Feminist Scholarship Review

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Helen Hunt Jackson, author and reformer of Native American policy in the U.S. (1830-1885)
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Letter from the Editor:

Feminist modes of research. The topic of this issue of *FSR* sounded distant to me, cool, theoretical. I wasn't sure I had anything to say about it. At least not until I began to read some articles which employed oral histories and researcher interpretations of those histories. Then the subject came to life for me. Reading the Scanlon article which is reviewed later in this issue of *FSR* illuminated some of the knotty issues involved in research methods that have the courage to take subjects and readers into account. I still wondered how this related to me, though, and what I could say about that relationship. Suddenly, I knew.

Many years ago, newly married and recently relocated to a small town in Massachusetts, I became pregnant and, unfortunately, suffered a miscarriage. I had few acquaintances in this new location, and virtually no support group. I felt isolated, vulnerable, lost. By chance, and simply for "factual" information, I bought the original edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. It was a slim volume compared to today's edition. I located the chapter on miscarriage, and was surprised to see that oral histories of women who had undergone this experience were included in the editors' definition of what was important to know about this topic. Personal stories were validated here in print, and through them, my own story was taken into account, as well. I read and reread those women's words countless times, and found, in them, my temporary support group. Some months later when I became pregnant again (with the baby who is now a senior in college!), I read the section on pregnancy and tried to assuage my fears and confirm my hopes through the stories of the women who spoke to me from the pages of that section of the book.

We come back, perhaps, to women's words, the topic of *FSR* in our Spring, 1993 issue. The expression of human experience and its interpretation by an audience is key to our sense of commonality, struggle and comfort. The "abstract" topic of feminist research is as concrete as our everyday experience, our everyday concerns and joys.

---Deborah Rose O'Neal
The author of this article, Jennifer Scanlon, states that her purpose in writing it is to “engage in some of the feminist debates about conducting and using oral histories in academic work and to offer suggestions...[as to] how one can and should give...compensation for information provided by research subjects:(640). The bulk of the rest of the paper, however, is concerned with Scanlon's own oral history, which includes a lengthy dose of what could be interpreted as the guilt she experiences when she uses others' histories to enhance her own reputation and position as a professor and published researcher. She talks protractedly about the unique situation which has placed her in a town on the Canadian border which temporarily houses scores of refugees from Central America and Africa and about her own efforts to give service time to the groups which support this needy population. Perhaps it is Scanlon's style of writing that makes her explanations sound awkward and self-serving. Perhaps it is actual self-reproach and self-blame that puts me off, but whatever the reason, I tire of her list of good deeds. "The most consistent effort I make for the refugees is to volunteer one morning each week at the Crisis Center...I often accompany women to Social Services so they can complete the paperwork there...I often accompany pregnant women to doctor's offices." To my ear, the recitation is a hollow one.

There is some value to this article, however well-hidden it may be. Despite herself, Scanlon does explore some of the issues involved in feminist research. The introductory paragraphs discuss the purposes of research in general in a thought-provoking, if too brief, manner. Scanlon's survey of the literature on this subject includes rich and stimulating commentary from other researchers. The researchers she cites propose ideas such as that "research must produce emancipatory knowledge", raise the "critical consciousness of the researcher and the subject, improve the lives of those involved in the project and begin to transform societal structures" (Maguire qtd. in Scanlon 639). A reference to Shulamit Reinharz, who is included in the anthology The Knowledge Explosion: Generations of Feminist Scholarship, summarizes neatly the reasons for the development of feminist scholarship with its attendant participatory approaches: "...doing research with people rather than on them; having women do research; doing research in ways that empower people; valuing experiential knowledge; honoring female intelligence; and seeking the causes of oppression" (Reinharz qtd. in Scanlon 639-640). In this short quotation, Scanlon gives us much to think about.

Scanlon longs to tell her own story and she found this listener to be a reluctant one! It may well be worth reading the article, however, if only for its fine introduction and for the list of references at the conclusion of the paper.

---Deborah Rose O'Neal
Does feminist research have its own methodology? What qualities distinguish feminist research from other forms of research? Who decides what research is and is not feminist? These are a few of the questions that Shulamit Reinharz addresses in Feminist Methods in Social Research published in 1992 by Oxford University Press.

Reinharz does not provide definitive answers to these questions. Her goal is "to illustrate what feminist research includes, i.e., to collect, categorize and examine the multitude of feminist research voices." She provides us with many answers to each question, often using the authentic voices of feminist researchers. Her text is a comprehensive compilation of the range of approaches used in feminist research and the rationale behind each perspective. Reinharz sees the defining of feminist research as an ongoing discussion, a work in progress which includes diverse perspectives. In keeping with this approach, Reinharz refuses to limit freedom of thought by accepting any one definition of what is feminist. Her text examines any work by a researcher who identifies her or himself as a feminist or is published in a feminist journal.

