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Advancing Women In Leadership

# **Feminist Epistemology: The Foundation of Feminist Research and its Distinction from Traditional Research**

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There are many questions surrounding feminist research. The most common question is: “What makes feminist research distinctive from traditional research within the Social Sciences?” In trying to answer this question, we need to examine feminist epistemology and the intertwining nature of epistemology, methodology (theory and analysis of how research should proceed), and methods (techniques for gathering data) utilized by feminist researchers. Feminist epistemology in contrast to traditional epistemologies is the foundation on which feminist methodology is built. In turn, the research that develops from this methodology differs greatly from research that develops from traditional methodology and epistemology. Therefore, I argue that one must have a general understanding of feminist epistemology and methodology before one can understand what makes this type of research unique. Such a foundation will assist us in our exploration of the realm of feminist research, while illuminating the differences between feminist and traditional research.

## **An Introduction to Feminist Epistemology**

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and how it is that people come to know what they know (Johnson, 1995, p. 97). Originating from philosophy, epistemology comes to us from a number of disciplines, i.e.: sociology, psychology, political science, education, and women’s studies (Duran, 1991, p. xi). Feminist epistemology emerged from research within these fields that professed to spell out what “feminist knowledge” entails, what is implied by women’s ways of knowing, and research on women’s lives (p. xi).

Unlike traditional epistemology, the term feminist epistemology does not have a single referent. Feminist theorists have used the term variously to refer to women's "ways of knowing", "women's experiences", or simple "women's knowledge" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 1). Therefore, the term feminist epistemology is

a means of summarizing, to some extent, and integrating women's knowledge and experiences. Inherent in feminist epistemology is the "multiplicity of women's voices" (Duran, 1991, p. xiii). This is central to feminist research. It implies that feminist researchers need not search for the one "Truth" but for the multiple "truths" that exist in researching the oppression of women.

The recent literature on feminist epistemology suggests that the word "epistemology" has been "reconstructed" by feminists to include the broadest possible sense of the term. This has been done by drawing attention to areas previously left untouched by traditional epistemologies and research. Additionally, by creating "gynocentric epistemics", knowledge centered on women's realities, a new knowledge is brought forth. The reason for these actions is the feminist desire to have women's experiences recognized, legitimated, and included as possible subjects of research.

The history of feminist epistemology is the history of the clash between feminist commitments to "the struggles of women to have their understandings of the world legitimated" and "the commitment of traditional philosophy to various accounts of knowledge" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 2). The history of epistemology has also been one of inquiry into "whether knowledge was possible" (Cartesianism/traditional epistemology) and "seldom into the conditions producing knowledge" (feminist epistemology) (Duran, 1991, p. 3). Cartesianism, traditional epistemology, assumes the unproblematic generalizability of knowledge from its context of discovery to a variety of contexts of use (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 191). This approach also views knowledge as existing independently of the person(s) who produced it. Feminist epistemology rejects these notions. The feminist researcher "is an active presence, an agent in research, and she constructs what is actually a viewpoint, a point of view that is both a construction or version and is consequently and necessarily partial in its understandings" (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 6). Feminist epistemology assumes "that those we deem to be knowers actually do possess knowledge" (Duran, 1991, p. 4). In other words, "knowledge is contextually specific" and not independent of the person(s) who produce it (p. 6). Therefore, feminist researchers must "acknowledge the ethical and political issues involved in what we do, how we do it, and the claims we make for it (p. 7)." We must not assume the generalizability of our knowledge and experiences.

As seen above, feminist epistemology evolved from a critique of traditional epistemology and its search for a dominant narrative. Today, feminist epistemology is comprised of research programs that move beyond the critique of traditional research to a reframing of the problematic of knowledge to unearth the politics of epistemology (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, pp. 2-3). Alcoff and Potter suggest that feminist epistemologies should not be taken as involving a commitment to gender as the primary axis of oppression or positing that gender is a theoretical variable separable from other axes of oppression and susceptible to a unique analysis (pp. 3-4). If feminist research is to assist in the liberation of women by researching our oppression, then it must address virtually all forms of domination because women fill the ranks of every category of oppressed people. Feminist epistemology "seeks to unmake the web of oppressions and reweave the web of life" (p. 4). This is similar to what Lorraine Code describes as standpoint epistemologies. In her discussion, "Taking Subjectivity into Account", Code argues that traditional, mainstream epistemology creates the illusion of a universal "Truth" through the removal of "unacceptable" points of view. These "unacceptable" points of view are the experiences of the oppressed. Therefore, according to Code, the goal of feminist epistemology is to overturn "perspectival hierarchies" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 5).

