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## Chapter 1

# Introduction to Feminist Research

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## Introduction

Are you curious, skeptical, persistent, and surprised by the social and political world around you? These are often the conditions of a good researcher. Yet, we cannot be good researchers just by wanting to be. It takes reflection and practice.

In this book, we provide students and scholars from a range of social science fields with a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to feminist research reflection and practice. Before we go any further let us set out our view of feminism explicitly. We think of feminism as that critical perspective on social and political life that draws our attention to the ways in which social, political, and economic norms, practices, and structures create injustices that are experienced differently or uniquely by certain groups of women. Taking this view of feminism in your research does not require you to participate in direct social and political action or necessarily to label or identify yourself as a feminist.

In this book we argue that a critical feminist perspective is expressed (in part) through a feminist research ethic that guides our research decisions and helps us to reflect on and attend to dynamics of power, knowledge, relationships, and context throughout the research process.

Since this book is specifically focused on how to do feminist research, we have assumed our readers will already have a fair idea about what feminism is and its main variants (but see Box 1.1 below for some suggestions on introductory reading). Throughout the book we have tried to summarize and briefly explain our understanding of the main contours of

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### KEY CONCEPT 1.1 CRITICAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

There are many kinds of feminist theory (see Box 1.1 for some introductions).

A critical feminist perspective uses critical inquiry and reflection on social injustice by way of gender analysis, to *transform*, and not simply explain, the social order. The perspective encourages opening new lines of inquiry versus simply "filling in gaps" in already

established disciplinary terrains. Such a perspective is informed by critical, post-colonial, post-structural theories and neo-Marxist political economy.

This form of feminism is the lens that guides this book, but throughout the book we also cite other feminists thereby exhibiting a broad range of perspectives.

feminism where we feel that this is necessary to ensure you understand what we mean by *a* feminist research ethic and how to apply it in your research.

In order to help those with this critical feminist perspective do research, we make readily accessible much of the teaching and advice we routinely share with our students and colleagues about how to carry out methodologically and ethically sound research. The book is founded on an appreciation for the diversity of feminist studies, their reluctance to be defined, and their ambivalent reception by some researchers and groups, including women around the world. Recognizing that "feminism" around the world has a mixed reception and sometimes faces a skeptical audience, even among women and often from non-feminist professors and academics, the book lays out a theoretically informed methodological guide to research.

### KEY CONCEPT 1.2 FEMINIST RESEARCH ETHIC

A feminist research ethic is a methodological commitment to any set of research practices that reflect on the power of epistemology, boundaries, relationships, and the multiple dimensions of the researcher's location throughout the entirety of the research process and to a normative commitment to transforming the social order in order to promote gender justice. It is an *ethic* in two senses: it demands that

we use critical reflection as a work ethic during research and it points us to recognize and account for the provisionality and contingency of data, the construction of knowledge by way of boundaries and categories, and the need to relate to these categories and boundaries in non-essentialist and transformative ways. (See Chapter two).

**Box 1.1 Introduction to feminism: a reading list***Surveys*

- Rosemary Tong. 1998. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 2nd edn. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Dietz, Mary G. 2003. "Current Controversies in Feminist Theory." *Annual Review of Political Science* 6: 399–431.
- Hawkesworth, Mary E. 2006. *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Ackerly, Brooke A., and Katy Attanasi. 2009. "Global Feminisms: Theory and Ethics for Studying Gendered Injustice." *New Political Science* 31,4: 543–55.

*Selected critical perspectives*

- bell hooks. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: Southend Press.
- Benhabib, Seyla, Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser, and Drucilla Cornell. 1995. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge.
- Mendoza, Breny. 2002. "Transnational Feminisms in Question." *Feminist Theory* 3, 3: 295–314.

Other feminists (and we elsewhere) put forward substantive accounts of feminism (see Box 1.1). Feminists make normative, conceptual, and empirical contributions to their fields. In this book, we focus on the *methodological* contribution that feminists have and can make to social science. We expect that readers will use these methodologies to make their own substantive contributions to their fields and to feminism.

The research that leads to those contributions often follows a non-linear process. This is because social and political research is inherently dynamic. As social scientists we are part of the very world that we are trying to understand, and that world is always changing and affected by our study of it. At the same time feminism requires us to reexamine continually our assumptions as we engage in research, making that research even more dynamic and non-linear. Feminists reflect again and again on the ways in which we approach our work, and on the changing nature of what we study. We focus on the ways in which power affects our assumptions, on the continually revealed exclusions and inclusions of research, on the relationships among its stakeholders (course instructors, researcher-participants, subject-participants, assistant-participants, translators, facilitators, audiences, communities, etc.) in our research, and on the ways in which our own decisions about how to conduct our research are linked to our particular social and political location. The feminist methodology we outline is explicit about the dynamic

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### **KEY CONCEPT** 1.3 RIGOR

For a feminist research project, the very concept of rigor is defined from a critical perspective on methodology. Etymologically, the term "rigor" means stiff. However, in social science it has come to mean using "systematic" and accountable methods. While we wouldn't want to argue that feminist

scholarship is stiff, we want to show that feminist scholarship has standards of quality which overlap in their key features with the standards of all social sciences: that they can be defended before a jury of academic peers. See for comparison (Mason 2002: 40–1; Yanow 2006b).

nature of social science research and provides an account of research that is true to the experience of most social science researchers.

