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# INTRODUCTION

## IS THERE A FEMINIST METHOD?

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Over the last two decades feminist inquirers have raised fundamental challenges to the ways social science has analyzed women, men, and social life. From the beginning, issues about method, methodology, and epistemology have been intertwined with discussions of how best to correct the partial and distorted accounts in the traditional analyses. Is there a distinctive feminist method of inquiry? How does feminist methodology challenge—or complement—traditional methodologies? On what grounds would one defend the assumptions and procedures of feminist researchers? Questions such as these have generated important controversies within feminist theory and politics, as well as curiosity and anticipation in the traditional discourses.

The most frequently asked question has been the first one: is there a distinctive feminist method of inquiry? However, it has been hard to get a clear focus on the kind of answer to this question that we should seek. My point here is to argue against the idea of a distinctive feminist method of research. I do so on the grounds that preoccupation with method mystifies what have been the most interesting aspects of feminist research processes. Moreover, I think that it is really a different concern that motivates and is expressed through most formulations of the method question: what is it that makes some of the most influential feminist-inspired biological and social science research of recent years so powerful? I shall first try to disentangle some of the issues about method, methodology, and epistemology. Then I turn to review briefly (or to introduce, depending on the reader) the problems with thinking that attempting to “add women” to existing social science analyses does all that should be done in response to feminist criticisms. Finally, I shall draw attention to three distinctive characteristics of those feminist analyses that go beyond the additive approaches. I shall try to show why we should not choose to think of these as methods of research, though they clearly have significant implications for our evaluations of research methods.

### Method, Methodology, Epistemology

One reason it is difficult to find a satisfactory answer to questions about a distinctive feminist method is that discussions of method (techniques for gathering evidence) and methodology (a theory and analysis of how research should proceed) have been intertwined with each other and with epistemological issues (issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justificatory strategy) in both the traditional and feminist discourses. This claim is a complex one and we shall sort out its components. But the point here is simply that "method" is often used to refer to all three aspects of research. Consequently, it is not at all clear what one is supposed to be looking for when trying to identify a distinctive "feminist method of research." This lack of clarity permits critics to avoid facing up to what is distinctive about the best feminist social inquiry. It also makes it difficult to recognize what one must do to advance feminist inquiry.

A research *method* is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence. One could reasonably argue that all evidence-gathering techniques fall into one of the following three categories: listening to (or interrogating) informants, observing behavior, or examining historical traces and records. In this sense, there are only three methods of social inquiry. As the essays in this collection show, feminist researchers use just about any and all of the methods, in this concrete sense of the term, that traditional androcentric researchers have used. Of course, precisely how they carry out these methods of evidence gathering is often strikingly different. For example, they listen carefully to how women informants think about their lives and men's lives, and critically to how traditional social scientists conceptualize women's and men's lives. They observe behaviors of women and men that traditional social scientists have not thought significant. They seek examples of newly recognized patterns in historical data.

There is both less and more going on in these cases than new methods of research. The "less" is that it seems to introduce a false sense of unity to all the different "little things" feminist researchers do with familiar methods to conceptualize these as "new feminist research methods." However, the "more" is that it is new methodologies and new epistemologies that are requiring these new uses of familiar research techniques. If what is meant by a "method of research" is just this most concrete sense of the term, it would undervalue the transformations feminist analyses require to characterize these in terms only of the discovery of distinctive methods of research.

That social scientists tend to think about methodological issues primarily in terms of methods of inquiry (for example, in "methods courses" in psychology, sociology, etc.) is a problem. That is, it is primarily when they are talking about concrete techniques of evidence gathering that they raise methodological issues. No doubt it is this habit that tempts social scientists to seek a unique method of inquiry as the explanation for what is unusual about feminist analyses. On the other hand, it is also a problem that philosophers use such terms as "scientific method" and "the method of science" when they are really referring to issues of methodology and epistemology. They, too, are tempted to seek whatever is unique about feminist research in a new "method of inquiry."