Recent work concerning feminist epistemology, (i.e., Fox-Keller, 1985; Bordo, 1988; Harding, 1986) has a common theme: "There is a masculinist, androcentric tradition that yields a hypernormative, idealized, and stylistically aggressive mode of thought" (Duran, 1991, p. 8). Keller analyzes the relationship between androcentric epistemology in Plato and Plato's philosophy of sexual love and its link to metaphysics (p. 8). Bordo's study of Descartes Meditations is similar to Keller's work. Harding's analysis offers the feminist responses to the androcentrism inherent in science (p.10). All are examples of feminist

epistemology and its reactions to traditional research.

Harding's analysis has been interpreted by Alcoff & Potter as an illustration of the impact of androcentrism upon traditional epistemological assumptions of science. Harding argues that feminist epistemology, particularly feminist standpoint epistemologies, must seek validation of the perspectives of knowledge that have been ignored by traditional research (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 5). Harding identifies herself as a feminist standpoint epistemologist. Yet, Harding does not go as far as embracing relativism. She suggests that feminist standpoint epistemologies will increase and strengthen women's ability to achieve objectivity. This can be done by the use of feminist methodology, which involves starting from the lives of marginalized people (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p.6). This will reveal more of the unexamined assumptions influencing science and will generate more critical questions, thus producing a less partial and distorted account (p. 6). Therefore, Harding argues that this research needs to be undertaken by everyone, not just by the marginalized.

Stanley and Wise disagree with Harding's suggestion. They advocate women as the knowers and the doers. They also view feminist epistemology a bit differently. They define feminist epistemology as a "framework or theory for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge about the social world; that is, it concerns how to understand the nature of reality" (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 188). Since women's realities differ from men's realities, then feminist epistemology is women's epistemology. For example, women's leadership styles may vary from male leadership styles because they are not phallogocentric in origin. Women's leadership styles emanates from a female center and construction of reality. This reality is one of objectification and marginality, as defined by an androcentric society. Therefore, women's leadership styles tend to be transformational, collaborative efforts rather than a traditional "one man show".

Feminist epistemology distinguishes what women's knowledge is and how it may differ from the knowledge that dominates, which is usually men's knowledge and traditional research. This is done by specifying the sex of the "knowers". Feminist epistemologies also examine by what means someone becomes the knower and "the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated and some rejected in favor of another/others" (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 188). I believe that this is fundamental to feminist research, "for it is around the constitution of a feminist epistemology that feminism can most directly and far-reachingly challenge non-feminist frameworks and ways of working" (Stanley & Wise, 1993, pp. 188-189). Stanley and Wise allege that there are key areas of the feminist research process that draw from feminist epistemology, which sets it apart from traditional research, such as:

1. The researcher/research relationship should not be a hierarchical relationship;
2. Emotions should be seen as valuable aspects of the research process;
3. The conceptualizations of "objectivity" and "subjectivity" as binaries or dichotomies must not occur in research;
4. The researchers' intellectual autobiography must be taken into consideration when viewing their conclusions;
5. The researcher must consider the existence and management of the different "realities" or versions held by the researchers and the researched;
6. The researcher must be aware of issues surrounding authority and power in research;
7. The researcher must recognize that there is authority and power in the written representation of research. (p. 189)

Harding describes these basic feminist epistemologies and places them into three categories: feminist standpoint, feminist empiricism, and feminist postmodernism. When Harding writes of the feminist epistemologies, she is referring to "feminist ways of knowing" or to "feminist critiques of traditional accounts of ways of knowing" (Duran, 1991, p. 81).

