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Taking on, Thinking about, and Doing Feminist Research in Geography

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What makes research in geography *feminist*? If you're a feminist, do you *have to* do feminist research? And, if you're *not* a feminist, can you do *feminist* research? What sorts of things do you *need* to know about in order to *do* feminist research? How do you go about *making* a conventional method *feminist*? Can the *practice* of geography research actually *ever* be feminist?

I began thinking about this book with this seemingly endless list of questions in mind, questions with definitive answers nowhere in sight. Then, I wondered about wanting definitive answers. I thought what a treat it would be to know when I had one and how suitably impressed I would be when I saw one. Yet I'm content not to know. In fact, I revel in not knowing – not knowing for sure. I'm comfortable asking questions about research that have no “right” answers, to talk endlessly about how feminism influences research in geography with whomever has similar inclinations. I've been interested in feminist geography research for what seems like ages now, as an undergraduate stealing glances of *Antipode* for special projects, research papers, and for any chance I could get. I eventually figured out that the path to being an academic – studying, obtaining degrees, and landing a tenure-track position at a university – seemed to be a worthwhile path to follow so that I could continue being a feminist while being employed. All these years later, after having undertaken various types of feminist research projects in geography and teaching feminist methodologies in a number of contexts, I decided that I wanted to pull together a collection of works that was organized around issues that I found useful in undertaking feminist research in geography. For me, and I would anticipate that for others this might also be the case, it makes sense to sort feminist research into processes that we engage in when putting feminist geography into practice: taking on, thinking about, and doing feminist research. And,

to be sure, these processes only make sense in the context of the history of methodological work within feminist geography.

Even though developing a feminist analysis was an issue early on in the radical movement in geography, methodological concerns began appearing in print only in the 1990s (see for example McDowell, 1992a, 1993a, 1993b; *Canadian Geographer*, 1993). It wasn't that feminists in geography weren't interested in doing feminist research; rather, feminists weren't publishing their thoughts on feminist methodologies. It soon became important however to refine feminist concepts in geography, including those concepts associated with doing feminist research – method, methodology, and epistemology (Moss, 1993, pp. 48–9). These early methodological works were heavily influenced by feminist work done in the early and mid-1980s (see for example Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981; Roberts, 1981; Bowles and Klein, 1983; Harding, 1986, 1987a; Hartsock, 1984). In fact, Sandra Harding's (1987b, pp. 2–3) definitions of *method* as techniques used in gathering evidence, *methodology* as a theory and analysis of how research should proceed, and *epistemology* as a theory of knowledge, are still powerful beginning points in understanding processes involved in undertaking feminist research. As debates unfolded within and outside geography throughout the 1980s and 1990s, feminists worked out more sophisticated definitions, especially as they related to racialized and sexualized relations within feminist scholarship (see for example Sedgwick, 1990; Mohanty, 1991; Collins, 1998). The crux of these concepts remained the same – method has to do with *doing* research, methodology had to do with *approaching* research, and epistemology had to do with *knowledge associated with doing and approaching research*.

Attention to methodological issues in feminist geography coincided with the increased publication of debates in collections of works focusing on a specific aspect of feminist methodology in women's studies, sociology, and anthropology (see for example Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Nielson, 1990; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Gluck and Patai, 1991) and of more generalized handbooks or "how-to" books (see for example Eichler, 1988; Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Smith, 1990a, 1990b; Reinhartz, 1992). In geography, these feminist debates manifested in collections of journal articles (see *Canadian Geographer*, 1993; *Professional Geographer*, 1994, 1995; *Antipode*, 1995), sections of books on feminist geography (see Jones, Nast and Roberts, 1997a; WGSG, 1997; McDowell, 1999), and single articles appearing in wide variety of feminist and non-feminist geography journals (see for example Pratt, 1993, 2000; Katz, 1996; Moss and Matwychuk, 1996, 2000; Domosh, 1997; Rose, 1997; Nairn, 1999).