Reinharz looks at feminist work within a variety of methods including experimental, cross-cultural, case studies, ethnography, survey, oral history, multiple methods and action research. She explores the challenges of diversity, inclusivity and subjectivity within each method and outlines ongoing controversies between scientific methods and feminist ideals. For example, in using interviewing as a method of gathering data, ethical decisions relating to researcher self-disclosure are discussed. Should one remain a neutral observer or provide advocacy and/or resources to participants in need? In the area of ethnography, researchers explain how they have come to understand and negotiate gender issues when doing fieldwork. The benefits and limitations of quantitative methods are also considered, as is the issue of how choices in language can narrow responses on surveys.

Students of social science research will find the extensive overview provided by this text to be extremely informative. The multitude of methods examined from the perspective of feminism stimulates one's own thinking about the diverse manners in which research topics can or should be approached. Reinharz's analysis goes far beyond the qualitative versus quantitative debate. Seasoned social scientists will appreciate the feminist analysis and the discussion of ethical and scientific concerns. For each dilemma posed, the reader is provided with a number of alternative viewpoints and options, a frustrating experience but certainly one that pushes you to think. This is the most obvious drawback of the text. Many more problems are raised than solutions. Feminist Methods in Social Research also left this reader with the wish that Reinharz had examined the research methods from the differing viewpoints of social, radical and liberal feminism. That, however, is another book and in no way diminishes the importance of this much needed, well-written, comprehensive overview of feminist research in social science.

—Diane Martell
WOMEN'S STUDIES/FEMINIST INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

Does the thought of receiving information from strangers across the country via your computer make you nervous? If you are one of the people who have not fully mastered communication through the Internet, do not fear. The Internet is an international web of computer networks which includes federal, regional, campus and international networks. It is an amazing resource for sharing knowledge with thousands of people worldwide. As a research project for an Independent Study class, Laura Hunt of the University of Michigan compiled information regarding valuable Women's Studies resources on the Internet today. With fundamental Internet skills, a wealth of information about current women's issues can be yours at the touch of a key. A partial listing of listservs Hunt researched and found useful and instructions on how to access them follows.

THE CLEAR AND SIMPLE WAY TO E-MAIL AT TRINITY

If you can operate a microwave, then you have what it takes to master E-mail. To start an E-mail account, students must make a trip to the Computer Center (MCEC) with a blank disk to copy it onto. The entire process takes about ten minutes, and requires that you choose a password for secure access. The next step is installing the account on the disk into your computer. This is a remarkably easy process that will be explained to you in detail by the Computer Center worker. Once E-mail is installed, the Eudora icon will permanently appear on your hard drive and all you have to do is double click it and you're on your way. If you don't own a computer, all you need is the disk with your account on it and you can use any computer to receive your mail.

Faculty and staff members of Trinity have it even easier. E-mail has automatically been installed on all of your computers. If the Eudora icon does not currently appear on your hard drive, or if you do not already have a password assigned to you, call the Computer Center (x. 2100) and they will set up one for you. E-mail can be used by both PC's and Macintoshes. The Computer Center staff will tell you exactly what you should do to access Eudora. From there, a quick double click on the Eudora icon will allow you to check and send mail.

FEMINIST INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

EDUCOM-W is a moderated list to facilitate discussion of issues in technology and education that are of interest to women.
Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@BITNIC.EDUCOM.ORG

FEMECON-L is a listserv for feminist economists. A source of information and answers to questions on economics with feminist perspectives.
Send subscription requests to: MAILSERV@BUCKNELL.EDU

FEMISA is a list for discussion of feminism, gender, women and international relations, world politics, international political economy and global politics.
Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@CSF.COLORADO.EDU
FIST (Feminism in Science and Technology) is an unmoderated list for discussion of feminism and science and technology. Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@DAWN.HAMPSHIRE.EDU

GEOGFEM is open to the discussion of all topics relating to gender issues in geography. Discussions of theoretical and empirical issues, book reviews, calls for papers, and information on conferences. Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@UKCC.UKY.EDU

H-WOMEN is an international forum for scholars and teachers of women's history. Send subscription requests to: H-WOMEN@UICVM.BITNET

LIS is a list for lesbians in industry, universities, government labs, etc. Send subscription requests to: ZITA@JUNO.PHYSICS.WISC.EDU

SASH (Sociologists Against Sexual Harassment) is a moderated list focusing on sexual harassment. For information or to subscribe, write to: Phoebe M. Stambaugh AZPXS@ASUVM.INRE.ASU.EDU

SSSSTALK is a sexuality discussion list where professional researchers, clinicians, educators and students in the field of sexuality can communicate freely, professionally and efficiently. Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@TAMVM1.TAMU.EDU