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A *methodology* is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed; it includes accounts of how "the general structure of theory finds its application in particular scientific disciplines."<sup>1</sup> For example, discussions of how functionalism (or Marxist political economy, or phenomenology) should be or is applied in particular research areas are methodological analyses.<sup>2</sup> Feminist researchers have argued that traditional theories have been applied in ways that make it difficult to understand women's participation in social life, or to understand men's activities as gendered (vs. as representing "the human"). They have produced feminist versions of traditional theories. Thus we can find examples of feminist methodologies in discussions of how phenomenological approaches can be used to begin to understand women's worlds, or of how Marxist political economy can be used to explain the causes of women's continuing exploitation in the household or in wage labor.<sup>3</sup> But these sometimes heroic efforts raise questions about whether even feminist applications of these theories can succeed in producing complete and undistorted accounts of gender and of women's activities. And they also raise epistemological issues.

An *epistemology* is a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a "knower" (can women?); what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against men's experiences and observations?); what kinds of things can be known (can "subjective truths" count as knowledge?), and so forth. Sociologists of knowledge characterize epistemologies as strategies for justifying beliefs: appeals to the authority of God, of custom and tradition, of "common sense," of observation, of reason, and of masculine authority are examples of familiar justificatory strategies. Feminists have argued that traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women could be "knowers" or agents of knowledge; they claim that the voice of science is a masculine one; that history is written from only the point of view of men (of the dominant class and race); that the subject of a traditional sociological sentence is always assumed to be a man. They have proposed alternative theories of knowledge that legitimate women as knowers.<sup>4</sup> Examples of these feminist epistemological claims and discussions can be found in the essays that follow. These issues, too, are often referred to as issues about method. Epistemological issues certainly have crucial implications for how general theoretical structures can and should be applied in particular disciplines and for the choice of methods of research. But I think that it is misleading and confusing to refer to these, too, as issues about method.<sup>5</sup>

In summary, there are important connections between epistemologies, methodologies, and research methods. But I am arguing that it is *not* by looking at research methods that one will be able to identify the distinctive features of the best of feminist research. We shall next see that this distinctiveness is also not to be found in attempts to "add women" to traditional analyses.

### Problems with "Adding Women"

In order to grasp the depth and extent of the transformation of the social sciences required in order to understand gender and women's activities, one needs to recognize the limi-

tations of the most obvious ways one could try to rectify the androcentrism of traditional analyses. Feminist researchers first tried to "add women" to these analyses. There were three kinds of women who appeared as obvious candidates for this process: women social scientists, women who contributed to the public life social scientists already were studying, and women who had been victims of the most egregious forms of male dominance.

① In the first of these projects, scholars have begun to recover and to reappraise the work of women researchers and theorists. Women's research and scholarship often has been ignored, trivialized, or appropriated without the credit which would have been given to a man's work. One of the notorious examples of this kind of sexist devaluation in the natural sciences is the treatment of Rosalind Franklin's work on DNA by her Nobel prize-winning colleagues.<sup>6</sup> How many other outstanding women social and natural scientists will we never have the chance to appreciate because they, unlike Franklin, had no close friend capable of setting the record straight?

However, there are severe problems with imagining that this is the only or most important way to eliminate sexism and androcentrism from social science. Obviously, one should not expect to understand gender and women's roles in social life merely through learning about the work of women social scientists in the past. Insightful as these "lost women" were, their work could not benefit from the many feminist theoretical breakthroughs of the last two decades. Moreover, these women succeeded in entering a world which largely excluded women from the education and credentialing necessary to become social scientists. Thus their work was constrained by the immense pressures on them to make their research conform to what the men of their times thought about social life. Such pressures are still very great, as we will see all of the essayists in this volume argue. Fortunately they often succeeded in resisting these pressures. Nevertheless, we should not expect their research projects to produce the kinds of powerful analyses that can emerge when women's and men's thinking is part of a broad social revolution such as the women's movement has created. What remains amazing is the intellectual courage and frequent flashes of brilliance exhibited in the thinking of these social scientists in spite of the social, professional, and political constraints they faced.<sup>7</sup>

② A different concern of feminist social research has been to examine women's contributions to activities in the public world which were already the focus of social science analysis. We now can see that women, too, have been the originators of distinctively human culture, deviants, voters, revolutionaries, social reformers, high achievers, wage workers, and so forth. Important studies have expanded our understanding of women's roles in public life both historically and in other cultures today.

