teach others to do this kind of research? How would policy makers receive our scholarship? Would the subjects of our efforts need or even want this information, let alone be empowered by it? Would they want to play an active role in the production of feminist knowledge? Was the

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new scholarship on women substantial enough and of sufficient rigor to support a curriculum for women's studies? Could we have an impact on public opinion and on social movements for equality and justice? Would our professional obligations compromise our political commitments?

In *Beyond Methodology*, we attempted to explicate the “logic-in-use” of feminist research practices. In our collection of articles, feminists addressed the issue of research as it was lived at a particular moment in time. These essays discussed epistemological arguments about how to comprehend the social as well as specific research techniques and practices to capture the intersectionality of gender with other categories of difference such as race, sexuality, and class. Also included were discussions of data collection and analysis, ethics, reflexivity, policy implications, social action, collaboration, and dissemination of research findings. Our original goal in compiling these articles was to capture the dilemmas feminists faced at each step of the research process, from the formulation of research questions to the dissemination and utilization of research results.

Before our collection was published, feminists writing on methodology focused mostly on epistemological issues and their relationship to the conduct of inquiry.¹ Epistemology was seen as the general framework or theory for specifying the generation of knowledge: how does the knower come to understand and interpret the nature of reality? Its domain concerned macro-level philosophical questions: What is knowledge? Who can know and by what means? How do we recognize, validate, and evaluate knowledge claims? Feminist scholars, particularly feminist philosophers, analyzed ongoing debates, refashioned old concepts, and generated new ideas regarding a range of epistemological issues, including agency, cognitive authority, objectivity, methods of validation, fairness, standpoint, and context of discovery. Some of these discussions were stimulated by the growth of poststructuralism in the academy, but others resulted from critiques of knowledge, including feminist knowledge, by scholars working in postcolonial, race, and ethnic studies.²

Women of color raised important questions concerning epistemologies of the oppressed. Did oppressed people, by virtue of their knowledge of both the oppressor's views of reality and that of their own subjugated

¹ See Millman and Kanter 1975; Bowles and Klein 1983; Harding and Hintikka 1983; Bell and Roberts 1984; Harding 1987; Smith 1988; Bordo and Jaggar 1989. The early 1990s were fertile years for publishing on the topic of feminist epistemology and methodology. See Longino 1990; Nelson 1990; Code 1991; Harding 1991; Reinharz 1992; Alcoff and Potter 1993; Antony and Witt 1993; Stanley and Wise 1993.

² Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; hooks 1984; Mohanty 1987; Ong 1987; Spivak 1987; Trinh 1989; Anzaldúa 1990; Collins 1990.

groups, have access to truer or better knowledge? Who is privileged in an epistemological sense—feminists, women of color, lesbians, working-class women, postcolonials? Who can speak for whom? These discussions were and continue to be pivotal in helping feminists to clarify the links among theory, method, and action that we believe spurred the growth, development, and acceptance of feminist scholarship in a variety of contexts.

Our original analysis of feminist approaches to social science research in women's studies revealed some commonalities, which we articulated as guiding principles of feminist methodology: first, the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research; second, the centrality of consciousness-raising or debunking as a specific methodological tool and as a general orientation or way of seeing; third, challenging the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from each other and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific; fourth, concern for the ethical implications of feminist research and recognition of the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge; and finally, emphasis on the empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research and research results.

Today the spectrum of epistemological and methodological positions among feminists is much broader—a healthy sign of the vitality of feminist studies. There has never been one correct feminist epistemology generating one correct feminist methodology for the interdisciplinary field of women's studies. Feminist scholars work within, against, and across epistemologies, often combining elements from different perspectives. Innovative methods are derived from successful efforts to reconcile differences and even from those efforts that conclude that certain epistemological differences are irreconcilable.

Our notion of methodology was, and continues to be, influenced by the philosopher of science Abraham Kaplan, who wrote, "The aim of methodology is to describe and analyze research methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge" (1964, 23). In our formulation, feminist methodology involves the description, explanation, and justification of techniques used in feminist research and is an abstract classification that refers to a variety of methodological stances, conceptual approaches, and research strategies. There is an overarching concept of feminist methodology in its epistemological assumptions, but on the way from ideas to practice, this concept is differentially articulated in different disciplines. Some features of fem-

Table 1 Selected Methods Employed by Feminist Scholars

Method	Method
Action/participatory	Genealogy
Autoethnography	Geographic information systems
Biography	Historiography
Case study	Institutional ethnography
Close reading	Intertextuality
Comparative case study	Meta-analysis
Content analysis	Multisite
Conversational analysis	Narratology
Cross-culture analysis	Needs assessments
Deconstruction	Oral history
Deviant historiography	Participant observation
Discourse analysis	Personal narrative
Ethnography	Simulation
Ethnomethodology	Survey
Evaluation	Thick description
Experiential	Trope analysis
Experimental	Unobtrusive observation
Feminist jurisprudence	Visual analysis
Focus group	

inist methodology are specific to the discipline in which it is practiced, while other features are more general and apply across fields.

