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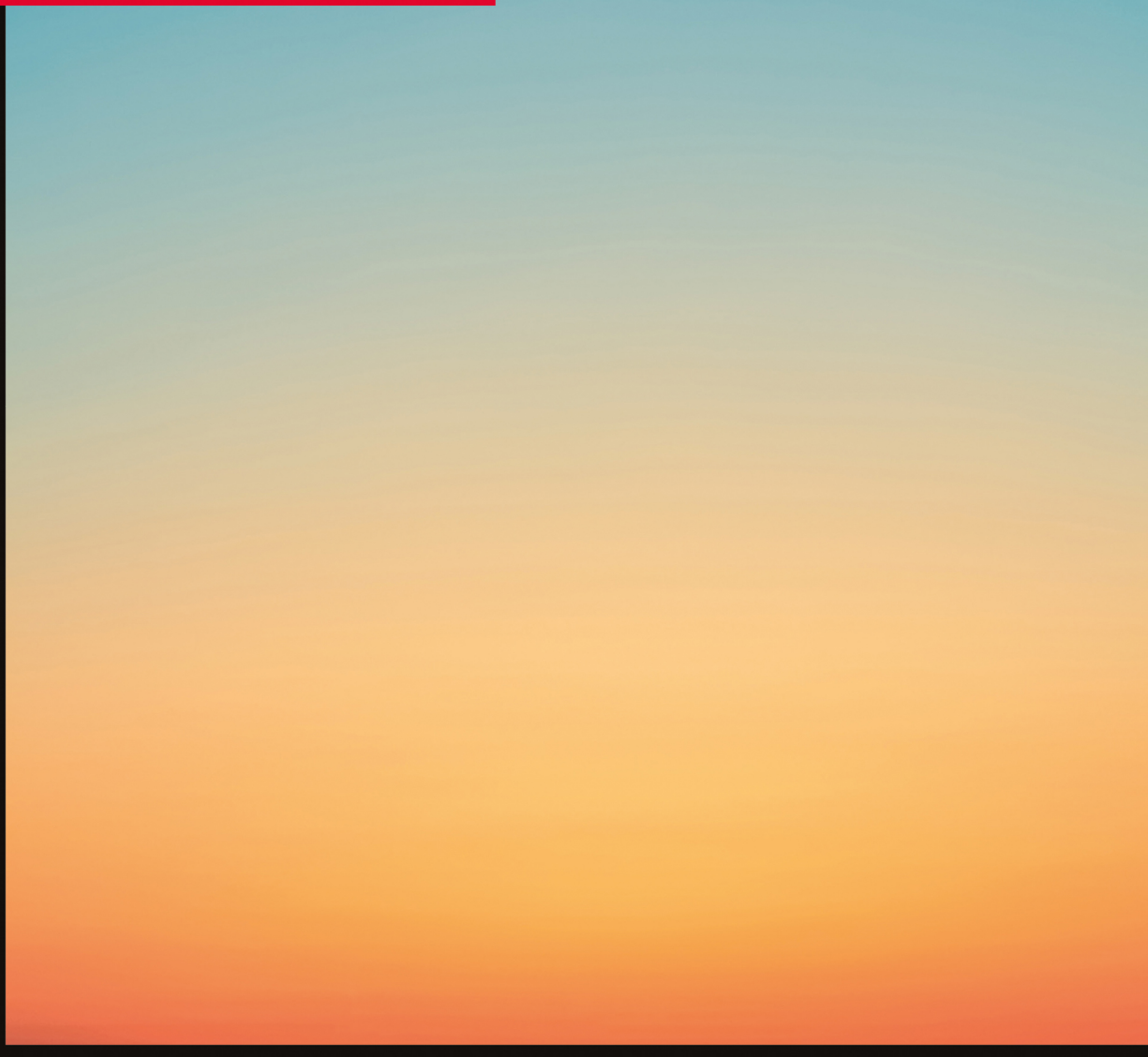

The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Philosophy of Science

Sharon Crasnow and Kristen Intemann

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SITUATED KNOWLEDGE AND OBJECTIVITY

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Introduction

Situated knowledge, broadly understood, is the view that the social location of the inquirer is of epistemic importance. However, not just any kind of social location is of interest to feminist philosophers of science. Feminist philosophers focus on those social locations that track systemic relations of power in the society. Systemic relations of power involve the ability of members of one social group, the dominant group, to constrain the choices available to members of another social group, the subordinate group. Systemic relations of power function as vehicles of domination when they constrain choices in ways that are harmful for members of the subordinate group. Like other social epistemologists, feminist philosophers of science draw attention to the social location of the inquirer, but they differ from others by focusing on the question of how relations of power and domination interact with knowledge.

Given the interest in power and domination, feminist philosophers of science have examined the epistemic significance of the inquirer's gender, ethnic identity, race, class, sexual identity, and (dis)ability. These attributes are morally and politically significant because in many national and cultural contexts they mark social locations divided by socio-economic inequalities or other ways in which social locations can be privileged or not privileged. As Alison Wylie explains, in feminist philosophy of science the situatedness of epistemic agents is construed in structural terms rather than as a matter of individual perspective or idiosyncratic skills and talents (2011: 162). Wylie emphasizes that the epistemically interesting features of social locations are not to be understood as essential properties of particular social groups. It is a matter of empirical inquiry to find out how the social location of the inquirer shapes her social experience in a particular context and how her social experience is relevant to specific research projects (Wylie 2003: 32).

In 1980s and 1990s, the idea of situated knowledge was advanced as a criticism of the myth-like understanding of objectivity as "the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway 1991: 189). Feminist historian of science Donna Haraway insisted that all knowledge claims, including scientific knowledge claims, are situated, and their situatedness is a key to understanding who is accountable for them (1991: 191). She argued that knowledge claims provide merely a partial perspective on the object of inquiry, and therefore, the ideal of objectivity as impartiality is no longer plausible. In addition to questioning the "god-trick" version of objectivity, Haraway also questioned a version of relativism. According to Haraway, "Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally" (1991: 191). In her view, both objectivity as "god-trick" and relativism as its "mirror twin" obscure the epistemic importance of social location, the

former by denying that knowledge claims are made in particular social locations, and the latter by denying that social locations can either impede or promote knowledge-seeking. While relativists grant equal epistemic standing to all social locations, Haraway, like many feminist philosophers, suggests that some social locations are better than others from an epistemic point of view.

In this chapter I discuss two questions that are motivated by the idea of situated knowledge. First, if the epistemic importance of social locations is contingent as many feminist philosophers suggest, how do social locations come to have epistemically interesting consequences, if not always, at least under some circumstances? Second, if relativism as epistemic equality of all social locations is problematic and if objectivity as freedom from social locations and partial perspectives is not a plausible alternative, how should the ideal of objectivity be redefined?

Local Knowledge and Social Experience

Social locations are thought to matter epistemically because they give rise to local knowledge and social experiences that are specific to the social location in question. Local knowledge is knowledge about a particular cultural, economic, or social practice and its circumstances, and it is best acquired by participating in the practice. Social experiences are social in two senses: they arise in particular social locations and they are shared with other people inhabiting similar social locations. The more complex societies are in terms of the division of labor and the more unequal citizens are in terms of their economic resources, education, and health, the more radically different the social experiences of citizens are likely to be. Moreover, the more pluralistic societies are in terms of political values and religious affiliations and the more multicultural they are in terms of ethnic identities and languages, the more likely it is that the social experiences of citizens will diverge. As Wylie explains, "social location systematically shapes and limits what we know, including tacit, experiential knowledge as well as explicit understanding, what we take knowledge to be as well as specific epistemic content" (2003: 31).

In scientific research, the social experience of the inquirer can be a source of criticism and creativity. Patricia Hill Collins argues that scientists and scholars who are "outsiders within" occupy an epistemically fruitful social location due to their first-hand experience of marginal or subordinate social locations in the society and access to the insider's perspective on academic knowledge production (2004: 103). Their unique social location enables them to assume a critical posture toward research that either ignores or distorts the reality of marginal or subordinate social locations. In virtue of the "creative tension of outsider within status" they are well positioned to identify anomalies in dominant scientific paradigms (2004: 122).

The idea of situated knowledge can highlight not only the social experience of the inquirer but also the social experiences of research participants and collaborators, that is, people who are studied and who can participate in the study in different ways, from agreeing to be observed and interviewed to contributing to the design of the study. With appropriate methods of participation, observation, and interview, scientists can do justice to local knowledge and the social experiences of research participants and collaborators. Sometimes scientists need to be engaged in social and political activism in order to earn the trust of research participants and collaborators. Relations of trust are of epistemic importance especially when the position of the scientist, on the one hand, and the positions of research participants and collaborators, on the other hand, are so unequal that they threaten to undermine the research process (Crasnow 2008: 1103).

Besides being a source of criticism and evidence, social experience can inspire new theoretical perspectives, that is, ways of conceptualizing the social phenomenon under study and the social mechanisms that are thought to generate and maintain the social phenomenon. By "social mechanism" I mean a constellation of human agents and activities that are organized so that they tend to bring about certain collective outcomes. For example, when a social scientist investigates

gender-based discrimination in academia, she has to conceptualize discrimination so that she can distinguish it from non-discriminatory processes. Discrimination can be conceptualized narrowly by focusing merely on overt forms of discrimination such as not hiring women even when they have the best qualifications. A broader and more refined conceptualization of discrimination might include subtle forms of discrimination such as micro-inequities that have an impact on women scientists' motivation, confidence in their capabilities, opportunities for collaboration, and visibility (Rolin 2006; Wylie et al. 2007). A broader conceptualization of discrimination might include a more complex account of the social mechanisms that maintain discrimination. The social mechanisms can involve not merely a bias against women in hiring decisions but also social forces that undermine women's academic productivity. A social scientist who has herself experienced micro-inequities is likely to prefer the broader and more refined understanding of discrimination and its causes.

In this section, I have argued that social locations can matter epistemically by giving rise to local knowledge and social experiences which are sources of criticism, evidence, and theoretical perspectives. Moreover, the social location of the inquirer involves relations with research participants and collaborators. The ability of the inquirer to create and maintain mutual relations of trust may be crucial to her epistemic project. I have argued also that theoretical perspectives can grow out of social experiences because they highlight those aspects of natural or social reality the inquirer considers as significant. This insight is developed further in Helen Longino's critical contextual empiricism (CCE) which is the topic of the next section.

From Situation to Context

In CCE, situated knowledge is analyzed as contextual knowledge. CCE employs three different notions of context, an evidential, a specialty, and a social-cultural context. The first notion of context, an evidential context, figures in the argument that epistemic justification is relative to background assumptions because such assumptions are needed to establish the relevance of empirical evidence to a hypothesis or a theory (Longino 1990: 43). As Longino explains, "a state of affairs will only be taken to be evidence that something else is the case in light of some background belief or assumption asserting a connection between the two" (1990: 44). The second notion of context, a specialty context, plays a role in Longino's analysis of objectivity, in which she argues that objectivity is a function of a specialty community's practice rather than an individual scientist's observations and reasoning (1990: 74). The third notion of context, a social-cultural context, is employed in her analysis of the role of values in science, in which she argues that values belonging to the social and cultural context of science can enter into evidential context via background assumptions (1990: 83). Longino combines the three notions of context when she argues that we should adopt a community-based account of objectivity because values belonging to the social and cultural context of science can influence the evidential context of inquiry via background assumptions.

