Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries: Navigating Change
Asian Fisheries Science Special Issue **27S** (2014): 119-133

ISSN 0116-6514

Research Paper

What Does Feminist Methodology Contribute to Gender and Fisheries Science?

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Abstract

In this article I try to create a bridge between the methods and methodology of feminist approaches and those of biotechnical sciences as practised by the vast majority of researchers on gender in fisheries and aquaculture. In describing the history of feminist appropriation and development of social science methodology, I attempt to identify features of feminist approaches that would be useful to gender in fisheries and aquaculture research. I try to provide background for researchers new to qualitative research and to feminist approaches to understand the underlying issues and thus to develop research methods and methodologies that suit their particular field of work and which reflect their commitment to greater equality and recognition for gender issues in fishery and aquaculture research.

Introduction

Feminism is a difficult word; there are many definitions and it carries a heavy load of assumptions, many of them inaccurate or dated. My usage in this article is broad: it reflects an understanding that women are usually disadvantaged in relation to men, that inequality between men and women is disadvantageous to both, that gender i.e. the relations between men and women, are informed by unequal access to, and control over, power. A political dimension to feminism insists that women's rights should be protected and enhanced in the interests of a more equal world for all, and an intellectual element insists that an analysis of gender relations and women's experience should inform all social research. However feminist interest in fisheries and aquaculture is relatively recent. While feminist scholars, practitioners and activists have long been concerned with agriculture and especially with ecological issues, they have largely neglected studies of the marine environment including fisheries and aquaculture. Even feminists working in development and natural resource management have tended to ignore the sector, although some notable exceptions include Coward et al. 2000; Binkley 2002; Neis et al. 2005; Williams et al. 2005; Williams 2008; Biswas 2011. In the last few years, interest has surged, especially among researchers involved in "gender and…" research as illustrated by the growing number and types

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of papers presented at the Asian Fisheries Society Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF) Symposia. These researchers are interested in introducing a feminist perspective into the traditional fields of marine studies. The majority of these new researchers do not come from backgrounds in feminist research or from social sciences but from backgrounds in biotechnical sciences and economics, especially in fisheries and aquaculture science. Trained in sciences such as biology and economics, they have carried out systematic and rigorous research in their particular areas of interest. When they become interested in gender, and particularly the lack of attention to gender in fisheries research, they tend to use the same methodology and methods that served them so well when they were studying fish, seaweed, aquaculture technology or peoples' incomes. The usual procedure is simply to apply the same methods that worked on the non-human species of previous studies, and to expect the same kind of precise and specific results that are available in applied scientific projects. All too often, the tools that scientific researchers have been using on fish or seaweed turn out not to work as well in social situations, and to produce results that, while accurate, are superficial in terms of understanding the social dynamics in a fishing community. Scientific researchers tend to frame their research in terms of hypotheses to test or models to apply, whereas social science researchers and especially feminist researchers begin by asking exploratory questions of the "why" kind. These two approaches lead to different methodologies and different methods. Scientific research has less of a tradition to think about the more philosophical and ethical dimensions of methodology, something that is central to understanding the claims and procedures of feminist methodology.

In recent years we have begun to understand that fisheries research is about the marine environment, including fish – but it is also about the women and men who harvest, process and consume fish, and the communities in which they live. It is this social dimension of fisheries research that feminist methodology can contribute to. Fisheries research today is going beyond its traditional focus on the science of fish and the marine environment and has begun to look at the entire chain of human activity associated with marine products and environments. We, therefore, find ourselves in an unusual situation where, in the absence of an established body of experienced feminist researchers in the field, biotechnical researchers with both knowledge and skills in the fields of research on fish and the marine environment are beginning to venture into social science research without the relevant background skills in either the theory or the methodology. As gifted researchers with a strong commitment to women's equality and gender justice, they are experiencing many of the same questions and dilemmas that faced feminist social science researchers when they began to invade the field of social sciences several decades ago. Despite the separation that currently exists between most feminist scholarship and fisheries science, a synergy does exist that is particularly relevant to the integration of gender concerns and feminist research methods into fisheries and aquaculture research projects.