Theories about how to know social life relate to how we go about studying that life, and the techniques we use to elicit knowledge influence our own theories of how to know and understand social phenomena. The interplay between theory as defining one's research and theory being defined by one's research suggests that researchers must become more aware of the rationale for the selection of methods and of those methods' strengths and weaknesses in studying specific settings and topics. Thus, there is no one correct method for feminist research. In table 1, we list the variety of methods and research designs employed by feminist scholars.

Just as our theorizing about gender, nation, race, sexuality, class, and physical ability has grown more complex, so too must our discussions of methods. We are excited by the creativity and diversity of these methods. Their use illustrates a diverse scholarship capable of fueling curricular reform in the academy's course offerings on research methodology.³ Fem-

³ Debates, critiques, and reflections on the meaning and scope of feminist methodology have greatly expanded since the publication of our collection. See, e.g., Visweswaran 1994; Gottfried 1996; Wolf 1996; Laslett and Thorne 1997; Bloom 1998; Ribbens and Edwards 1998; DeVault 1999; Hawkesworth 1999; Hunter 1999; Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas 1999;

inists have nothing to fear from healthy internal debates about methods and their epistemological antecedents or from vigorous engagement with other critical fields of study.

In the following sections, we revisit some of our earlier ideas about feminist methodology and identify newer trends and debates. Instead of an exhaustive review of the literature, we provide a selection of examples that serve to illustrate points about the dilemmas that we encounter not only in the literature but also in our work as researchers and teachers.

The epistemic and ontological turn to the body

When we published *Beyond Methodology*, the critique of the disembodied abstract knower was well under way. It was exciting for us, as young scholars, to discover that there was philosophical grounding in feminism from which we could explore methodology, and we chose two epistemological essays to frame our collection—Kathryn Pyne Addelson’s “The Man of Professional Wisdom” (1991) and Patricia Hill Collins’s “Learning from the Outsider Within” (1991). At last the knowing subject had a body, one embedded in a complex matrix of power relations (even if mostly obscured) constituted by social categories of difference. Addelson addressed the taken-for-granted ways that those from the dominant group claimed cognitive authority, while Collins made a compelling case for the unique standpoint of black women scholars as “outsiders within” the academy. Today it is hard to imagine a time when we did not know that bodies and their location mattered or that rationalities were gendered.

Ontological and epistemological discussions about research have expanded and continue to be fruitful and important to the way feminists theorize about the production of knowledge. From the beginning, feminists challenged the artificial separation of reason (mind) and emotion (body), and they have come to view emotion as both a legitimate source of knowledge and a product of culture that is as open to analysis as any other culturally inscribed phenomenon. The significance and legitimacy of emotions as a topic of inquiry, as a source of theoretical insight, and as a signal of rupture in social relations is now well established in feminist circles.⁴

We did not anticipate the enormous growth in feminist scholarship about the body, and there are no entries in our book’s index for “body,”

Oakley 2000; Mayberry, Subramaniam, and Weasel 2001; Jacobs 2002; Ramazanoğlu with Holland 2002; Letherby 2003; Mohanty 2003; Naples 2003; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004.

⁴ Behar 1996; Alcoff 2000; Franzway 2001; Shields 2002.

“embodiment,” or “ontology.” Our generation was busy refuting biological determinism by showing that gender was a social construct, separate from the biological construct of sex. It did not occur to us to view the physical itself as a social construct. Since then, there has been an explosion of feminist scholarship on the body, due in part to philosophical and theoretical advances in feminist scholarship that challenged the dualism of nature versus culture. Feminist scholars view the body in at least four ways: two of these—the embodied knower and the body as object of inquiry—were familiar to us, but two others—the body as a category of analysis and the body in relationship to the material—are relatively new.

Attention to the body as object of inquiry flowed from the fact that so many of the early struggles of the contemporary women’s movement centered on women’s right to bodily integrity. By focusing research on topics such as reproductive rights, violence and rape prevention, mothering and pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment in the workplace, body image, and sexist representations of women’s bodies in advertising and popular culture, feminists were able to show how control over women’s bodies was the linchpin of women’s oppression and of their potential liberation.

Women’s bodies continue to incite political debate, but our understanding of the battlefield is much more nuanced and complex because of the shift from studying the body as an object of inquiry to using the body as social category of analysis. Contemporary feminist theory has added new ways to think about the body, and feminists now speak of writing the body, reading the body, sexing the body, racing the body, enabling the body, policing the body, disciplining the body, erasing the body, and politicizing the body (Weitz 1998; Lee 2003).