To convey the diversity, self-reflection, and the dynamic character of research, we draw extensively on examples of local, international, regional, global, and multi-sited research projects. We guide students through the research process in a way that reveals the methodological structure of a feminist research process. And we guide the researcher in the exposition of her project to feminist and non-feminist audiences alike. Making a feminist research project accessible to a non-feminist academic audience is not about concealing its feminism; it is about revealing its theoretical and methodological rigor.

In this book, we redefine, rework, and develop the basic architecture of political and social science research in order to improve it and to create a feminist research practice. You can read this book as feminist scholarship to be evaluated and challenged from multiple perspectives as you would other scholarship. Or, you can pick it up and take it with you on your journey of feminist research. However, even if you take this second route, trusting it as your guidebook, we hope you will treat it as an adventurer treats his favorite guidebook, and develop your own way to do your research guided by your feminist research ethic. The book should give you the tools to do this yourself, and to become an informed critical feminist researcher and evaluator of feminist research.

### **Key Tools in this Book**

To facilitate a linear exposition of the dynamics of the non-linear research process, in this book we use supplemental modes of exposition. Each chapter contains Key Concepts, Boxes, and Selected Sources for Further Reading.

**Box 1.2 Doing Feminist Research on the Web**

The accompanying website at <http://www.palgrave.com/methodology/doingfeministresearch> includes:

- a searchable glossary of terms;
- a set of practical exercises organized by book chapter;
- materials for facilitating interview research;
- guidelines for reviewing and evaluating your own research.

The book's website <http://www.palgrave.com/methodology/doingfeministresearch> has other supporting materials, including practical exercises for each chapter of the books, a glossary of terms used throughout the book, examples of materials we have used in our own interview research, as well as guidelines for how to use the feminist research ethic to evaluate research.

*Key Concepts* highlight those concepts that have a developed or contested literature and sets out our use of them. These are brief expositions of concepts that deserve more attention than the narrative of the text allows. Sometimes, we use these key concept textboxes to indicate how we are deploying certain concepts that are the subject of debate.

*Boxes* provide insights from our experience as researchers and illustrative examples of effective and insightful research in different fields of study. While each researcher needs to create her own research, it can help to see what choices others have made and what constraints others have faced. Boxes give the reader examples from published research, unpublished reflections from our own practice or from that of other feminists. See the "List of Boxes" to help you relocate Boxes that you have found useful.

*Selected Sources for Further Reading* also appear at the end of chapters to provide the reader with references to key literatures on the topic. Since we offer rich bibliographic references throughout each chapter, we offer the selected bibliography as a recommended starting place.

In addition to the glossary of terms and concepts on the accompanying website <http://www.palgrave.com/methodology/doingfeministresearch> (see Box 1.2), these are also defined either in the text or in Key Concepts boxes, generally where they first occur.

**Doing Feminist Research: A Book for Your Practice**

This book is not intended to make you an expert on the *scholarship* of feminist methodology, but rather to help you develop *your practice* of feminist research. Because this book is a guide to the overall research process rather

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### KEY CONCEPT 1.4 METHODOLOGY

Generally, “methodology” is understood as a particular set of methods or way of doing research. However, a feminist methodology is *not* a series of particular methods or guidelines for research, like a protocol, but a commitment to using a whole constellation of methods reflectively and critically, with the end aim being the production of data that serve feminist aims of social justice. Thus, a feminist methodology is

a way of using and reflecting on methods, and not a particular set of methods or a particular research design. Rigorous feminist methodologies lead to decisions made during the research process that are to academic peers.

This view of methodology helps us reexamine the basics of the research process in the social sciences.

than an exposition of particular research methods, the text encourages students to make use of the bibliography to explore further certain debates and methods. In some disciplines, feminist methodology is now an area of specialization. Graduate students are examined in feminist methodology. Graduate and undergraduate courses are devoted to feminist methodology. Many feminist courses have a methodological component. Many methodology and research design courses have a feminist component (Chafetz 2004; Hesse-Biber 2007; Hootman 2006). The bibliography will help you pursue the scholarship of feminist methodology on your own.