This interest in methodology among feminist geographers was not only a part of how feminism shapes feminist research in geography but also, as Susan Hanson (1997, p. 122) points out, part of how geography shapes

feminist approaches to research. Feminist geographers took up topics that were specific to the discipline: spatializing the constitution of identities, contextualizing meanings of places in relation to gender, and demonstrating how gender as a social construction intersects with other socially constructed categories within particular spatialities, among many other topics. Being able to work through these types of interests has had an impact on the way feminists approach research within geography ranging from approaching research as a feminist, through integrating spatial conceptualizations into a feminist research framework, to choosing feminist methods for collecting and analyzing information. The maturity of the methodological arguments developed by so many feminists within the past several years makes feminist geography a rich field from which to draw out specific research practices. Being a feminist matters when taking on research in geography in that a feminist politics – whether it be based on pro-woman, anti-oppression, or based on social justice – influences all aspects of the research process. Thinking about feminist research tends to sharpen an approach to a project in that understanding power and knowledge brings into focus the varied contexts within which research takes place. Doing feminist research means actually undertaking the task of collecting and analyzing information while engaging a feminist politics. By including pieces written by different feminists with different perspectives on research and methods, I am able to offer a collage of ideas, thoughts, and arguments about the *practice* of feminist geography. Instead of reiterating the arguments about method, methodology, and epistemology by way of introducing these works, I turn the kaleidoscope just a bit and focus on sets of issues that have arisen out of those discussions. As a way to make my way through these issues, I first discuss taking on, thinking about, and doing feminist research in turn and through the discussion offer a possible framework for understanding specific practices in feminist research in geography.

Taking on Feminist Research

Taking on feminist research entails close scrutiny and (re)politicization of all aspects of the research process – from choosing a research topic to selecting data collection methods, from setting a research question to conceptualizing theoretical constructs, and from designing a research project to presenting and circulating analyses. Working with the variegated contours of the infusions, interfaces, and articulations of feminism and research is a first step in taking on feminist research in geography. Placing feminist work as well as placing yourself as a feminist researcher in the context of research in geography and in feminism – contextualizing your

work – makes it easier to see where you are coming from and where you see your work going.

Though perhaps tiresome to both ask and answer, being able to figure out why a piece of research is feminist continues to be important. Feminism has often been differentiated by distinguishing waves of political approaches to explaining and understanding women's lives. "First wave" feminism is associated with social reform, suffrage, and temperance movements; "second wave" with equitable pay, sexual liberation, and consciousness-raising; and "third wave" with difference, speaking from the margins, and positioning self and other within multiple oppressions. And, now, as we are moving through the new decade of the twenty-first century, feminism is being reconstituted into *feminisms*, ones that go beyond gender as the central construct in defining any feminism (see for example Hekman, 1999; Oakley, 2000), beyond power conceived dichotomously as either something to hold or something to be used (see for example Collins, 1998; Sandoval, 2000), and beyond body as the home and/or conduit of being and experience (see for example Kruks, 2000). With the increase in various influences affecting the constitution of feminisms, it becomes more and more difficult to differentiate pieces of work that use feminist frameworks, feminist theories, or feminist constructs to provide critical or radical readings, research, and analyses and those that are indeed feminist. At the risk of being essentialist, that is promoting the idea that there is a feminist *essence* that exists in *all* feminist research, I think that it is useful to unravel explicitly the ties that bind a piece of research in geography to a particular feminist politics, a particular feminism. Refusing to accept that there is one singular feminist politics does not preclude identifying straightforwardly how an author of a research text is engaging feminism in the sense of not only abstract concepts, but also concrete actions.

Being able to scrutinize more closely the ways in which we take on feminisms in research may be a way to open up debate with non-feminists as well as among feminists themselves. With non-feminists, debates could take up the issue of what advantages do feminisms offer researchers that non-feminist research can't and, perhaps, vice versa. Unfortunately, what happens in this type of debate is that the potential overlap of views that is the basis for exchanging ideas is quite limited and therefore falls flat as many feminist geographers no doubt have experienced in classrooms, conferences, and colloquia. "Opening up debate" among feminists has its own set of problems. In an academic milieu that is masculinist in its practices, how can feminists wholly resist reproducing these practices and remain *feminists* and *academic researchers*? Much feminist research in geography is masculinist in its practice, not out of intention, but moreso out of training for being an academic and for survival in the field. Throughout the research project, feminists are continually holding in

tension the immediacy of constructing authority through doing research, writing about it, and teaching it and the notion that what they are doing initially emerged as a contestation of an existing orthodoxy. Paradoxically, even while negotiating this tension, within writings about feminist research in geography there has arisen seemingly inevitably a feminist orthodoxy in the English-speaking academy, one that tends to value qualitative research and reflexivity as cornerstones of feminist research in geography. Paying attention to the wide-ranging and perhaps roaming definitions of feminism that infuse feminist research in geography and then engaging with those ideas with feminists in discussion and in print could possibly release some of the tension and facilitate a way through this dominance toward opening up what it might mean to take on feminist research.