In CCE, the social experience of the inquirer is of epistemic interest especially when it functions as a source of value-laden background assumptions. While not all background assumptions "encode social values," many of them do (Longino 1990: 216). Value-laden background assumptions are difficult to identify when they are shared by all or most community members. In homogenous scientific communities, "they acquire an invisibility that renders them unavailable for criticism" (1990: 80). Longino argues that scientific communities benefit from heterogeneous social experiences and values because scientists are more likely to question value-laden background assumptions when the values in question differ from their own (2002: 131).

In CCE, the situatedness of scientific knowledge means also that scientific knowledge claims can *legitimately* be value-laden. Like many feminist philosophers of science, Longino (1990) rejects

the value-free ideal, the view that contextual values are not allowed to play any role in the practices where scientific theories and hypotheses are justified and evaluated epistemically. As she explains, "contextual values, interests and value-laden assumptions *can* constrain scientific practice in such a way as to affect the results of inquiry and do so without violating constitutive rules of science" (1990: 83). Moreover, she does not believe that it is possible to eliminate the influence of moral and social values on epistemic justification "without seriously truncating the explanatory ambitions of the sciences" (1990: 223). In response to the worry that value-laden background assumptions lead to "unbridled relativism" (1990: 216), Longino introduces the ideal of "social value management" (2002: 50). The ideal recommends that the role of contextual values in scientific inquiry is analyzed, criticized, and judged as either acceptable or unacceptable by a specialty community that satisfied certain conditions (see the section on objectivity).

By emphasizing the role of specialty communities, Longino introduces yet another meaning to the idea of situated knowledge. Knowledge claims are situated in the sense that they are addressed to particular epistemic communities. In virtue of being members of epistemic communities, scientists have epistemic responsibilities toward other community members. This means that they have an obligation to engage criticism when it is appropriate, and to defend their knowledge claims by appealing to the standards of evidence and argumentation accepted by other community members. Knowledge claims can be situated also in the sense that they are addressed to particular non-academic audiences, for example, social groups who can use the results of research in their effort to solve pressing social, environmental, or health problems.

In this section, I have argued that the social location of the inquirer involves an epistemic community where her knowledge claims are accepted, rejected, or modified. In some cases, the social location of the inquirer involves also a non-academic audience interested in the application of research results. In sum, the thesis of situated knowledge, in a broad sense, is the idea that "knowledge is local in a profound way – knowledge is knowledge for and by a particular set of socially situated knowers" (Crasnow 2014: 147). In the next section, I discuss yet another way of theorizing the social location of the inquirer and its epistemic importance.

What Is a Standpoint?

Feminist standpoint theory (FST) advances the idea that the social location of the inquirer can be developed into a standpoint that is an epistemic resource in scientific inquiry. Thus, having a standpoint is not the same thing as occupying a particular social location or viewing the world from a particular perspective. A standpoint differs from a social location and a perspective in three ways. First, developing a standpoint requires that one is critically aware of the social conditions under which scientific knowledge is produced. As Wylie explains, "Standpoint theory concerns, then, not just the epistemic effects of *social location* but the effects and the emancipatory potential of a critical *standpoint on* knowledge production" (2012: 63).

Second, the formation of a standpoint is a collective project that involves shared values and interests, and sometimes also activism. Kristen Intemann argues that a standpoint involves a political commitment to producing scientific research that challenges systems of oppression (2010: 786). Research combined with activism is one way to generate knowledge of the ways relations of power function in society. As Sandra Harding explains, "[W]e can come to understand hidden aspects of social relations between the genders and the institutions that support these relations only through struggles to change them" (1991: 127). That scientists, scholars, and activists can share values and interests makes it possible to understand how otherwise differently located individuals come together to form a standpoint. Sharon Crasnow (2013) argues that a standpoint is properly attributed to an epistemic community that is also a political community. A political community is built on shared interests (2013: 420). As Crasnow explains, "Building such a community requires

acknowledging diversity and discovering those shared interests" (2013: 420). This means that shared interests are not taken for granted but understood as an outcome of negotiation and coalition building (Crasnow 2014: 159).

The third feature of a standpoint follows from the second one. If the formation of a standpoint is a collective undertaking, then a standpoint is an achievement. As Harding explains, "A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by 'opening one's eyes'" (1991: 127). This insight is called the "achievement thesis" (Crasnow 2013: 417). The term "achievement" describes both the process of building epistemic and political communities and the knowledge-generating struggles of such communities.

The concept of standpoint figures in the main thesis of FST, the thesis of epistemic advantage. This is the view that those who are unprivileged with respect to their social location are potentially privileged with respect to particular epistemic projects (Wylie 2003: 34). While subordinate and marginal social locations do not automatically give epistemic benefits to people who inhabit these locations, they can be a source of a standpoint that improves scientific research. According to Harding, the standpoint of feminist research is "less partial and less distorted than the picture of nature and social relations that emerges from conventional research" (1991: 121).

Not all feminist philosophers of science accept the thesis of epistemic advantage. The critics of FST argue that the thesis of epistemic advantage is undermined by the so called "bias paradox" (Antony 1993: 188–189; Longino 1999: 338). The bias paradox is the apparent contradiction between the thesis of epistemic advantage and the thesis of situated knowledge. Whereas the former states that some knowledge claims are less partial and less distorted than others, the latter states that all knowledge claims are situated and partial, thereby questioning the possibility of some claims being "less partial." The situated knowledge thesis threatens the epistemic advantage thesis because it suggests that there are no impartial standards that allow one to judge some situated knowledge claims as better than others. If FST wants to hold on to the thesis of epistemic advantage, the objection goes, it will have to explain what standards allow feminists to assess research conducted from a feminist standpoint as well as conventional research.

In response to the criticism, some feminist philosophers argue that the bias paradox can be dissolved by interpreting the thesis of epistemic advantage as an empirical hypothesis (Wylie 2003; Rolin 2006; Intemann 2010). While the thesis of epistemic advantage seems to rely on the assumption that there is a "view from nowhere," that is, an impartial standard that enables one to judge some situated knowledge claims as better than others, there is no need for such an assumption. In a particular context of inquiry, one can assess the relative merits of research conducted from a feminist standpoint in comparison to conventional research by applying standard epistemic values such as empirical adequacy and consistency. The key move is to specify an epistemic advantage by pinpointing a conceptual innovation, a novel body of evidence or another type of empirical success brought about by a feminist standpoint (Rolin 2006: 127).

One epistemic advantage is that a feminist standpoint can remedy epistemic injustices, that is, unfair treatment of persons in their capacity as an inquirer (Wylie 2011). The notion of epistemic injustice offers yet another way to understand how the social location of the inquirer can be epistemically consequential. One form of epistemic injustice is testimonial injustice which occurs when "prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker 2007: 1). Another form of epistemic injustice is hermeneutical injustice which occurs when "a gap in collective interpretative resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experience" (Fricker 2007: 1). In both cases a person is put into an epistemically unprivileged position because of social identity prejudice against her. However, according to FST, an epistemically unprivileged position is potentially a privileged one. A feminist

standpoint can generate new knowledge by restoring credibility to victims of testimonial injustice and by correcting hermeneutical injustice with novel concepts such as "micro-inequities."

A feminist standpoint has the capacity to challenge relations of power and domination because it is akin to a social movement. A feminist scientific/intellectual movement provides feminist scientists, scholars, and activists with an opportunity to receive fruitful criticism for research which may be ignored in the larger scientific community (Rolin 2016: 17). Moreover, it enables them to generate evidence under social circumstances where relations of power tend to undermine their attempts to do so (2016: 16). This is because a social movement has the capacity to empower individuals, that is, to encourage them to act and speak in spite of or in response to the power wielded on them. Whereas an isolated individual is easily trapped in stereotypical images offered by prevailing relations of power, a feminist standpoint can empower her by transforming her self-definition and self-valuation (Collins 2004: 106). Scientists, scholars, and activists are also empowered by acquiring a sense of moral and political justification for speaking and acting in novel ways (Rolin 2016: 17). For example, the slogan "the personal is political" has provided many feminist scholars with a justification to use their own professional experiences, observations, and reflections as evidence in research (see e.g. Katila and Meriläinen 1999).

In this section, I have argued that knowledge can be situated in the sense that it is achieved from a standpoint. Whether an individual inquirer works in isolation or whether she participates in a feminist scientific/intellectual movement can make a huge difference to the epistemic outcome of her inquiry. As a participant in a feminist scientific/intellectual movement she can benefit from collective critical awareness of the social condition of knowledge production and feed-back from colleagues with whom she shares feminist values and interest. Moreover, by combining the generation of evidence with empowerment, she can generate novel evidence and theoretical perspectives under oppressive social conditions that could otherwise frustrate her efforts.

Intemann (2010) argues that contemporary versions of FST have so many features in common with feminist empiricism (e.g. CCE) that they are properly called feminist standpoint empiricism (FSE). Yet, FSE differs from CCE in its emphasis on the social experience of unprivileged people and the importance of building epistemic communities based on political commitments and shared interests. In the next section, I argue that these differences are also reflected in their respective conceptions of objectivity.

Feminist Approaches to Objectivity

Feminist philosophers of science are critical of the understanding of objectivity as freedom from social locations, partial perspectives, and values. Harding (1991) argues that the conventional understanding of objectivity as value-free science is too weak to identify sexist, racist, and homophobic assumptions in scientific research. Against the "weak" notion of objectivity, she advances the ideal of "strong" objectivity that requires systematic examination of background assumptions and methods through which knowledge is produced (1991: 149). According to Harding, strong objectivity is achieved from a feminist standpoint. As she explains, "starting thought from women's lives" increases the objectivity of research results because it challenges background assumptions that appear natural from the perspective of the lives of men in the dominant groups (1991: 150). More recently, Harding argues that "researchers should start research from outside the dominant conceptual framework – namely in the daily lives of oppressed groups such as women" (2015: 30). In her view, this increases objectivity because it enables scientists to detect the values, interests, and assumptions that serve the most powerful groups in the society, and might otherwise go unquestioned because the dominant groups are unlikely to challenge them (2015: 34).

For Harding, strong objectivity means also a commitment to cultural, sociological, and historical relativism when it comes to understanding socially situated knowledge claims and a rejection of epistemological relativism when it comes to comparing socially situated knowledge claims (1991: 156). As Harding explains, strong objectivity recognizes "the value of putting the subject or agent of knowledge in the same critical, causal plane as the object of her or his inquiry" (1991: 161). By this she means that inquirers should reflect on the epistemic effects of their own social locations as well as the processes through which they acquire knowledge.