Methodologies take many forms. For the purposes of introduction, we conceive of methodology as the ongoing reflection that guides research. Feminist methodology encompasses reflections about the relationship among the purpose of research, how we tell fact from belief, theory and conceptualization, research design, ethics, methods, and analysis. In particular, it involves self-conscious reflections on the purpose of research, our conceptual frameworks, our ethical responsibilities, method choices, and our assumptions about what it means to know rather than just believe something. Such reflection occurs *throughout* the research process.

In previous work we refer to this ongoing ethical reflection as a “theoretical methodology” (Ackerly and True 2006). Many readers stumbled over this term and found it jargon-y. In this work we shift terms. We argue that in feminist empirical inquiry, the insights of feminist theory are used as a guide to a research practice. A feminist research ethic is a set of research practices and a normative commitment to using and developing these. Importantly, this is a feminist normative commitment to a research practice. Such a research practice does not involve specific normative

## KEY CONCEPT

**1.5 FEMINIST PRACTICE**

Feminists often use the language of "praxis" to refer to the practice of feminist scholarship that is informed by critical feminist normative and theoretical perspectives. Praxis is theory in action and action-oriented theory. Generally, we do not use the language of "praxis" to describe our methodology because we don't think it is concrete enough in its prescriptions.

Although critical self-reflection is not unique to critical feminism, the scope of these reflections sets most

feminist contributions apart from the mainstream social science disciplines of politics, international relations, sociology, and human geography for example and makes feminist inquiry an important partner in the more critical endeavors of those fields. Often, but not always explicitly stated, a feminist research ethic (in the sense of a practice and a set of ethical commitments) guides the researcher through systematic reflection throughout the process, from research question to publication.

commitments to an ideal world, that is, they are commitments about *how* we study the world even while we may differ on *what* kind of world we would like to bring about. While we respect that for many of us feminist research is an important part of our personal normative commitments, we wish to distinguish these substantive, normative commitments – which may be broad and diverse and important to our research – from the normative commitment to a reflexive research, which should be the focus of your methodological work.

A feminist project is identifiably "feminist" by its research question, by the theoretical underpinnings of the project and by the use of a feminist research ethic throughout the research process rather than by any particular method(s) used or a particular set of normative commitments (Ackerly 2008b; Ackerly, Stern and True 2006; True 2008c). For instance, feminism alerts us to the importance of studying silences and absences in familiar institutions and of studying marginalized and excluded peoples' experiences for understanding our local and global world. However, no definitive feminist method exists because many methods may be necessary for one question or another in order to reveal silences and oppressions and to understand the conditions, processes, and institutions that cause and sustain them. Feminist goals are plural and contested and, as such, feminist research cannot be reduced to a particular normative orientation or political, ideological agenda. Yet, in looking closely at our feminist colleagues' work, we see familiar methods – such as ethnography, oral history, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and survey research – being carried out in more or less feminist ways.

**Box 1.3 Baker and Cooke on the Bronx Slave Market**

Feminist empirical inquiry predates feminism in academe. In 1935 two NAACP colleagues, Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke, joined hundreds of African Americans who sold their labor on 167th Street and Simpson Avenue in the Bronx in order to study and reveal their working conditions and to demonstrate the connections between these African American women seeking domestic work and the plight of other workers and families affected by the depression.

“In the boom days before the onslaught of the depression in 1929, many of these women who are now forced to bargain for day’s work on street corners, were employed in grand homes in Long Island and Westchester, at more than adequate wages. Some are former marginal industrial workers, forced by the slack in industry to seek other means of sustenance. In many instances there had been no necessity for work at all. But whatever their standing prior to the depression, none sought employment where they seek it. They came to the Bronx, not because of it promises, but largely in desperation ... The general public, though aroused by stories of these domestics, too often think of these problems of these women as something separate and apart and readily dismisses them with a sign and a shrug of the shoulders” (Baker 1955: 330, 340).

**Critical Feminist Approaches to Methodology and Research**

Students and scholars today benefit from the critical building blocks of feminist scholarship in the social sciences and even before the institutionalization of feminist knowledge in the academy (see Box 1.3). Feminist scholars have paved the way for serious engagement with gender and other categories of oppression and exclusion in previously gender-blind fields of study. For example, feminist scholars have opened the field of economics to a whole new research agenda by revealing the gender bias implicit in the oversimplifying assumption of the household as a unitary and homogenous actor and unit of analysis. Such treatment assumes that resources are distributed equally among household members, and that decision-making is unitary rather than subject to power dynamics within the household (Dwyer and Bruce 1988; Folbre 1984; Tinker 1990). Similarly, in the field of International Relations, feminist scholars have challenged the core concept of security and its association with the state’s provision of military security rather than individual human security, such as the insecurity experienced by women subject to domestic violence, rape in war, or chronic insecurity associated with living in a conflict zone, living in poverty, and environmental degradation.