This focus still leaves some powerfully androcentric standards firmly in place, thereby insuring only partial and distorted analyses of gender and women's social activities. It falsely suggests that only those activities that men have found it important to study are the ones which constitute and shape social life. This leads us to ignore such crucial issues as how changes in the social practices of reproduction, sexuality, and mothering have shaped the state, the economy, and the other public institutions. Furthermore, this research focus does not encourage us to ask what have been the *meanings* of women's contributions

to public life for women. For instance, Margaret Sanger's birth control movement played an important and unfortunate role in eugenics policy. But it also signified to women that they could plan their reproductive lives and in that sense systematically and effectively control the consequences of their sexual activities. This second meaning is not likely to be noticed when the focus is on only women's contributions to "men's world." To take another example, both white and black women worked courageously in the antislavery, black suffrage, and antilynching movements. But what did it mean for their lives as women to work in these movements? (They learned public speaking, political organizing, and the virulence of white men's hostility to women learning how to speak and organize, among other things!)\*

3 A third kind of new focus of research on women can be found in the study of women as victims of male dominance. Male dominance takes many forms. Researchers have provided path-breaking studies of the "crimes against women"—especially rape, incest, pornography, and wife beating. They have examined the broader patterns of institutionalized economic exploitation and political discrimination against women. And they have looked at the forms of white male domination which have particularly victimized women of color—in slavery, in state reproductive and welfare policies, in "protective" legislation, in union practices, and in other circumstances.<sup>9</sup> The emergence to public consciousness of this ugly underside of women's condition has made it impossible for serious thinkers to continue to believe in the reality of unmitigated social progress in this culture or most others. One might reasonably find contemporary cultures to be among the most barbaric from the perspective of the statistics on the victimization of women.

Victimologies have their limitations too. They tend to create the false impression that women have *only* been victims, that they have never successfully fought back, that women cannot be effective social agents on behalf of themselves or others. But the work of other feminist scholars and researchers tells us otherwise. Women have always resisted male domination.

I have pointed out problems with three basic approaches to the study of women and gender which initially looked promising. While each is valuable in its own right, the most widely acclaimed examples of the new feminist scholarship include analyses of these "kinds of women," but also move far beyond these projects.<sup>10</sup> Let us turn to look at just what it is that characterizes the best of this research, for these characteristics should offer more promising criteria than research methods for what is distinctive in feminist analyses.

### What's New in Feminist Analyses?

Let us ask about the history of feminist inquiry the kind of question Thomas Kuhn posed about the history of science.<sup>11</sup> He asked what the point would be of a philosophy of science for which the history of science failed to provide supporting evidence. We can ask what the point would be of elaborating a theory of the distinctive nature of feminist inquiry that excluded the best feminist social science research from satisfying its criteria. Some of

the proposals for a feminist method have this unfortunate consequence. Formulating this question directs one to attempt to identify the characteristics that distinguish the most illuminating examples of feminist research.

I shall suggest three such features. By no means do I intend for this list to be exhaustive. We are able to recognize these features only after examples of them have been produced and found fruitful. As research continues, we will surely identify additional characteristics that expand our understandings of what makes feminist accounts explanatorily so powerful. No doubt we will also revise our understandings of the significance of the three to which I draw attention. My point is not to provide a definitive answer to the title question of this section, but to show that this historical approach is the best strategy if we wish to account for the distinctive power of feminist research. While these features have consequences for the selection of research methods, there is no good reason to call them methods.

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### New Empirical and Theoretical Resources: Women's Experiences

Critics argue that traditional social science has begun its analyses only in men's experiences. That is, it has asked only the questions about social life that appear problematic from within the social experiences that are characteristic for men (white, Western, bourgeois men, that is). It has unconsciously followed a "logic of discovery" which we could formulate in the following way: Ask only those questions about nature and social life which (white, Western, bourgeois) men want answered. How can "we humans" achieve greater autonomy? What is the appropriate legal policy toward rapists and raped women which leaves intact the normal standards of masculine sexual behavior?<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, many phenomena which appear problematic from the perspective of men's characteristic experiences do not appear problematic at all from the perspective of women's experiences. (The above two issues, for example, do not characteristically arise from women's experiences.) On the other hand, women experience many phenomena which they think do need explanation. Why do men find child care and housework so distasteful? Why do women's life opportunities tend to be constricted exactly at the moments traditional history marks as the most progressive? Why is it hard to detect black women's ideals of womanhood in studies of black families? Why is men's sexuality so "driven," so defined in terms of power? Why is risking death said to represent the distinctively human act but giving birth regarded as merely natural?<sup>13</sup> Reflection on how social phenomena get defined as problems in need of explanation in the first place quickly reveals that there is no such thing as a problem without a person (or groups of them) who have this problem: a problem is always a problem for someone or other. Recognition of this fact, and its implications for the structure of the scientific enterprise, quickly brings feminist approaches to inquiry into conflict with traditional understandings in many ways.