How this debate takes place and the form it inhabits is open. I think that this book is one attempt at trying to rupture the closely knitted visions of feminist methodologies in geography and to rumple the smooth progress of developing decidedly feminist approaches to research in geography and accentuate the highly contingent performance of feminisms in feminist geographers' works. If taking on feminism in doing research in geography makes a difference, then learning about how feminists have come to a feminism in their work is useful. The content of each piece has a particular relationship with methodology, epistemology, and method. Elisabeth Bäschlin provides a brief history of the forging of feminist geography in German-speaking countries. Her tale plays out in four scenes with pioneering feminists weaving networks and eventually entering institutions so as to shape more fully the future of taking on feminism in geographic research. Mary Gilmartin reflects on her personal journey toward geography through her readings of Toni Morrison. She comes to understand that she can access experiences in ways that will assist in negotiating the tension between knowing, learning, and doing. Meghan Cope lays out what types of feminist claims about knowledge affect the undertaking of research. She unravels just one type of bind that marks a piece of research as feminist. Louise Johnson draws on her own experience with a research project with women looking for employment. She recounts how feminism makes a difference in research activities including securing funding, hiring research assistants, and analyzing data. Bearing in mind the contingent ways feminisms articulate in specific research projects, trying to identify connections among feminisms, geographies, and research while reading these contributions is but one entry point into understanding what taking on feminist research involves.

Thinking about Feminist Research

Issues arising when thinking about feminist research, though similar, manifest differently than when taking on feminist research. The extent to which feminisms influence research processes as well as the translation of feminist politics into research are just as significant. Yet thinking about feminist research also includes the articulation of specific theories *with* a feminist methodological approach. For example, being able to interweave thoughts about identity, subjectivity, and self requires thinking through how to access salient information as a feminist as well as how to create a feminist framework for understanding identity, subjectivity, and self. Through this process, ambiguities, contradictions, and paradoxes emerge alongside relative certainties, congruencies, and consistencies about both the content and the process (methodology). These seemingly opposing empirical findings permit researchers to continue pursuing ideas, thoughts, and notions about the topic and how to do research. Not all geographers undertaking feminist research focus on identity, subjectivity, and self as research topics; however, these topics have been important in understanding the relationships researchers have with themselves, research participants, research topics and thus have come to play a large part in understanding feminist methodology (see for example McDowell, 1993b, 1997b; Nast, 1994). The particularities of methodological discussion regarding topics, themes, and the manner of engagement are specific to the feminists thinking about research. Within feminist geography, researchers have tended to think about power, knowledge, and contexts together with sorting out the practicalities of doing research.

Power is a central construct in discussions of how to approach feminist research and differences in conceptualizations of power produce different types of feminist approaches to research. Feminist methodological discussions rarely revolve around competing conceptualizations of power that would be useful for feminist research; rather, discussions of power usually promote one particular conceptualization. For example, Gillian Rose (1997) argues that feminists who discuss “distributions of power” invoke a structuralist account of power that is not particularly useful for feminists. She claims that using the notion of uneven landscapes of power refuses to acknowledge that people variously located in complex webs of power participate in their own constitution. As a result of invoking such a transparent notion of power, feminist geographers only end up creating a transparent reflexivity – something that is impossible to achieve because no one can know themselves thoroughly and exhaustively. In contrast, Linda McDowell (1997b), dealing with the same sets of issues – destabilization of the category woman, what makes research feminist, and gender – comes to

a different conclusion. Even with the shift in focus on *how* gender is constituted through power, she remains focused on transformative understandings of women's conditions of everyday life. She makes the point that holding onto notions of power that conceive social relations as flexible but not too flexible permits complex abstractions to explain more adequately complexities in everyday life. What is interesting about these two methodological discussions is that they both focus on identity and difference – of the researcher and of the research participant. These same interests reproduce feminist research in geography differently in different contexts (for example see Peace and Longhurst, 1997, for the Aotearoa/New Zealand case; Bäschlin and Meier, 1995, for feminist geography in the German-speaking academy). In disciplines other than geography, feminist researchers discuss approaches to research and power outside identity and difference. For example, in North American sociology, struggling to justify qualitative methods in light of quantitative dominance shapes feminist discussions of methodology (for example see Devault, 1999; *Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche féministe* 2000) whereas in North American psychology, unsettling links among masculine power and subjectivity fashions discussion (see for example Swann, 1997; Ussher, 1997).