**Box 1.4 Create and seek out opportunities for discussion of methodology**

The conferences, workshops, and panels we have organized in recent years have confirmed that there is a pressing demand from students and scholars engaging in feminist projects for an explicit methodological guide.

We urge the reader to participate in methodological discussions wherever they happen, during their disciplinary conferences and in small and large multidisciplinary meetings including Feminist Epistemologies, Methodologies, Metaphysics and Science Studies (FEMMSS) which meets biannually in the United States and the International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women which meets triannually.

As a result of path breaking feminist scholarship, students and scholars are continually formulating new feminist research questions and agendas. The articles published in the increasingly voluminous range of feminist journals, illustrate the theoretical diversity, multidisciplinarity, and often global scope of that new research. However, students, instructors and supervisors often do not know the methodological “scaffolding” that frames this feminist research.

Certainly, there are essays and books on methodology, but trailblazing critical feminist scholars have not always left a trail of methodological guidelines. Publishing norms that were established during the process of legitimating a discipline do not generally include encouraging reflection on *all* aspects of a methodology, especially those more awkward aspects that don't seem parsimonious. Consequently, those reflections are not visible in the final design. In this book we intend to make feminist research more doable by making visible all aspects of methodological reflection (Box 1.4).

The impetus for this book is the need felt by ourselves, our colleagues, and our students for a guide to translating normative and theoretical feminist work into successful, ethically-rigorous research on feminist and non-feminist questions. We complement other work on critical and feminist methodology. By offering both *critical reflection* on research from purpose to practice (cf. Davis 2005; Gadamer 1989) and *constructive advice* about how to do and present academic scholarship (Baglione 2006; Burnham *et al.* 2004; King *et al.* 1994; Marsh and Stoker [1995] 2002), we encourage the scholar to produce scholarship that challenges, but is accessible to, a wide range of audiences.

In many discussions of social science, including feminist studies, the boundary between methodology and method is fuzzy. In *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* together with Maria Stern (Ackerly, Stern and True 2006) we followed an account articulated by Sandra Harding who distinguishes between an epistemology – that is, a “theory of knowledge” – a

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methodology – that is, “a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” – and a *method* – that is, a “technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence” (Harding 1987: 2–3). This typology is not meant to encourage linear thinking, but in practice we have seen scholars misuse it to parse epistemology from methodology and method. Instead, we provide an account of a feminist research ethic that relies on a dynamic epistemology, one that is destabilized by continual reflection *as well as findings*.

Drawing on feminist theories of methodology and research, we aim to provide a practical guide on how to do feminist research, conveying the actual detail of that research from several disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields (cf. Fonow and Cook 1991; Harding 1987; Hesse-Biber *et al.* 1999; Hawkesworth 2006; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). The book guides the student through the research process from research design through analysis and writing while simultaneously introducing the reader to the range of debates, challenges, and tools that feminists make use of in their research around the world, revealing feminist ways of doing research in a broad range of applications. The chapter order roughly follows the order of a dissertation or funding proposal, although typically there is not room in a proposal to display the detail that is required to exhibit the degree to which feminist reflection informs your project. We all need to reflect on the dimensions of our research beyond merely the reflections that will appear in the proposals or publications. This book can be your friendly guide from refining a research topic through to the final writing whether you are writing an undergraduate research paper, an academic monograph, or a dissertation or funding proposal.

The fact that the chapter sequences in this book largely follow the “linear” order of research suggested by conventional social science and its textbooks on methodology is potentially problematic when we intend to convey the non-linear, back and forth process of research that is the actual experience of most researchers and certainly those researchers guided by a feminist research ethic. We also sometimes use scientific metaphors in the discussing research such as “hypotheses,” “variables,” “validity,” “rigor,” etc. Many feminists and critical researchers argue that we should resist this scientific order and language that dominates social science and tends to reproduce essentialism and the notion that there is only one model for doing good research (Fausto-Sterling 2000; see also Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). From our feminist critical perspective, there is no perspective on research that is above this risk. Any account of research is at risk of relying on and producing its own essentialisms. Our best response is to be alert to this possibility and to attend to it. We use this language as feminists, attentive to the potential power in the habituated meaning of these concepts to constrain our imaginations. Moreover, we choose to proceed in using some scientific language for social science inquiry because we see feminist scholarship as a transformative *part*

## KEY CONCEPT

**1.6 GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

Gender mainstreaming is a meta-gender equality strategy (Krook and True forthcoming; True 2009b). The United Nations, the international institution working in a broad range of substantive areas defines mainstreaming as applying "a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively" (United Nations 1995: 116). The implication of this

definition is that gender equality cannot be achieved if policy makers do not consider the gendered consequences of all policies, global, and local. The purpose of the gender-based analysis promoted by gender mainstreaming is to "eliminate obstacles to the exercise of women's rights and eradicate all forms of discrimination against women" (1995 Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 207, section c).

of social science, not outside it. For instance, in this book we develop ways of talking about and doing our methods that are recognizable to traditionally trained scholars. If after ontological and epistemological reflection on how and what it means to know, you view the purpose of research as to change the world, you will nonetheless need to ask what methods will best enable you to change the world through your research.