While the advocates of FSE recognize the epistemic benefit of having a standpoint, they propose a different, more familiar conception of objectivity. According to Wylie, situated knowledge claims are objective when they satisfy widely accepted epistemic virtues such as empirical adequacy, internal and external consistency, and explanatory power (2003: 33). Intemann (2016) argues that in FSE the political and social aims of inquiry are partly constitutive of (as opposed to distinct from) the cognitive or epistemic aims of inquiry. This means that the interpretation of empirical adequacy depends on these other aims that define what type of evidence is relevant and how much evidence is needed. Crasnow (2014) proposes that "interest-based" objectivity is an appropriate ideal to both FST and FSE. Standpoints are interest-based in the sense that they are achieved by epistemic communities where scientists, scholars, and activists have common interests; yet, not only research results but also interests are subject to empirical constraints and such constraints are all that objectivity demands (2014: 157).

According to CCE, scientific knowledge is objective to the degree that a relevant community conforms to the four norms of "public venues," "uptake of criticism," "public standards," and "tempered equality of intellectual authority" (Longino 2002: 129–131, see also 1990: 76–81). Each of the four norms contributes to "transformative criticism" (1990: 76). The public venues norm requires that criticism of scientific research be given the same or nearly the same weight as original research (2002: 129). The uptake norm requires that each party to a critical exchange is ready to revise their views instead of merely "tolerating dissent" (2002: 129–130). The public standards norm requires that criticism appeals to at least some of the standards of evidence and argumentation recognized by the community (2002: 130–131). Finally, the tempered equality norm contributes to transformative criticism in two ways, by disqualifying those communities where certain perspectives dominate because of the political, social, or economic power of their adherents (1990: 78), and by making room for a diversity of perspectives which is likely to generate criticism (2002: 131).

Longino argues that a community practice constrained by the four norms advances objectivity because it forces scientists to examine critically the background assumptions that facilitate evidential reasoning as well as the moral and social values that may have motivated the choice of certain background assumptions (1990: 73). Without such a community practice, many ungrounded or even false assumptions may pass without criticism. As Longino explains, "As long as background beliefs can be articulated and subjected to criticism from the scientific community, they can be defended, modified, or abandoned in response to such criticism" (1990: 73–74). She adds that "As long as this kind of response is possible, the incorporation of hypotheses into the canon of scientific knowledge can be independent of any individual's subjective preferences" (1990: 74).

In sum, feminist philosophers of science argue that situated knowledge claims can be objective. In FST and FSE, it is a feminist standpoint that increases the objectivity of situated knowledge claims. By drawing on the social experience of unprivileged social groups in the society and the collective critical awareness of feminist scientists, scholars, and activist, a feminist standpoint is a good position to examine critically value-laden background assumptions and conventional methods of inquiry. In CCE, a larger scientific community is needed to increase the objectivity of situated knowledge claims. The scientific community should be open to criticism and inclusive of diverse perspectives, including the ones emerging from feminist standpoints.

Conclusion

The social location of the inquirer is an epistemic resource when it gives rise to local knowledge, social experience, criticism, evidence, and novel theoretical perspectives. It also situates the inquirer in a particular relation to other people, including research participants, collaborators, and potential users of knowledge. Most importantly, the inquirer is situated in particular epistemic communities. While all scientists and scholars are situated in disciplinary and specialty communities, feminist scientists and scholars are situated also in feminist research communities.

That knowledge claims are situated does not mean that they cannot be objective. Quite the contrary, feminist philosophers of science argue that the objectivity of scientific knowledge claims depends on scientific communities in which inquirers are situated. CCE holds the view that scientific knowledge is properly attributed to scientific communities and the objectivity of knowledge claims depends on how well these communities function epistemically. Ideally, an epistemically well-functioning community provides a platform for the criticism of sexist, racist, and heterosexist assumptions in research, and community members respond to criticism by revising such assumptions. The advocates of FST and FSE suggest that transformative criticism will not take place automatically as an effect of increased diversity and inclusion in scientific communities. While they agree that objectivity depends crucially on the ability of communities to detect and eliminate problematic assumptions, they emphasize the need to mobilize critical forces collectively. In their view, this involves the formation of a standpoint, an epistemic community with critical awareness, political commitments, and shared interests.

Related chapters: 6, 7, 15, 17.

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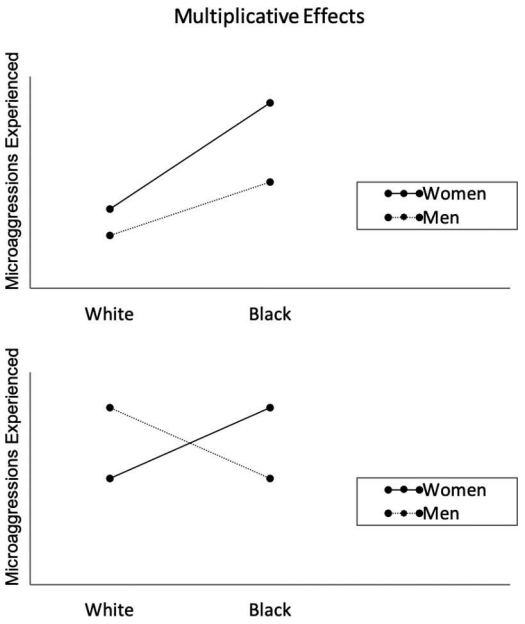

Figure 26.3 Example of potential multiplicative effects that can be identified with an intersectional approach using quantitative methods

Interpretation and Framing

Of course, none of these methods or techniques is truly intersectional without an interpretation and framing that make the role of power and inequality in social categories explicit. Too often, studies of group differences between men and women or of white people and people of color become studies of essentialized differences, reinforcing stereotypes and binary thinking that are antithetical to intersectionality. Thus, of all the techniques we suggest for examining intersectionality, the only essential one is an interpretation of research findings with the knowledge that groups exist within a context in which power and inequality are linked, rooted in, and perpetuated by social categories.

Combining Techniques in an Intersectional Approach: An Example

To illustrate several of the techniques we have described here (and in more detail elsewhere, Else-Quest and Hyde 2016b), consider Williams and Lewis' (2019) quantitative study of Black women's experiences of microaggressions and depressive symptoms. Drawing explicitly on intersectionality as a theory guiding their investigation and research questions, Williams and Lewis examined gender and race as person variables in focusing on the experiences of Black women. The project used a within-groups focus to examine these constructs with a sample of $n = 231$ Black women, who were recruited through purposive techniques. Participants completed surveys explicitly measuring intersectional phenomena. These measures include the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (Lewis and Neville 2015) and a scale of racial identity (Sellers et al. 1997) modified to be specific to Black women. These scales included items such as, "I have received negative comments about my hair when I wear it in a natural hairstyle" and "I am proud to be a Black woman," respectively. To analyze these data and describe how these experiences are connected to coping and depressive symptoms, Williams and Lewis tested a moderated mediation model. In that model,

Williams and Lewis found that Black women's experiences of gendered racial microaggressions were associated with greater experience of depressive symptoms via their coping mechanisms, that is, coping mediated the effect of microaggressions. In addition, gendered racial identity modified this mediation, such that the effects were strongest for women with lower levels of gendered racial identity and weakest for women with higher levels of gendered racial identity. In other words, gendered racial identity, at higher levels, served a protective function in the face of inequitable treatment. In framing the process by which gendered microaggressions have adverse mental health consequences, gendered racial identity can be understood as a psychosocial resource in the context of gendered racism.

Conclusion

In recent years, intersectionality has become a buzzword in the social sciences—frequently invoked but inconsistently undertaken with the critical perspective on social justice in which the approach is rooted. Its widespread and frequent mention is both reasonable and welcome: intersectional approaches can strengthen any research in psychology by incorporating the diversity of human experiences within a rich and complex social context and by promoting the well-being of people from marginalized groups. Yet, while qualitative psychologists have explored and integrated intersectionality to varying degrees, intersectionality is only beginning to find its way into mainstream psychology (Else-Quest and Hyde 2016a, b). With an eye toward shaping the field of psychology to be more effective in its purpose of optimizing the development and well-being of all people, especially those who are marginalized, we have offered some guidance on the quantitative implementation of intersectional approaches. Intersectionality challenges us to revise our research questions and consider diverse perspectives, presenting us with new opportunities for knowledge production. Thus, insofar as intersectional research is rigorous and focused on its original aim of subverting inequality, mainstreaming intersectionality will be beneficial for psychology and ultimately will execute the generative power of intersectionality. We are optimistic that, as more psychologists earnestly undertake an intersectional approach in their research, intersectionality can move beyond buzzword to foster substantive change within the discipline.

Related chapters: 7, 16, 28.

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Suggested Further Reading

Else-Quest, N. M. and Hyde, J. S. (2016a) "Intersectionality in Quantitative Psychological Research: I. Theoretical and Epistemological Issues," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 40, 155–70. (For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical and epistemological issues of intersectionality in psychology described here.)

Else-Quest, N. M. and Hyde, J. S. (2016b) "Intersectionality in Quantitative Psychological Research: II. Methods & Techniques," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 40, 319–36. (For a more detailed discussion of the methods and techniques suggested for using quantitative methods within an intersectional approach.)

Social Science

27
FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Drucilla K. Barker and Edith Kuiper

Introduction

Can you define feminist economics for me? What is feminist economics about? Is feminist economics the same as what women economists do? These are some of the questions feminist economists often get asked. They are of course legitimate questions, and although the short answer is simple – doing economics taking women and difference into account – the more useful and extended explanation is considerably more complex. This chapter aims to contribute to that answer by outlining the foundations of feminist economics, briefly discussing the content of the field, and exploring its central epistemological and methodological issues.

Before feminist economics was formally established, feminist scholars in economics applied ostensibly gender neutral economic methods to examine issues that were of particular importance to women. Discussions of the gender wage gap, labor market segregation, and women in development (WID) are cases in point. By the mid-1980s feminism was firmly ensconced, not only in the humanities but also in other social sciences such as sociology and anthropology. Economists – mainly women – began to take a critical look at their own profession and explored various ways to bring feminism to bear on the field of economics. We were an eclectic group and our brands of feminism ran the gamut from liberal to Marxist. It was a heady time, and the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological debates that it sparked are still ongoing. In this chapter we provide the reader with an overview of these debates and how they have evolved over the past three or so decades and articulate both the differences and the commonalities that bind a large subset of economists together under the heading of "feminist economics."

The Foundations

We begin with a brief discussion of the state of the economics profession in the post WWI years. During this time women economists still mainly lacked access to academic positions in economics departments. The Department of Home Economics at the University of Chicago was an exception. It was here that questions about consumption and the economic well-being of families and households were studied, a subject previously ignored by the mostly male mainstream of the profession. In 1923 Hazel Kyrk published *A Theory of Consumption*, and in 1935 Margaret Reid, her PhD student, developed objective and systematic methods for measuring the economic value of household production (Reid 1934). Reid's work on measurement, especially the "third person criterion" – an activity is work if you can pay someone else to do it for you – remains foundational

in statistical estimates of the value of household production (UNDP 1995). However, in the years after World War II, interest in the household and families waned, and the home economics department at Chicago was terminated in 1956.

It was during this time that neoclassical economics gained its hegemonic position, particularly in the United States. [1] Although there were other schools of economic thought during this time, American institutionalist (studying the roles of institutions and social norms) and Marxist economics (studying the laws of motion of capitalist society-production, distribution, and accumulation) for example, it was neoclassical economics that became economics unmodified. For reasons that are outside the scope of this chapter, in the United Kingdom and Europe there remained a bit more room for other economic schools, especially Marxism.