Feminists undertaking research in geography think about multiple aspects of knowledge through an array of relevant concerns. Geography as a discipline has privileged a masculine subject position and reproduced binaries such as male/female, culture/nature, and object/subject where more value has been placed on the first part of the dichotomy. Feminists in geography have followed the lead of several feminist philosophers in examining the underlying assumptions of who are knowers, what can be known, and what is valued as knowable (see for example Hawkesworth, 1990; Harding, 1991; Haraway, 1991; Tuana, 1993). Understanding how masculinity permeates the discipline has opened up ways of thinking about knowledge such that a feminist subject positioning can develop within geography as well as that the same, masculine-weighted binaries are not continually being reproduced. In coming to terms with these sorts of assumptions, feminists also distinguish processes that construct or constitute knowledge – processes that are primarily discursive such as reiterating masculine words (for example, mankind), concepts (for example, objectivity), and notions (for example, exploring, conquering, and subduing the exotic as integral to the practice of geography) and processes that are primarily material such as mentoring students, training researchers, and teaching students (for examples of these types of arguments see Berg and Kearns, 1996; Blunt and Rose, 1994; Desbiens, 1999; Moss et al., 1999; Hanson, 2000). Because these processes are saturated with power even within feminism, a politics surrounding the construction of knowledge

endures beyond the overt actions involving written or spoken words. More subtle activities, such as the choice of authors in a reading list for a senior undergraduate class, of a book to be reviewed in a journal, or of a cited work as an exemplar of a point a scholar wants to make continue (re)creating an authoritative knowledge that may or may not challenge the dominant orthodoxy in feminism. Being able to read works critically under the conditions within which one learns implies untangling the processes constructing that specific contribution as a piece of knowledge as well as part the process of creating knowledge that would include that specific contribution.

In addition to issues involving power and knowledge, thinking about feminist research entails thinking about the context within which research takes place. Because power is intimately tied up with the construction, constitution, and production of knowledge through research, the context within which research can take place also needs close inspection. Take, for instance, funding and time, two of the most limiting and enabling aspects of research. Ample time and money creates an environment where research can actually take place. Yet having both does not necessarily entail an unproblematic research process. Questions immediately arise as to whether to accept money from, for example, a corporate entity, a philanthropic foundation, or the state or to hire research assistants to increase research time for the project. The latter of course further begs the question, what sorts of employment relationships are part of feminist research? Designing research projects sensitive to notions of power and knowledge takes a considerable amount of planning. Issues for thought range from, for example, “appropriate” attire to seat location while conducting interviews; from etiquette for contacting potential research participants to remuneration of actual participants; and from facilitating relationships among research team members and participants to enabling a supportive environment for training research associates in the field. Dilemmas inevitably emerge even with careful, thoughtful, and thorough planning and not all quandaries can be resolved – immediately or in the long term. The context of research also includes understanding issues beyond the immediacy of undertaking a feminist research project. For example, in order to secure funding, researchers need to figure out what types of research agendas are being advanced by particular funding agencies so that applications for funding are directed to appropriate institutions. Also, recognizing conventional practices of the academy *in specific places* is important so that an aspiring feminist researcher knows whether to engage in local struggles over justifying feminist research as “legitimate.” Thinking about research in the context of feminist research then includes understanding the specificity of the spatialities of both the research process and the milieu of feminist research.

The authors in this book have given thought to and written about specific aspects of power, knowledge, and context, either explicitly or implicitly. Liz Bondi explores a paradoxical space within feminism. She relates her experiences with the journal *Gender, Place and Culture* as an example of a feminist politics in an uncertain space as part of the context within which feminist geography contributes to creating knowledge. David Butz and Lawrence Berg present some of their thoughts on being male and trying to do feminist research while working through notions of masculine dominance in the politics of knowledge production. They offer an innovative conceptualization, a duppy (which refers to a variety of sly and malevolent ghosts) feminist, that may describe more sincerely the power dimensions among men engaging feminism. Karen Falconer Al-Hindi and Hope Kawabata use Hope's research project as a backdrop against which Karen argues that feminist researchers do have the potential to be more fully self-reflexive in the pursuit of understanding power relations in the context of interviews. Unlike some of the prevailing understandings of reflexivity in feminist geography, Karen claims that an equitable power relationship between researchers and research participants is possible. Gill Valentine recalls some of the situations in her research projects that call into question assumptions about sameness and difference. She argues that her performance of her gender and sexuality is context-specific – varying from project to project, interview to interview precisely because negotiations and readings of both are momentary and specific. From these contributions, it becomes more feasible to think that sorting through issues of power, knowledge, and context may pave the way for actually doing feminist research.