In many ways this book puts forward one way of being a feminist researcher, working within the mainstream to broaden its boundaries. For instance, we suggest following the outline of a dissertation proposal or mainstream social science article. We offer tools that would enable you to research and write for the mainstream journals and publishers of your discipline. We discuss the obstacles in Chapter six as individual challenges rather than engaging with their structural dimensions more thoroughly. This book is not revolutionary. However, we do not mean to suppress your revolutionary spirit. Rather we intend to set out a path for transformative gender mainstreaming within social science research in its current instantiation.

In the remainder of this chapter, we outline the structure of the book and the kinds of readers who will find it most useful. We guide the scholar in how best to use the book to help design her research and anticipate challenges she is likely to face in the research process. We lay out the research process in a deceptively linear fashion but do so in a way that acknowledges that the possibility for linear exposition does not come from a linear research process, but rather from careful attention to moments of methodological decision. We guide you to notice and enjoy the nonlinear aspects of research and help you to reflect systematically on them so that you can engage in the research process more consciously and deliberately. Most importantly, this book aims to help you maintain your self-reflective perspective throughout the research process.

## The Plan of Doing Feminist Research

The sequence of chapters of this book follows roughly that of a proposal – from question statement (Chapter four), literature review and hypotheses (Chapter five), methodology (Chapters seven through eleven), through to presentation of findings (Chapter thirteen). Around that we frame the research with a feminist research ethic (Chapter two), the tools for sustaining a non-linear research project (Chapter three), the personal and political constraints on research design (Chapter six), the important things that researchers tell each other (Chapter twelve), and review and evaluation (Chapter fourteen).

In Chapter two, “A Feminist Research Ethic Explained,” we argue that a feminist research ethic is definitive of feminist methodologies and explore the implications of this ethic throughout the research process. We explain the key elements of this ethic: (1) attentiveness to power; (2) attentiveness to boundaries, intersections, and normalization; (3) attentiveness to relationships among all stakeholders (course instructors, researcher-participants, subject-participants, assistant-participants, translators, facilitators, audiences, communities, etc.); and (4) self-reflection at each stage of the process. This ethic is applied not only to our research but also to our *process* of research. That means that we reflect on our own ways of discerning fact from opinion, looking for our own hidden assumptions, and we reflect on past decisions in our research process, noting that the moments of those decisions were themselves artifacts of the power of epistemology at those moments. Power shifts as we research and with it, our research needs to reflect and shift. This is obviously true for those studying explicitly political phenomena, but it is true for those studying social and cultural phenomena which are likewise affected by shifts in power.

How we present our work does not mirror how we actually do our work. While the table of contents of this book outlines steps in a research process, it does not describe our research process. In Chapter three we set out conceptual tools for thinking about the research process. We offer a number of ways that researchers describe the research process. Although the process itself is not linear, we include in our conceptualizations the linear model. We invite you to offer the appropriate exposition for your audience. We suggest a linear model of *exposition* of a project and findings because we think it can make them comprehensible for both researchers and audiences. However, we also suggest that for those audiences interested in research process, it might be appropriate to share the dialogical nature of certain aspects of the project.

Chapters four and five set out the work of coming up with a good research question and situating that question theoretically, conceptually, and politically. What makes for a compelling research question that both contributes to a field of knowledge and can be manageably researched? How can a

thoughtful review of the literature help you to conceptualize your question, making it relevant to existing and future scholarship? We offer concrete advice for structuring a literature review. You may choose to follow an existing typology of your field, or decide that your question is better exposed by setting out your own typology or none at all.

Chapter six serves as an intermission between setting out the methodological scaffolding of our research and actually doing our research. It is a time to take a step back from your project and to situate it in the context of your life. In this chapter we make visible and attend to a range of social, personal, cultural, political, economic, and geographic factors that contribute to research design. Can an undergraduate do fieldwork in the remaining ten weeks of the term? Does a father of small children leave them with a working spouse to do field work? Do partners choose research agendas that enable them to travel together? How can non-indigenous people do research with indigenous people? Can an untenured tenure-track academic pioneer unconventional research methods? Should and how should job market considerations inform a graduate student's choice of research topic? How do contexts that differ by institution and academic culture affect the researchers of those contexts? How do contexts affect research collaborations of scholars from different contexts? These questions that may seem not to be questions about *research*, in fact *do* influence methodology. Of course, many researchers may proceed as if they do not confront these questions. However, *not* confronting these questions is a privilege that only some in academe enjoy. By asking these questions we can make visible the differences among us, including those differences between faculty and students and among students that make each research project face its own invisible methodological challenges. Asking these questions as a methodological precondition of our work reveals a hidden privilege within academe and acknowledges that these questions have an impact on our research design without compromising the legitimacy of our work.