More recently, the body has come to be seen as the site of culturally inscribed and disputed meanings, experiences, and feelings that can, like emotion, be mined as sources of insight and subjects of analysis. For example, theorizing the body has led to important breakthroughs in our understanding of disability. Through her close reading of medical discourse, sculpture, and commercial advertising, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2002) uncovers the politics and norms of appearance. She argues that feminists must incorporate disability as a category of analysis and as a system of representation in order to understand the challenges of studying the body. The potential of feminist disability

theory as radical critique hinges on a broad understanding of disability as a cultural system that stigmatizes certain kinds of bodily variations.⁵

Jennifer Terry (1999) uses deviant historiography to trace the contradictory discourses, both popular and scientific, that constitute the homosexual body throughout the twentieth century. She relies on a discourse analysis of medical texts, scientific reports, psychiatric case studies, statistical accounts, legal cases, legislative debates, and published first-person accounts of homosexuality to show the material effects of these discourses on the constitution of homosexual identities or sex-variant subjectivity. She views expert commentary as the site of the production and circulation of a particular kind of knowledge that passes as both scientific “truth” and as common sense about homosexuals. Because Terry relies on texts from different genres, she uses multiple analytic strategies to understand the formation of sex-variant subjectivity. Her methods allow her to see how individuals accept, transform, and/or resist experts’ accounts of who they are.

Ontological insights about the body are also important in understanding new developments in methodology. Donna Haraway’s (1985) important work on the nexus of body and machine has inspired philosophers of science such as Nancy Tuana (2001) to look at embodiment and epistemic agency in terms of how bodies interact with the natural, the material, and the more-than-human environment. Both interactions and intra-actions are central not only to what and how we know but also to what there is to know (Tuana 2001; Barad 2003; Code 2003). In *Thinking from Things*, philosopher of archaeology Alison Wylie (2002) makes a case for what we can learn about culture from the seemingly inarticulate materials of the archaeological past. As a philosopher, she offers us new ways to think about the methods of philosophy and archaeology in the post-positivist period by proposing ways to be “empirical” but not “narrowly empiricist.” The fragmentary materials of the archaeological record are an asset because they force researchers to look beyond data to background knowledge and auxiliary assumptions in order to establish evidence that is believable. The data or material become laden with theory that enriches the analysis.

Detailed methodological discussions of the ontological and epistemological shift from the body as object to the body in relation to the material realm are just beginning to emerge. In *The Body Multiple*, Annemarie Mol (2002) proposes an intriguing way to examine the

⁵ For an example of feminist research and scholarship on disability, see the special disability issue of *NWSA Journal* 14, no.3, published in Fall 2002.

methodological implications of ontology through what she calls *philosophical ethnography*. She draws on feminist theory, medical anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and science and technology studies to reframe such issues as the disease-illness distinction, subject-object relations, boundaries, difference, situatedness, and ontology. She uses the standard ethnographic methods of observation, analysis of records, and interviews to uncover the multiple ways the disease of atherosclerosis is “enacted” by the materials (such as medical tests, machines, surgical practices, and medicines) used to diagnose and treat it and by the practices of doctors, patients, pathologists, and lab technicians. Our understanding of atherosclerosis coheres across a range of practices, from doctor-patient conversation and the way records are made and stored to the slides made by the pathologist, including the tools and the dyes used in the process. Mol labels her methodological approach *praxiography*, or *ontology-in-practice*. She contends that our methods for understanding the objects and subjects we study mediate between an object and its representation.

Reflexivity

In *Beyond Methodology*, we defined reflexivity as the tendency of feminists to reflect on, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process. Nearly all of the pieces in our collection explicitly reflected on some aspect of the research process. At that time, there was a desire on the part of feminist researchers to focus on women’s “lived experience” as a way to recover what had been omitted or distorted in academic knowledge about women and gender and to give women a voice in the construction of new knowledge. This led to a number of methodological innovations, but it also led to criticisms about how those voices were to be represented, who had the authority to do so, and what form these representations should take (Spivak 1990; Roof and Wiegman 1995; Olesen 2000) and to critiques of the way experience itself had become foundational in feminist research (Gorelick 1996; Scott 1996).

Phenomenological and hermeneutical epistemologies had encouraged us to think about the types of methods that would be required to capture the ways subjects themselves made sense of their own experiences. This in turn led to an interest in consciousness-raising as a process worth studying and as a methodological tool for gaining access to the hidden, taken-for-granted, commonsense understanding of everyday lives. To reveal how consciousness-raising worked, feminists employed such techniques as group interviews, long interviews repeated with the same subject over time, and asking

respondents for feedback about the research. Today, in addition to the researchers' reflections on methods and the subjects' reflections on the meaning of experiences under investigation, reflexivity has also come to mean the way researchers consciously write themselves into the text, the audiences' reactions to and reflections on the meaning of the research, the social location of the researcher, and the analysis of disciplines as sites of knowledge production.