## Feminist Standpoint Theory

The fact that women are charged with maintaining everyday life is the basis for feminist standpoint theory. Within research, standpoint feminists argue that the problem is deeper than "bad science" or "poor research methods". The problem is that the dominant conceptual schemes of research fit the experiences of Western, white, elite class males (Harding, 1991, p. 48). The specific social location of the knower is important to research because it shapes what is known and what is not known. Standpoint feminists argue that not all perspectives are equally valid, complete, discovered, or even heard by the use of traditional research methods. Therefore, it is essential for feminist research to begin from women's lives, "then we can arrive at empirically and theoretically more adequate descriptions" (p. 48). Harding argues, "Women's specific location in patriarchal societies is actually a resource in the construction of new knowledge" (Andersen, 1994, p. 373 citing Harding, 1991). "Reflecting long-standing feminist criticisms of the absence of women from or marginalized reports of women in research accounts, research done from the perspective of standpoint theories stresses a particular view that builds on and from women's experiences (Olsen, 1994, pp. 162-163 citing Harding, 1987)."

Standpoint theory assumes that systems of privilege are less visible to those who benefit the most and who control the resources that define the dominant cultural beliefs, i.e.: whites, males, heterosexuals, etc. Standpoint feminists believe that it takes the standpoint of the oppressed groups, i.e. people of color, women, and homosexuals, to recognize systems of oppression and privilege. However, this standpoint is not accepted blindly. "Systems of oppression also shape the consciousness of the oppressed" (Andersen, 1994, p. 373). Therefore, standpoint feminists must construct knowledge that reflects the experiences of both the dominant and subordinate groups in order for that knowledge to spawn liberation.

Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, and Sandra Harding, as well as Hilary Rose, Jane Flax, and Alison Jaggar, among others, all assisted in the development of standpoint themes that originated from Hegel's insight into the relationship between the master and the slave. The themes also originated in the insight of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's development of the "proletarian standpoint" (Harding, 1991, p. 120). These standpoint researchers/theorists focus on differences between men and women's situations. There are many differences, which are the grounds for standpoint feminists to make their claims. According to Harding, there are seven basic assumptions concerning the differences between men's and women's experiences. The seven differences are summarized below:

1. Women's different lives have been erroneously devalued and neglected as starting points for scientific research and as the generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims.
2. Women are valuable "strangers", "outsiders" to the social order...women's exclusion from the design and direction of both the social order and the production of knowledge...this status is seen as an advantage.
3. Women's oppression gives them fewer interests in ignorance...this is grounds for transvaluing women's differences because members of oppressed groups have fewer interests in maintaining the status quo.
4. Women's perspectives are from the other side of the "battle of the sexes" that women and men engage in on a daily basis...human knowers are active agents in their learning and women's knowledge emerges through the struggles.
5. Women's perspectives are from everyday life, which is best for the origins of research.
6. Women's perspectives come from mediating ideological dualisms, nature versus culture, which enables us to understand how and why social and cultural phenomena have taken form.
7. Women, especially women researchers, are "outsiders within" ...this increases objectivity (Harding, 1991, pp. 121- 131).

The works of Smith and Hartsock exemplify feminist standpoint research, that is, research that starts from women's actual experience in everyday life and ends with the stimulation of thoughts, doubts and

questions concerning traditional research (Olsen, 1994, p. 163). Both Smith and Hartsock illustrate this challenge of traditional research by examining the researcher's place "in the relations of ruling" within the research process (p. 163). They stress the importance of intersubjectivity in research as well as the problematic nature of the everyday world. Women's experiences are shaped by external material factors (p. 163). Therefore, a feminist researcher studying the experiences of women must not view the experiences as objects for study. This would only divide subject and object as traditionally done. Instead, a researcher must "be able to work very differently than she is able to with established sociological strategies of thinking and inquiry that are not outside the relations of ruling" (Olsen, 1994, p.163 citing Smith, 1992).

### Feminist Empiricism

Harding (1991) also discusses two other types of feminist epistemologies: feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism. Basically, feminist empiricism attempts to bring the feminist criticisms of scientific claims into the existing theories of scientific knowledge (p. 48). Feminist empiricists argue that sexist and androcentric ways of knowing result from "bad science". Feminist empiricists work within the standards of the current norms of research, however; their research "proceeds on the assumptions of intersubjectivity and commonly created meanings and the realities between researcher and participant" (Olsen, 1994, p. 163). Scholars working within this genre do not reject traditional research per se, but try to do it better. Feminist empiricism undercuts traditional assumptions of research by recognizing that bias is introduced by the very nature of the context of discovery (Danner & Landis, 1990, p. 107). Similarly, feminist researchers recognize the social identity of the research, i.e.: race, ethnicity, class, and gender, as relevant to the validity of the knowledge produced by the research process. "Acknowledging the subjective stance of the researcher at once increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the objectivism which hides this kind of evidence from the public" (Danner & Landis, 1990, p.107 citing Harding, 1987).