Chapters seven through eleven are the heart of what most methodology books attend to: research design, methods, and analysis. Each chapter is filled with invitations to reflect on a host of options that you might plan to consider *and* examples of how others have dealt with dilemmas that they may or may not have anticipated. As in other chapters, boxes illustrate the complications with examples to stimulate your thinking and offer additional reference sources to enable the reader to pursue given questions in greater depth. We refer the reader who focuses on Chapters seven through eleven back to Chapter three for its account of the research process, back to Chapter two for the way in which a research ethic can guide you out of certain dilemmas, and back to Chapters four, five and six to appreciate the ways in which earlier reflections may limit or inspire your methodological decisions during the execution of your research.

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Chapter twelve offers some very concrete advice that applies to many research designs. In Chapter thirteen we take up writing and publication in the broad sense of sharing your findings with other researchers, your supervisor, peers or classmates, those affected by your research, those who have contributed to it, and the field (however you choose to define your field). We approach the writing process, publication, and sharing of findings as another step in the research process, not the conclusion of the research process. Writing and reading are methods in their own right that require collaboration. Feminism invites us to appreciate our work as incomplete without the work of others and always in dialogue with and often building on our own and other feminist work.

Finally, in Chapter fourteen, we reflect on how feminist research is evaluated. Through the life course of a project, it will be evaluated by supervisors, potential funders, ethical review committees and boards, as well as your peers. In this last chapter we show that a research project that defies some of the norms of social and political science research is held to higher and *more rigorous* research standards than those that do not interrogate the intellectual meaning and function of the standards by which they are evaluated. We discuss the way we might use a feminist research ethic not merely to guide our own research process and projects but also to critically evaluate other scholars' research process and research findings.

### **Is this Book for Me?**

This book is written for both students and scholars from a range of fields. It will be especially relevant for readers who find themselves interested in research questions and subjects that are not yet on the mainstream agendas of disciplines. For instance, this might include students examining the practices and discourses of contemporary social movements. We also hope it will be helpful to readers who are interested in feminist methodological approaches and tools that they are not yet familiar with. For instance, the book will be useful to instructors teaching research design and methods that are not well versed in feminism but have students interested in feminist research questions and want a course text that can guide the whole class through the research process rather than one that favors one form of inquiry.

For a variety of reasons, you are exploring feminist terrain. You are reaching feminist audiences, seeking non-feminist audiences for feminist insights, retooling familiar methods for feminist questions, recontextualizing non-feminist questions, gathering data in feminist ways, and confronting ethical questions around publication and sharing of findings. You are criss-crossing the boundary between feminist and non-feminist, contributing to and remaking both feminism and your fields as you go.

## 1.7 INTERDISCIPLINARY, TRANSDISCIPLINARY, MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Feminist inquiry is known for working across disciplines. But what does that mean? Many terms are bantered about to describe this kind of work and the terms mean different things depending on whether we are talking about a space of scholarly engagement or a person's scholarship.

When we are talking about a space of scholarly engagement, *interdisciplinary*, *transdisciplinary*, and *multidisciplinary* are roughly synonymous. Academics from a range of disciplines come together to share their work and their disciplinary insights. This can happen in your classrooms, conferences, journals, peer workshops, and reading groups.

For an individual scholar, "interdisciplinary" means working between disciplines. Picture a scholar with a foot

in two places, perhaps a PhD in two disciplines. Her work may import the insights of one discipline into another and may be read by one or both disciplines. A "transdisciplinary" or "cross-disciplinary" scholar works to cross disciplines; this scholar tries to create new spaces of inquiry. Her work may be read by a broad range of scholars who may or may not share her disciplinary expertise. A "multidisciplinary" scholar may work in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary ways. The label does not tell us which, but it suggests that more than two disciplines may be involved, making us worry about how well-grounded the work can be in each discipline.

In this book, we use "multidisciplinary" to include both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work.

Many readers of this book will be transgressing boundaries for theoretically-driven reasons or because their question requires them to challenge disciplinary and knowledge-related, gender, or national/political boundaries. It is not unusual that feminist research projects transgress all three forms of boundaries by studying historically-excluded women or gender relations as research subjects in conventional disciplines, by engaging in interdisciplinary, collaborative research that also questions the boundary between the researcher and the researched, and by analyzing transnational phenomena that may fall outside traditional disciplinary boundaries (see Yuval-Davis 2006a; Peterson 1992). For example, Anna Sampaio's study of a transnational feminist network, *Hermanas En La Lucha* which connects Chicano/Latino women in Southwest USA and indigenous women in Chiapas, Mexico, illustrates this kind of research (2004). She uses a participant observation method and co-authors her text with the network. In so doing, Sampaio and *Hermanas En La Lucha* transgress the boundary between researcher and researched. They study and participate in *transna-*

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*tional feminism*. They cross boundaries as they study a political phenomenon – in this case transnational feminism – that is itself a practice of negotiating national and ethnic boundaries, and the different political perspectives of women of, and in, the Global South.

