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Original Feminist
Research Methods¹

As some women become culture makers and as we communicate with our own students in a new idiom, we must *create new tools of thinking* and establish new norms for feminist research and action.²

My methodological and material routes often have had to be *ad hoc*.³

This chapter discusses feminist research that claims to use "original" methods. By underscoring originality here, I do not mean to imply that work discussed in other chapters is unoriginal. There probably is very little on earth that is entirely new. "New" ideas typically are not the property of a single individual but are discovered by many people simultaneously.⁴ Social factors, such as the academic culture of competition, inflate the appearance of originality. Inadequate study of the history of feminist scholarship compounds the appearance of originality by hiding our predecessors' work. Sheila Webster's concern about this matter in the field of folklore studies applies generally:

The recent upsurge in writing by and about women should not blind us to the long line of female folklorists who have been at work since the beginnings of the discipline. . . . the blame for lack of recognition of their work lies not with these foremothers but rather with later historians and teachers of the subject.⁵

If we lack feminist mentors it is difficult to know intimately the experience of other feminist researchers and to see how our work is similar to theirs. Being unaware of developments in other disciplines abets ignorance of yet additional forerunners of our "innovations."

In the early 1960s the choice to study females rather than males seemed strikingly original to those who were doing it. From a more informed historical perspective, it would have been clear that feminist researchers had been studying women all along, and that this work had been "invisibilized" in the disciplinary canons.⁶ In the 1980s feminist scholars wrote that "until recently women have played only a minor role as theorists in the social sciences" and that "women have been missing even as research subjects at the formative stages of our psychological theories."⁷ Now that we have reached the 1990s, feminist researchers are less likely to claim that their study is innovative simply by virtue of a focus on women. Hopefully we are still aware of feminist research done in the 1960s,

1970s, and 1980s, but Dale Spender is skeptical about the longevity of this awareness:

While we are prepared to put much energy into reclaiming women from the distant past, our record is not so good when it comes to preserving our more recent heritage. In fact, we have sometimes been careless about the way we have discarded that very heritage. . . . One cannot be a feminist and be unaware of the fate of feminist books. Again and again they have been published over the centuries; and again and again they have been "lost."⁸

Even if we remember that women of the "distant past" and of "our more recent heritage" did study women, we might wrongly consider *other* components of our research projects innovative. While writing *On Becoming a Social Scientist*,⁹ for example, I believed mistakenly that I had invented "experiential analysis,"¹⁰ a research approach that rejects the role of the "unembodied scientist" and adopts the role of human knower complete with feelings and ambivalence. I believed it was original to write in the first person singular and to describe the process, not simply the product, of discovery. At the same time, however, other sociologists such as Susan Krieger were working in the same way:

I spent a year alternately picking up and putting down my interview notes before I learned that, in order to progress, I had to confront the ambivalence of my personal feelings toward the community in which I had lived and done my research. The process of exploring my own experience led me ultimately to see that feelings similar to my own were important in the accounts of the women I had interviewed and enabled me to use those feelings to guide my larger analysis.¹¹

The more I developed my ideas about "experiential analysis," the more I realized that it was actually an "original" idea shared by many working independently. I subsequently learned that women in other disciplines had continuously reinvented this approach. An example from anthropology is Ruth Leah Bunzel (1898–1990) who studied the Zuni Indians of the southwestern United States. Her mentor, Franz Boas, advised studying women's pottery making, but she found they "talked . . . in a nonspecific way about their craft." To further her study,

she became skilled at fashioning the vessels herself, and at one point she could walk about with a pot on her head, and climb a ladder balancing a pot with her hand. *The Pueblo Potter*, the result of her Zuni fieldwork, reflects Bunzel's identification with the thoughts of the women as they performed their craft.¹²

Thus my use of the term "original" does not signify a method never considered or used prior to the instance discussed here. Rather, it reflects the researcher's effort to create a new approach that met her feminist criteria.

Forms of Feminist Research Originality

Feminist research has been innovative in its choice to study particular *groups* of women formerly ignored by social science (e.g., upper-class women,¹³ farm

women,¹⁴ Japanese-American domestics),¹⁵ particular *behaviors* (e.g., feeding one's family,¹⁶ adult adoption of orthodox religion,¹⁷ improving one's community¹⁸), and new *forms of data* (e.g., "women's subjective social experience" or "subjective self").

Sociologist Meredith Gould noted that "a feminist perspective is . . . distinguished from other developments in critical sociology in that the definition of 'data' has . . . been subject to scrutiny," requiring a reassessment of "the distinction between theory and method, as well as what is meant by 'data' to begin with."¹⁹ The search for data from everyday life has led some feminists to seek ways of studying conversation such as U.S. psychologist Nancy Henley's work on mundane activities such as interrupting. Her unobtrusively taped conversations of same-sex and mixed-sex pairs revealed that "96% of the interruptions and 100% of the overlaps in conversation were made by male speakers."²⁰ Bettina Aptheker also discusses the search for a methodology based on everyday life:

[The] dailiness of women's lives structures a different way of knowing and a different way of thinking. The process that comes from this way of knowing has to be at the center of a women's politics, and it has to be at the center of a women's scholarship. . . . The point is to integrate ideas about love and healing, about balance and connection, about beauty and growing, into our everyday ways of being. We have to believe in the value of our own experiences and in the value of our ways of knowing, our ways of doing things. We have to wrap ourselves in these ways of knowing, to enact daily ceremonies of life.²¹

"New forms of data" also means texts of women and girls who were "not important figures," and physical objects that reveal the social construction of gender. Thus, feminist sociologists have examined such cultural objects as Girl Scout manuals to study gender socialization,²² and children's art work to study gender ideology.²³ Meredith Gould considers locating innovative data essential: "Doing sociology as a feminist requires recognizing the gendered construction of social reality. . . . virtually all data are transformed by attending to the social construction of sex."²⁴

The desire to recover the lives of people who left few public records (e.g., poor immigrant women) has led to the use of short stories and excerpts from novels for social research purposes.²⁵ Elizabeth Hampsten, a professor of English at the University of North Dakota, explains the significance of "private writing" (e.g., "letters to friends and relations, jottings in a copybook") for understanding a particular class of women that has systematically been ignored. She describes her persistent search for overlooked material concerning women in the U.S. Great Plains in the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century:

My reading falls in the fifty-year period from 1860 to 1910, most examples dating from 1880-1900. Although these years coincide with major settlement of the Northern Plains, I have not particularly sought out descriptions of that experience; in fact many writings reflect quite other ways of living.²⁶

Elizabeth Hampsten's "experienced originality" consisted of doing what she calls "the reverse," i.e., using private material to illustrate something "not important."²⁷

Other forms of new data were discussed in the chapter on content analysis,

reflecting feminists' long tradition of text analysis.²⁸ In the current period, the sexism imbedded in medical textbooks,²⁹ cookbooks,³⁰ pornography,³¹ and advertising has been studied extensively. Feminists have also examined the gendered nature of scientific texts. My own work in this area includes the study of metaphors, examples, and other "trivia" in sociological writing. Such research transforms "trivia" into "data" that reveal the actual "sociology" of the authors.³²

Feminist research has also been original in its choice of *samples* of women to study. For example Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule's research on women's intellectual development drew on clients of family agencies (which they call "the invisible college") as well as women enrolled in formal academic settings.³³ In addition, feminist research can be innovative in the way the *report itself is written*. Two examples are the work of Kathleen MacPherson, a professor of nursing who studied herself studying her menopause collective,³⁴ and sociologist Susan Krieger, who strove to write a perspective-free book about a lesbian community. Several authors are original in the way they incorporate the research team into the project. An example is Margaret Gordon, Stephanie Riger, and Andrew Gordon's inclusion of their typists' reactions to the data as part of the research findings.³⁵ Some feminist writing and research are original in attributing *authorship* to a whole group, such as the Boston Women's Health Book Collective,³⁶ the Nebraska Sociological Feminist Collective,³⁷ the Combahee River Collective,³⁸ the Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective,³⁹ and the Hunter College Women's Studies Collective.⁴⁰ *Hull-House Maps and Papers*, authored by "The Residents of Hull-House," is a notable forerunner.⁴¹

Much feminist research is original in *reaching beyond a single discipline*⁴² and integrating material not usually discussed in academic writing. An example is Stephanie Demetrakopoulos' study of female wisdom.