The traditional philosophy of science argues that the origin of scientific problems or hypotheses is irrelevant to the "goodness" of the results of research. It doesn't matter where one's problems or hypotheses come from—from gazing into crystal balls, from sun worshipping, from observing the world around us, or from critical discussion with the

most brilliant thinkers. There is no logic for these "contexts of discovery," though many have tried to find one. Instead, it is in the "context of justification," where hypotheses are tested, that we should seek the "logic of scientific inquiry." It is in this testing process that we should look for science's distinctive virtues (for its "method"). But the feminist challenges reveal that the questions that are asked—and, even more significantly, those that are not asked—are at least as determinative of the adequacy of our total picture as are any answers that we can discover. Defining what is in need of scientific explanation only from the perspective of bourgeois, white men's experiences leads to partial and even perverse understandings of social life. One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences. It also uses these experiences as a significant indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested.

Recognition of the importance of using women's experiences as resources for social analysis obviously has implications for the social structures of education, laboratories, journals, learned societies, funding agencies—indeed, for social life in general. And it needs to be stressed that it is women who should be expected to be able to reveal for the first time what women's experiences are. Women should have an equal say in the design and administration of the institutions where knowledge is produced and distributed for reasons of social justice: it is not fair to exclude women from gaining the benefits of participating in these enterprises that men get. But they should also share in these projects because only partial and distorted understandings of ourselves and the world around us can be produced in a culture which systematically silences and devalues the voices of women.

Notice that it is "women's experiences" in the plural which provide the new resources for research. This formulation stresses several ways in which the best feminist analyses differ from traditional ones. For one thing, once we realized that there is no universal man, but only culturally different men and women, then "man's" eternal companion—"woman"—also disappeared. That is, women come only in different classes, races, and cultures: there is no "woman" and no "woman's experience." Masculine and feminine are always categories within every class, race, and culture in the sense that women's and men's experiences, desires, and interests differ within every class, race, and culture. But so, too, are class, race, and culture always categories within gender, since women's and men's experiences, desires, and interests differ according to class, race, and culture.<sup>14</sup> This leads some theorists to propose that we should talk about our "feminisms" only in the plural, since there is no one set of feminist principles or understandings beyond the very, very general ones to which feminists in every race, class, and culture will assent. Why should we have expected it to be any different? There are very few principles or understandings to which exists in every race, class, and culture will assent!

Not only do our gender experiences vary across the cultural categories; they also are often in conflict in any one individual's experience. My experiences as a mother and a professor are often contradictory. Women scientists often talk about the contradictions in identity between what they experience as women and scientists. Dorothy Smith writes of

the "fault line" between women sociologists' experience as sociologists and as women.<sup>15</sup> The hyphenated state of many self-chosen labels of identity—black feminist, socialist feminist, Asian-American feminist, lesbian feminist—reflects this challenge to the "identity politics" which has grounded Western thought and public life. These fragmented identities are a rich source of feminist insight.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the questions an oppressed group wants answered are rarely requests for so-called pure truth. Instead, they are queries about how to change its conditions; how its world is shaped by forces beyond it; how to win over, defeat, or neutralize those forces arrayed against its emancipation, growth, or development; and so forth. Consequently, feminist research projects originate primarily not in any old "women's experiences," but in women's experiences in political struggles. (Kate Millett and others remind us that the bedroom and the kitchen are as much the site of political struggle as are the board room or the polling place.<sup>17</sup>) It may be that it is only through such struggles that one can come to understand oneself and the social world.

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### New Purposes of Social Science: For Women

If one begins inquiry with what appears problematic from the perspective of women's experiences, one is led to design research for women, as a number of the authors in this volume point out. That is, the goal of this inquiry is to provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need, rather than providing for welfare departments, manufacturers, advertisers, psychiatrists, the medical establishment, or the judicial system answers to questions that they have. The questions about women that men have wanted answered have all too often arisen from desires to pacify, control, exploit, or manipulate women. Traditional social research has been for men. In the best of feminist research, the purposes of research and analysis are not separable from the origins of research problems.