Understanding of the role of the feminist researcher as an active agent in constructing knowledge has generated a large body of reflexive writing and reminiscences about the motivation, interpretation, and process of doing research and producing scholarship. Experienced scholars in sociology—Laurel Richardson (1997), Dorothy Smith (1998), Marjorie L. DeVault (1999), and Nancy A. Naples (2003)—have published collective works that look back at their research over time and attempt to place their careers and work within broader philosophical and theoretical advancements in women's studies. In *Fields of Play* (1997), Richardson creates a “pleated text” of essays and papers written over a ten-year period, accompanied by “writing stories” about their production. She uses time as a framework to explore the contexts and pretexts of her texts and contextualizes her knowledge claims and her changing sense of self within her discipline, her academic department, her political commitments, and her personal history and longings.⁶ In *Feminism and Method* (2003), Naples presents us with reflections on her substantial body of work, paying close attention to the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of the methods she has found helpful as a feminist researcher—including ethnography, discourse analysis, and activist research.

Feminists involved in critical race studies have become increasingly reflexive about the ways that race constitutes research. In *Racing Research/Researching Race*, France Winddance Twine and Jonathan W. Warren (2000) offer us a collection of methodological writings in the field of critical race studies that both incorporates and expands the work of feminists. These authors focus our attention on race less as a topic and more as a methodological dilemma. Their selections illustrate how the methodological dilemmas arising from racial subjectivities, racial ideologies,

⁶ Richardson has written extensively about writing as a methodology. Her essay “Writing: A Method of Inquiry” (2000) is one of the most cited essays on this topic in the field of qualitative research. Her latest book, *Travels with Ernest: Crossing the Literary/Sociological Divide* (Richardson and Lockridge 2004), a collaboration with her novelist husband Ernest Lockridge, is an experimental text that explores the relationship between literary and ethnographic writing. For an overview of the methodological implications of writing, see Behar and Gordon 1995; Ellis and Bochner 2000.

and racial disparities have analytical, ethical, emotional, and methodological import. The collection addresses these dilemmas not only in terms of how race is studied but also regarding who is allowed to “have race”; it foregrounds for critical analysis what it means to be conscious of race when one is doing research. Twine argues that, because racial standpoints, racial fields, and racial discourses are not unitary or fixed, the instability and unevenness of racism can have methodological consequences for qualitative researchers, even when their research is not about race or racism. Contributors reflect on these racialized fields with brutal honesty about their experiences. How does one handle blatantly racist remarks in the research process? What if they are made by members of one oppressed group about another? What happens to researchers when they treat whiteness as a race? What is the difference between studying whites and studying whiteness? How does “color blindness” about race function in the field? How do you design a study of covert and dangerous white extremist groups?

Other feminist scholars, drawing on earlier notions of the researcher as an object of inquiry, have conducted innovative participatory research projects in which subjects are active in the construction of knowledge about their lives and researchers attempt to be more transparent about their roles. In *Troubling the Angels*, a book about how women with HIV make sense of their lives, Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997) provide a novel approach to the representation of research that reveals the triangulated, collaborative, and reflexive impulse of feminist research. In one section of the book, interview transcript material is presented on the top half of the page while the bottom of the page contains sections from one of the authors’ research journals, capturing the reflexive process that is often ignored. This experimental text also captures women’s multiple realities of living with HIV/AIDS. For example, one woman’s poetry is presented beside national statistics from the Centers for Disease Control, along with drawings that illustrate overarching themes. These different methods sometimes yield results that are contradictory or lead to only partial understanding, yet the authors do not view this as negative. Instead, competing knowledge serves as an opportunity to uncover new knowledge.

On the other hand, Brenda Jo Brueggemann (1996) reflects on research she conducted about how deaf college students acquire English literacy skills, reminding us that there are limits to reflexivity and to subjects’ willingness to be enlisted as research collaborators: “I don’t think it is entirely ethical that we unequivocally assume that they want to be involved, to collaborate, to respond, to co-construct representations with us” (Brueggemann 1996, 33). She is critical of viewing reflexivity as the an-

tidote to the crisis in representation and legitimization. She suggests that “self-reflexivity, turning as it does on issues of representation, risks turning reflexivity into a solipsistic, rhetorical position in which the researcher (the self)—ah, once again—usurps the position of the subject (other)” (19).

Crisis in representation

The “crisis in representation” has deepened considerably since the publication of our anthology, and this has influenced the development of feminist methodology. Earlier social science had been “naturalist” in its assumptions and claims (i.e., that, with the right method it was possible to accurately represent reality) and generally did not take as its task reflection on its own representations, whether in the form of written, verbal, or visual (e.g., film/video, charts/graphs, photography) accounts of social life. When we assembled our collection, feminists were beginning to challenge the idea that data exist in a one-to-one relationship with the social reality that is being studied. Since then, poststructuralist feminists have made us more aware that the product of any research process is a construction of, not a reflection of, what the reality is about. Feminist researchers have written extensively on this topic, and we refer readers to the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) for review essays concerning many of the debates associated with the crisis in representation and the value of reflexivity.⁷ Postmodern researchers have challenged modernist claims to the intelligibility of the social world by using methodological devices that consciously enhance and emphasize textuality. Their challenge constitutes a rereading of the relationship between the social, the reader, and the writer.