This article constitutes an attempt to start the process of enabling biotechnical scientists who are interested in integrating gender concerns into their work to understand the background and potential of feminist methodology and methods. We need to begin by carefully distinguishing research 'methodology' from 'methods'. In this article I treat methodology as the theory of method. It asks questions such as: Why do we want to know? How will asking in particular ways

'create' different knowledge? How can we validate research by relying on different measures than the traditional ones? How we can rely on participants as co-creators of knowledge? In contrast, 'methods' is the nuts and bolts, how we actually carry out the research. It addresses questions such as how to carry out a qualitative interview or when to use biographical research. I will focus on feminist methodology, rather than on the specific methods feminists adopted or developed. In briefly describing the history of feminist scholarship as it developed in North America and Europe I hope to illustrate some of the dilemmas and theories that feminist scholars encountered on their way to developing theories and methodologies that were appropriate to their needs.

This discussion of the history of feminist methodology – from an "add women and stir" approach in the 1970s to the current debates about the relevance of postmodern theory will reflect some of the issues gender researchers in fisheries are encountering today and may help suggest the directions in which this research should go. One key point is the way in which feminist methodology has been seen as coterminous with qualitative methods. I suggest that this is rooted in political and ethical concerns about "women's experience" as a central and essential category of feminist research. This exploration of the core of feminist methodology will point us towards ways of making fisheries research more concerned with gender issues while avoiding the conflict between qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The origins of feminist methodology

The so-called "first wave" of feminism is generally seen as the struggle for the vote in various countries, including some in the economic South. First-wave feminists also took up other issues, such as women's access to and control over their fertility and poor working conditions in factories. A lull followed the first wave, although some campaigns and organisations continued, until the "second wave" of feminism began in the 1960s, mostly in countries of the economic north. This "wave" was both more radical than the first wave, and also much more theoretical, drawing heavily on the radical theory that was emerging to support the radical activity of those years. Thus the key texts in those early years were not focused on research on women and hardly mentioned methodology. The major texts and influences were all theoretical. Important thinkers who contributed to the new tradition of feminist theory, such as Friedan (1963), Millet (1970), Firestone (1971), Mitchell (1971), the French philosopher de Beauvoir (1949), (whose *Second Sex* pre-dated the later feminists by nearly 20 years), all tried to understand the difference between the sexes, where it had come from, why it led to inequality and oppression and whether that was inevitable. Very soon feminists wanted to examine their own data to support their arguments. They found that all the existing social science research although purportedly "gender neutral" was in fact carried out from men's perspective and was largely about men – or, worse, it was about "people" who lived male lives and had male perspectives. Studies that actually looked at women were scarce and tended to cover topics such as housework or motherhood (Luxton 1980). The generic "he" that supposedly included women took no account of the specificity of women's lives or perspectives. This situation of having virtually no useful research that could tell us how women actually lived their lives led to the first feminist methodology – the "add women and stir" approach, as it later became known (Oakley 1981). Feminist researchers simply looked at the (many) gaps in the research literature about women and went out to fill those gaps using the same methods and

approach that previous (mostly male) researchers had used. At the time, this work was very useful and certainly helped to round out the picture but it did not go nearly far enough and soon came up against feminist concerns that these methods did not provide the information we needed in the form in which we could use it. Nevertheless, there remain many areas of our knowledge about women in fisheries where this objective of simply filling the gaps is a useful starting point. We need the factual information about women's work to balance the "generic" work that supposes that all participants are male. Many of the papers at recent GAF symposia remind me of this stage in feminist research, especially those falling into the "Technical Papers" and "Short Reports" categories. These researchers, and many like them, are eager to focus on gender issues and to include women where they have been excluded. But the thinking behind their research remains caught in traditional scientific moulds and pre-conceptions. So, let us consider how feminists got from the "add women and stir" approach to more sophisticated and sensitive ways of doing research with women.