Neoclassical economics, also referred to as mainstream economics, was ascendant. It was defined not by its object of study, but rather by its methodology. Its adherents are committed to the belief that rigidly prescribed "scientific" methodology results in unbiased economic science. It assumes that economies are comprised of rational individuals, who maximize their utility subject to the constraints placed upon them by prices, incomes, and time. Formal mathematical models trace the implications of consumers' and firms' behaviors, which simultaneously determine equilibrium prices and quantities (Barker 1999). Although sex may be taken as an explanatory variable in empirical work, there is no ontological difference between women and men in economic theory. Both are rational economic agents. The deductive method and mathematical modeling are at the center of the project as that is where the claim to the scientific status of economics lies.

The ongoing process of professionalization and the increase of mathematical formalism of economics that went with it meant a serious setback for the research on many of the issues that most profoundly affect the lives of women and their families (Kuiper 2008). In addition, the assumption that economies can be described and analyzed in terms of rational economic agents, or informally "economic man," excluded any meaningful discussion of economic interactions motivated by anything other than personal gain. Altruism, for instance, was considered a behavior that occurred only in families, and families lay outside the purview of mainstream economics.

Economics has never been a profession that was particularly welcoming to women. Then, as today, women were small minority and only a limited few made it to associate and even fewer to full professor. To remedy that situation, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) was started in 1971. A standing committee of the American Economic Association (AEA), CSWEP serves professional women economists by monitoring their progress in the field and promoting their careers. As women economists entered the profession they brought their political positions with them and tended to take methodological positions that were in accordance with their positions in the larger feminist community. Liberal feminists used mainly neoclassical approaches (Bergmann 1986; Blau and Ferber 1986; Bergmann 1986), while socialist feminists applied Marxist approaches (Benería and Sen 1981; Elson and Pearson 1981; Folbre 1982; Hartmann 1981). Whether working in the neoclassical or Marxist schools their work emphasized the importance of including gender and difference in economic theory and measurement. It became more and more clear, however, that a feminist lens was necessary in order to reveal and interrogate the masculinist values that are deeply embedded in the concepts of rationality, efficiency, and scarcity that are the methodical core of mainstream economics (Ferber and Nelson 1993).

Establishing a Field

During the1980s and early 1990s, mainstream economics was so firmly entrenched in US academia that it became the standard by which all other schools were judged. Neoclassical economists were able to determine what counted as legitimate economics. Thus, taking a critical stand and conducting economic research outside the mainstream research program could well threaten one's

status as "a real economist"; it certainly created a barrier to getting results published in top ranked journals. However, we were not to be deterred. The 1990s saw a coming together of feminist economists worldwide, despite the fact that during that time mentioning the word "feminism" in the economics discipline was like cursing in the church.

Most feminist economists had been working for years in marginalized and isolated positions in their own departments. To be able to work with similarly motivated colleagues worldwide they founded the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) in 1992. The founding of IAFFE provided them with an epistemological community committed to bringing feminist perspectives on issues particularly germane to women's lives. In 1995 IAFFE launched its journal, *Feminist Economics*, with Diana Strassmann at the helm as its founding editor. The purpose and guiding philosophy of the journal at that time was articulated in the editor's introduction:

> By opening the gates that have for so long protected economics theories from fundamental critique and by subjecting all ideas addressed in the forum to critical scrutiny, *Feminist Economics* will encourage the emergence of a more resilient economics.
>
> *(Strassmann 1995: 1)*

Taking a feminist stand and acknowledging the fundamental role of gender in the economy required uncovering the implicit masculinist values embedded in mainstream concepts, theories, methods, and scientific standards for research. The fundamental rethinking and reorganizing of economics as a science was explored in the anthologies, *Beyond Economic Man* (Ferber and Nelson 1993) and *Out of The Margin* (Kuiper and Sap 1995). These scholars identified gender as the dominant fundamental hierarchical dualism in economics with profound consequences at all levels of the science. This opened the door for further explorations of the importance of including considerations of gender and to a lesser extent, racial differences in economics (Barker 1995; Elson 1991; Feiner 1993; Folbre 1993; Nelson 1995; Pujol 1992; Seiz 1992 Sen and Grown 1987; Strassmann 1995; Williams 1993).

Most of the feminist economic research of this period can be characterized as an example of feminist empiricism (Hankinson Nelson 1990; Harding 1986; Tuana 1992. In this view, sexism and androcentrism in science are biases that can be corrected by adherence to the existing norms of scientific inquiry, while at the same time increasing gender and racial diversity among the academic community. The inclusion of women and people of color is considered necessary to this endeavor as they are the ones most likely to notice the shared andro-and ethnocentric values and implicit assumptions that produce bias both in the context of discovery and in the context of justification.

This period also saw a few brief forays into using qualitative methods such as interviews, archival research, ethnography, and discourse analysis. However, these efforts rarely resulted in publications in *Feminist Economics* unless they also included a healthy dose of either formal modeling or statistical evidence. Mixed methods were encouraged, but articles relying on purely qualitative analyses generally were not. This is not surprising since in order to establish itself as a legitimate field within the larger discipline of economics feminist economists had to establish their scientific credentials. In order to provide a context for a discussion of some of the ongoing epistemological and methodological debates, the next section provides a brief outline of some main subfields where feminist economists made significant contributions.

Labor Economics

Traditionally most feminist economists in the United States and Europe worked in the field of labor economics. (So common in fact that "Are you going into labor?" was a joke commonly

circulated among women graduate students.) Dominated by the neoclassical framework of individual optimizing behavior and quantitative research methods during the 1970s and 1980s, emerging feminist economists found a home in labor economics conducting research on wage disparities, occupational segregation, and the impact of motherhood on women's participation in the labor force. (Blau and Ferber 1986; Goldin 1992; Gustafsson 1996). As mentioned earlier, these issues had been previously studied, but not from a feminist perspective. Without an explicit commitment to feminist values, there is strong tendency in this research to explain away the issues by difference in preferences, attitudes toward risk, and other contextual factors between women and men.

This is best illustrated by the influence of the Nobel laureate Gary S. Becker. Becker (1981) extended the core assumptions and methods of neoclassical economics to a theory of the family – previously considered by economists as "black box," a pre-capitalist and a-historical institution. This opened the door for economists to apply mainstream economic theory to research on the relationship between the sexual division of labor in the family and waged and salaried labor. While he may have opened the door, his was not a feminist approach. For example, his analysis of the gender wage gap came to the conclusion that it was the result of women's rational choices to work in lower-paying occupations that required less investment in education and training because these jobs were compatible with their responsibilities as mothers and wives. Becker's claims that men were biologically oriented toward the market and women toward the household invoked the feminist counter argument: that women bear children may be a biological fact; that women bear the sole responsibility for rearing their children is a social construction and can be changed.

Feminist economists took great intellectual pleasure in debunking these and other such arguments and in advancing alternative feminist explanations that questioned why the rearing of children was primarily the responsibility of women. Many turned to more sociological theories and approaches to understanding the complex determinants of disparities in the labor market and including gender and race discrimination. Others used institutionalist approaches that take historical factors into account and investigate institutional characteristics for their impact on economic behavior and decision making (Figart, Mutari and Power 2002). New econometric techniques were developed in order to measure the effects of intersectional identities on wages and occupational segregation (Kim 2007). The gender wage gap remains a central feminist concern. Its significance is now recognized by international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Economic Forum. Nonetheless, feminist perspectives that acknowledge the importance of discrimination, intersectionality, and the recognition of class differences among women are still too often ignored in favor of references to Becker's work.

Domestic Labor and Care Work

The importance of unpaid domestic labor to the functioning of the economy emerged as a concern in own right among feminist economists working in the Marxist tradition. These scholars were located mainly, but not exclusively, in the United Kingdom and Italy. They coined the term "domestic labor" to describe the unpaid housework that was necessary for the support and maintenance of waged labor within capitalism (Dalla Costa and James 1973; Federici 1975; Himmelweit and Mohun 1977). The immediate products of domestic labor such as clean clothes and cooked meals are necessary for the reproduction of the labor force on both a daily and an intergenerational basis. They are crucial to capitalism and central to understanding the oppression of women in capitalist societies.

Other feminist economists, working in the tradition of Hazel Kyrk and Margret Reid, turned their attentions to developing methods for measuring the contribution of women's unpaid household labor to economic growth (Goldschmidt-Clermont 1990; Ironmonger 1996; Waring 1988).

As discussed earlier, measuring domestic labor was premised on the third party criterion: an activity was considered work if you could pay someone else to do it for you. In other words, the activity was separable from the person doing the work. Some types of domestic labor do not fit easily into this definition of work. While who vacuums the floor is irrelevant as long as the job is done well, who cares for the children, the elderly, and the infirm does matter (Himmelweit 1995; Jochimsen 2003). This type of labor is called caring labor. Caring labor is not separable from the person doing it because it is constituted by the relationship between those who give care and those who receive care. The care received by infants, young and school-age children, the ill, the disabled, and the elderly depends upon the quality of the relationship connecting the givers and the receivers of care (Folbre 1995; Folbre and Nelson 2000).

A second question soon arose. Why is care work devalued? Why is it badly paid, if it is paid at all? Folbre (1995) argued that the value of caring labor presented a paradox for feminist economists because the affective nature of care implies that it should be its own reward: however if it does not command an economic return its global supply will be diminished. Folbre and Nelson (2000) resolve this paradox by separating the affective value of care from the activities of care. Caring activities should command an economic reward. Feminist economists also elaborated on the ways that care, broadly understood as applying to both people and the environment, was the foundation for economies that provided for human well-being and were sustainable (Jochimsen 2003; van Staveren 2001).

Other feminist scholars interrogated what they saw as the raced and gendered assumptions in this stream of scholarship (Barker and Feiner 2009; Glenn 1992; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010; Hewitson 1999). Without disputing the vital need for care work or its scarcity under global capitalism, these feminist economists reframed the analyses. They pointed out the ways that these discussions naturalized the connection between women and care, masked the racialization implicit in the distinction between the affective and non-affective dimensions of care and failed to address why some groups are entitled to be cared for and cared about, while others are not afforded this privilege.

Globalization has ushered in a significant change in the international division of domestic labor. The increased participation of women in the labor force, aging populations, and low population growth in the global North have increased the demand for domestic workers. Due to structural changes in the global economy more and more poor women, and increasingly men, from the global South migrate to clean the houses and care of the children and elderly in the more affluent parts of the world. The demand for college educated, English speaking Filipinas to care for the children of the elites is the classic example (Parreñas 2015). As these young women migrate, their own children are left behind for many years to be cared for by women further down the ladder of class privilege in the Philippines. Arlie Hochschild (1989) describes this as a "global care chain." These feminist economic insights fly into the face of the neoliberal social and political policies of the United States and Europe that pursue further privatization of care, increased barriers to migration, and decreased state support for the social provision of domestic and care labor (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010).