Recent scholarship in women’s studies employs intertextuality as a method of deconstructing representations. Intertextuality, the study of how the symbolic codes in one text are related to those in another, allows the researcher to compare and contrast similar themes within or among different genres or media. In a study of race and maternity in U.S. visual culture, Ruby Tapia (2002) affirms the co-constitutive relationships among apparently separate sites of visual culture to examine the symbolic images that go into producing the maternal body as a racialized intertext. She examines maternal visual objects and texts in different media genres ranging from film, documentary television, and popular journalism to photographic art

⁷ This crisis is more than a crisis about truth and accuracy. For many feminists, the crisis is also about politics and the stakes we all have in wanting our knowledge claims to be relevant for the liberation of women and all oppressed people.

installations and public health posters in order to illustrate the specific role of the visual in the racialized construction of the maternal body.

Feminist concerns about the ethical and political implications of representing the “other” are an important part of the crisis in representation. A new generation of social scientists has taken this critique as a starting point but still works empirically with observation and data. In *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok* (2004), anthropologist Ara Wilson argues that feminist researchers must be aware that they are often entering fields of study that are hyperrepresented—as is the case with sex industry workers in Thailand. She contends that the research design should take into account the discursive field it enters; otherwise feminists risk reinscribing dominant power relations. In some cases, the researcher may conclude that the best way to study prostitution may include the decision not to study prostitution or to study it differently. In her case, Wilson resolves the issue by using a multisite ethnographic approach in which she regards the sex industry as but one of a number of local labor markets in Thailand in which gender and the forces of globalization collide. Juxtaposing the sex industry with retail, direct sales (Avon and Amway), and telecommunications opens the discursive field and avoids reducing Thailand to the land of exotic sex tours with women cast either as victims or as liberated icons. Wilson’s knowledge of the language, her description of multiple sites, her reflexivity about her own social position, and her participation in a local sex-worker-rights nongovernmental organization help her to navigate the power imbalances within the field she studies.

Leela Fernandes (1999) examines how representations develop in one national context and circulate in another—particularly when power discrepancies exist in the production, consumption, and context of such representations. Rather than searching for the perfect method that will “get the real right,” or abandoning the possibility of ever representing the subaltern at all, she proposes that the solution lies in analyzing the textual strategies of representing the real (124). Fernandes compares two very different strategies for representing the life of Indian political activist Phoolan Devi—one a commercial film, *Bandit Queen* (1994), and the other a testimonial, *I, Phoolan Devi* (Devi 1996)—to highlight the methodological issues at stake when the focus of analysis is expanded beyond the production of representations to their circulation and consumption across transnational sites.

The crisis in representation has led to greater experimentation in how we think about methods and how we represent our findings. Lather (2001) contends that we cannot solve the crisis but only trouble any claims to accurate representation. One collection that takes this task seriously is

Working the Ruins by Elizabeth St. Pierre and Wanda S. Pillow (2000). The contributors to this volume, who are ethnographers and theorists, are “working the ruins” of humanism, methodology, and education after the postmodern turn. They try to make sense of humanist research after the critique of its methods, and they raise provocative questions about what counts as data; how such data will be collected, analyzed, and validated; how best to represent research findings; whose political interests are at stake; and the link between research and praxis. Skepticism and failure incite new challenges and possibilities for knowing and for what is knowable. Lather sees the potential of working the ruins for ethnography; she writes, “I look for the breaks and jagged edges of methodological practice from which we might draw useful knowledge” (2001, 200).

Social action and policy

Feminist approaches to research have always emphasized action and social change. This action orientation is reflected in the articles and topics (social movements, activism, policy, political consciousnesses) in *Beyond Methodology* and in their focus on the purpose and rationale of authors’ research projects, the choice of method, the involvement of subjects, and the dissemination strategies. An original thrust of feminist research was women’s liberation, and this was construed as anything from the radical transformation of patriarchy (sometimes all of capitalism) and the corresponding empowerment of women to the more liberal insistence that specific attention be paid to the policy implications of research on women. Most of us believed in one way or another that, to study and understand change, one had to be an active participant in political struggle (Mies 1983).