[My] methodology . . . reflects my life and my studies. . . . Due to multiple marriages and many children and stepchildren, I have been all my life steeped in different family situations and questioned the meaning of family for myself and other women. I have also been steeped in literature, art, psychology, philosophy and theology and I bring these disparate disciplines to bear throughout this book. . . . This book, then, is interdisciplinary. I hope the richness I've tried to bring to it can give women insight into what it means to exist within the body of woman.⁴³

Many feminist researchers and writers have *invented words* such as herstory,⁴⁴ mythography, gynopia,⁴⁵ phallism and phallist,⁴⁶ motherwork,⁴⁷ ltmtdt,⁴⁸ animal queendom,⁴⁹ gynagogy,⁵⁰ foresisters, womyn, wimmin,⁵¹ maialogical,⁵² and Ms.⁵³ Robin Morgan explains that instead of "demography," she labeled a section of her *Statistical Prefaces in Sisterhood Is Global* as "'Gynography,' [her] term for sexual-politics topics . . . and [she labels] the last two sections . . . 'Herstory' and 'Mythography.'"⁵⁴ Harriet Martineau developed the shocking analogy between women and slaves,⁵⁵ and Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote of woman as horse and cow.⁵⁶ Some feminists have used new *metaphors* (e.g., organism rather than mechanism)⁵⁷ for the entire research process. Canadian social psychologist Elaine Melamed redefined research itself as "recreation" or "play." She wrote

about research as a process rather than a product, about research as experience rather than work, and about research as lived rather than as done:

Once having clarified the relationship between learning and research, I needed to conduct research in the same way that I learned. If playful learning was something I valued, then this should also be incorporated into the dissertation process. The idea of choosing one method, like adopting one style of learning, was becoming unthinkable; remaining open to experience was one of the keys to playful learning. . . . I was looking for an approach, not a method, which would enable me to develop a rigorous yet playful style. To be true to the open metaphor, it was necessary to let the phenomena lead me, and to remain open to the experience of coming to know. This is not always easy, especially in the world of academe, where we are advised to play the game according to traditional rules.⁵⁸

Some feminists have been innovative by *altering capitalization, grammar, or phrases*. Examples are bell hooks' conversion of the object—"the feminist movement"—into the process—"feminist movement"—and Stephanie Demetropoulos' verb "to sacralize." She explains that she could "use 'to make sacred' instead, but I simply need the verb without the noun because I think the verbal expression of women's spirituality is in a state of process, of beginnings, at this time."⁵⁹ Mary Daly has gone the farthest of all in this regard. In *Gyn/Ecology* she invented an entire vocabulary linking the discovery of new forms of data with new ways of naming.⁶⁰ She also recovered or rescued older words such as "witch" and "crone." In *Beyond God the Father* she makes the argument that Method is a tyrannical "false god" and that "the tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries":

it prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illuminated by ideas that do not fit into preestablished boxes and forms. The worshippers of Method have an effective way of handling data that does not fit into the Respectable Categories of Questions and Answers. They simply classify it as nondata, thereby rendering it invisible. It should be noted that the god Method is in fact a subordinate deity, serving Higher Powers. These are social and cultural institutions whose survival depends upon the classification of disruptive and disturbing information as nondata. Under patriarchy, Method has wiped out women's questions so totally that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experiences. Women have been unable even to experience our own experience. This book is an effort to begin asking nonquestions and to start discovering, reporting, and analyzing nondata. It is therefore an exercise in Methodicide, a form of deicide.

Methodicide goes hand in hand with the "liberation of language." It requires seizing the power to *name* and to wrench words from their semantic fields. She writes that new words emerge when women really listen to ourselves and each other supportively. All words we hear will not be "new." Rather they will be renewed by a "semantic context that arises from qualitatively new experience."⁶¹

Mary Daly's point is reminiscent of what Lynn Davidman and I discovered while working on this book. Even when feminist researchers rely on traditional methods of data collection, the very asking of feminist questions and the attempt

to create new knowledge in which women's experience is central can create subtle shifts. Similarly, when Mary Daly uses old words in new contexts, she shifts their meaning. These forms of originality suggest that feminism invites researchers to see, write, act, know, and speak in many new ways.

The Creation of New Methods

The rest of this chapter focuses on feminist researchers who create new qualitative or quantitative methods (or use old methods in new ways) because the knowledge they seek *requires* it. Dutch researchers Rosasharn van der Burg and Nelleke Schoemaker provide an example of quantitative research concerning work:

The concept of labor chances (LC) must be studied: it is a complex variable and similar to the socio-economical status (SES). Once its components are known, empirical enquiries can be made in order to measure relative labor chances . . . for different groups. We will refer to the labor chances of a group as a variable of the labor chances score (LCS). Research reveals that much material is available on the background setback of women in the labor market. However, no method is known to us for the purpose of measuring LCS. This omission inspired us to construct the LCS-measuring methods as described below.⁶²

Feminist psychologist Sandra Lipsitz Bem created a new scale to measure what she had experienced as true, that people can be both masculine and feminine, i.e., androgynous. Called the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, this paper-and-pencil instrument distinguishes among masculine, feminine, and androgynous individuals but treats masculinity and femininity as two orthogonal (rather than continuous) dimensions, and presents both as positive rather than the conventional format of masculinity as positive and femininity as its absence.⁶³

U.S. sociologist Kathleen Barry needed multiple innovations in her qualitative study of "female sexual slavery" because research literature was nonexistent and traditional methods were not feasible:

One cannot, for example, find a sample population of sexual slaves, survey them, and then generalize from the results. Nor is participant observation a possibility. And interviewing those held in slavery is impossible. I began to look for the women who have escaped. My approach was to find any evidence of sexual slavery wherever I could, and try to fill out fragmentary facts from interviewing people with a particular case. . . . As I received information about each case of sexual slavery, I would confirm the story by contacting people close to the case—lawyers, reporters, police, district attorneys, anti-slavery organizations, and the victims themselves whenever possible.

Her next challenge was to find ways of interviewing those women she had located:

Interviewing these women [who had either escaped or left prostitution] presented a special problem as their life experiences had taught them that few if any people are willing to believe their victimization. Indeed, society has been unwilling to even name it as a form of victimization. As a result I conducted long open-ended interviews which provided an opportunity to sort out possible contradictions or

exaggerations. . . . As a further check, I used here only portions of the interviews when I could be satisfied with their report or that I could verify against other evidence.

Her third challenge was to understand the relation between the individual story and the larger social system:

After days of tracking down people, getting interviews, observing trials, and filling out the details of a particular case, I would consistently find that the extreme incident that I was studying was in fact part of a pervasive practice usually existing clandestinely over many years. Not only did my investigations confirm a particular incident, but that incident in turn revealed larger practices. . . . As a result . . . I came in contact with several organizations whose titles alone suggest the seriousness of the problem. . . . My discovery of these organizations and activities was further evidence of the broad scale of the practice.