The quantitative versus qualitative methodology debate

At this point, we need to address the problem of the relative roles and value of quantitative versus qualitative research and especially the issue of the "validity" of qualitative research. This is a question that particularly bothers researchers coming from the "hard" sciences, with their predictable, well tested and straightforward processes for carrying out and validating practical research. It was an issue that challenged many feminist researchers trying to break away from standardised questionnaires, large samples and statistical data analysis in the early days of the development of feminist methodology. At first they attempted to carry out qualitative research in the same way as quantitative research. Researchers tried to ask more or less the same questions of all participants and to assemble the responses in coded categories, desperately trying to ensure that their results were "valid, reliable, verifiable and replicable" (Kirk and Miller 1986). Mostly it was not very convincing. Statistics do not work on very small samples (often fewer than 30 interviews), and other efforts to use hard scientific methods of verification seemed artificial and forced. This kind of presentation of qualitative work is still quite common but the most significant effort to create a free standing qualitative analysis with the same detail and significance as large data sets was the work of Lyn Richards and her team in developing first the NUDIST and then the NVivo computer program (Richards 1999). Richards lays emphasis on the ability of NVivo to help the researcher make connections between sets of interviews and to draw on those connections to theorise the data. While useful, the process is inevitably deductive rather than inductive, which is where the real strength of qualitative research lies.

In his admirably clear elucidation of the differences between and comparative strengths and weaknesses (and claims to validity) of quantitative and qualitative research, Bryman (1988) focused on seven characteristics of the two approaches: relationship between researcher and subject (sic), researcher's stance in relation to subject, research strategy, scope of findings, image of social reality and nature of data (Bryman 1988). In each case the two approaches are in stark contrast to each other, but Bryman argued that both were useful, both were valid and in conjunction, both could be used in social research. He also argued against seeing the two approaches as wholly different and located in different epistemological worlds, and tried to

describe a continuum of research strategies and philosophies, which uses both, as appropriate. Progress in understanding the relationship between the researcher and the people they interviewed can be measured by what they are called. At first, researchers adopted from science the dehumanising term "subject". Later they would refer to "interviewees." This term recognises that there is a relationship between "interviewer" and "interviewee" but still does not construct the "interviewee" as an active co-creator of the research interview. More recently researchers use the term "participant" in an effort to recognise the active nature of the role of the people we study in our research.

Despite Bryman's even handedness, I would argue that qualitative research is both more difficult to carry out, more demanding of a theoretical approach and less "certain" in its conclusions. Qualitative data simply does not give up its meaning as easily as the statistical results from a large data set. "Results" of qualitative research rest on the interpretation of experience as mediated through the voice of the participant. It depends on empathy and the ability to both identify with, and interpret, another's experience. It is demanding and time consuming and at the end, the researcher can only try to convince her audience that her interpretation of the data is the most likely one. After a long process of examining and analysing the data, the qualitative researcher must find ways to present the data so that the reader is convinced. Most times, this depends on the ability to find and use the most appropriate theoretical analysis of that particular data, and to present it convincingly. The quality of the theory and the way it interpenetrates the methodology have to be presented in logical but attractive ways to an often sceptical readership. Qualitative researchers are constantly searching for new and more powerful ways to present both their data and their arguments and recently have turned to a variety of visual, dramatic and audio means to convince their audiences.

How the experience of feminist researchers changed feminist methodology

As feminism took root in the economic North in the early 1970s, a generation of feminists began to insert themselves into the academic world. I was one of them, beginning my Ph.D. research in Industrial Sociology in 1970 under a male supervisor and in a department where all but one of the faculty were male. Quantitative methods ruled. What could not be counted had no scholarly validity. Like many other feminist graduate students at that time, I completed the obligatory courses in statistics and quantitative methodology but found them of no use at all when I began to design my own research, focusing on the experience and the political understanding of working class women. The chief tool of quantitative methods in Sociology was the structured interview with its carefully graded questions and the ability to insert the answers into codeable categories. Quantitative social research was built on this but also on the methods being developed in psychology, which, at the time, had a heavily positivist orientation. This orientation insisted that only "objective", codeable data was useful and that the results had to be verifiable, replicable etc. While we had not yet learned to challenge the positivist orientation on its own grounds, both the actual practice of the structured interview and the positivist theory behind it alienated feminists.