Feminists today are still concerned with these issues. For example, those conducting participatory action research (PAR) involving subjects as co-researchers continue to argue that this approach can empower disenfranchised groups and create research agendas with immediate implications for social change (Cook and Wright 1995; Cancian 1996). Participatory action research can also help to reduce the widely divergent power differentials between the researcher and the researched, allowing multiple subjectivities to define the problem and its solution.⁸ In *Tangled Routes*, Deborah Barndt (2002) uses this approach to trace the production, distribution, and consumption of the tomato through the North American Free Trade Agreement chain to explain the gendered nature of globali-

⁸ See Kemmis and McTaggart 2000 for an overview of PAR. For classic work on feminism and PAR, see Maguire 1987.

zation. She uses PAR and photographic analysis to show how women workers make sense of globalization and its impact on their lives.

The vexing question of women's agency continues to be an important component of the action orientation and a fruitful avenue for theory and scholarship. Feminists no longer seek one consciousness-raising event that will inspire all women to action, for agency has become increasingly complex. We know that women consent to, resist, and reshape the social relations of power within a complex matrix of domination and subordination. Our collection focused on the resistance side of the equation. In "Learning from the Outsider Within," Collins (1991) showed that self-conscious black women's everyday behavior constituted personal resistance and social activism. She has extended and complicated this argument in *Fighting Words* (1998) and *Black Sexual Politics* (2004).

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval (2000) calls for fluid methodologies that recognize the decolonizing possibilities of U.S. third-world feminist criticism. She excavates the multiple locations and shifting sites of differential consciousness and identifies the methodological implications of a mobile consciousness born in opposition. She focuses on how such a consciousness can be closely read within the texts of U.S. third-world feminists and how these texts are engaged by critical theorists. By placing such texts in dialogue, we find the language of possibility that can help us develop more sophisticated concepts of political agency and new ways of organizing social movements.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith offers both critique and hope in her analysis of imperialism, research, and knowledge production by and about the Maori in New Zealand. By reexamining the colonizing effects of research and by reclaiming research as a tool for survival, Smith shows how the spaces of marginalization have become places of hope and resistance. In these spaces, indigenous academics and researchers are continuing to develop research methodology. Smith discusses what an ethical, respectful, and useful research agenda would look like and outlines twenty-five indigenous research projects with themes such as cultural survival, healing, and self-determination. Her book is designed to help indigenous people research their own experience.

These authors suggest that resistance and power reside in many different locations and arrangements and that agency is always an ongoing, changing accomplishment.⁹ Women's activism emerges within organiza-

⁹ Feminists continue to be very interested in the study of social movements and have been publishing in the University of Minnesota series on social movements, protest, and contention (Ray 1999; Fonow 2003; Klandermans and Staggenborg 2003; Kurtz 2003; Raeburn 2004).

tions, movements, and social groups and in everyday social settings. It is constructed on the local, national, and transnational levels as well as in the movement between these levels. This can require more complicated research methodologies, including designs that are multisited and trans-scalar, and can capture the ways political subjectivities constitute discourse, structure, and the material environment. It will take interdisciplinary teams of feminist researchers in different locations to carry out the types of research that our new conceptions of agency and activism demand.

Feminist scholars have also come to understand that women can be complicit in the exploitation and oppression of other women and men, and there is a growing body of scholarship about the role of women in right-wing movements throughout the world. In *Right-Wing Women*, Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power caution us against perceiving women on the right as lacking in agency: "Women in the right are neither dupes of right-wing men nor less powerful replicas of them. . . . Rightist women consciously choose to support and help build the projects of which they are a part" (2002, 3). The authors argue for a transnational understanding of the oppositional social movements and submerged social movement networks that women on the right use to mobilize participants for various conservative and extremist causes, an understanding critical to fashioning a feminist resistance.

We believe it is imperative for feminists to develop the analytic skills and intellectual strategies to see through right-wing social policies and smoke screens such as "compassionate conservatism." *Fundamental Differences*, a new collection edited by Cynthia Burack and Jyl J. Josephson (2003), begins to take on this challenge. Here, feminists confront conservative social thinkers about their values and ideas, exposing their intellectual and political strategies. The authors grapple with conservative analyses and recommendations regarding family formation, sexuality, gender, socialization, and education. They critique the methodologies used by conservatives and disassemble their tactics for achieving scholarly legitimacy. Burack and Josephson pay attention to the ways in which conservatives represent themselves and their opinions in the marketplace of ideas, examining the impact that conservatives have on the ways policy is framed and on feminism itself.

Globalization and the neoliberal policy agenda have produced new discourses, created new sites of political action, and changed the nature of feminist claims on the state for gender equity and women's rights. As a consequence, feminists have expanded their policy focus to include contemporary policy issues (national security, militarization and armed conflict, and free-trade agreements) while searching for new ways to respond

to earlier feminist policy concerns (domestic violence, poverty, employment discrimination and pay equity, and political representation). The emerging interdisciplinary field of feminist policy studies is gaining momentum through its focus on bringing together researchers from a variety of perspectives and diverse methodologies. Some of this work, such as Nancy D. Campbell's (2000) study of gender, drug policy, and social justice, was not even possible before the theoretical advances of the last decade. Campbell examines law-enforcement practice and discourses of criminology, pharmacology, psychiatry, and popular culture to disclose how normative expectations about women's responsibilities for social reproduction shape both government policy toward women and citizens' willingness to accept drug policies that are counterproductive as well as unjust and unfair to women. She calls for an explicit commitment to social justice as a principle of drug policy.