Development Economics

Feminist analyses of unpaid and non-monetized household labor became an important concern in the field of development economics as well. Briefly, development economics is the field in economics that is concerned with economic growth and modernization in the global South. During the 1960s it was believed that the key to curing poverty in the South was to transform their economies in the image of the North - modern, industrialized, and monetized. However, these plans did not take women into account. Women were typically viewed as "unproductive"

housewives despite the important roles they played in agricultural production, urban manufacturing, reproductive labor in the household, and more. Feminist economists pointed out the male bias in this thinking (Elson 1991). The WID framework that emerged stressed the complementarity between women's liberation and the economic goals of efficiency and growth. This framework quickly gave way to the gender and development (GAD) approach, which explored the ways that gender norms are embedded in the structures of economy and connected the gender division of labor in the home to women's position in the paid labor force. Its focus on broader social transformation as the key to women's liberation and empowerment remains salient today.

Just as GAD was gaining currency, however, an enormous structural change occurred in the international economy. The old development model was no longer feasible as the countries of the global South found themselves heavily indebted to the banks of the global North. They turned to the international community for assistance, which was forthcoming in the form of new loans with onerous conditions attached. These conditions were called structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and required changes to the structure of these countries' economies in ways that would result in cost savings, spur growth, and open them to the global market. This was the stated plan anyway.

It took the work of feminist economists to show that these measures did not save money, but rather shifted costs from the monetized sector of the economy into the non-monetized household sector where women were left to cope with higher prices and reductions in social spending. The result was an increase in both their waged and unwaged work (Benería 1995; Benería and Feldman 1992; Elson 1991). In addition, global South countries also had to service (pay the interest plus some portion of the principal) these new loans. They attracted the dollars necessary to do this in two ways: (1) remittances from women's migration to work in transnational domestic labor markets as nannies, maids, and sex workers, and (2) the revenue earned by women working in export production zones sewing clothes, making toys, and assembling electronics (Çatagay, Elson, and Grown 1995). One consequence is today's transnational gendered division of domestic labor (Barker and Kuiper 2014).

Even though SAPs have now been replaced by Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), which require indebted countries to articulate their own strategies for reducing poverty, the reasoning behind this practice has not changed much. Development economics remains a central field of interest for many feminist economists, who employ an expanded set of research strategies, such as gender sensitive budgeting, gender critiques of macroeconomic modeling, time use surveys, and the development of new indices that take gender into account. A large part of this research has been disseminated through policy briefs, reports, and edited volumes. Its importance is also coming to the fore today as many countries in the developed world face austerity measures that have similar gendered effects as SAPs.

History of Economic Thought

Feminist economists have also made important headway in theorizing the history of economic thought. A substantial part of this work is the re-evaluation of women economists' and women economic writers' work and their contribution to economic thinking reaching as far back as the 1800s (Dimand, Dimand and Forget 1995; Barker and Kuiper 2010; Madden, Seiz and Pujol 2004).

Feminism and Anti-feminism in the History of Economic Thought, by Michelle Pujol (1992) laid the basis for a feminist critique of the history of economic thought by showing how sexist values and assumptions structured the course of British political economy in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Building on Pujol's work Barker (1995), Nelson (1995), and others revealed the

implicit assumptions about the masculinist nature of "economic man." Some historians of economics focused on pointing out the way classical economists like Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, Jean Baptiste Say, and Nassau Senior wrote about gender and gender relations (see e.g. Dimand and Nyland 2003). Nancy Folbre (2009) published a comprehensive discussion on the conceptualization of "self-interest" throughout the history of economic thought. As the definition of economics is broadened by feminist historians of economics to include women's economic writing, a wider array of texts come under scrutiny (see Kuiper 2014; Madden and Dimand 2019). This work includes interdisciplinary work on women's writing on economic topics and issues in novels, poems, and diaries.

Where the history of economic thought used to be dominated by an internalist historical approach, feminist economists have contributed to a diversification of methods and theoretical frameworks, in which there is ample attention to the impact of the historical context on the development of economic concepts and ideas.

Epistemological and Methodological Reflections

As part of the quest to uncover implicit assumptions and shared masculine values in contemporary mainstream economics, many feminist economists turned their attention to epistemology and methodology. The article by Sandra Harding (1995) in the first issue of *Feminist Economics* was enormously influential at this juncture. Her application of the concept of weak and strong objectivity to economics and critique of the positive/normative distinction set the stage for further discussions and reflections. Julie Nelson in *Feminism, Objectivity and Economics* (1995) elaborated this critical reflection on the development of economic science and indicated the variety of ways sexist values have been impacting the organization of the field, the use of metaphors, theories, concepts, methods, and choice of methodologies.

In a special issue of *History of Political Economy* Janet Seiz (1993) provided an overview of the fundamental questions concerning basic economic concepts addressed by feminist economists, and Nancy Folbre (1993) outlined the then current approaches to feminist economics in terms of "social construction" and "distortion" of scientific inquiry (167). A special issue of *Feminist Economics* provided space for Tony Lawson (1999) to argue that feminist economics could be strengthened by building on a critical realist ontology. This was followed by responses refuting his case on the basis of epistemology (Harding 1999), ethical considerations (Barker 2003), and methodology (Kuiper 2004).

Julie Nelson marked the new millennium by asking,

> Should economics remain defined as rational choice theory – a notion based in a radically Cartesian, anti-body view of the world – feminists will have relatively little to say. I want to change the central question to one of "provisioning" – how we provide for ourselves the means to sustain and enjoy life.
>
> *(Nelson 2000: 1178)*

This reframing of economics would over the years result in a stream of theorizing around economic as provisioning rather than as rational choice.

There were dissenters, of course. Those applying insights of postmodern and the poststructuralist turns in the humanities and other social sciences saw the scientific aspirations of feminist economics in a more problematic light. Gillian Hewitson (1999) was one of the first here. In her monograph, *Feminist Economics*, she points out that by and large feminist economists uncritically adhere to the sex/gender distinction, in which sex is biological and gender is social. This is both politically astute and theoretically problematic. Astute because it provides a familiar terrain upon

which to base suggestions and push for changes in the way that economics is done. It is problematic, because it entails the expulsion of the body from the essence of personhood, a philosophical tradition that dates back to Descartes and seventeenth-century French philosophy. By clinging to the mind/body dichotomy feminist economics will, like neoliberal economics, theoretically exclude the specifically female body. If feminist economics is to be truly transformative, its adherents must theorize the production of sexed bodies.

Suzanne Bergeron (2009) and Colin Danby (2007) explore the implicit heteronormative assumptions that haunt feminist economists' scholarship. Bergeron's work reveals the implicit assumptions behind the dominant representations of the household: all adults belong to one of two genders and conform to dominant gender scripts; every adult forms a sexual and reproductive bond with a member of the opposite gender and forms a household with that person; and all households in which care work is performed are understood as being constructed around a heterosexual couple. Even when other household types are considered, single parent and same-sex couples, they are viewed in relationship to the normative paradigm.

Danby (2007) argues that heteronormativity names tacit conceptions about what is socially normal and these conceptions make it possible to think of heterosexuals or homosexuals as essential categories of people. A critique of heteronormativity would make visible a pattern of state repression that makes proper citizens by opposing them to improper ones, a process that simultaneously shapes gender, sexuality, citizenship, and race. If queer theorists are right, the obviousness of heteronormative assumptions to many people is partly a consequence of state efforts to establish and police familial norms. Economics, styling itself as a science of policy, has been reluctant to challenge the state's view of society. Danby makes the point that feminist economics would be greatly enriched taking up this challenge.

The debate on methodological issues over the following ten years furthered by several edited volumes. In *Postcolonialism Meets Economics*, edited by Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela (2004) the authors explore the colonial roots of mainstream and heterodox economics and articulate the ways that economics may start to critically engage with postcolonial themes and issues. *Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Economics,* edited by Barker and Kuiper (2005), provides a space for exploring the contours of the emerging debates between the feminist empiricists and poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to feminist economics. *Robinson Crusoe's Economic Man: A Construction and Deconstruction*, edited by Grapard and Hewitsen (2011), brings together a group of authors who further deconstruct traditional binary thinking in economics.

The methodological issues that were central in feminist economics at the beginning have been fading in interest over the last decade or so. Recently, Sheba Tejani (2018) investigated three decades of articles in *Feminist Economics*, 1995–2015, and showed that there has been a clear shift toward articles applying quantitative and specifically econometric research methods and secondary datasets, and a decline in theoretical, historical and methodological articles. Based on her data from analysis of 490 articles and reviews, Tejani links this shift of focus in the journal to the internal pressures of the discipline and the self-enforcing process in which the current content of the journal attracts a specific type – mostly econometrically sophisticated feminist articles, which, in turn, results in the selection of associate editors who can handle them.

If we define feminist economics today primarily by what is published in *Feminist Economics*, our assessment is that feminist empiricists "won" the epistemological debate. Scholars working with postpositivist and interdisciplinary approaches have had to find other publication venues such as *Signs*, *Frontiers*, and the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*. This current state of affairs is, we think, due to two factors.

First, the contradictory goals of feminist economics: from the beginning, the main goals of feminist economists were the transformation of the discipline on the one hand and the establishment

of validity of feminist economics within the larger profession on the other hand. This need to find acceptance in the larger profession and to increase the number of feminist economists and advance their careers entails compromise. As Barker (2005) argued, feminist economists inherited the power and prestige of economics, a discipline that calls itself the "queen of the social sciences." Poststructuralism and postmodernism, which question the very possibility of science, and postcolonialism, which reveals the racism and domination in Western science, both serve to undermine the scientific aspirations of feminist economists. Postpositivist approaches entail giving up the notion that economics, when grounded in the authority of reason and science, can be separated from power and can work toward a feminist common good. This last point is crucial. Many, perhaps the majority of, feminist economists hold precisely this view, and argue that empiricist methodology is the way toward this goal.

Lourdes Benería, a well-respected and highly influential feminist economist, argued that while postmodern work emphasizing identity, difference, and agency has enriched our understanding of identity politics, postcolonial realities, and the intersections of gender and race it has "run parallel to changes on the material side of life, particularly the resurgence of neoliberalism across countries and to the globalization of markets and of social and cultural life" (Benería 2003: 25). Postmodern work tends to deemphasize the economics and generate an imbalance between the "urgent need to understand economic reality … and the more predominant focus on 'words,' including issues such as difference, subjectivity, and representation" (Benería 2003: 25). It is not that work on these issues is wrong but rather that it needs to be linked to an understanding of the socioeconomic aspects of life. This is the task of feminist economics.

Julie Nelson, whose work has been greatly important in shaping the field, goes even further in her critique. She argues that the lack of deconstructionist or poststructuralist scholarship relative to that in other social sciences is not a drawback because such work creates barriers for scholars not educated in "obscurant literatures/techniques," and "promulgate[s] a bloodless and lifeless view of the world, and fail[s] to take into account lived experience" (Nelson 2000: 1180). Not surprisingly, the contours of this debate reflect what was going on in the larger community of feminist scholars regarding the impact of postmodernism/poststructuralism on feminist theory. Posing this question as an opposition, instead as a source of productive tension and source of theoretical innovation, has pushed feminist economics to the side of feminist empiricism.