### Feminist Postmodernism

Feminist postmoderns argue that feminist empiricists and "standpointers" are not radical enough. It is believed that these two approaches still adhere to the "damaging Enlightenment beliefs about the ability to produce one true story about reality that is out there and ready to be reflected in the mirror of our minds" (Harding, 1991, p. 48). Postmodern feminist researchers regard truth as "a destructive illusion" and view the world as "endless stories or texts, many of which sustain the integration of power and oppression and actually constitute us as subjects in a determinant order" (Olsen, 1994, p. 164). With such a foundation, the focus in postmodern feminist research is narrative. The distinction between text and reality where gender is no longer privileged, as seen in standpoint feminist research, is important to this "new" ethnography offered by postmodern feminists. This "new" ethnography is more than just "writing it up"; it lets the people we are studying "speak for themselves" (p. 164).

There are three types of inquiry of interest to postmodern feminists. First, there is an interest in the social construction of realities. In other words, postmodern feminists examine such artifacts as video, film, music, and the body to understand "the production, distribution, consumption and exchange of cultural objects and their meanings" (Olsen, 1994, p.164 citing Denzin, 1992). Second is "the textual analysis of these cultural objects, their meanings, and the practices that surround them" (Olsen, 1994, p.164 citing Denzin, 1992). Third, postmodern feminists study the impact of these culturally constructed meanings. They study the "lived cultures and experiences, which are shaped by the cultural meanings that circulate in everyday life" (Olsen, 1994, p.164 citing Denzin, 1992). As Patricia Ticineto Clough argues, "The textuality never refers to a text", as in traditional research, "but to the processes of desire elicited and repressed, projected and introjected in the activity of reading and writing", of experiencing culture (Olsen 1994, p.164 citing Clough, 1993).

Postmodern feminist research rejects the oedipal logic of realist narrativity (Clough, 1998, p. xiii). Feminist critics of traditional research refer to “the narrative of the heroic scientists, the researcher who goes out in search of truth, struggling to get there, stay there, and return from there with a truly objective story of the world” (p. xiii). Framing research in such a manner grants a form of subject-identity that privileges masculinity and serves to authorize cultural constructions of reality (p. xiii). Thus, rather than maintain the same male-dominated focus of traditional research, feminist research focuses on “the problem of discursive authority at the level of literary practices – at the level of a political unconscious, which the narrative logic of Western, modern discourse puts into play” and on “the way narrativity elicits the participation of readers and writers in the practices of dominant forms of knowledge, thereby showing how a male-dominated production of knowledge is linked to modern practices of reading and writing – practices of meaning construction generally” (Clough, 1994, p. 3). This focus on discursive authority may seem too narrow. Postmodern feminist researchers have argued to extend their focus to include the assumptions and methodological orientations of research.

Stanley and Wise reject Harding's conception of the empiricist and postmodern epistemologies. They believe that it is around the constitution of feminist epistemology that feminist methodology develops, research methods can be conducted, and where feminism can directly challenge non-feminist frameworks (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 189). They argue that to conduct proper feminist research, the methods must derive from the methodology, which derives from feminist epistemology. The researcher/study participant relationship must not be hierarchical in nature and emotions must be viewed as an aspect of the research process. The researcher must also be critical of objective versus subjective binaries, focusing on the processes by which understanding and conclusions are reached. This understanding is achieved through the researchers' frank presentation of the existence and management of different realities held by both the researcher and the researched. The feminist researcher should also examine the issues of power in research and try to dispel any and all unequal distributions of power, including the written representations of the research findings (p. 89).

Feminist epistemology not only impacts what researchers examine, it also affects the methodology utilized by the researcher. Therefore, we must understand the intertwining nature of epistemology, methodology, and methods in order to recognize the impact that feminist epistemology has upon the research that evolves from its basic assumptions.