Her final challenge was to understand, as Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman had tried for incest, societal reaction to the abomination of enslaving women for prostitution:

Once I was convinced of the pervasiveness of the problem, the immediate question facing me was why and how female sexual slavery has remained invisible. . . . For example, most research on prostitution looks at female motivation rather than the objective conditions which bring many women into prostitution, shifting the causal assumptions from those who traffic in women to the psychological states of the women themselves. . . . [T]o sociologists they are deviants, to psychologists they are sadomasochists. Their life and experiences are construed as normal for them while they are supposedly different from the rest of us.

It is in this kind of contradiction that feminists have learned to look for larger truths about female experience. It is in female sexual slavery that I have found conditions which affect all women. Because of these problems it was necessary for me to develop a perspective for analyzing both the documentation of female sexual slavery and the attitudes that define it as normal, which would reveal self-interest on the part of those who label it. . . . As I studied the attitudes that accept female enslavement, I realized that a powerful ideology stems from it and permeates the social order. I have named that ideology cultural sadism.⁶⁴

Consciousness-Raising

Feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon argued that consciousness-raising is the unique feminist method⁶⁵ because it embodies principles such as enabling women to discuss and understand their experiences from their own viewpoints. Like other feminist "innovations," consciousness-raising has its roots in women's history. In the United States women formed study clubs in the post-Civil War era so that middle-aged, middle-class women could "enlarge their mental horizons." Originally devoted to educational goals, the clubs turned "from the realm of abstract thought to the arena of practical action."⁶⁶ Some women mentioned in earlier chapters, such as Ida B. Wells, led study clubs and used them to develop group solidarity and political activism.

Consciousness-raising now refers to meetings by small groups of women over

an extended period of time for the purpose of discussing personal experiences without professional leadership. In these meetings, women attempt to articulate a political analysis that will facilitate change.⁶⁷ Feminists typically do not define consciousness-raising as a research method but rather as a political, therapeutic, or educational activity. Its product is usually not a publication but a new way of thinking, relating, naming, or acting.⁶⁸ Thus, although Catharine MacKinnon considers consciousness-raising the unique feminist method, I found no examples of its research use other than a few cases that deviate from its typical meaning.

Such an example is psychologist Mary Gergen who chose a consciousness-raising model because she had "specifically . . . feminist criteria in mind." She invited seven female friends, aged 41–48, to participate in "a discussion group about the lives of women between 40–60":

My goal was to present to a group of peers the notion that menopause marked a new era in a woman's life, when she could become freer, more self-actualized and satisfied with life than in preceding years. I expressed to them the view that the medical model of menopause (that middle-age was a time of loss and decline) was not the most advantageous social construction for us. I joined the group as a member, and invited the other group members to share in the development of the research and its outcomes.

Mary Gergen added conventional data collection techniques such as pre- and post-session questionnaires, measures of opinions about menopause and self-image, and a semantic differential rating test of 20 paired adjectives. The group held additional meetings and at one of these they tape-recorded a 1½-hour discussion:

As the discussion facilitator, I introduced topics at various times. The first hour was devoted to the exploration of beliefs and feelings about the traditional meaning of menopause. In the last half hour, I introduced the notion of a new social construction of menopause. . . . The participants dealt with this issue during the last portion of the session.⁶⁹

While violating the idea of leaderlessness, and having an imposed theme, Mary Gergen's group did consist of friends who discussed an issue that affected their lives and could be reinterpreted in broader terms. Her "original" research format overlaps with consciousness-raising in some ways, not others. Ann Bristow and Jody Esper also attempted to use consciousness-raising as a model for their rape research. Their format consisted of continuous dialogues between researchers and participants, among researchers, and between researchers and society.⁷⁰

Creating Group Diaries

U.S. psychologist Terry Kramer argued that diaries combined with consciousness-raising is a feminist research method that uncovers the dynamics of women's lives.

Numerous studies have utilized the small group and consciousness-raising group . . . for information gathering, yet few have utilized the methodology as a complement to diary research. The individual . . . benefits from . . . interaction

with others who are also involved in diary writing. . . . By sharing information, defining common problems, and arriving at solutions, the woman is able to verify her own feelings and experiences. . . . [D]iary research can provide psychology with new knowledge of what it means to be a woman. . . . As a feminist methodology, diary research will . . . enable women to define themselves on an individual and collective basis. The interaction of these two objectives can only lead to future social changes in the way women are perceived and the way in which they perceive themselves.⁷¹

I located two instances of what might be called a group diary, or might be labelled "write-in" to parallel "speak-out." This "group diary" was carried out by female graduate students in a department of sociology. A computer-based anonymous group diary allowed them to express themselves without fear of reprisal, while also providing a forum for the women to communicate with each other and organize for change. The text was open only to the diary contributors but others were aware of its existence. The document they produced begins with this question:

Who is writing this?: The Graduate Women's Forum agreed last fall to develop a document which described incidents of sexism within the department. Women participating in its writing include virtually all the graduate women currently doing course work.

Working anonymously and individually, women began the report by entering on the computer our descriptions and comments about being women students in the department. In some cases, a woman would write about the experience of another woman who found it impossible to write of it herself; sometimes passages were written together by two women. The process of writing, reading, responding, and rewriting was simultaneously an individual and a collective task, both a spontaneous and a reflective effort. The report grew quickly away from its original, circumscribed goal of citing individual sexist incidents. It became a collaborative work generated by the unexpressed breadth of our experience and analysis of sexism in the department, and by the unexpected synergy of writing with each other.⁷²

The women viewed the computer-based group diary as a strategy for furthering a feminist agenda within the department. They undertook this writing project to challenge the dominant epistemology, research methods, and politics within sociology.

A related research method is a feminist group interview. Unlike a diary, the group interview has a leader, includes face-to-face interaction, and is time-limited. Although not derived from the methodology of focus groups—an established method in market research and a new method for sociological research⁷³—feminist group interviews are similar to them in several ways. Focus groups are small groups (usually under 12 people) established by researchers for a one-time discussion of a topic. The researcher leads the discussion by asking a few questions and listens to the way the participants discuss the topic. The discussion is tape-recorded and the transcript is then analyzed.

Sociologists use focus groups to ascertain public opinion about foreign policy and other contemporary issues. Focus groups are generally not composed of "ex-

perts" on these issues but rather attempt to tap the opinions of the general public. Using a group interview, U.S. psychologist Joan Callahan studied attitudes concerning mobility among working class women who had become psychologists. Her nine-person group interview was similar to a focus group in that the women came together for a one-time discussion of the issues. However, the women were "experts" in the sense that they themselves were working class women who had become psychologists. Her choice of a group interview format stemmed from Ann Oakley's ideas⁷⁴ about interviewing women and from her

belief that the women's participation and the flow of ideas and information would be enhanced by being able to listen to each other's experience and to interact with each other. . . . a group interview format facilitates women building on each other's ideas and augments the identification of patterns through their shared experience. Because of [her] own intimate involvement with these issues, [she] co-lead the group interview with a colleague of [hers], Nancy Keyes, who does not come from the working class.⁷⁵

In Germany, Frigga Haug developed a method she calls memory-work in which a group of women wrote stories about memories of different aspects of their bodies. They read these stories to each other, discussed them, and wrote analyses that drew on social theory. At the same time, they compared each other's experiences and developed complex ideas about how girls are socialized to be sexual beings alienated from their bodies.⁷⁶

Drama

British feminist Vivienne Griffiths devised original methods to study "how girls make sense of their experience of adolescence and what the distinctive features of this experience might be." Her interest was substantive and methodological, wanting to see

how drama can be used in feminist research. . . . What started off as a seemingly straightforward enterprise raised many questions about the nature of feminist research, whether there can or should be a feminist methodology, and what might constitute a feminist approach to research, whatever methods are used. This made me reassess how important the perspective I brought to the drama was in making it feminist.