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### New Subject Matter of Inquiry: Locating the Researcher in the Same Critical Plane as the Overt Subject Matter

There are a number of ways we could characterize the distinctive subject matter of feminist social analysis. While studying women is not new, studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world can claim virtually no history at all. It is also novel to study gender. The idea of a systematic social construction of masculinity and femininity that is little, if at all, constrained by biology, is very recent. Moreover, feminist inquiry joins other "underclass" approaches in insisting on the importance of studying ourselves and "studying up," instead of "studying down." While employers have often commissioned studies of how to make workers happy with less power and pay, workers have rarely been in a position to undertake or commission studies of anything at all, let alone how to make employers happy with less power and profit. Similarly, psychiatrists have endlessly studied what they regard as women's peculiar mental and behavioral characteristics, but women have only recently

begun to study the bizarre mental and behavioral characteristics of psychiatrists. If we want to understand how our daily experience arrives in the forms it does, it makes sense to examine critically the sources of social power.

The best feminist analysis goes beyond these innovations in subject matter in a crucial way: it insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint. This does not mean that the first half of a research report should engage in soul searching (though a little soul searching by researchers now and then can't be all bad!). Instead, as we will see, we are often explicitly told by the researcher what her/his gender, race, class, culture is, and sometimes how she/he suspects this has shaped the research project—though of course we are free to arrive at contrary hypotheses about the influence of the researcher's presence on her/his analysis. Thus the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests.

This requirement is no idle attempt to "do good" by the standards of imagined critics in classes, races, cultures (or of a gender) other than that of the researcher. Instead, it is a response to the recognition that the cultural beliefs and behaviors of feminist researchers shape the results of their analyses no less than do those of sexist and androcentric researchers. We need to avoid the "objectivist" stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects beliefs and practices to the display board. Only in this way can we hope to produce understandings and explanations which are free (or, at least, more free) of distortion from the unexamined beliefs and behaviors of social scientists themselves. Another way to put this point is that the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence. Introducing this "subjective" element into the analysis in fact increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the "objectivism" which hides this kind of evidence from the public. This kind of relationship between the researcher and the object of research is usually discussed under the heading of the "reflexivity of social science." I refer to it here as a new subject matter of inquiry to emphasize the unusual strength of this form of the reflexivity recommendation. The reader will want to ask if and how this strong form of the reflexivity recommendation can be found in the following analyses. How is it implicitly directing inquiry? How might it have shaped some of these research projects yet more strongly?

To summarize my argument, it is features such as these three—not a "feminist method"—which are responsible for producing the best of the new feminist research and scholarship. They can be thought of as methodological features because they show us how to apply the general structure of scientific theory to research on women and gender. They can also be thought of as epistemological ones because they imply theories of knowledge

different from the traditional ones. Clearly the extraordinary explanatory power of the results of feminist research in the social sciences (such as that exhibited by the papers that follow) is due to feminist-inspired challenges to the grand theories and the background assumptions of traditional social inquiry.

### Two Final Issues

Before concluding this essay, I want to warn the reader against two inferences one should resist drawing from the analysis above. It is sometimes falsely supposed that in using women's experiences rather than men's as an empirical and theoretical resource, feminism espouses a kind of relativism. It is sometimes also falsely imagined that men cannot make important contributions to feminist research and scholarship. The two issues are related to each other.

First, we should note that on the account I gave above, women's and men's experiences are not equally reliable guides to the production of complete and undistorted social research. Feminist inquirers are never saying that sexist and antisexist claims are equally plausible—for example, that it's equally plausible to regard women as incapable of the highest kind of moral judgment (as men have claimed) and as exercising a different but equally "high" kind of moral judgment (as Carol Gilligan argues). The reader can identify innumerable additional directly contradictory claims in the reports of feminist challenges to traditional social analyses which follow. Feminist researchers are arguing that women's and men's characteristic social experiences provide different but not equal grounds for reliable knowledge claims. In the concluding essay I shall explore the grounds that several contrasting feminist epistemologies advance for why we all—men as well as women—should prefer women's experiences to men's as reliable bases for knowledge claims. Here I can only relativize relativism itself; that is, I can point to the limited social contexts in which it appears to be a reasonable position to advance.