### The Intertwining Nature of Epistemology, Methodology, and Methods

The answer to the question posed in this article, "Is feminist research distinct from traditional research within the Social Sciences?", is yes. Yet, we cannot leave this discussion at this point. We must explore feminist methodology, which evolves from feminist epistemology and lays the foundation for feminist research. This leads us to another question, "Is there a distinct feminist methodology?" Here, we are concerned with "theory and analysis of how research should proceed". Feminist methodology is connected to feminist epistemology, which challenges issues of adequate theory of knowledge or justificatory strategy and traditional theory and methods (Harding, 1987, p. 2). The answer to this question is yes. I would argue that there is a distinct feminist methodology. I would also argue that feminist methodology is based on distinct epistemological assumptions that differ from traditional methodology. For example, a main feminist epistemological assumption is that "rather than there being a 'woman's way of knowing,' or a 'feminist way of doing research,' there are women's ways of knowing" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 4 citing Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarul, 1986). "The ways of knowing that women have cultivated and learned to value, ways we have come to believe are powerful but have been neglected and denigrated by the dominant intellectual ethos of our time" (preface). Therefore, women have different ways of knowing and understanding reality. In turn, research concerning women must be approached differently.

Feminist methodology, due to its basis in feminist epistemology, proposes alternative theories of knowledge that legitimate women as knowers. Avoiding the “add women and stir” ideology of traditional research that begins its analyses only in men’s experiences does this. For example, theories of crime have a fascination with male deviance and crime. As Chesney-Lind argues, criminology suffers from the “Westside Story Syndrome”. According to Chesney-Lind, this androcentric focus of research may be explained by Margaret Mead's observation (Chesney-Lind, 1988):

that whatever men do, even if it is dressing dolls for religious ceremonies, has higher status and is more highly rewarded than whatever women do...For this reason, field studies focus on male activities and attributes wherever possible: to study them is to convey higher status to the researcher (p. 26).

Therefore, feminist methodology evolves from the epistemological assumption that women's experiences provide the new resources for research (Harding, 1987, p. 7). This “fault line”, as Dorothy Smith refers to the fragmentation of women's identities, offers rich sources of insight from which feminist research generates (Harding, 1987, pp. 7-8). The goal of this research is to provide explanations, for women, of social phenomena that affect their lives so that they can understand themselves and our gendered world better. “In the best feminist research, the purpose of research and analysis are not separable from the origins of research problems” (Harding, 1987, p. 8). Therefore, the personal is very much political. For example, Dorothy Smith and Nancy Hartsock “note that all research is done from a particular standpoint or location in the social system” (Andersen, 1994, p. 372). For women, this location is one of the oppressed groups.

Smith continues the debate by stating, “Research and theory must situate social actors within their everyday worlds”. Unless research begins within the ordinary facts of lives, then the knowledge constructed will be “both alienating and apart from the actual experiences of human actors” (Andersen, 1994, p. 372). The objective here is to establish the relationship between social structure and everyday life. This relationship is especially important in comprehending women's experiences. This is due to the fact that the affairs of everyday life are the specific area of women's expertise. “Given the gender division of labor, women are charged with maintaining everyday life. To overlook that fact or to treat it as insignificant is to deny women's reality” (Andersen, 1994, p. 373 citing Reinharz, 1983 and Smith, 1987).

Since I have argued that there is a distinctive feminist epistemology and methodology, another question could be posed at this juncture. “Are there specific feminist methods?” This question concerns “the techniques for gathering evidence” (Harding, 1987, p. 2). My response to this question is no. I, along with many other feminist researchers (Stanley & Wise, 1993, Reinharz, 1992) do not believe that there are distinct feminist techniques for gathering evidence. “Feminists have used all existing methods and have invented some new ones as well” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 4). Although the epistemology and methodology of feminist research is distinct from traditional research, the tools for collecting data remain relatively the same. It is the approach, the epistemological assumptions and research methodology, to research that differs from traditional methodology and places it within the realm of feminist research. In other words, it is the epistemology and methodology, not the methods, which makes feminist research distinctly feminist. As Harding argues, “It is difficult to find a satisfactory answer to the questions about a distinctive feminist method” because discussions of method and methodology have been “intertwined with each other and with epistemological issues...in both the traditional and feminist discourses” (p. 2).