In my research, I was trying to understand the different ways in which women working in their homes developed a political understanding based on their daily experience and arguing that

it was just as valid as the ideas developed by their men folk working in factories, which led to "trade union consciousness". Thus, I had to spend time with both men and women, talk to them about their responses to issues and explore how they interpreted their own experience to mould their political views. Thus, I needed a qualitative approach. One possible choice was ethnography, which involved long term "immersion" in a particular community, was a respected approach in anthropology. There was a substantial literature of highly theoretical defences of ethnography, which argued that only such theoretically informed, long term study could reveal the underlying patterns in community life. But ethnography was less common in sociology and even rarer in related social sciences such as political science or economics. Some sociological ethnographic studies existed, especially in the form of "community studies", usually of bounded or isolated communities. But all these studies also depended on the traditional ethnographic tools of long, immersive participant observation, where two years in the field was considered the minimum. As feminists began to consider appropriate qualitative methods, many were attracted to the purity of ethnographic immersion, including a few by feminists such as Cole (1991) working in coastal communities. But few academics, and even fewer women academics, who often had children, had the freedom to live away from home for two years or more. However, feminists were arguing increasingly that qualitative approaches were key to understanding women's lives, because those lives did not fit into the boxes of male knowledge. Like many other feminist researchers I needed a methodology that fitted women's experience better. And note the appearance of the word "experience," which was to become so important in feminist debates.

During the 1970s feminist researchers turned increasingly to one method - the qualitative, semi- or unstructured interview. One of the key interventions in developing this approach as the main feminist method, was Ann Oakley's famous 1981 article "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms" (Oakley 1981). In this article, she argued that the emerging principles of feminist research were in clear contradiction with the prescribed methods of carrying out interviews which were a) one way – interviewer asks questions and interviewee answers, b) treatment of interviewee as objective "data," and c) impartial and objective stance taken by interviewer. Oakley described this as a masculine paradigm and emphasised how it is clearly not how women actually communicate with each other. Oakley raised several examples from her own research on mothering where the interviewee would ask her opinion or advice – in other words, would treat her as another woman. The text book advice for this is "if the informant asks a question, parry it,' or laugh it off with a head shaking gesture suggesting "that's a hard one". Oakley found that she could not simply refuse to answer such questions or pretend to be objective and uncaring when asked questions like – how will I breastfeed? will childbirth hurt? how will I cook for my baby, or refuse to respond when the interviewee asked for her own experiences – what was it like for you? (Oakley 1981). Many researchers into fisheries will have encountered the same problem – the closed box questions they are asking are clearly not fitting well with their participants' experience, but their methodology is not allowing them to move past the pre-ordained closed questions to explore further.

What Oakley and others were suggesting was that a feminist interviewing women is necessarily an "insider" in the exchange and ignoring that commonality is neither possible nor

ethical - nor likely to lead to good research. There was a growing realisation that something different was going on when women were researching women and especially when feminists, with a philosophy that refused to treat participants in research as "objects" researched women. This insight was also taken up in related areas of research such as biographical research. It is interesting to note that one of the pioneers of this approach, Paul Thompson, carried out his early work, focusing on gender relations, in two fishing communities in Scotland (Thompson 1983), thus pointing the way for our work today. Biographical and autobiographical research (e.g. Roberts 2002), including work by feminists (Steedman 1987) began to set the methodological bar very high in terms of sophisticated understandings of the interior nature of conversation. They insisted that what we say to each other is never simple, and is often coded in the sense of having multiple layers of meaning. These studies showed how superficial much "interview research" was.

Feminist methodology grows up

Meanwhile, feminist methodology was moving far beyond a defensive position and thinking quite differently about the nature of knowledge and especially feminist knowledge and how to use that in research. The new directions raised complex methodological, and philosophical, issues for all qualitative researchers, and early in the 1980s feminist methodology began to encounter some difficult problems, not only methodologically but also ethically. In such a brief article I cannot do justice to the full range of debates but simply indicate the parameters of some of the most important issues.