The subject matter was "how the girls' attitude to their gender affected their present actions, including their patterns of resistance to authority and their future aspirations." The method was dramatic role-play:

My research project was carried out in two mixed-sex comprehensive schools in the North of England, where I worked with . . . 51 girls aged 13–14 from different class and ethnic backgrounds (6 West Indian, 11 Asian, 34 white/Anglo-Saxon/Christian?). . . . With each group of girls, I worked in 1½ hour sessions over several weeks, taking a particular theme each week such as parent–daughter relationships, what they liked or disliked about being a girl, and their plans or hopes for the future. Many other topics were raised and developed by the girls themselves, and these I considered equally important. The way I used drama in

each session usually followed these stages: (1) a short introductory scene enacted by myself; (2) a group discussion of the scene and the issues raised by it, leading to a consideration of the general theme; (3) improvisations by the girls, working in small groups, around the areas raised in the discussion; (4) looking at some of the scenes and further discussion. For future reference, I tape-recorded my own scene, the discussion and the girls' final improvisations, and made notes of the small group work. I also made general notes about how each session went afterwards. I tried to make the introductory scenes as open-ended as possible, and at all stages to follow-up and include ideas raised by the girls. Discussions were an integral part of the process. Working in this way, I was always an active participant myself.⁷⁷

Her article analyzes four reasons for considering drama to be a qualitative feminist method: it requires collaboration (collective story-building), it enables people to find their voice (drama is both a verbal and a nonverbal medium), it is concrete (rather than abstract), and it is context-dependent. But also, because she is a feminist.

Another example is the work of Honor Ford Smith, a Jamaican woman who helped form a drama collective with black, primarily working-class women.⁷⁸ The plays performed by the group, named *Sistren*, were based on stories the women told about their lives. A resulting book, *Lionheart Gal*, was originally intended to describe the work of the theater group but ended up documenting the process by which the stories were written, and presenting the stories themselves.

The stories here are told by the women of the *Sistren Theatre Collective* which was founded in 1977. The working-class women who make up most of the group were all drawn from the emergency employment programme . . . a special "make work" project of the democratic socialist government of 1972-1980 led by Michael Manley. Approximately 14,000 people were employed by the government to give temporary relief to the problems of unemployment. Of these about 10,000 were women. Although the work was low paid and temporary—a common feature of women's work—the fact remains that working together to earn a wage offered a space within which the women could begin to organize around their own concerns. This situation offered the women a chance to recognise that they wanted to explore their situation as women further and that they wanted to do it in a way which they would enjoy.

In 1977 I [i.e., Honor Ford Smith] was invited to direct a play for a Workers' Week concert. Thirteen women from the special employment programme came to our first meeting. I asked them what they wanted to do a play about. They said, "We want to do plays about how we suffer as women. We want to do plays about how men treat us bad." "How do you suffer as women?" I asked, and we began the long process of exchange of women's lived experience which has always characterised our work.

Sistren began, thirteen Black women and one Jamaica-white woman (apparently white woman with a partially Black ancestry), to create artifacts on women's lives or, as we put it then, "analyse and comment on the role of women in Jamaica society through theatre, to organise ourselves into a self-reliant co-operative enterprise, and to take drama to working-class communities." Since then, *Sistren* has become an organisation which administers a professional theatre group, a popular education project using drama as its main tool, a research project, a

screen-printing project and a quarterly magazine. What we did not realise when we started was that we were drawing on a legacy of feminism in the Caribbean to begin our work as a collective.

The process for producing the book was the same as producing theater, i.e., the group "took in testimony and shaped it into a final product." They also used drawings, group interviews, and group discussions:

"Ava's Diary," for example, began from a detailed statement she had written about her experience of domestic violence to give to the police. . . . The fact that we have worked together for many years and are ourselves an organisation meant that the interviews could go quite deep. We could often help each other to recall incidents and to sort out details, to pick out falsifications and to encourage openness. . . . After the final draft of each piece was finished each person was given hers to read. Then, in a long meeting together, we decided on the final modifications. The first draft of the whole thing was presented to the collective and read over. In long meetings we decided on the title of the collection from those proposed, how the authorship credits would go and how money from the book would be used in the collective. In addition, we decided to maintain anonymity so far as the identity of each person was concerned to protect her family and the individuals in the stories.⁷⁹

Another feminist experiment blurring boundaries between social science and drama is the work of sociologist Marianne (Tracy) Paget. After publishing an analysis of a doctor-patient conversation in which the (male) doctor did not relate to the (female) patient's cancer,⁸⁰ she decided her article would be even more effective if viewed as theater. Tracy Paget then arranged to have the article performed.⁸¹ In the performance, the roles of author, doctor, patient, cancer, and "concepts" became clarified. In a series of ironic, tragic events, Tracy Paget learned at that very time that she, herself, had developed cancer of the same sort as the patient in the article and play, and that her life was threatened by the same acts of miscommunication. Shortly before her death she completed the manuscript aptly titled "Life Mirrors Work Mirrors Text Mirrors Life" blurring the boundaries between life, social science, theater, and now, sadly, death.

Strangely too, had I not thought so long about the cancer experience of the patient I examined in "On the Work of Talk," had I not watched the staging of a play in which the terror of cancer was so exquisitely expressed in the whispering of the cast, I would not have been able to describe my own circumstances so plainly. . . . Now I write about my life and my work, and my work and my life, and my writing distracts me from the immediacy of my death. My work still excites me. There is so much more to do and say.⁸²

The woman Tracy Paget studied might have said the same. Vivienne Griffiths, Honor Ford Smith, and Tracy Paget clearly used the power inherent in drama to transform players and audience.

Genealogy and Network Tracing

Several feminist researchers developed genealogy⁸³ to trace women's relationships. Liz Stanley writes that she created this method to understand two puzzles

about the African feminist, Olive Schreiner—why she was famous during her lifetime and forgotten shortly thereafter, and why she was considered to be a very sociable woman but was described after her death as unable to sustain relationships. The key is a damaging biography written by Olive Schreiner's husband, Samuel Cronwright Schreiner. To create a fresh understanding, Liz Stanley collected information about Olive Schreiner's friendships with women and constructed diagrams illustrating the friendship webs. These grids display the kinds of networks in which Olive Schreiner was embedded and help explain the type of person she was. They also show how her husband's biography was distorted and served, unwittingly or not, to diminish his wife's later literary standing. Liz Stanley's extraordinarily detailed friendship diagrams shatter the inaccurate image of Olive Schreiner and unveil her previously hidden relationships with women.⁸⁴

Philosopher Janice Raymond uses the term "Genealogy" for the women's history method she developed in *A Passion for Friends*:

In charting a genealogy of female friendship, it is necessary to trace the lines of contact between various groups of female friends to show that we have a common ancestry. One way to do this is to seek resemblance in diversity. A genealogical method, while demonstrating the differences between and among those who are related, establishes lines of likeness between and among groups of women in different periods of history and in disparate cultures who are apparently dissimilar. . . . [T]he intent of a genealogical tracing . . . challenges a cultural or historical relativism whose effect is to divide women from their Selves and each other. . . . An important tool of genealogy in this book is looking into the background of hetero-theory, hetero-explanations of woman-identified phenomena, and the "disciplines" of hetero-relations. . . . Looking into the background of hetero-explanations and the disciplines of hetero-relations creates a counter-memory. Counter-memory is able to glimpse that which arises in opposition to the prevailing memories of a subject or event.

She explains that doing feminist history in this genealogical way uncovers phenomena that otherwise would have been hidden:

For example, the history, biology, and psychology of hetero-relations tell us that woman has always been "naturally" attracted to man. If this is true, counter-memory questions why hetero-relations for women have to be enforced by the myriad prohibitions against Gyn-affection, ranging from the brutalities of clitoridectomy, woman-battering, and sexual slavery to so-called soft-core pornography, which keep women "in line" with one man in particular or with men in general. . . . My method of genealogy is not concerned with defining relations of causation, the exact positioning of each clue or fragment vis-a-vis another, overall laws of symmetry between different groups of female friends, or even key periodization points. What I want to establish is a way of tracing genealogy rather than an exhaustive account of the genealogy of female friendship.