The other factor of relevance here in our view is that many, perhaps most, feminist economists have experienced how sexism, discrimination, and masculine values have structured their daily lives and personal experiences as economists. Many in the field have been subject to discrimination and have been engaged in cases brought to committees similar to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in the United States to demand a promotion or job they considered themselves (over) qualified for but did not get. Feminist economists understand that the economics discipline is a social institution and are aware of their location within it. Their choice of a theoretical framework may at least be partly based on strategic considerations with respect to the space and opportunity they see for change, their wish to keep open the lines of communications with their colleagues and the field more broadly, and their concerns about continued employment as economists. This could mean that feminist economists have been choosing epistemological and methodological approaches partly based on the power dynamics within the discipline while still pushing the boundaries to make changes happen. Integrating and conceptualizing this activist and power-aware stand of feminist economists and engaging in affiliations with other critical scholars is a direction for a feminist philosophy of economics that may be fruitful for getting beyond the debate between empiricism and postmodernism.

Present State of Feminist Economics

Since the Great Recession of 2008/2009 the context for economics has changed. These events have put neoclassical economics in its place as too ahistorical and too focused on abstract modeling. Historical economic research regained status as the deductive, abstract approach of neoclassical economics has not proven useful in the face of major earth shaking economic problems such as the financial crisis of 2008. The failure of the mainstream has created a demand for new economic thinking in general. This opens a space for pluralism in economics that may engender the transformation of economics that many feminist economists hope for.

Today feminist economics is still fundamentally an empiricist project, although it is likewise eclectic and interdisciplinary in its approach. For researchers in the field, understanding the historical, gendered and racial contexts in which concepts and theories have developed is considered an important part of applying and developing new theories, indicators, indices, and methods. Feminist economists are somewhat freer to make their own choices regarding their approaches to economics, although quantitative methods continue to be privileged over qualitative methods in all the social sciences, not just economics. Many feminist economists have turned their attentions toward policy oriented research on both national and international arenas. For example, Heidi Hartmann founded the highly successful Institute for Women's Policy Research in Washington, DC in order to insert a feminist economics in US policy making. Similarly, Radhika Balakrishnan, Diane Elson, and Heinz (Balakrishnan 2013) were deeply involved in the conversations and debates that led to the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Another example is the work that started in 1994 in Australia by Rhonda Sharp and in 1995 in South Africa by Debbie Budlander on Gender Budgeting, and is now supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It is currently building momentum in both the global South and Europe. Both the UNDP and the European Commission have been working for years now on both gender mainstreaming and bringing gender considerations into the budgeting process on all levels of government policy making. Gender analyses of the impacts of specific policies and the development of improved policy proposals, together with monitoring their progress, require painstaking and detailed work for which new indicators and measurement tools often need to be developed.

While this type of research often does not find its way into academic journals, it constitutes crucial groundwork for transforming economies and improving the conditions of women in countries around the world, thus in many ways fulfilling the aspirations of the feminist empiricists discussed earlier. For example, the continued scholarship and activism by Bina Agarwal starting with her monograph, *A Field of One's Own* (1997), led Indian policy makers to pass the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act in 2005 which gives all Hindu women, regardless of marital status, equal rights with men in the ownership and inheritance of property. Most recently she has brought together her work on agriculture and food security, women's property rights, and environmental change in a three volume set (Agarwal 2016). She has become one of the most influential economists in India.

As feminist economics increasingly includes voices from the global South and people of color, and builds alliances with feminists in other academic fields and groups outside academia, it clearly strengthens the case of interdisciplinary research. The struggle of feminist economists has for a large part been a fight internal to the discipline; however, the field is now established and recognized. As the economics profession changes we need to make sure that feminist economics is part of these changes.

Related chapters: 8, 26, 28, 29, 33.

Note

1 The term neoclassical is used because it is a synthesis of nineteenth-century classical political economy and twentieth-century marginal analysis.

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28

FEMINIST METHODOLOGY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Sharon Crasnow

Introduction

The twentieth century saw an influx of women into the social sciences. 10% of doctorates were awarded to women in these fields at the beginning of the century whereas by its end slightly more than 40% of social science PhDs were women (Thurgood, Golladay, and Hill 2006).[1] This trend accelerated rapidly during the 1960s, coinciding with second-wave feminism, and resulting in the emergence of explicitly feminist social science – a social science that recognized gender as a social category affecting the distribution of power in ways that had a negative impact on women's lives. Women entering these fields often describe themselves as feeling like outsiders in disciplines where they were relative newcomers. Sometimes they were asking different research questions than those usually investigated by researchers in their disciplines. Feminist economists, for example, noticed that traditional economics did not acknowledge an economic role for unpaid domestic work (done mostly by women) and proposed this as a new area of investigation (see Barker and Kuipers, Chapter 27 of this volume).

Not all women in the social sciences during this period challenged traditional frameworks nor were they all feminists. However, those who saw themselves as feminists viewed social science as potentially valuable for feminism's liberatory and egalitarian goals and sought to produce knowledge that would indeed support those goals. Consequently, feminist approaches in the social sciences elicited concerns about the role of social and political values in science, since feminism involves political and social justice commitments. Such explicit commitments are seemingly in conflict with the value-free ideal of science – the view that science must eschew all political and social values in order to remain objective and thus arrive at a true account of reality. While such an understanding of science has come under scrutiny in recent years, as feminist social science research was emerging the value-free ideal was still the dominant understanding of science (see Chapter 15). Commitment to feminist values thus put feminist researchers at odds with the mainstream work in their disciplines resulting in debates about the nature of their research, including reflection on research methodology. Thus feminist social science of the 70s, 80s, and 90s often challenged the mainstream epistemological and ontological presuppositions of social science disciplines. Debates about what counts as feminist social science methodology are manifestations of these challenges. This chapter explores some aspects of these methodological debates.

Clarifying Terms

It is helpful to begin by explaining some terminology. First, in the context of social science, feminism is not monolithic. There is not agreement among all those who identify as feminists about a precise meaning of the term. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some shared commitments. Sociologist Joey Sprague describes these commitments in the following way:

> [W]hile feminists are a very heterogeneous group and we disagree on many issues, there are two points on which we have consensus: (1) gender, in interaction with other forms of social relations such as race/ethnicity, class, ability, and nation, is a key organizer of social life; and (2) understanding how things work is not enough – we need to take action to make the social world more equitable (Sprague 2016: 3)

A feminist methodology is one that is shaped by and serves these commitments. It requires adopting approaches and methods that are sensitive to the key structural elements of social life through which power is distributed, most notably gender, although it is important to recognize that most contemporary researchers recognize that gender is interconnected with other social categories that structure power relations such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and ability. Feminist methodology also aims at producing knowledge that can be used to further feminist and other liberatory goals. A recurrent theme when these commitments are addressed is the prescription to start research from the lives of women – the socially situated reality of those lives. It is here that both what matters to those who are oppressed and an understanding of what is involved in that oppression begin. Alison Wylie calls this a commitment "to empower women by recovering the details of their experience and activities" (Wylie 1992: 226).

Analyses of how gender structures society involve recognition of the differential distribution of power that can affect the assumptions made by the researcher located within such matrices of power, access to evidence relevant to those structures, and the ability of those who are marginalized to testify to their experience. Feminist approaches recognize that knowledge is situated – dependent on these and other social and political factors. In addition, the commitment to activism is a commitment to undoing the harms of oppression. Among these harms are various forms of epistemic injustice that occur as a result of women not being included as sources of evidence or being unable to express themselves as a result of being excluded both physically and conceptually from knowledge production (Fricker 2007; Dotson 2011; Medina 2013).

In order to understand what this means it is useful to distinguish method, methodology, and epistemology. Following Sandra Harding, we might think of methods as "techniques for gathering evidence." Interviews, surveys, archival research, creation of data sets, statistical techniques for analyzing data sets, and so on are examples. A methodology, in contrast, is "a theory and analysis of how research should proceed." Epistemology offers accounts of how a particular methodology and methods that might be associated with it produce knowledge (Harding 1987: 2).

Although method, methodology, and epistemology can be conceptually distinguished, in practice they are intertwined. Political scientist Mary Hawkesworth's characterization of the difference between method and methodology indicates one way this is so.

> In contrast to discussions about feminist "methods," which focus on particular tools to collect and analyze specific kinds of data, debates about methodology encompass questions about theories of knowledge, strategies of inquiry, and standards of evidence appropriate to the production of feminist knowledge.
>
> *(Hawkesworth 2006: 4)*

While epistemology can be distinguished from methodology, methodologies are supported by epistemological assumptions and commitments. Put another way, methodology presupposes epistemology.

Sprague acknowledges this stating that

> Each methodology is founded on either explicit or, more often, unexamined assumptions about what knowledge is and how knowing is best accomplished; together, these assumptions constitute a particular epistemology. That is, *a methodology works out the implications of a specific epistemology for how to implement a method*.
>
> *(italics in the original) (Sprague 2016: 5)*

Sociologists Mary Margaret Fonow and Judy Cook point out that methodology and method are related as well.

> 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".
>
> *(Fonow and Cook 2005)*

The interplay of epistemology and methodology is prominent in what is perhaps the best known feminist methodological approach – feminist standpoint theory. The phrase "feminist standpoint theory" is ambiguous. It appears as a methodology in feminist social science and is marked by the central idea that research should start from the lives of women – from their "standpoint." But it has also been elaborated as an epistemology by feminist philosophers of science. There it is an account of why it is that such a methodology is able to produce knowledge. Dorothy Smith's remarks in her contribution to Harding's 2004 collection, *The Feminist Standpoint Reader* reflect this ambiguity:

> Feminist standpoint theory, a general class of theory in feminism, was brought into being by Sandra Harding (1986), … to analyze the merits and problems of feminist theoretical work that sought a radical break with existing disciplines through locating knowledge or inquiry in women's standpoint or in women's experience.
>
> *(Smith 2004b: 263)*

She goes on to say

> I cannot speak here for…others …, but, for myself, I am very much aware of being engaged with the debates and innovations of the many feminist experiments in sociology that, like mine, were exploring experience as a method of discovering the social from the standpoint of women's experience.
>
> *(Ibid.)*

Smith takes Harding (and other philosophers) to be doing "theoretical work" – epistemology. In contrast, she describes what she and other sociologists were concerned with as questions of research practice. They were experimenting with methods that got at women's experiences and used those experiences as evidence for feminist knowledge production. If we think of epistemology as providing justification of methodology, Harding and others who have offered (epistemological)

accounts of standpoint theory are indeed involved in a different project than feminist social scientists like Smith. However, given that methodology depends on epistemological assumptions, it is not always clear that these can be neatly separated.

Feminist standpoint as an epistemology is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, but it cannot entirely be avoided in discussing methodology. Briefly, the key elements of the epistemology that underpin feminist standpoint methodology are that it takes all knowledge to be socially situated, identifies the potential for epistemic advantage for those situated outside the dominant framework, and describes the fulfillment of that potential as dependent on theorizing how the distribution of power affects knowledge production. This last is an acknowledgment that standpoint is not equivalent to the perspectives of women even though it begins there. Thus a standpoint methodology is justified because it treats social location as highly relevant and takes seriously accounts of experience, recognizing that such accounts stem from a social location that has the potential for epistemic advantage. Finally, it directs researchers to be sensitive to the ways in which dominant knowledge frameworks may be inadequate to capture such experience because of the way the distribution of power affects knowledge production. This last, in part, captures what it is about social location that makes it relevant to knowledge. We will see how this plays out more clearly in the examples discussed in the next section.