In this book we seek to empower you to do feminist research that will be respected by both feminist and conventional scholars. We frequently refer to other feminist resources on feminist inquiry and methods in order to guide either the instructor in the classroom or the student who may be pursuing a feminist research project under the mentorship of a non-feminist scholar in her field. We intentionally use gender-specific male and female pronouns (for example, he and she, himself and herself) as a political strategy to make gender visible and to appeal to the men and women researchers that we hope will read this book. We also use first and second person pronouns to underscore that we understand ourselves in dialogue with the reader, herself likely cited in this text or otherwise influential in our feminist imaginations.

### **How to Use this Book**

While we have organized the book loosely as a mirror of the conventional exposition of a research project, we expect that only some readers will use the text as their own introduction to feminist research. Others will use the book to help design research and anticipate challenges they are likely to face in the research process. Still others will use it to inspire reflection on work they have already done or are in the process of completing. The book is designed to be useful for all three kinds of researchers.

Among these researchers some may be new to feminism, some new to research, and some new to feminist research. The book is designed to be useful to all, but each will read it differently. The *researcher new to feminist theory* is encouraged *not* to dwell on theoretical puzzles that are unclear to her at first reading, but rather to focus on how feminism might be useful to her research (from the exposition in Chapter two). The *researcher new to research* may likewise go quickly over the theory that is familiar to her, but slow down to reflect about what these theoretical insights mean for empirical inquiry (again in Chapter two). She might spend more time in the chapters on picking a research question (Chapters three and four) and on research design and methods (Chapters seven through nine) rather than in the theory and conceptualization chapter (Chapter five). The *researcher new to feminist research* will likely take the most time with Chapters one and two and revisit it habitually as she moves through the later chapters of the book in order that she may be reminded what is distinctive about the *feminist* research project. Likewise, the researcher new to feminist research is expected to

spend extra time with research design (Chapter seven). (It is possible to do original research using data created by others.) An undergraduate who is not expecting to do field work will focus on Chapters two, four, five, thirteen and fourteen.

The *researcher who reads cover to cover* may be just starting out on a feminist research project or career. She may be theoretically knowledgeable about feminism, but need some guide for assisting students with empirical projects. Or, she may be well-versed in feminist methodology but less familiar with the feminist theory behind it. Or, she may be practiced in innovating feminist methods, but less comfortable situating feminist methods within feminist theory and methodology.

The *researcher currently engaged in a project* may want to pick and choose her way around the book based on her point in the research process. As the research process is non-linear, so too may be the way in which a reader uses the book. Perhaps she is more or less curious about the feminist literature review or ethical dilemmas with data analysis for example. Perhaps she wants a “friend” to commiserate with about the unexpected challenges that life and family commitments can pose for research.

The *researcher who is finishing or has just finished a project* may wish to think about how to put her research in dialogue with other feminist research within and outside of her field. She may seek to be multidisciplinary by including perspectives on similar topics from across the disciplines, but may be challenged to see questions from perspectives not often articulated from others within her home discipline. The book is designed to help her see and work through those challenges.

There are as many ways of reading this book as there are paths on a research journey. We urge every reader to spend some time with chapter two as this is the chapter where we lay out the ethical space where feminist theory becomes feminist empirical research (see also Ackerly and True 2008b). However, while this book is a complete research guide from before beginning to after finishing, it is not a comprehensive guide. We can help you situate your work theoretically and methodologically, but feminist research is collaborative and needs to be contextualized by other research. So just as feminist research on the macropolitics of gender and globalization for instance may not tell us about the specificity of women’s subjectivities and experience in particular locales (see True 2003), so too a feminist work on doing feminist research across the social sciences cannot guide you through the specific questions that your own research will face in its own places – political, geographic, disciplinary, and temporal.