Thus, it is not only the specific topic—female friendship—but the new method—genealogy—that she is eager to share.⁸⁵

The "genealogical" approach to the history of women and female friendships is difficult to execute but worth the effort. It inspired my attempt to create a new reading of Manya Wilbushewitz Shohat, about whom I had previously conducted

biographical research.⁸⁶ In this new version I periodize her life into segments characterized by the most significant female friendship she had at the time.⁸⁷ What emerged for me was a new way of understanding her development and the role women played in each other's achievements.⁸⁸ Clearly, other researchers can adopt feminists' innovations to deal with specific problems in their own research. In other words, original feminist methods are transferable.

The Nonauthoritative Research Voice or Multiple-Person Stream-of-Consciousness Narrative

In the appendix to *The Mirror Dance*,⁸⁹ Susan Krieger explains how fiction can become a model of social science, even though it deviates from standard social science practice. Feminist foremothers who used fiction to communicate sociology are Harriet Martineau,⁹⁰ Charlotte Perkins Gilman⁹¹ (who also wrote science fiction),⁹² Mari Sandoz,⁹³ and Zora Neale Hurston,⁹⁴ among others, although their definition of fiction was literal and Susan Krieger's seems to be more figurative. Her definition refers to the methodological innovation of writing in a way that belies a perspective,

an approach in which the details or evidence . . . would tell my story for me, . . . by "showing" rather than "telling". . . . I decided on a form I later came to call a multiple person stream of consciousness narrative. . . . In constructing this composite story, I considered myself to be very much a social scientist in that I was committed to developing an explanation and to being systematic in moving from my data to my interpretation. I deliberately devised and followed rules for doing this. . . . I would allow myself no analytic or theoretical commentary in the body of my text. My evidence, faithfully interpreted, would have to do this work for me. My second rule . . . was that my account should not be partial to any one person or point of view. . . . Rather it would have a primary commitment to making plain a pattern of detail in which everything was important. . . .

My account was written so . . . that the reader could then draw her or his own interpretive conclusions. . . . While I did not explicitly tell my readers what to think, I did implicitly assert my own explanation as one possible alternative by structuring the situation I described at its most basic level: deciding what to admit as evidence, setting up linkages, manipulating detail, piecing together the story . . . as it seemed to me to make sense, or to be explicable.⁹⁵

Susan Krieger wanted the radical removal of her authority as author to shock her reader into recognizing the passivity-inducing style of conventional social science writing.

The Mirror Dance is clearly an experiment, both in women's language and in social science method. It is composed of an interplay of voices that echo, again and again, themes of self and community, sameness and difference, merger and separation, loss and change. Speaking in the colloquial style of the [lesbian] community, these voices provide their own narration. . . . The reader may find that, at times, the voices of these women merge with one another and become indistinguishable; individuals with different names speak as if they were one, reflecting

the extent to which the community is a community of likeness. At other times, the same persons stand out from others as separate and different, and are therefore more easily identifiable. In this way, the text illustrates its own thesis: that clarity about identity occurs through push-and-pull processes as individuals join and draw back; respond to loss and confusion; feel, on the one hand, dependence on community, and on the other, apartness from it.⁹⁶

Deliberately working toward a perspective-free voice, she forces readers to recognize that what is conventionally called an objective social science stance is actually a particular view from a particular standpoint. Her intention was "to show more of what is 'really' going on," rather than to present an analysis limited by whatever theoretical model is in vogue at the time. She created a method that stayed close to the data and silenced her distinct voice: "I added very little of my own wording to my text beyond crediting paraphrased passages to different speakers and identifying when speakers changed. I . . . became almost absent as a narrator." This book takes a radical approach to the feminist ideal of letting women speak for themselves. "It consist[s] solely of the voices of the community with minimal transition between them and no generally integrative narrative voice." She also deliberately avoided the modifications that make for a smooth style, wanting her book to convey the disjointed feel of multiple voices and a contradictory social setting.⁹⁷

At one point I tried to imitate Susan Krieger's method while writing *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. But, as Susan Krieger acknowledges for her book, prepublication readers considered the format cumbersome and confusing. I then reverted to transitions, analysis, and integration, introducing a perspective of my own. I would be disappointed if that decision, however, encouraged readers to rely on my interpretation. I prefer that people read the excerpts and develop their own analysis. Susan Krieger's daring, jarring, approach continues to appeal to me although I did not implement it here.

Other feminist scholars such as Jane Marcus have also experimented with this method. Using the label "direct subjectivity" to describe one end of the "curve of discourse," she believes that the more subjective the voice (i.e., the less mediated by an interpreter), the greater the potential that the material will dissolve differences between the reader and the speaker. When the differences between women are dissolved, they are better able to challenge the dominant ideology. In her words: "The ideology of patriarchy is most effectively undercut for the woman reader by the most unmediated of the voices of female experience." Jane Marcus considers the unmediated voice of women, particularly women mental patients, to be "the testimony of the victim." Such testimony is

the most violent displacer of claims to order and civilization. The less the victim speaks, the less the value of her text for subversion of an oppressive social regime. Our curve of discourse on female [madness] begins in the most subjective mode, autobiography, and moves on to fiction (or poetry); the case study, which retains strong traces of the woman's voice, is next, followed by the historical narrative of women and institutions and the literary-critical analysis of text [about madness]. The clinical psychoanalytical study is the most distancing of all, claim-

ing the most "objectivity." Crucial to these distinctions is the authority of the narrator of each story, from victim to expert.⁹⁸

Susan Krieger and Jane Marcus did feminist experiments with direct subjectivity and dissolving the role of the author. In their view the more "objective" the author, the more distorted the product. This innovation sets most mainstream definitions of social research on their heads.

Conversation

"Conversation" or "dialogue" is another feminist methodological invention that experiments with the nonauthorial voice by using multiple voices: An introduction to an article in two voices explains that the authors, art historians Arlene Raven and Ruth Iskin, used this format to convey open-endedness. They wrote in conversation form

to define this new [lesbian] sensibility, search out its historical roots, and develop a theoretical understanding of its meaning and impact. The conversation is meant not as any conclusive analysis or statement but rather as a starting point in opening up insight, in developing perspective on the significance of lesbian sensibility as a metaphor for all our lives.⁹⁹

Michal M. McCall and Judith Wittner utilized a modified "conversation" format to convey a nonauthorial voice in oral history. Their unusual article consists of components labeled Headlines, News, and Imaginary Dialogues: "From time to time we will interrupt the news with human interest stories from our own life history research."¹⁰⁰ In their article, no train of thought is presented in its entirety or given its complete context. Instead the authors construct a collage of "thinking fragments" that form a kaleidoscopic whole that feminist political theorist and psychoanalyst Jane Flax¹⁰¹ describes as characteristic of the postmodern world. They begin an argument and then interrupt it, as people do in conversation.

Similarly, sociologist Rhoda Linton needed to invent a format to convey the originality of an experience she underwent. The result was a type of "conversation in print":

On November 15th and 16th, 1981, 3500 women gathered in Washington, D.C., to express their fear, their rage, their sorrow, and their hope to the warlords of the Pentagon. In a two-day ritual, intricately woven into a symbolic whole, these women poured themselves into their message. . . . What [she] experienced . . . was an event so powerfully different in its approach to mass political action that she found herself seized by its inventiveness, compelled to try to conceptualize and articulate precisely what it was that made this demonstration "so different" in its approach and its impact on her.