While it is not always clear that feminist methodology is explicitly standpoint methodology, the features of the underlying epistemology described here are generally those underpinning feminist research. The primary prescription of standpoint approaches – to start research from the lives of women – appears in many discussions of methodology. Consequently, the examples in the next section can be interpreted as consistent with feminist standpoint methodology.

Before leaving the discussion of standpoint it is important to note a further implication of the directive to start research from the lives of women. If researchers take this directive seriously, the recognition that women do not all share the same lived experiences is unavoidable. Since lives differ as a result of differences in social location the experiences of women are shaped not only by their social location as women but also by other social factors that affect the distribution of power. The work of sociologist Patricia Hill Collins illustrates this. She starts her research from the lives of women in African American communities and describes a Black feminism which develops differently than the middle-class white feminism most closely associated with second-wave feminism. Race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and disability are all aspects of social location differentially affecting those who live at their intersections. As an advocate of standpoint approaches, it is not at all surprising to see her endorse intersectionality as a crucial tool for social research (Collins and Bilge 2016). Starting from the lives of women reveals not only shared experiences but also the differences in their experiences (Collins 2000/2009).

Feminist Methodology and the Difference It Makes

Methodological choices affect many aspects of research. To understand how this is so consider various stages of inquiry – although "stages" is somewhat misleading as it suggests that they are temporally distinct. Since research is typically iterative, the decisions made at one stage are open to revision as the research proceeds, so while "stages" might be conceptually distinct they may actually occur in any order or even simultaneously. Research questions are developed in response to disciplinary theory and the interests of researchers as they are shaped by their experience. How the objects of inquiry are understood – that is, how they are conceived – influences what questions are investigated and so the connection between questions and concepts is a close one. Research questions may change as the understanding of the objects of inquiry changes in response to changes in theory or as a result of the researcher's interactions with the objects of inquiry. Deciding what data to collect depends in part on what is taken to be significant and significance is dependent on

the questions being asked, the understanding of the objects of inquiry, and the interests and goals of the researchers, which may change as the research proceeds. The generation and sampling of data, the analysis of the data, including the choice of technique for analysis, and decisions about when to end the collection and analysis of data are all aspects of research as well. Methodological choices make a difference throughout the research process and thus ultimately to the conclusions that are drawn from the research.

In her work on methodology, sociologist Marjorie DeVault (1999) addresses the connection between methodology and the various stages of research explicitly with examples from her own work and those of other feminist social scientists. She frames the central dilemma of the feminist researcher in the following way:

> The dilemma for the feminist scholar, always, is to find ways of working within some disciplinary tradition while aiming at an intellectual revolution that will transform that tradition (Stacey and Thorne 1985). In order to transform sociology…we need to move toward new methods for writing about women's lives and activities without leaving sociology altogether. But the routine procedures of the discipline pull us insistently toward conventional understanding that distort women's experiences (Smith 1987, 1989).
>
> *(DeVault 1999: 59)*

She goes on to give examples of the various ways in which feminist scholars tackle this dilemma. At the stage of developing research questions – which she calls "constructing topics" – she considers her own research which "examines household routines for planning, cooking, and serving meals" (DeVault 1999: 63). She first thought of this as a study of housework but she found that how the concept was dealt with in the literature did not capture all that she wanted to explore, primarily because housework was understood as a type of work. What DeVault wanted to get at was how the various tasks involved in this sort of caring activity organized the daily lives of those who did it and the ways the various tasks involved were thought of as meaningful. She came to focus on what she first thought of as "providing food" and then ultimately as "feeding the family" as a specific example.[2] When described in this way, she found that she was able to ask questions of her informants that revealed the organizational nature of the daily activities in ways that conceiving of the preparation of food as work traditionally understood did not. The difficulty was that the sort of activity she was investigating did not fit into the work/leisure dichotomy – a dichotomy understood in her discipline as a standard way of classifying human activities. Further reflecting on the process that led her to alter her understanding of her topic she writes, "This particular insufficiency of language is an example of a more general problem, a more pervasive lack of fit between women's experiences and the forms of thought available for understanding experience" (DeVault 1991: 5). DeVault needed to find a way to ask her informants about their experiences that allowed them to describe what she was trying to investigate. The open-ended nature of her description of the topic did this. She found the informants able to talk easily about their daily tasks, and interestingly, they were sometimes concerned that they were not describing what she was interested in – that what they were talking about could not be what a sociologist wanted to find out. Their preconceptions of social science knowledge based on the dominant conceptual framework did not seem appropriate to their experience.

DeVault describes a similar reconceiving of topic in the research of criminologist Elizabeth Stanko who, in order to study what might be thought of as self-defensive steps that women take to avoid assault, asked her informants about "the things we do to keep safe" (Stanko 1997). In both cases the researchers were interested in the broader structural causes and effects surrounding women's daily routines. In addition, both were conscious that the behaviors surrounding these activities are often routinized and normalized so that they are invisible both to those who engage

in the behaviors and to researchers operating within traditional research frameworks. This is because the ideas of both researchers and those researched are shaped by the dominant culture. For DeVault's research, the way that caring work permeates the entire life of those who do it obliterates the traditional disciplinary distinction between work and leisure. For Stanko, while the things women do to keep safe are really forms of self-defense in some broad sense, they do not fit into the traditional understandings of that concept.

Altering the understanding of the objects of inquiry – changing the concepts used to describe the features of the world that are of interest to the researcher and relevant to the lives of their informants – affects the framing of the questions put to the informants. The feminist methodology operating here involves having an awareness that standard understandings may not be appropriate for gathering the data relevant to the project. In doing so, it challenges the ontological presuppositions underlying mainstream research. Consequently one feature of feminist methodology – one way in which feminists approach research – is that they come to the research with an openness to the possibility that the concepts in their disciplinary toolbox may not fit the experiences of those they are researching.[3] Sociologist Dorothy Smith refers to this awareness as a sensitivity to "lines of fault" – points where women's experiences are in conflict with the culture or ideology of the society in which she lives (Smith 1987: 49).

Methodological issues are also pertinent for data production, collection, and interpretation. DeVault's account of changes in her interview practices illustrates this. Traditional interview transcribing practice called for eliminating or smoothing over hesitations and verbal missteps – the "ums" and "you knows" in the responses of those interviewed. But as DeVault transcribed her interviews she came to realize that such features of ordinary conversation often marked topics that needed to be returned to or reflected emotional states that were relevant to the research questions she was investigating (DeVault 1999: 78). Specifically, she noted that these hesitations often occurred when her interviewees were searching for some way to describe what they were thinking or doing because the usual categories of description – those of the dominant voices in society – did not quite capture what was that they wanted to say. Consequently, she came to reject some aspects of the transcribing practices she had been taught. DeVault, "starting from the lives of women," was attentive to the emotional valences of her informants. What was usually discarded from the interview became evidence that her interviewees were struggling with finding appropriate descriptions of their experiences. DeVault's understanding of what was significant – what phenomena were data – was altered. The epistemological presuppositions about what counts as evidence that come with standard practice are thus open to question when a feminist framework is adopted.

The methods researchers use in these examples are primarily qualitative. As noted in the previous section, methodology does have something to say about method, but it is not straightforward. We cannot read method directly from methodology and it would be a mischaracterization to treat feminist methodology as prescribing that research be qualitative. The next section considers the question of whether, and if so how, feminist methodology constrains choices of method.

Methods: Qualitative vs. Quantitative?

In some of their earliest forms methodological debates revolved around the question of whether feminist methodology required a rejection of traditional methods of social science disciplines – methods that were increasingly quantitative in many of the social sciences. Some feminists argued that quantitative methods were inadequate to address feminist interests and goals and that qualitative methods – ethnography, participant observation, and case studies for example – were better suited to feminist research goals. Others disagreed, embracing the power of quantitative research and the prevailing norms of their disciplines. The remarks from Fonow and Cook cited in section

2 suggest that feminist thinking about methodological questions should be more nuanced than such a framing would suggest. A more accurate characterization describes feminist methodology as calling for reflection about the choice of method – how and why it is being used in any particular research project – rather than a rejection of any particular technique for eliciting evidence. Feminists were not alone in questioning the growing dominance of the quantitative approach, as Sprague's overview of the current state of play regarding methodology indicates:

> Contemporary critiques of mainstream knowledge have fed a kind of methodological schizophrenia in the social sciences. On one side are a legion of committed practitioners of quantitative methods who, aided by the rush of technological developments, are pursuing ever-increasing levels of technical precision, mostly untouched by the swirl of doubt about the validity of their product. On the other side, many critical researchers are rejecting quantitative methods because of their skepticism about assumptions of objectivity, impartiality, and control. Instead, they are relying on qualitative methods, believing that these have more potential for avoiding some of the major pitfalls of the past.
>
> *(Sprague 2016: 29)*

To understand what is at stake it is helpful to consider the difference in the sort of evidence each type of method produces.

Quantitative – statistical – methods are well-suited for studying average effects in populations. They examine differences in sample populations in order to draw conclusions about the characteristics of the populations that have been sampled. There are questions relevant to feminist goals that are appropriate to answer through this sort of evidence. If one is interested in investigating a wage-gap in the salaries of women in comparison to men there are appropriate quantitative tools for doing so. However, many of the questions that feminist social scientists are concerned with are more directly related to the ways that gender makes a difference in the experiences of individuals. Qualitative methods are good at getting at the differences *within* populations but do not provide strong support for conclusions *about* the characteristics of populations.

Different methods produce evidence suited to answer different types of research questions and so the dominance of these methods in the social sciences privileges some research questions over others (questions about populations). But there are indeed questions about populations that feminist researchers may want answers to. Statistical (quantitative) methods in the social sciences have often been used to good effect in support of feminist goals as illustrated by the extensive research documenting the wage-gap mentioned earlier. Londa Schiebinger offers another example from primatology:

> In the 1970s Jeanne Altmann drew attention to representation sampling methods in which all individuals, not just the dominant and powerful, were observed or equal periods of time. (Primatologists had previously used "opportunistic sampling," merely recording whatever captured their attention). Representative sampling required that primatologists evaluate the importance of events by recording their frequency and duration. Commonplace events such as eating, grooming, and lolling thus claimed their place next to the high drama of combat and sexual encounters, allowing for a more nuanced and egalitarian vision of primate society.
>
> *(Schiebinger 1999: 7)*

The work of Susan Greenhaigh and Jiali Li (1995) on "missing" girls in China using demographic techniques similar to those used by Amartya Sen on missing women globally (1990) provides yet another case in which quantitative methods are able to serve feminist ends.

Examples like these count against identifying feminist methodology with qualitative methods. Nonetheless, there are questions that arise during research that cannot be answered quantitatively.