Quantitative methods

In the early 1990s, the use of quantitative approaches in feminist research was far from rare, as illustrated by the articles we included in our collection. What set these approaches apart from their nonfeminist counterparts was the researchers' attention to the ways in which key concepts were operationalized, the careful matching of statistical techniques to research questions, the transparency with which the researchers presented their data and analysis, and the focus of the analysis on disenfranchised groups and salient policy issues.

A review of current writing on feminist quantitative research reveals the continuation of these trends along with new advances and insights in applying quantitative analysis as a feminist method. This body of scholarship shows that, while the gulf between qualitative and quantitative methods is still wide, it is often feminists who have sought to bridge it through their collaborative impulse, their critical stance, their search for more inclusive and nuanced ways to measure complex social phenomena, their location on the continuum of political activism, and their desire to create research that can be used to promote social change.

Perhaps the largest body of feminist writing about the use of numerical data and quantitative analysis concerns its potential to influence public policy at local, federal, and international levels. This is predicated on the understanding that governments and policy makers are less attentive to the concerns of individuals, as reflected in qualitative work (Westmarland 2001), and that quantitative research is needed to measure the extent of social and political problems (Rose 2001) as well as their prevalence

(Thorne and Varcoe 1998). Large-scale surveys have the power to alter public opinion in ways that a smaller number of in-depth interviews do not (Kwan 2001). Recognizing that statistics are needed to formulate legislation, feminist survey researchers employ statistical analyses that can best represent the phenomena under study at the highest level of rigor, selected explicitly for policy impact (Westmarland 2001). This involves acknowledging that abstraction is necessary to enhance political understanding on a personal level, by refusing to equate abstraction with its masculine expression (Sprague and Zimmerman 1989).

Feminist scholars also use quantitative methods in new ways to understand women's everyday experiences. Geographer Mei-Po Kwan (2001) has developed sophisticated quantitative measures of spatial and temporal restrictions on women's daily activities. *Fixity constraint* is the need to perform activities at a fixed location or time, such as child-care drop-off. *Time budget constraint* represents limitations on the amount of time available for daily activities, such as time for housework before or after one's job. Using geovisual representations of complex cartographic forms in three-dimensional space, Kwan shows that these levels of constraint depend more on one's gender and sharing of household responsibilities than on conventional variables such as the presence or number of children in the family.

Another focus of new quantitative feminist research is an emphasis on quantification that is sensitive to women's experience (Westmarland 2001). This has led quantitative feminists to operationalize "with care" (Kwan 2001, 165) by standardizing categories using women's rather than men's locations in social structure and relationships (Risman 1993). This theme is echoed by Judith A. Cook's (2003) analysis of gender biases in disability assessments of women with depression. She shows how traditional disability assessments overrely on labor force participation, erroneously treating women's and men's employment patterns as if they were similar; contain simplistic notions of role performance that neglect women's complex, culturally bound social-role constellations; and fail to measure or control for a series of comorbidities that are common among depressed women, such as histories of childhood physical and sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment.

There is also a new sophistication in practicing and reflecting on triangulation, now referred to by a number of terms such as *mixed-method research* (Jenkins 2000) or *experimental methodological pluralism* (Rose 2001), and a growing appreciation of the various forms this approach can take. First, the critical view of "multimethodism" acknowledges that such projects may not emphasize all methods equally, making one method predominate in importance, and that a project's major research question

itself may promote the primacy of one method over another (Rose 2001). One resolution to this dilemma is to design research projects that include a number of equally important, complementary questions, such as Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt's (1995) work combining census data, survey data, and in-depth interviews to investigate links in occupational segmentation by gender in local labor markets.

Another aspect of multimethodism acknowledges the recent blurring of the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative methods as feminist researchers rethink the quantitative-qualitative debate. Damaris Rose (2001) notes the growing tendency of qualitative researchers to collect and report quantitative data on their subjects, such as education and income levels, in order to better reflect the particular, subjective features of the women they study. At the same time, it is taken for granted by many feminist survey researchers that their work must be informed by complementary in-depth qualitative analyses (Kim 1997; Jenkins 2000; Kwan 2001).