On a rainy day in late March 1982, Rhoda [Linton] sat with Michele Whitham to relate her experiences of the Women's Pentagon Action and to undertake an analysis of its unique "demonstration-ology." Rhoda chose Michele as her collaborator in this effort because of their eight year friendship, their mutual commitment to social justice and the women's movement, and Michele's professional

experience as a Freirian educator and writer on the subject of women's empowerment. What follows, then, is a conversation between two women, friends, sisters, comrades. It is an interaction—not a formal interview—organized around one woman's account and interpretation of the events of the Women's Pentagon Action, another's spontaneous response and analysis.¹⁰²

The article then proceeds with the two women trying to do a "demonstration-ology" using a conversation format.

Philosopher Jane Martin invents a conversation to present ideas concerning the education of women. The six speakers are Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, Catharine Beecher, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and herself, all of whom lived at different times:

We need to listen to what Wollstonecraft had to say to Rousseau, and what he had to say to Plato, and what Plato might have said to Wollstonecraft so that we do not repeat their mistakes. We need to know how Beecher's views, for all their divergence from Wollstonecraft's, contribute to the development of the latter's position, as well as how Gilman's views illuminate both Plato's and Rousseau's, and how Rousseau's views, in turn, constitute a check on hers. . . . I use the image of a conversation over time and space rather than that of a debate. The term debate suggests that a single question is being argued and there are two clear-cut positions. . . . A good conversation is neither a fight nor a contest. Circular in form, cooperative in manner, and constructive in intent, it is an interchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings come together to talk and listen and learn from one another. . . . This is the phenomenon I have tried to capture.¹⁰³

Jane Martin's intention is similar to artist Judy Chicago's "dinner party" in which historical figures sat and talked with each other and with those who came to look. In this vein, Mary Jo Deegan supplanted the oppositional "comments" and "re-joinders" format typical of professional journals with a "conversation" department.¹⁰⁴

Finally, Kim Chernin and Renate Stendhal's book about female friendship and theory is a conversation that consists not of "she said," then "she said," but rather of "letter writing, storytelling, surprise visits, journal entries—even . . . everyday activities like flirting in cafes and changing shoes." In the foreword Shana Penn writes:

The book's experimental form is provocative and puzzling, like a lover. . . . Chernin and Stendhal have invented a contemporary feminist dialogue recreating Plato's classic discourse between Socrates and Phaedrus on eros and beauty. In *Sex and Other Sacred Games*, too, characters talk and cruise one another. It is impossible to read about this cleverly crafted courtship without also being lured into its erotic labyrinth—and thus entangled and sometimes lost. One is always lost when traversing new territory; being lost is where the new story begins.¹⁰⁵

Many feminist scholars experiment with conversation as a means of gathering and displaying data and ideas.¹⁰⁶ The conversation format nicely illustrates how knowledge is socially constructed, tentative, and emergent. A conversation is different from an interview with its division of labor between the party who asks

questions, and the other who answers. Reading conversations makes me very sensitive to the way single-authored writing [and published interviews] smooth out controversy and silence voices. Conversations are harder to read because the reader has to take part, and work out the differences; in single-voiced writing, readers can simply sit back and "listen" to the voice of authority.

Using Intuition or Writing Associatively

In the preface of *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin describes the methods she used and why these methods made her study "unconventional":

I found that I could best discover my insights about the logic of civilized man by going underneath logic, that is by writing associatively, and thus enlisting my intuition, or uncivilized self. Thus my prose in this book is like poetry, and like poetry always begins with feeling. One of the loudest complaints which this book makes about patriarchal thought (or the thought of civilized man) is that it claims to be objective, and separated from emotion, and so it is appropriate that the style of this book does not make that separation.

To avoid separating thought and emotion, she wrote her book in two voices: patriarchal thought is a detached, disembodied voice that "rarely uses a personal pronoun, never speaks as 'I' or 'we', and almost always implies that it has found absolute truth, or at least has the authority to do so." The feminine voice, using both emotion and cognition, "began as [her] voice but was quickly joined by the voices of other women, and voices from nature . . . is an embodied voice, and an impassioned one." So instead of a conversation between two or more people as in Jane Marcus' work, Susan Griffin creates a conversation between two or more parts of the self.

The preface explains the process of working on this remarkable book, different parts of which evolved into different "physical spaces" that "began to be real for me; passing over into work on 'Her Vision' I would feel as if I had entered a free zone, and breathe a sigh of relief."¹⁰⁷ Making the same point about feminist scholarship as Barbara DuBois in "Passionate Scholarship,"¹⁰⁸ Susan Griffin argues that not separating emotion from cognition, or self from work, is a feminist alternative to patriarchal thought.

In a style that might be called "feminist synthesis," the writer immerses herself in a deep nonchronological, nontopical intuitive process that differs from a systematic review or analysis of the relevant literature. Feminist synthesis requires passivity alternating with integration. U.S. theorist Dorothy Dinnerstein writes about this method when describing her book *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*:

It is a distillation from an inner reservoir in which personal experience has flowed together with varied streams of formal thought: social-philosophical, social-scientific, literary, and psychoanalytic streams, and even some streams from the experimental study of perception and cognition, at which I have spent a good part of my working life. What it is then, is not a scholarly book: It makes no effort to survey the relevant literature. Not only would that task be (for me) unmanageably huge,

it would also be against my principles. I believe in reading unsystematically and taking notes erratically. Any effort to form a rational policy about what to take in, out of the inhuman flood of printed human utterance that pours over us daily, feels to me like a self-deluded exercise in pseudomastery. . . . [My] method is to appeal to the reader's own experience: if the result feels in any way enlightening, the argument is validated insofar as it can be.¹⁰⁹

Intuition and a nonsystematic approach to reading are cognitive/emotional processes that feel like feminist innovations to those who engage in them because they defy mainstream definitions of how one should do scholarly work or science.¹¹⁰ On another level, it is a feminist reworking of stream-of-consciousness blending dreams, reading, and thought. Rae Carlson wrote about this in an article that contributed significantly to altering feminist psychologists' methods: "To correct the impoverishment and imbalance in current conceptions of personality, we will need to develop our intuitive and empirical knowledge of femininity in both the agenda of psychological research and in our modes of inquiry."¹¹¹

Identification

Forming a "deep identification" that breathes life into that which is studied and into the woman doing the study is another way in which some feminist researchers try to break out of conventional scientific strictures. The feminist scholar does not hide this identification from the reader. Instead, she discloses herself, sharing her story and inviting the reader to identify with her. Furthermore, the author frequently imbeds her process of identification in a larger personal story of "becoming" and of writing. An example is Elinor Langer's biography of Josephine Herbst, which describes her feelings about Josephine Herbst in detail. It is almost impossible for her to find words intimate enough to describe the experience of first reading Herbst's work:

For sheer absorption, for identification, I felt as I had at no other time in my life except when I read *The Golden Notebook*. . . . A mysterious kinship linked me with this female stranger as if not only our blood but the cells of our marrow were somehow matched.¹¹²

Studying Manya Wilbuszewitz Shohat, I had a similar sense of exhilaration. Other feminists, however, did not allow me to romanticize or misconstrue Manya just because I identified with her. They showed me that identification is useful, not "sacred."¹¹³

Many feminists have worked with identification as they retrieve pioneers of feminist thought and practice. In their anthology on women and symbolic interaction, for example, Mary Jo Deegan and Michael R. Hill reprint parts of Jessie Taft's doctoral dissertation, completed in 1915,¹¹⁴ because they identify with her efforts and recognize the relevance of her work to our times. In her effort to retrieve Harriet Martineau for contemporary feminism,¹¹⁵ Gayle Graham Yates discussed her identification explicitly:

As an English-language feminist intellectual, I think I would recognize her as my forebear and the ancestor of my culture more readily than I would identify with

my illiterate Irish American great-grandmother who came to America in 1850 to escape the potato famine—or Emma Goldman, the Russian-American anarchist feminist whom I would like a great deal, and whose radical twentieth-century ideas I enjoy exploring. But Goldman and our great-grandmothers have had minimal influence on what most American and English women think, and what we socially assume even outside the range of our conscious deliberations, whereas Martineau spelled out a century ahead of us these thoughts and deliberations.