Historically, relativism appears as an intellectual possibility, and as a "problem," only for dominating groups at the point where the hegemony (the universality) of their views is being challenged. As a modern intellectual position, it emerged in the belated recognition by nineteenth-century Europeans that the apparently bizarre beliefs and behaviors of non-Europeans had a rationality or logic of their own. Perhaps the preferred Western beliefs might not be the only reasonable ones.<sup>18</sup> The point here is that relativism is not a problem originating in, or justifiable in terms of, women's experiences or feminist agendas. It is fundamentally a sexist response that attempts to preserve the legitimacy of androcentric claims in the face of contrary evidence. "Perhaps," the relativists argue, "men's views are not the only legitimate views. Women have their views of the matter and men have theirs. Who is to say objectively that one is better than the other?" The feminist epistemologies we shall examine later offer uncompromising rejections of this way of conceptualizing feminist understandings. I hope the reader can already glimpse why one should be skeptical of claims that the results of feminist social research rest on relativist grounds.

The second faulty inference one might be tempted to make is that men cannot make important contributions to feminist research and scholarship. If the problems feminist inquiry addresses must arise from women's experiences, if feminist social science is to be for women, and if the inquirer is to be in the same critical plane as subject matters (which are often about women and gender), how could men do feminist social science? This vexing question has gained increasing attention as more and more men are, in fact, teaching in women's studies programs and producing analyses of women and gender.

On the one hand, there are clearly important contributions to the history of feminist thought which have been made by men. John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels are just the most obvious of these thinkers. Their writings are certainly controversial and, at best, imperfect; but so, too, are the writings of the most insightful women thinkers of these periods or, for that matter, in the present day. Moreover, there have always been women willing and able to produce sexist and misogynistic thought—Marabel Morgan and Phyllis Schlafly are just two of such recent writers. Obviously, neither the ability nor the willingness to contribute to feminist understanding are sex-linked traits!

Moreover, significant contributions to other emancipation movements have been made by thinkers who were not themselves members of the group to be emancipated. Marx and Engels were not members of the proletariat. There are whites in our own nation as well as in South Africa and other racist regimes who have been willing and able to think in antiracist ways—indeed, they have been lynched, exiled, and banned for their antiracist writings. Gentiles in Europe and the United States have argued for and suffered because of their defenses of Jewish freedoms. So it would be historically unusual if the list of contributors to women's emancipation alone excluded by fiat all members of the "oppressor group" from its ranks.

On the other hand, surely women, like members of these other exploited groups, are wise to look especially critically at analyses produced by members of the oppressor group. Are women's experiences used as the test of adequacy of the problems, concepts, hypotheses, research design, collection, and interpretation of data? (Must the "women's experience" from which feminist problematics arise be the experience of the investigator her/himself?) Is the research project for women rather than for men and the institutions men control? Does the researcher or theorist place himself in the same class, race, culture, and gender-sensitive critical plane as his subjects of study?

Once we ask these questions, we can see many research projects which are particularly suitable for men sympathetic to feminism to conduct. These are the critical examination of the gendered dimensions of men's thoughts and behaviors historically and cross-culturally—what is referred to in literary criticism as the "phallic critique." The reader can examine for her/himself how this project appears to satisfy the requirements of the most successful feminist inquiries discussed above. (Note that the requirement to "study up" will direct these projects toward the beliefs and behaviors of men of the same or higher social classes as the investigator; neither men nor women should try to "blame" classes of people who are not responsible for designing and maintaining our social institutions for the sins of those institutions.) Moreover, there are some areas of masculine behavior and thought to

which male researchers have easier and perhaps better access than do women researchers: primarily male settings and ones from which women are systematically excluded, such as board rooms, military settings, or locker rooms. They can bring a feminist perspective to bear on certain aspects of some relationships that is valuable in different ways from the perspective women would bring to such relationships. I am thinking here of the "phallic critique" men could provide of friendships between men, or of relationships between fathers and sons, or between male lovers. How do these feel lacking to their participants? How do they contrast with the characteristics of friendships between women, and so forth?<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the scholarly or scientific benefits which could accrue from such studies, this kind of self-critical research by men makes a kind of political contribution to the emancipation of women which inquires by women cannot achieve. Just as courageous whites can set an example for other whites, and can use for antiracist ends the great power institutional racism bestows on even the most antiracist of whites, so too can men make an important but different kind of contribution to women's emancipation. If men are trained by sexist institutions to value masculine authority more highly, then some courageous men can take advantage of that evil and use their masculine authority to resocialize men.