Doing Feminist Research

Issues surrounding doing feminist research in geography are in a sense an amalgamation of matters arising when taking on and thinking about feminist research. Paying close attention to how ideas about feminism, power, knowledge, and context play out when undertaking the research itself and engaging particular research methods are part and parcel to doing feminist research. Without a continuation of thinking through these issues, the work going into designing a *feminist* research project might be lost.

Three key concerns shaping the doing of feminist research in geography are the scales of analysis and project, analytical issues emerging from engaging in the research process, and the choice of data collection method. The scale of analysis – the spatial focus of the inquiry – differs from the scale of the project – the spatial extent of the research. Feminist research can be undertaken on a variety of scales – for example, local, regional,

national, and international – with a variety of scales of analysis – for example, body, people, home, institution, city, or region. Although feminist research often focuses on local, micro-scale studies, there is no intrinsic connection between feminist research and scale. Drawing out the implications of a specific scale of analysis as well as the scale of the project for the topic at hand is part of what research in geography is about (see the organization of McDowell's 1999 book).

What appear to be also significant in doing feminist research are the analytical issues emerging from engaging in the research process itself. Questions concerning the implementation of a feminist epistemology and feminist methodology manifest during the undertaking of research and emerge as problems or dilemmas. Sometimes analytical problems can involve incongruent knowledge claims, as for example, arguing that the experience of marginalized women is the (only) basis for political action while using a structuralist framework that situates experience outside accessible knowledge. Or, perhaps problems have to do with the incompatibility of topic and theory, as for example, focusing on detailed social practices of an institution and empowerment without accounting for the notion of how power is deployed through social relations of power in institutional settings. Both these types of problems cause difficulties in providing an analysis that makes sense. Problems may also arise when the methodological approach of a research project is at odds with the chosen theoretical framework. For example, maintaining a complex conceptualization of power methodologically throughout data collection and analysis (through a specific understanding of identity as fixed) while theoretically challenging the same conceptualization of power in the explanation of the phenomenon (identity as changing) can be difficult. Undesired slippage between concepts is common and can usually be identified and dealt with through discussions with colleagues, exchanges of works in progress, and write ups of the research. Addressing these types of problems as they emerge can strengthen the analysis of the topic of a research project as well as refine the methodological approach.

With regard to the choice of method in feminist geography there doesn't seem to be a question as to whether feminists "should" be using qualitative or quantitative approaches either for data collection or analysis (for an extensive exchange of ideas see *Professional Geographer*, 1995). Rather, the predominant view seems to be choosing a method *appropriate* to the research question. Feminists have argued that the issues brought to the fore during the challenge to quantitative methods, especially the exploitative nature of the relationship between numbers and people, are moot in the sense that qualitative methods can be just as exploitative (see for example the argument in Stacey 1988). Calling for more sensitivity to the relationship between the researcher and the research participant (often referred to

as “the researched”) definitely heightened awareness about the actual choice of method for data collection and analysis. Interviewing women, for example, was not just about interviewing women (in contrast to Oakley’s 1980 argument), and the types of conclusions that one could draw when basing the entire collection of information on the notion that women had some connection to each other because they were women had to be questioned. Where that woman was located *vis-à-vis* the multiplicity of power relations mattered when it came to interacting and deploying power within the research process. Interviewing elite women, for example, was different, and perhaps could and should be approached differently than interviewing women marginalized by the same economic processes that made the first woman a member of an elite. These choices of method, too, are inexorably shaped by the types of questions feminist researchers in geography are interested in asking. Certain methods seem to be associated with certain kinds of research – ethnography with cross-cultural research, focus groups with minority groups being studied by majority groups, and autobiography with marginalized women. But this is not always the case. Ethnography can be used within one’s own culture; focus groups can be used as a way of studying “us” instead of “them”; and autobiography might be useful in addressing privilege.