She explains her identification with Harriet Martineau in the following passage:

Martineau's kind of radicalism rattled the whole Anglo-American cognitive universe as well as the political one. Unlike the radicalism of the Emma Goldmans, it set in place the cognitive assumptions the majority of us, whether socialist, radical, or liberal feminist, operate under today, whether fully consciously or vaguely from within our culture's orientation to the world. These assumptions are the belief in order, the belief that change will bring about betterment, the belief that knowledge is power, the belief that the individual will do good if she or he is taught the good, and, above all, the substitution of a science of society for a theological or speculative base, as the first premise for other individual and collective ideas.¹¹⁶

Although feminists obviously did not invent the stance of "identifying with" others, the renewed critique of distancing, neutrality, and objectivity¹¹⁷ has revived identification as a methodological principle. Susan Krieger identified with the lesbian community she studied and appealed to her reader to identify with it as well.¹¹⁸ Feminists point out that "being objective" has come to mean "making the other into an object" and "not identifying with" the other. Thus, feminists experiment with ways of "identifying with" in order to "know" the other.¹¹⁹ "Identifying with" can be risky. In some situations it may bring enormous pain as I described in the chapter on interviewing. Barbara Katz Rothman's identification with the women in her study of decision-making after amniocentesis led her to write that her next book was going to be on something safe, such as flower arranging.

I need a rest. . . . I began the project knowing there would be sad and unpleasant aspects, but not realizing the depth of it, nor how it would shake me. . . . The first questions were the woman's age at the time of her pregnancy, and the age of her baby now. Dead. It said in shaky pencil, "dead." Age of baby—dead. O my god. On no. I tore through it. She had had an amniocentesis, learned of the baby's having Down's Syndrome, and then aborted, and I had sent this idiotic, dreadful, heartless list of questions: Describe fetal movement in the last three months of pregnancy; what month had she started wearing maternity clothes, stupid, stupid questions.

I dumped the box of letters requesting interviews out of my desk, searched through, and found her letter to me. No, no way I could have known from that letter. She had asked for an interview form to discuss her experience with amniocentesis. No hint of what was to come. She had aborted under pressure; she had been rushed into a decision—the doctor who told her the results over the phone said she had to decide right then, in that very phone call, so that they could schedule her abortion. She was unsure, still, if it was the right or wrong thing to do.¹²⁰

The value of identifying lies in the enhanced understanding one can develop and assistance one can give. The drawback is the pain that comes from identifying with people who are suffering. We may gradually turn away to protect our equanimity and continue our work.

Other feminist social researchers, such as Judith DiIorio who studied "van clubs," have reported strenuously avoiding identification with nonfeminist women. Nevertheless, when doing ethnography in nonfeminist settings, they frequently are forced into traditional sex roles and find themselves identifying with the plight of such women in the settings.¹²¹

Feminists have also advocated "identification" in the natural sciences such as zoology and genetics. For example, neurophysiologist Ruth Bleier writes the following about Sarah Hrdy and Donna Haraway, two historians of science who

agree that the entrance of large numbers of women into field primatology and their individual and collective feminist consciousness were responsible for upsetting long-held beliefs and assumptions (for Hrdy, paradigms; for Haraway, narratives and myths of origin). Women primatologists, Hrdy recounts, using herself as an example, identified with the female primates they were observing and with their problems, at the same time (in the 1970s) that they began to be aware of and to articulate problems that women confront in their world. Consequently, they began to formulate questions that had never been asked before concerning the behaviors and coping mechanisms of female primates. These new questions and the observations and interpretations made possible by them transformed a body of beliefs that had been central to primatology.¹²²

In her biography of Nobel Prize winning geneticist, Barbara McClintock, Evelyn Fox Keller calls this way of relating "having a feeling for the organism."¹²³ Mary Belenky and her colleagues call it "connected knowing"¹²⁴ and Sara Ruddick calls it "maternal thinking."¹²⁵ In my view these are all forms of deep identification in which emotion, cognition, and relating are blended.

Studying Unplanned Personal Experience

Feminist researchers have been innovative in the study of their personal experiences. The impulse, as described in research reports, does not stem from opportunism or exhibitionism but rather from the desire to eradicate the distinction between the researcher and the researched. Psychologist Nancy Datan explains what she calls a "natural ethnography" of the postmastectomy experience as follows:

It is a central tenet of feminism that women's invisible, private wounds often reflect social and political injustices. It is a commitment central to feminism to share burdens. And it is an axiom of feminism that the personal is political. It is in that spirit that I ask you to come with me in imagination where I hope nobody will ever go in fact, to a hospital bed on the morning after a mastectomy. . . . Breast cancer currently affects one of every eleven women and is expected to affect one out of ten in the near future. Of those, some will inevitably be feminists. I am one of them.¹²⁶

Her study begins with quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the *Reach to Recovery* literature given her in bed.

Some feminist researchers start with their own experience, analyze it, and do not collect other data.¹²⁷ Others start with their experience, are troubled by it, and then collect other data to compare with their experience. Yet others intend to study other people's experience, but in the process recognize that they are part of the group studied and use this identification to deepen the study. Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich exemplify the first type.¹²⁸ They studied the processes of homophobia and lesbian aging by examining their own experiences and not collecting other data. Sociologist Marianne (Tracy) Paget studied the process of confronting death as she struggled with her own terminal illness.¹²⁹ She did not collect information about other people's dying.

Feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst Jennifer Hunt exemplifies the second type. She studied her fieldwork dreams and then the dreams of other fieldworkers.¹³⁰ Similarly, I studied my miscarriage experience and then the miscarriage experiences of other women.¹³¹ Liz Stanley and Sue Wise studied obscene phone calls received from men attempting to intimidate them.¹³² Theirs is a compelling example of the disappearing distinction between "researcher" and "researched." Their nonlinear article discusses how they presented their findings to colleagues, and how those responses, in turn, became research data. They explain how their research aims to contribute to feminist theory while also "naming the oppressor." British psychologist Wendy Hollway also used her own experience, was troubled by it, and then studied the experience of others.

I evolved a method and theory which was adequate to the psychological research I wanted to conduct about gender identity, research which was inspired by my own and others' experiences during times of change. . . . At what point can I say that I started doing research, as opposed to something which many other women were doing at the time? I was reading widely any feminist literature: history, social anthropology, political economy, language and psychoanalysis; anything on sexuality, homosexuality and sexual identity, and any social theory which seemed to address the problem of the relation between individual and social. I was also living the problem and—again like many women—keeping a journal. . . . I want this book to provide an example of an alternative theory of subjectivity and an alternative method for psychology. In my theory, this is bound to include a different relation of the researcher to participants, but it also involves a different relation of the researcher to knowledge.¹³³

Florence Rush's research on child sexual molestation exemplifies the surprise of finding one is part of the group studied:

During my many years as a social worker I observed that the pattern of the sexual abuse of children consisted of a male adult and a female child. The victims who came to my attention were primarily socially and economically deprived, but as others from advantaged backgrounds came to my attention I realized that the problem cut across all areas of society. Indeed, I painfully remembered that I, despite the amenities of a middle-class upbringing, had also been sexually abused as a child.¹³⁴

Feminist psychologist Michelle Fine used her personal experience as a volunteer rape counsellor—a role she did not take for research purposes—to reevaluate the

assumptions inherent in social psychology. The power of this "non-research project" to yield valuable insights forced her to reevaluate what occurs in formal research, particularly what is lost when we use informed consent procedures. She did not intend to do this study, but felt compelled to do so by the contradictions she encountered between "being a psychologist" and "being helpful." Studying unplanned personal experiences, just as engaging in identification, can have difficult consequences for the feminist researchers.