There are two final arguments to be made on behalf of the possibility of male feminist social scientists. I suggest that feminists should find it inappropriate both to criticize male scholars and researchers for ignoring women and gender and also to insist that they are incapable of conducting research which satisfies feminist requirements. Moreover, since feminists often insist (and correctly so, I would argue) that every issue is a feminist issue, it seems a bit odd, and at least a strategic error, to adopt a policy which in effect recommends that only women do social science at all.<sup>20</sup>

What is clear is that whether they are women or men, those who do not actively struggle against the exploitation of women in everyday life are unlikely to produce social science research about any subject at all that is undistorted by sexism and androcentrism. As Nancy Hartsock says, "the vision available to the oppressed group must be struggled for and represents an achievement which requires both science to see beneath the surface of the social relations in which all are forced to participate, and the education which can only grow from struggle to change those relations."

In spite of these arguments to the contrary, it is easy to understand why many feminists take a skeptical attitude toward a man's claim to be doing feminist research or providing an adequate account of gender or women's activities. Of course it is important to discourage men from thinking they can take over feminist research the way they do everything else which becomes significant in the public world—citing only other male researchers, doing little to alleviate the exploitation of their female colleagues or the women in their lives whose work makes their eminence possible, and so forth.

My own preference is to argue that the designation "feminist" can apply to men who satisfy whatever standards women must satisfy to earn the label. To maximally increase our understanding, research must satisfy the three criteria discussed earlier. The issue here is not so much one of the right to claim a label as it is of the prerequisites for producing less partial and distorted descriptions, explanations, and understandings.

It is time to turn to examine what has been responsible for generating some of the most widely acclaimed of the new feminist social analyses.

## NOTES

1. Peter Caws, "Scientific Method," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 339.

2. Feminist methodologists have even achieved the heroic in showing that through ingenious applications of what have been widely regarded as hopelessly sexist theories—such as sociobiology—we can increase our understandings of women and gender. See Donna Haraway's discussion of this issue in "Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic," pt. 2, in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 4, no. 1 (1978).

3. Dorothy Smith, Heidi Hartmann and Nancy Hartssock explicitly provide such methodological discussions in their essays in this volume.

4. The concluding essay in this volume examines feminist epistemologies. For further discussion of the feminist science and epistemology critiques see my *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986) and Jean O'Barr and Sandra Harding, eds., *Sex and Scientific Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

5. I suggest that readers try to distinguish these three aspects of research in the papers that follow.

6. See James Watson, *The Double Helix* (New York: New American Library, 1969), and Anne Sayre, *Rosalind Franklin and DNA* (New York: Norton, 1975). Carolyn Wood Sherif discusses such practices in psychology in her essay in this volume.

7. See Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), for documentation of the efforts by women natural and social scientists in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

8. Bettina Aptheker, *Women's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex and Class in American History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); and Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1983).

9. It needs to be said that white women, too, have participated in oppressing women of color in a variety of ways.

10. Peggy McIntosh provides an interestingly harsher judgment than I of these additive approaches to feminist scholarship in "Interactive Phases of Curricular Revision: A Feminist Perspective," working paper no. 124 (Wellesley, Mass.: Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1983).

11. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

12. Problems with these "men's problems" are discussed in the essays.

13. These "women's problems" generate analyses in the essays below.

14. In this collection, the essays by Joyce A. Ladner and Bonnie Thornton Dill make this point most clearly.

15. See Smith's essay in this volume.

16. We shall return to this issue in the concluding essay.

17. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday & Co. 1969).

18. There are situations where relativism could be a reasonable epistemological stance: where two *equally powerful* and noncompetitive perspectives generate different understandings. For example, an artist and a geologist could have different and equally valid grounds on which to base their claims about a particular group of mountains. But precisely because these are noncompetitive grounds, the issue never comes up: no one imagines a geologist would have any reason to contradict an artist, or vice versa.

19. One such study is the chapter on friendships between men, "Man to Man," in Michael E. McGill, *The McGill Report on Male Intimacy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986). Gerald Turkel brought this to my attention.

20. "So why, after all this impassioned argument, is there no essay by a man in this collection?" one might well ask. There were two essays by men on the original list from which the present set were winnowed. Both were dropped, along with essays by an anthropologist, a linguist, a feminist sociobiologist, women of color other than black Americans, a demographer, a phenomenological sociologist, a colonial historian, a statistician in psychology, etc. I chose to discuss the issue here, leaving space in the collection itself for essays which each had to satisfy a number of different criteria.

# FEMINISM AND METHODOLOGY

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Social Science Issues

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
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INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS  
*Bloomington and Indianapolis*