With this noted, feminist research methods can range from questionnaires to oral histories. The recognition of the plurality that exists within feminist research methods is important. I say this because this plurality of methods is a reflection of basic epistemological assumptions of feminist research, which contradict the epistemological assumptions of traditional research. The feminist epistemological assumption, of which I speak, is the recognition of the multiplicity of women’s voices and experiences. In

other words, traditional research fails to recognize that women experience the world differently than men and each other. Traditional research has silenced these voices and experiences by not including them in the realm of study. Therefore, feminist epistemological assumptions are based on the desire to create something different from that, which already exists, dominates, and oppresses women. Traditional research ignores the experiences of women, while feminist research celebrates them.

## Feminist Research and Traditional Research: The Basic Differences

Other than the differences already illustrated, feminist research differs from traditional research in that it locates the feminist researcher on the same critical plane as those on which she is researching. Both men and women, according to Harding and Smith (1991), can do feminist research. However, many feminist researchers, including myself, believe that nothing is separate from social life and experiences, nor does it exist outside the social (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 192). We also believe that men and women have different experiences. Since it is argued that feminist research methods must reflect feminist ontology, epistemology, and methodology, which are derived from the experiences of women, then the question is, can men conduct feminist research? This is yet another issue that is still unresolved within the debate concerning feminist research and is a topic for another article.

Another way feminist research differs from traditional research is that the feminist researcher makes sense of the world and produces generalized knowledge-claims on the basis of experiences (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 8). Feminist researchers also treat knowledge as situated because they make the assumption that particular structures are defined as facts external to and constraining upon people (p. 8). In addition, feminist researchers are aware of the varying degrees of oppression in relation to a woman's social location and in relation to men, thus necessitating "prying apart the category men and women's experiences of different men in different times, places and circumstances" (p. 8).

Feminist research differs from traditional research in that it rejects using research to colonize material differences among women. This is done by presenting a social constructionist and non-essentialist notion of "the self" (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 8). Many feminist researchers believe that there is a social reality, "one which members of society construct as having objective existence above and beyond competing constructions and interpretations of it" (p. 9). It also recognizes that social life is composed of discussions, debates and controversies concerning objective reality (p. 9).

A major distinction of feminist research from traditional research is "the questions we have asked, the ways we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work" (Maynard & Purvis, 1995, p. 6 citing Kelly, 1988). Feminist researchers begin with the rejection of hierarchical relationships. By doing this, feminist research becomes a means of sharing information.

Feminist research is characterized by a concern to record the subjective experiences of doing research (Maynard & Purvis, 1995, p. 16). In other words, the researcher herself becomes a subject matter in the research. She must take into account her personal experiences as part of the research process. This differs from the objective stance that traditional research usually takes.

Feminist research is distinctive in that the research is political in nature and has the potential to bring about change in women's lives (Maynard & Purvis, 1995, p. 16). Feminism is both theory and practice. It is a framework that informs women's lives. "Its purpose is to understand women's oppression in order that we might end it" (p. 28). This is what it means to do feminist research. It also means becoming part of the process of discovery and understanding. It is a responsibility to attempt to create and initiate social change. We must, as feminist researchers, see feminist research as praxis. Through our research we create useful knowledge in order to "make a difference" and inform activism (Maynard & Purvis, 1995, p. 28).

As illustrated above, differences may be found when examining the goals of traditional and feminist research. The goal of traditional research is to uncover human experiences and to understand human behavior. In addition, the goal of feminist research is to uncover and remove the blinders that obscure knowledge and observations concerning human experiences and behaviors that have traditionally been silenced. In this light, many feminist researchers see a direct relationship between feminist consciousness, feminism, and research.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, no matter what the discipline or method of research, the unique nature of feminist research is its foundation of basic feminist epistemological assumptions. These assumptions are critiques of traditional research. Feminist researchers argue that there is a pervasive lack of information about women's worlds and the oppression they experience. There is also a bias in the under-representation of women researchers. Therefore, feminist researchers believe there is a need to re-conceptualize traditionally investigated phenomena to include women's experiences. They also argue that new research questions must be asked that have crucial implications both for the results obtained and for practical action (Cook, 1983, p. 127). These basic assumptions, as well as the fore mentioned epistemological assumptions, lay the foundation for feminist methodology and the resulting research. Therefore, it is the epistemological assumptions that affect the methodology that ultimately create feminist research. With all this said, I believe that feminist epistemologies are the golden keys that unlock the door to feminist research. Once the door is unlocked, a better understanding of the distinctive nature of feminist research can occur.

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