Structured Conceptualization

U.S. sociologist Rhoda Linton's "structured conceptualization"¹³⁵ is a type of concept mapping described in her paper "In Search of Feminist Research Methodology." She developed this method in order to be able to define the meaning of feminism "embodied in practice."¹³⁶ To do this, she systematically recorded, analyzed, and synthesized¹³⁷ information from feminists and put it in the form of a map. First, she asked feminists to generate as many ideas as possible. Next, she grouped similar ideas. And finally she used computerized statistical procedures to produce a map displaying all the ideas in relation to each other as well as in clusters named by participants. The purpose of this method was "to help feminists understand how they think," an important goal given feminists' diverse and conflicting beliefs and activities:

The map is a picture of the thinking of the group which can reveal not only what we know we think, but also thinking of which we may not be aware, particularly that thinking which shifts when trying to incorporate diversity. Through inspection of the relationship of the clusters, using distance and direction, the map can reveal *how* we think, or on what underlying bases we organize our thinking.¹³⁸

The "map" is a mirror that reflects women's thinking.

Photography or the Talking-Pictures Technique

Margaret Hagoood, the U.S. sociologist discussed in previous chapters, was a pioneer in the use of photography for social research purposes.¹³⁹ After having studied southern U.S. tenant farming families using statistical and in-depth interview techniques, she returned to study them with a camera. With fellow sociologist Harriet Herring, and Marion Dost and Dorothea Lange, two photographers from the staff of the Farm Security Administration, "she compiled a detailed photographic record of the patterns of agriculture and farm life in the southeast. This study formed the basis for an exhibit at the University of North Carolina in 1940 and, but for the disruption of World War II, would doubtless have been made into a book."¹⁴⁰

Photographs are also an integral part of contemporary feminist research.¹⁴¹ Although Ximena Bunster and her colleagues Elsa Chaney, Carmen Pimente, Gabriela Vilalobos, Hilda Mercado, and Ellan Young do not state explicitly that their method of "talking pictures" was motivated by feminist concerns, they do write that they wanted to engage Peruvian proletarian working women in activities that

are typically feminist. These were to "formulate their conventional, explicit and conscious rules of behavior as workers, mothers, and members of unions; to state their values, objectives in life, and aspirations . . . [to reveal] an inner world of feelings, values and significance." Ximena Bunster and her colleagues rejected interviewing as "not the best way of understanding the subjectivity of informants who may have difficulty with language." For an alternative they turned to, and then modified, the work of Margaret Mead who experimented with photography as a research method. They called their approach "talking-pictures technique," an interdisciplinary, collaborative procedure that used photographs to "promote empathy between the interviewer and interviewee and provide a fluid and fruitful context for understanding and data gathering."

To begin, a photographer and an anthropologist took Polaroid photographs of four groups of women: street vendors, market women with fixed stalls, domestic servants or maids, and factory workers. These photographs were given to the women as gifts in exchange for their continued cooperation in an investigation of "working mothers in the city to commemorate International Women's Year." Twenty-five women in the four occupational groups "allowed the photographer and the anthropologist to follow them around during daily, weekly, and monthly work and domestic routines." When the photographs were developed, [the research team] took them to the women and held "elicitation meetings" whose purpose was to choose "the most appropriate pictures to be included in the final photo-interview kit." The "subjects" thus helped define and select "the research instruments." Ximena Bunster and her colleagues asked the "informants to aid us in a tentative arrangement of scenes under researcher-defined categories. For example, which photographs would an informant pick to show the kinds of machines operated by men and by women in a factory?" Through this process, 120 photographs were chosen from the 3000 that had been shot and were pasted in a large album made for the study.

The format, though bulky, was a versatile interviewing tool. It could be opened on the grass; we talked to many maids while they were taking care of children in parks. It could also be accommodated over crates and piles of vegetables in markets. The pictures were then combined with a structured, but open-ended questionnaire.¹⁴²

Unlike Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Tests that offer informants ambiguous stimuli, or written questionnaires or interview guides that require literacy, the photographs were indigenous to the women who were studied. They selected the photographs and discussed them in ways that enabled the researchers to address the original study questions.

U.S. sociologist Robbie Pfeufer Kahn's review¹⁴³ of two books about birth uses photographs to organize her comments. In the review, she "reads" the photographs and projects herself into the various roles—the male physician looking at and holding the birthing woman, the birthing woman, the child being born, the other people in the room—including the role of the reader gazing at the photographs. She writes as a reader of pictures. Marianne Wex has created a book that contains "literally thousands of candid photographs of women and men, in public,

seated, standing and lying down . . . that vividly demonstrates the very systematic differences in women's and men's postures and gestures."¹⁴⁴ In my view, we have barely scratched the surface of the feminist research potential of photographs. Our preference for the written word is a bias that may keep women separated from one another because we can hardly see each other. Next, I discuss another use of technology, in this case the tape recorder.

Speaking Freely into a Tape Recorder or Answering Long, Essay-Type Questionnaires

Cheryl Boudreaux has written a proposal for a sociology doctoral dissertation that contains, I believe, another innovative methodological twist. Her study is concerned with women's spirituality and combines thematic analysis of the journal *Womanspirit* with questionnaires and interviews. Because of her unusual subject matter, she uses a tape recorder so that a respondent can interview herself and bypass writing:

I will also do interviews with women who see themselves as involved in the women's spirituality movement and/or identify themselves as spiritual women. Some of these interviews will be done by phone and/or by tape recorder. I will send them a tape and a list of questions. This will allow them to speak freely about their experience with spirituality, and will allow me to interview women who are too far away for me to meet in person.¹⁴⁵

In a related project, Dale Spender and Cheris Kramerae have developed a book, *Knowledge Explosion*, based on essays solicited from 40 feminist researchers in response to a set of 10 questions.¹⁴⁶ Based on the innovative feminist method of collecting statements from as many people as cared to respond, Shere Hite has produced three different books about sexuality and love.¹⁴⁷ Some individuals sent her tapes and others sent written responses to what she calls her "long, essay-type questionnaires." She defines her method as "scientific" and claims that critics of her work do not understand the term "scientific." Most feminist researchers who develop original methods do not argue that these methods meet the norms of science, as Shere Hite does. Rather, they ignore the debate about science and strive to find methods that fit their definition of feminism.

Some Final Thoughts

In *On Becoming a Social Scientist*, I argued that every research project should produce substantive, methodological, and personal understanding. U.S. psychologist Terry Kramer expressed a similar idea of having multiple objectives—involving the participant so "that she is positively affected by the process," and deriving "new knowledge which will alter the ways in which psychologists and others perceive women and the effects of oppression on them."¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the plethora of innovations relates to this desire among feminist social scientists to be creative in multiple ways.

Not all feminist social research is innovative with regard to method. In fact, some feminist scholars regard methodological innovation as counterproductive because only studies conducted according to "rigorous" scientific procedures will convince the skeptics. For those who do not share this concern, however, feminism typically leads to the study of new topics that require or allow new forms of study. For these people, the feminist spirit is one of breaking free, including breaking free of methodological traditions.

One of the many ways the women's movement has benefitted women is in freeing up our creativity in the realm of research. And one of the ways feminist researchers, in turn, have benefitted the societies in which we live is by the spirit of innovation. Although I have listed several types of "original" research and writing, there is room for many more. As feminists gain greater control of publishing opportunities and academic positions, we will undoubtedly see evidence of more of these.