Responding to those who critique the limited interaction between researcher and subject in quantitative analyses, Sally Thorne and Colleen Varcoe (1998) point out that lengthy in-person interviews can carry considerable "subject burden" and note the value of shorter surveys, which obtain higher response rates and thereby offer greater representativeness and inclusivity. Marlene Kim (1997) reports on a project to train and employ low-income women as interviewers in an evaluation of the effectiveness of Job Training and Partnership Act programs designed to return poor people to work. While the federally funded evaluation involved poor women only as respondents and focused primarily on the programs' short-term training outcomes, the feminist evaluation focused on the needs of the poor and used the insights and queries of its low-income interviewers to broaden the nature of the inquiry. The traditional evaluation found that significant short-term increases in employment rates and earnings evaporated over time. The feminist evaluation showed how short-term gains were negated by the poor quality of low-paying, entry-level jobs that hampered trainees' ability to establish longer-term economic self-sufficiency. Thus, while the traditional evaluation tracked changes in wage and work status, it could not explain the evaluation results—a central aim of the feminist evaluation.

Infrastructure and support

Substantial capacity has developed for feminist scholars in academic settings and through the women's research centers movement. This capacity was

early in its formation when we began to write about feminist methodology. It now includes the institutionalization of interdisciplinary women's studies graduate programs and departments, significant contributions of feminists to their disciplines and to interdisciplinary fields, a proliferation of academic journals and presses publishing feminist scholarship, and the creation and expansion of regional feminist policy and research centers.

Today, a feminist research infrastructure serves as the site for the development of innovative feminist methodologies, and it is here that many of the dilemmas of feminist research practice will be resolved. For example, the National Council for Research on Women (NCRW), founded in 1981, has grown from twenty-nine research and policy centers to a network of three thousand individuals and organizations, including policy makers, the media, governmental and nongovernmental agencies, educators, researchers, and activists concerned with advocacy for women and girls. Ninety-two research centers and institutes focus on women and girls. The NCRW serves as a bridge across traditional divides separating research, policy formulation, activism, and practice.

Member centers of NCRW continue to grow and develop, and some are playing important roles in the effort to influence policy. The Institute of Women's Research and Policy in Washington, DC, under the direction of Heidi Hartmann, continues to advance our understanding of women's economic and policy issues and to publish policy documents that help feminists disseminate ideas to policy makers and to the public. Women's research and policy institutes have also been formed at regional levels, focusing on particular local policy issues or the issues of specific geographic regions.

Three of our contributors (Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Marianne L. A. Leung [1991]) were founding members of the Center for Research on Women at Memphis State University. This center has become a leading institution dedicated to research on women and social inequality in the U.S. South and among women of color. The center's research is action oriented, emphasizing feminist and antiracist theories and methodologies that illuminate the structural relationships among race, class, gender, and sexuality and that relate regional developments to national and international developments. Another contributor, Ronnie Steinberg, is the executive director of the recently established Women's Social Policy and Research Center at Vanderbilt University, where she also served as director of women's studies. The center facilitates research on the impact of federal and state policy on women's social and economic status in Tennessee and surrounding states. Researchers are attempting to define and measure the value of a living wage for women in Nashville and are examining the impact

that tax reform proposals being considered by the state of Tennessee would have on women.

Conclusions

As scholars who benefited from maturing in environments that allowed and even rewarded challenges to the epistemological foundations of knowledge, it remains important for us to acknowledge our responsibility for advancing this tradition. At this time in the United States, traditional methodologies remain highly valued, while many other countries rely more on qualitative and consensus studies in setting their public policy agendas and enacting corresponding legislation. As of this writing, the 2004 U.S. Congress is calling for, and in some cases requiring, very narrow “scientific” research designs and protocols that focus on “proving” cause and effect—a troubling and obviously political move.

At one time, feminist researchers were on the outside looking in, but now many feminist scholars of our generation have become the gatekeepers (Cook and Fonow 1984) of a much richer array of resources that are needed to produce and distribute feminist knowledge. We are training the next generation of feminist researchers and deciding who will receive grant funding, who will publish, and who will be awarded tenure. This is both an important responsibility and a valuable opportunity to advance the field by championing and mentoring the work of newer scholars, some of whom are questioning the feminist work—including our own—that came before them.

We are encouraged by the growth of writing about feminist methodology and hope that researchers will continue to critique, expand, and invent new ways of doing feminist research and of theorizing about feminist inquiry. Such efforts cannot move forward independent of advances in feminist theory. Feminists have moved well beyond the analysis of bias and exclusion and toward more contextual forms of theorizing about the intersection of gender with other categories of social difference and with place and time, and this, inevitably, has led to more sophisticated discussions about methods.

The introductory article to our anthology was titled “Back to the Future” (Fonow and Cook 1991a), and in preparing this new article we find that the process of looking back at what feminist scholars have struggled to achieve and how that has served as the foundation for subsequent efforts has brought the future into clearer focus. It remains our task to preserve the tradition and the history of feminists engaged in the conduct of inquiry, being ever mindful of its limitations and presuppositions yet focused

increasingly on its consequences and the limitless potential for transforming human lives.

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