Further, scholars will read the book differently in part because they are situated in disciplines in which the scholarly recognition of feminist work in the mainstream is unique to their discipline. Readers will use this book in different ways depending on their discipline and when and how feminist

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research emerged in that field. For example, there has been feminist political theory throughout the history of political thought; though Aristotle did not think much of Plato's proposal, Plato devoted a chapter of *the Republic* to utopian reflection on the possibility for genderlessness among the elites of a society. Contemporary Sociology and Political Science's engagement with feminism are closely connected with second wave feminism. Although feminist work on women and race was available, it did not become integrated into mainstream sociology and political science until the late 1970s. Inspired by the questions raised by feminist social movements in the 1970s, sociologists and political scientists began to study women, and to develop explanations of women's position in society based on gender analysis (Bourque and Grossholtz 1974; Okin 1991). Later, some feminist sociologists and political scientists interrogated the epistemological foundations of the category of woman (Sapiro 1981; Sylvester 1993) and examined the social construction of sociological knowledge in the discipline (Sapiro 1998).

By contrast, early feminist scholarship in international relations dates to the late 1980s and early 1990s when the insights of postmodernism invited feminists to take up political questions in ways that were attentive to the power of epistemology to condition and constrain even a feminist enterprise (Sylvester 1994; Tickner 1992). This meant revealing that the construction of the field of international relations itself reflected the biases of major powers and dominant western subjectivities in a cold war world (Ackerly and True 2008a). Revealing the ways in which political power structures conditioned the knowledge production of the discipline was important for revealing that the social construction of knowledge was also political – leaving women *and* gender issues outside of the most powerful political spaces. Feminists were not alone in challenging the power of epistemology in international relations (IR). Feminist challenges emerged as a part of broader epistemological challenges that included non-feminist critical theory, postmodern, post-colonial, and neoMarxist perspectives. Each discipline has its own history with feminism and multidisciplinaryity.

This book is a product of these multidisciplinary feminist interventions and research agendas. We are able to write this book *because* there is vast feminist work across disciplines and *we* are able to write this book because our particular disciplines – Political Theory and International Relations – recognize feminism and methodology as important areas of scholarships.

In some forms of scholarship, the exposition of the work does not require the authors to situate themselves in the sociology of the field. For our purposes, it is important that this introductory chapter situate us in our fields. Though explicit self-situation is not always an essential element in the text of a given piece of feminist social science scholarship, *reflection* on one's

**Box 1.5 About the authors**

The sociology of our backgrounds in political theory, political science, and international relations (IR) certainly conditions our view of which struggles may be more difficult for a researcher. In political science and IR, the *science* of social science is highly respected and we seek to advise readers on how to be true to a feminist research ethic while being comprehensible to, and able to be judged “rigorous” by, a social science-oriented audience.

Our understanding of feminism and feminist questions are *global*. Because we think that it is empirically and normatively imperative to understand feminism in its global and local contexts, we read broadly about feminism around the world. Extensively referencing global feminism, we seek to share these references in order that we may all better understand our work in its global context.

We met and began collaborating in 2000. We each have two children and partners with full-time careers, one in academe, one not.

own location is. We situate ourselves in Box 1.5 because throughout the book we will further draw on our own locations and experiences. We do this not to portray ours as representative (in fact, ours are quite different from each other’s), but as a friend, colleague or mentor would share her experience and from her experience and therefore our particulars are relevant to the readers’ ability to interpret those parts of the text that draw on our particular experiences.

How *you* use this book will in part be conditioned by how feminism intersects with the mainstream of your discipline; whether you feel comfortable reflecting on the structures of power in knowledge production, and whether your home discipline acknowledges the implications for empirical research of such reflections. Consequently, feminist research will take different forms in different fields and in the hands of different researchers. There are not one or two replicable models of feminist research. We hope this book opens to you the possibility of learning from other fields even as you engage with the specificity of your own if that is your goal, or that it empowers you to cross disciplinary boundaries, confident in a compass that can guide you across and back.

However you read this book, whatever your research question, we hope that it inspires you to enjoy the intellectual fruits of a reflexive approach to research that encourages you to engage in the research process consciously and deliberately even while appreciating the distraction and inspiration of feminist inquiry.

## Conclusion

Research is about listening, not expertise. Research is about being curious, skeptical, surprised, and sometimes helpless. Research is a process; even though in academe it is often assessed by an outcome or output, a final paper, talk, or publication. It is a process, one we muddle through, and one that challenges our ethical sensibilities if they are activated by the theoretical and personal commitments that bring us to scholarly endeavors.

While muddling through is expected, we must learn from our mistakes and averted mistakes, extracting from each quandary all of the theoretical, methodological, and practical insights to be gained so that each quandary is a maximally informative learning opportunity. This book contributes to the collaborative view of any inquiry – even individual scholarship – as contributing to shared knowledge by filling in, correcting, transgressing, challenging, rethinking, revisiting, reconceptualizing, and piecing together. The book should make it easier for us to notice and learn from the connections that can be made across research questions and disciplines. Ideally, we will be able to learn from our self-reflective questioning before the learning opportunities presented by a challenge or quandary in our research pass us by. In this way we show that curiosity, skepticism, persistence, and surprise can function as research tools, *rigorous research tools*, which are essential for doing feminist research.

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