STOPRAPE is a sexual assault activist list. Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@BROWNVM.BROWN.EDU

WISENET is a list for women in science, mathematics and engineering. Send subscription requests to: U35049@UICVM.BITNET

WMN-HLTH is a women's health electronic news-line, started by the Center for Women's Health Research. Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@UWAVM.U.WASHINGTON.EDU

WIRE: Women's Information Resource and Exchange is the first International interactive computer network dedicated to women. WIRE provides women with a centralized source of women-oriented information and conversation. WIRE provides access to databases, discussions, alerts, abstracts, resources and experts on health, politics, career, finance, technology, parenting, education, etc. WIRE is located in San Francisco, CA and is available for a monthly fee. For more information contact WIRE at 415/615-8989 or send E-Mail to INFO@WIRE.NET

For information on more feminist oriented Internet services, please contact the Trinity College Women's Center.
HOW TO SUBSCRIBE
To subscribe to a listserv you need to send a subscription request as an E-mail message to the addresses supplied above. A subscription request simply consists of the message below sent as the body of your message. Most of these are done electronically and not by individuals, so do not write more than that message if all you want to do is subscribe.

Subscription request:
SUB <LIST NAME> <YOUR FULL NAME>

Unsubscription request:
UNSUB <LIST NAME> <YOUR NAME>

---Jennifer Guy

The preceding information was researched by Laura Hunt, University of Michigan.
Feminist Research Methods

What is feminist research? Are the specific tasks, techniques and approaches different for feminists operating within sociology, psychology, anthropology, or any of the social sciences? How are these tasks different? Connie Miller searched through the literature to find instances where feminists self-consciously address the issue of differing methodologies. She has gathered her findings in the annotated bibliography Feminist Research Methods where in recognition of the varying interests of others she sorted her findings by discipline.

Each chapter begins with an overview of feminist activity within a particular discipline and then lists annotations to discussions within that field. The sources include books, chapters from books, journal discussions and documents published between 1920 and 1990. Because Miller's findings have shown her that in general feminist researchers tend to be more interdisciplinary in their work she also includes a detailed subject which functions as a cross index to the sources. There is also an author index.

Feminism has changed traditional research. Miller is hopeful when she observes that non-sexist language has become a standard guideline for submission to many journals and that researchers are more cautious about drawing conclusions about everyone from only studying men. She also picks up on some disappointments. Factions of feminists are forming and some factions spend more energy criticizing the methods of other researchers than clearly articulating their own.

While the books and articles on feminism and research are plentiful, most approach the topic inductively by showing instances of feminists in action. It is more difficult to find practitioners reflecting on their feminist approach within a discipline. Can quantitative methods exhibit sensitivity to gender work? Must all studies of social differentiation include gender along with tank, class and kinship? Why do some feminist psychologists pay more attention to social context and status in their analysis that do traditional psychologists? Consideration of these key issues and the like will improve your own research methods. Explore Connie Miller's bibliography.

---Linda McKinney
Wrestling with writing

by Alix Kates Shulman


As a novelist ever on the alert for insights about writing to pass on to my workshop students (and hug to myself), I treasure such books as Annie Dillard's The Writing Life and Italo Calvino's Six Memos for the Next Millennium, both deeply perceptive works about writing. But too often reflections on the writing life are either lessons from on high full of epigrammatic pronouncements, or else horatory pep talks. Nancy Mairs' new book of essays, Voice Lessons, is neither. Not that it lacks its share of useful tips - "What creators do, over and over [is] fail and start again." "If I kept merely wanting to write it appeared pretty likely that I would die. Instead I reached for a pen." But it offers something far more valuable. By continually examining the messy context in which her work developed, a context with feminism at the center, Mairs' book, like Dillard's and Calvino's, is more useful and satisfying than even the best advice.

Mairs unabashedly believes that writing is an "instrument of conversion" and shows how writing - others' and her own - has changed her life. As much about the making of a feminist as the making of a writer, Voice Lessons traces the interaction of these two narrative strands in the intellectual development of one particular writer who is "female, white, well-educated, moderately prosperous, crippled, a Roman Catholic convert, heterosexual." A collection of nine autobiographical essays, the book is actually an intellectual adventure story that recounts Mairs' efforts to integrate the dichotomies: between the academic and "real" worlds, ideas and emotions, writer and reader - and between critical and creative writing, the one that, she says, "proved most vexatious to my work."

An essay collection, Mairs writes in "Essaying the Feminine," "begins, halts, shifts, begins anew," and Voice Lessons is no exception. Yet embedded in it is a fairly unified

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“The myth of male superiority can only be demolished with shining examples of female achievement against which nobody could argue intelligently.”

--Wangari Maathai

Environmentalist, Political Activist