The authors writing about doing feminist research discuss specific research projects in terms of project design, choice of method, and dilemmas surfacing once the research has begun. They also address issues concerning scales of analysis and projects, analytical issues emerging while engaging in the research process, and choice of methods in their chapters. Maureen Reed teases out fibers that hold in balance the “needs” of the researcher and the “demands” of funding agencies. She uses examples from several forestry research projects with different scales of analysis and shows how this tension can be balanced. Karen Nairn pulls together some of her thoughts about conducting multi-method research. She politicizes the notion of “field trip” in the vein of politicizing “fieldwork” and ends up exposing processes that construct geographic knowledge. Mei-Po Kwan argues that understanding quantitative analysis is important for feminists so that they can root out masculine bias. She works through specific examples and pulls out the epistemological claims that make the research either feminist or not. Joan Marshall presents some of her deliberations over choices she has had to make while negotiating personal and professional relationships with the people in the community where she is undertaking her research. Because the community she is studying is so small and replete with complex social relations, she must continually scrutinize and assess her interpretations and presentations of information from her research. Deirdre McKay seeks to problematize the personal interaction between researchers and research participants: she is both

enthusiastic and reluctant to disclose information about both herself and the women she talked with. She suggests that resolution may come through critical analysis of not just the topic, but the process of engagement. Kim England presents detailed examples of her experiences of interviewing elite women. She draws out the dissension between her expectations and the actual happenings of the interview setting and provides useful tips on how to adjust. Geraldine Pratt raises questions about the process of interpreting material collected through focus groups. Through her critical reading of printed transcripts, she encourages feminists to access the potential focus groups have to offer in providing insight into topics such as power and identity. Although these contributions are not exhaustive of the types of feminist research geographers undertake – some obvious omissions are institutional ethnography, survey research, and participatory action research – they do represent the range of methods taken up by geographers doing feminist research. These contributors demonstrate *en masse* that in doing feminist research, taking on feminism as a methodological approach to research matters and that the thinking about feminist research doesn't stop.

Feminist Methodologies in Geography

To reiterate, feminist methodology is about the approach to research, including conventional aspects of research – the design, the data collection, the analysis, and the circulation of information – and the lesser acknowledged aspects of conventional research – relationships among people involved in the research process, the actual conduct of the research, and process through which the research comes to be undertaken and completed. But it is not just adjustments in the definition of methodology that make a methodology “feminist.” Making a methodology “feminist” implies politicizing a methodology *through* feminism. As we already know, a feminist politics has a wide range of possibilities. These possibilities are realized through our own translations of a politics into practice (read praxis). Our exchanges of information, experience, and knowledge through various types of interactions – taking and teaching courses, attending and giving workshops, giving and receiving advice, writing and reading papers – seek to further refine existing arguments as well as open up new spaces for new, innovative directions for future feminist research in geography. Whether it be in formal lectures or informal conversations, critiques are ongoing and are necessarily part of learning, understanding, and engaging feminist research.

What may be helpful in figuring out how to approach, assess, or affirm feminist approaches to research in geography is to contribute to discussions

of how feminist methodologies play out in the politics of doing research in and out of the classroom. I have found three discussion points, conceived as tensions rather than polarities, useful in igniting dialogue.

Feminism as a politics is sometimes difficult to grasp for those not already committed. The increased incidence of younger women refusing to claim to be feminists might be directly related to the backlash against the public gains feminists have made in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the negative media images of individual feminists (see Faludi 1992 for a popular take on this issue). Is the question really about whether or not you call yourself feminist, or is it about taking up the politics associated with a particular feminism? Or, can you call yourself a feminist without being politically committed in your research or in your daily life? And, if you're not committed, are you being a dilettante, perhaps shopping for a politically correct stance for future job opportunities, and is that a "bad" thing? Coming to terms with this tension between political commitment and dilettantism is embedded in our everyday existence and can be deeply troubling.

As can the tension between theory and praxis. Theory, as a combination of both conceptualizations of phenomena and an explanation of how phenomena work, exist, or articulate, and praxis, as a politically active way to live in the world, are undeniably linked. Understanding one as integrally wrapped up within the other creates an environment where there cannot be any act that is not political. Understanding them as separate entities permits neatly carved out niches among those interested in theorizing life (for example, academics) and dealing with social injustices (for example, activists). Is either a solution? Many feminists hearken back to Karl Marx's words, and point out that the contribution of feminism is not (only) to provide an understanding of the world, the point is (also) to change it. Yet living daily life always being politically engaged is emotionally painful and ethically debilitating. Are there guidelines to resolving such a tension for feminists? For feminist researchers?