The conceptual shifts that were described in the previous section depend on attention to the experiences of individuals. Recognizing these strengths of qualitative methods has led some feminist social scientists to be more supportive of qualitative research than other (non-feminist) researchers in their disciplines. As the social sciences have become increasingly impressed with the power of quantitative and formal methods and so dominated by them, the research questions that might be better addressed through qualitative methods have been marginalized. Feminists focusing on issues better suited to qualitative research have consequently been marginalized as well.

Quantitative methods have sometimes been thought to be more "scientific." There are several reasons for this. The first is the idea that physics – a field in which quantitative methods dominant – is taken as paradigmatic of science. Such an understanding suggests that in order to be better as a science, any discipline should aim for the clarity and precision found in that field. While this is a somewhat naïve view, it does still have some resonance in the social sciences. However, the idea that physics should provide a model for all of the sciences is open to question. There are reasons to think that the physical world and the social world have differences that would count against such a comparison, but even more compelling are arguments that the complexity that we find in biology is much more akin to the social world than is physics (see for example Mitchell 2009).

A second and somewhat related reason that quantitative methods are thought more scientific is the idea that they lead to greater objectivity. This idea seems to be based on the belief that numbers are not affected by the subjectivity that sometimes seems problematic in the social sciences. Thus turning to numerical representations of the features of interest is a way of eliminating problematic subjectivity (Porter 1995). While this idea has had broad appeal, when examined it too is revealed to be overly simple. It is only plausible when the sources of numerical values that play a role in their social sciences are not considered.

There are a variety of ways in which numbers are affected by factors that might be considered subjective. Whenever we count, we make judgments about what things qualify as the sort of thing we are counting. For the social sciences, those judgments need to be based on a clear understanding (a precise definition) of what we are counting. Conceptualization proceeds measurement (see Chapter 29; see also Cartwright, Bradburn, and Fuller 2017). Economists who did not conceptualize work as inclusive of unpaid domestic work did not include such work in their quantitative research. Their judgment of how to conceptualize work was disputed by feminist economists.

Science does not provide a complete description of the world but rather an account of the features of the world that are significant for those investigating and in relation to particular goals of investigation. The data upon which quantitative work is based should not be understood as self-evident. Decisions about what to count – how and what to measure – rely on theory and the concepts related through theory. In other words, all research, including quantitative research, involves determinations about what aspects of the (social) world matter – what is significant. As Smith puts it, "From the point of view of "women's place" the values assigned to different aspects of the world are changed. Some come into prominence while other standard sociological enterprises diminish" (Smith 2004a: 21).

Suppose, for example, one wished to study, as Stanko did, how often in the day women engage in behaviors that are self-defensive. The sorts of things that Stanko thought were appropriate to consider depend on how the researcher conceives of self-defense and so which behaviors to count. Stanko starts with the lives of the women in which routinized behavior such as avoiding dark streets at night, choosing a time to go to the laundromat, choosing what to wear all are seen as forms of self-defense when the researcher elicits them through conceptualizing them as "things we do to stay safe".

Another example is the work of Pamela Paxton (2000) who challenges the dominant understanding of democracy through which the "three waves" of democracy are identified (Huntington 1991). Paxton points out that the understanding of suffrage used as one of the key elements

of democracy is "universal male suffrage" and that if one understands suffrage as inclusive of all adults there appear to be two rather than three waves. How to identify what counts matters.

Research by Julia Brines provides a final example of how concepts matter. Brines (1994) offers a reevaluation of the standard account given for the unequal distribution of housework in households with male and female partners. The economic model that Brines challenges is a dependency model. What needs to be accounted for is that in heterosexual marriages, women typically do more housework than men do, even when both partners are employed outside of the home. The standard explanation given for this phenomenon is that women typically earn lower wages than their husbands and hence are economically dependent on them. As a result they have less bargaining power when it comes to housework. They do more housework because they lose when negotiating as a result of their economic dependence. The underlying model is a game theoretic model that treats marriage as an economic bargain. The account fails to explain an anomaly, however. It seems that in households where women earn more than men, men do even *less* housework. The standard explanation predicts that given the increased bargaining power of women in such circumstances, men should be doing more of the housework, not less.

Brines argues that the explanation based on the dependency model is unable to accommodate this anomaly because it ignores the way gender structures power relations in society (and consequently in marriages), focusing solely on economic dependence. In so doing the dependency account fails to recognize other factors about the social significance of gender that are relevant to bargaining. Brines points out that the social institution of marriage is not only an economic institution but also provides a venue in which husbands and wives perform gender. Wage earning is conceived of as a masculine performance. Housework is traditionally feminine. When women perform masculinity through higher wage earning men compensate by performing more masculinity at home (less housework). On this account, the way gender structures relationships plays out in marriage so that it affects the bargain. Brines does not reject the dependency model per se but rather offers a revision that incorporates gender relations. She modifies the model so that it incorporates the power dynamic produced by the gendered structure of social life. The bargaining is not solely economic – the loss of (men's) economic bargaining power calls for a renegotiation and compensation of power as exemplified through gender role. Understanding such behavior calls for attention to the way that gender structures social relations. This, in turn, calls for a sensitivity to the difference in experience depending on one's social location in a world where power relations are structured along many lines, only one of which is economic.

In each of these examples, shifts in understanding are brought about through feminist methodology. Stanko starts from the lived experience of her informants. Paxton simply notices the way gender was not taken to be a relevant factor in democracy studies. Brines is conscious of the importance of gender as a social phenomenon and the power dynamics gender identity generates. Their work reflects the dual commitments that Sprague notes feminist methodology shares: the acknowledgment of gender as a key organizer of social life and the desire to address the injustice that results from the inequitable distribution of power resulting from that social organization.

While it would be inaccurate to characterize feminist methodology as qualitative, it is true that feminists have often been among the advocates for the potential benefits of qualitative research. Interviews, participant observation, ethnography, and case studies are research methods that pay attention to details of context, pick out factors that reveal differences in social location, and hence are likely to be more sensitive to the way that gender matters. Nonetheless, as previously noted, there are many circumstances in which the sorts of information that quantitative research reveals are relevant for feminist goals. Feminist social science has always employed a plurality of methods and more recently, feminist researchers have been at the forefront of those advocating for "mixed methods" research in the social science. Mixed methods research involves combining qualitative

and quantitative methods within the same research project. Brines's research is an example. She employs formal models (game theory), statistical information (how much work is done, on average), and qualitative evidence gained from understanding the meaning that women and men attribute to the tasks they carry out. She engages in mixed methods research, recognizing that different types of approaches may be useful for understanding different aspects of the phenomenon.

Feminist methodology is consistent with a variety of methods; however, it does imply something about how these methods should be chosen, specifically in relation to which methods are best suited for particular projects. Consequently, feminist methodology is self-reflective and pragmatic. While quantitative methods are powerful tools for discovering trends in populations and correlations between variables exhibited in those populations, feminist methodology often leads to reexamination of the concepts through which the social world is understood. Often this reexamination is needed because the ways in which gender structures social spaces have not been incorporated into the data collection or analysis. Qualitative methods are better suited to the local and specific features of the social variations from the presumed norm or dominant framework. Sprague describes this as the power of qualitative methods to challenge inequalities that are apparent from "the downside of the social hierarchies" – from the lives of those who are the subjects of research (Sprague 2005: 114).

Feminist Methodology as Pluralist

While the previous section argues that a variety of methods can be useful for the production of knowledge that supports feminist liberatory goals, nonetheless it is possible that methods can carry value commitments antithetical to feminist research in some contexts. As explained in the last section, quantitative methods in the social sciences are aimed at providing information about average effects in large populations. Such information can be useful in establishing that social injustice has occurred but when disciplinary norms treat methods that produce average effects evidence as the only acceptable research – for publication, for tenure, for grants – difficulties can arise. Privileging knowledge of average effects can lead to the disappearance of relevant differences within populations. This can result in a de facto de-valuing of minority populations and individuals. Such an approach threatens to have a disproportionate impact on those who are not "average" in the requisite sense. This is not a problem if knowledge of average effects is adequate to the problem under investigation. If we want to know *that* there is a causal relationship but do not need to know precisely what the mechanism that produces that relationship is then the methods that produce average effects evidence may be adequate. Nor is it a problem if the policy decisions need to be based on average effects. But sensitivity to these issues requires attention to the choice of method, its adequacy to goals, and the values that will be promoted in such policy decisions.

The adept use of quantitative methods may ameliorate these worries to some degree. If populations are recognized as heterogeneous then there is motivation to engage in further research on subpopulations. This move addresses some aspects of the problem of erasure of difference, but which factors determine relevant subpopulations will depend on paying attention to the lived experience of those who are studied and so this points again to the need for pluralism regarding methods. Feminist attention to intersectionality and the ways power differentially structures society through gender, race, ability, sexuality, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, and other salient features of individuals raise a further worry. It is not entirely clear how a subpopulation strategy can address social justice issues intertwined in this way. There has been some work in this direction. For example, Bright, Malinsky, and Thompson (2015) offer one approach to examining intersectional causality. But intersectional effects are not to be understood as additive – once again counting against reliance on exclusively quantitative approaches. Finally, there is the problem that further partitioning of the reference class may also decrease the sample size and thus undermine

the power of the method. In any case, these worries further support the feminist intuition that methods must be chosen consciously and with attention to the aims of research.

The dominance of quantitative methods can have another dampening effect on research, particularly in disciplines where recognition and advancement require demonstrating one's skill with such methods. Economics provides an example. Sheba Tejani examines the methods used in articles published in *Feminist Economics* from 1995 through 2015 and finds that the majority use econometric (quantitative) methods. Qualitative methods such as interviews and mixed methods approaches constitute only a small proportion of the published work in this journal. Tejani suggests that "institutional barriers to methodological plurality, professional pressures, the background and training of researchers, and a bias towards empiricism in feminist thought might account for some of these shifts" (Tejani 2018: 3). In other words, the normative standards in economics influence the way that all research in that field is carried out – including feminist research. Tejani's worry suggests that disciplinary pressures can push against the pluralism many feminist methodologists advocate for.[4]

In summary, feminist methodology sometimes reveals that standard disciplinary conceptions of the objects of inquiry do not get at what is significant relative to questions that matter for addressing social justice. Furthermore, while no particular method is uniquely feminist, there are important differences in the types of evidence that each produces. Some methods are suitable for studying large populations but not for revealing what we may need to know about individuals or smaller populations. The appropriateness of methods depends on a variety of factors – among them, the aims of research. Finally, feminist social scientists have among their aims liberatory goals. In other words, their social justice goals and values shape their research. Methodology is thus connected to ontological, epistemological, and value commitments. Each of these requires conscious consideration when research methodology is chosen. The pluralism, pragmatism, and critical approach of feminist research motivate this sort of reflective awareness of the interrelationship among all aspects of knowledge production.

Related chapters: 7, 26, 29.

Notes

1 This trend continued in this century with the women PhDs in the social sciences at nearly 49% as of 2016 (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics/National Science Foundation https://ncses.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19304/data).
2 DeVault's *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work* (1991) is the result of this research.
3 Arguably this is the case for all research; however, because the lives of women were not traditionally the target of social research the point is particularly relevant in the context of *feminist* social science.
4 Tejani's work is also discussed in Barker and Kuiper (Chapter 27).

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