When disagreements emerge over things like the extent or intensity of political commitment and the practice of theory, how, when, and in what context do feminists express criticism? Being aware of the tension between maintaining solidarity and engaging in critique is crucial in practicing a feminist politics. What is difficult in negotiating this tension is to "know" when to support other feminists, even though you disagree with them, and when to speak out against feminist actions, even though you might support the end result. In the context of feminist research in geography, this may play out in a variety of ways. You might give support to feminists presenting their work in departmental colloquiums even though you adhere to an opposing theoretical framework whereas you might choose to publish a critique of the same feminist's work in a feminist journal, perhaps outside the reach of the department's immediate attention.

The outcome of discussing these tensions in the context of taking on, thinking about, and doing feminist research is uncertain. It may polarize discussion between feminists and non-feminists. It may pull feminists apart and set up a continuum of “pure” and “tainted” feminist politics. Or, it may, as it has in my experience, evoke a set of ideas that establish a fresh, context-specific framework for engaging methodological debates in feminist geography. The process of setting up the framework through discussion might set a collective, engaging tone for reading, discussing, and critiquing the contributions in this textbook.

About the Book

I set the purpose of this book as threefold. First, I wanted to put together a textbook with a wide variety of feminist perspectives on putting feminist geography into practice, or how to approach research in geography as a feminist and how to undertake feminist research in geography. Several influences within feminism are represented in these chapters: environmentalism, Marxism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and socialism. There is also a noticeable difference between second and third wave feminisms as well as between feminisms that deal primarily with discourses and those that deal with materialities. What is profoundly attractive about all these contributions is that they are all “feminist.” Although all may not echo your particular feminism or feminist stance, my hope is that some of the work at least resonates with your experience or piques your interest. Second, I intended to capture a *sample* of leading feminist research from a variety of feminist geographers. The contributors have various relationships with the English-speaking academy with between three and over twenty years of experience as feminist geographers – ranging from a complete “outsider” to a well-ensconced “insider,” from undergraduate students to full tenured professors, from the “margins” of Australia and New Zealand in the English-speaking academy to the bi-nodal “center” of North America and Britain. Locations of these contributors within the complexly spun web of power relations and social divisions vary according to sex, age, gender, class background, expressions of sexuality, race, ability, and ethnicity. Access to such difference may or may not be easy for the reader unless that difference is disclosed as part of the discussion about methodology. Third, I aimed to create a collection that participated more fully in demystifying the research process and making research accessible in various ways. Rather than portraying research as something too important, too complex, or too difficult for women and feminists to undertake (unfortunately, a still too common belief!), I sought to unravel, in bits and pieces,

the research process by inviting other feminists to write specifically about one particular aspect that I thought might interest them. Breaking down research into parts makes the tasks not only “do-able,” but also “identifiable” – not in a search to simplify research, but rather to make each aspect more comprehensible. By piecing together the text, I was able to highlight what I thought important for discussion: rather than focusing on rigor, validity, reliability, and bias (points upon which non-feminists attempt to debunk feminist research), the book tends to focus on personal and political struggles, rethinking research strategies, and embracing contradictions.

With such a tightly woven purpose, one could walk away with the notion that this was the intent from the beginning. I’d rather not have that happen. This book has its own history, one that is only partly located in feminist methodologies in geography. Originally, I had planned a feminist book on autobiography and many of the contributors had agreed to write about their experiences of being a feminist geographer. At the book proposal review process, however, the book transformed into a book on feminist methodologies in geography. Yet even this process was subject to revisions – initially the book was conceived as a text on approaching gender and geography, but as the contributors created their pieces, it became clear that this was a book on feminist geography and not gender and geography. All the contributors remained committed to the project, however, and the change in the final list of contributors reflects competing commitments more than intellectual differences. Some contributions went through a formal peer-review process at the submission stage, whereby I was primarily the editor. I acted as both an editor and a reviewer for almost all the contributions. Through the editing process, I strove to create a tone that was personal, informal, erudite, and critical in hopes of producing an accessible text for undergraduates and new graduate students. Even though I saw myself as being picky beyond what I usually can muster enough in courage to display, all authors eagerly took on this challenge, and succeeded.

In organizing these contributions, it seemed to me that the themes of “taking on,” “thinking about,” and “doing” feminist research in geography encompassed what it was that I thought was needed in a textbook on feminist methodologies in geography. Taking on feminism in research is a political act. Yet being a feminist in geography is not necessarily difficult, nor is it necessarily simple. Depending on the way feminist research in geography is situated within the most immediate institutional environment for geography (department, university, for example) and the way the discipline is conceived, presented, or “taught,” the path for developing as a feminist in geography or contributing to feminist geography will vary. Although uneven in constancy, feminism still struggles for legitimacy within geography and the academy. Thinking about feminist research is crucial to

being both a feminist and a researcher. What feminists decide to discuss about research stems directly from the meeting point of intellectual moments, such as the focus on self, subjectivity, identity, and difference as well as power and knowledge, and their values, ethics, and politics, such as social justice, equity, anti-oppression, and experience. How to go about achieving goals in feminist research is a tangible purpose for being a feminist geographer. The goals, of course, are set through the arduous process of self-reflection with collective voice and of finding a way through theory and praxis. Doing feminist research covers the nitty-gritty of the actual data collection and analysis. But even while doing the most mundane task, one needs to think about the method, the analysis, and the use of information or data; the audience, the participants, and members of the research team; and about how feminism articulates with the chosen methods, form of presentation, and circulation of information or findings.

Another large part of the preparation of the book was the development of the pedagogical material, located at the beginning and end of each section. The Feminist Pedagogy Working Group, of which I was a member, consisted primarily of women undergraduate and graduate students in Victoria, British Columbia, who had some interest in feminism and geography. At one point, the group tried to include undergraduates at different universities through email connections, but this proved to be impractical. Each working member had answered a public invitation to attend a meeting about “putting together a textbook on feminist methodologies in geography.” Not all members were feminist geographers, two were in English; not all were students, two had already graduated and three finished their studies during the project; and not all were the same age, the age span was nearly 30 years. Each woman was interested in drawing on their experiences, especially in the classroom, to develop material that would assist in making research more accessible to students like themselves. We held meetings where we discussed the content of each chapter in detail, possible questions that would provoke engaged discussion, and potential exercises that might enhance or challenge the point being made by the author(s). Three matters shaping the interpretation of the material in the chapters continually arose in the discussions – the definition of feminism, the use of language, and the creation of authority. The Group decided to convey the substance of these discussions as short essays that introduce each of the three sections of the book. In “Defining Feminism?” group members point to the variety of intellectual and experiential elements that have left impressions on their and other people’s notions of what feminism is and can be. In “Delimiting Language?” group members question to what extent the use of jargon or precise language can be useful in the practice of feminist research. In “Decentering Authority!” group members draw attention to underlying thoughts about the processes through which authors

forge, reproduce, sustain, and decenter authority. Communicating the nuanced meanings and the extensive array of discussion in written form has been taxing, for not all points can be represented adequately, and burdensome, in that choices have had to be made. The final form the pedagogical material takes was the most effective way the Group could express their engagement with the material. Members of the Group pored over each word, each question, and each exercise as a group, individually, and then as a group again. Group members offer each word, each question, and each exercise as *only one way* to engage the material presented in the chapters.

As with any writing project, especially textbooks, as the book took form, lacunae began to appear – some foreseen, others unanticipated. I knew that the contributors were all located in privileged and hegemonically powerful positions as members associated (at least at some time) with a university steeped in Western thought. I also knew that the topics addressed by the authors did not explicitly address racialization processes within feminist research, the problematization of the construction of ‘race’ and ‘race’ relations with feminist geography, or anti-racist strategies for effecting social and political change. More diversity along the lines of including feminist geographers from the South as well as topically would have only strengthened the collection. What I had not anticipated was the lack of variety in data collection methods and in analytical methods. Qualitative data collection methods dominate these pages and qualitative and textual analytical methods are by far the most popular types of analytical methods included in the book. But this lack of variety should not be too surprising given the propensity of feminist geographers in the English-speaking academy to reject quantitative methods as part of introducing feminism into geography. These elisions and omissions notwithstanding, I think that this book as a text will be an outstanding contribution to the practice of feminist geography.

Read, engage, learn, enjoy.

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