Early efforts to understand what might be different about feminist methodology drew a distinction between research *on* women and the way that replicates a male approach to research and research *for* women (Bowles and Klein 1983). One example of this new focus on research *for* women was carried out by a group of women in Germany who not only fought to get a women's shelter established but documented the experience collectively so as "to record a collective experience of women in our society which would lead to theories and strategies for change" (Bowles and Klein 1983). This research was an example of the ways in which feminist researchers were trying to break the boundaries between "researcher" and "researched", as well as that between academic research and practical activism. The commitment to research *for* women rapidly became the only legitimate criteria for feminist research; its identifying hallmark is that it leads to positive change for women. Thus the key, sometimes the only, question for feminist methodology to address was "how can feminist research be legitimate in these terms?" Feminists tended to ask not so much "how can we know?" as "how can we demonstrate that the research is legitimate?" which is not quite the same as "ethical," although that issue also became increasingly important to feminist researchers. Gender fishery researchers, most of whose research is practically and policy oriented will have no difficulty adapting their research to this requirement that it be useful for women and will lead to positive changes in their lives. But for social science researchers who had come from more highly theorised backgrounds, the demand that their research be not only theoretical but practical was often a challenge.

Another hallmark of feminist research is the involvement of feminist researchers as equals in the research process. This approach also begins to question the notion of scientific, absolute,

provable "truth" in scientific research. As Mies points out "we then realised that the truth of a person cannot be asked for, is not static but grows and develops over a lifetime" (Bowles and Klein 1983). This kind of discussion triggered the debate about the need for new methods for feminist research in order to be legitimate, not primarily in the eyes of established scientists, but in the eyes of other feminists.

Soon, such methodological thinking led to an argument about how far any qualitative feminist research could go. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise's book *Breaking Out* consisted of attacks on the ways in which feminist scholarship was developing in the late 1970s and early 1980s in North America and Europe (Stanley and Wise 1983). Their main argument was far-reaching. In *Breaking Out* and many other writings, e.g. "The knowing because experiencing subject" (Stanley 1993), they systematically demolished the legitimacy of most existing and emerging forms of feminist research. They did not do this on ethical grounds of inevitable exploitation and misrepresentation of the women being researched but because it is not possible to "know" in any real sense the experience of someone else, especially another woman. Their book, and their argument, ends, inevitably, with the "sample of one". They argue that the researcher can only truly "know" her own experience; that the particular combination of experiences that is "I" is the only one we can examine with true validity; that one cannot enter into another's experience and certainly cannot represent it to a reader or audience. In the end, they are confined to reflections, however theorised, of their own experience. There is a way in which this is instinctively "true," and any researcher, reflecting on how much she "knows" about herself, will see the contrast to the little she can ever hope to know about her research participants. But the limitations of this logical methodological approach are so great that most feminist researchers are simply not prepared to accept the consequences and abandon all research that is not confined to "the sample of one".

At the same time, feminists who were not white, European/North American and middle class were beginning to challenge the racist/classist and ethnocentric assumptions they saw in all the feminist research around them. These well-grounded critiques were first led by black Americans, such as Hooks (1990) and Collins (1990) but they were soon joined by others from the global South. The DAWN collective, led by Sen and Grown (1987) offered a summation from the perspective of Southern women, essentially arguing that the only valid research should be based on the experience of, and carried out by poor women, although the DAWN collective was, of course, composed of articulate and well educated women. Later, Indian feminists were in the fore of looking at the impact of colonialism on the way the world was understood and theorised and responded with an articulation of "post-colonial" theory (Narayan and Harding 2000). While much of this writing is highly theoretical and takes little account of actual, practical research on the ground, the central questioning of the hegemony of western thought is extremely valuable in freeing researchers in the global South from the bounds of "western" or established ways of thinking and practice. It allows feminist researchers on fisheries to develop approaches and theories that suit the data as they find it, rather than as the texts tell them they ought to find it. This insight is also applicable at more mundane levels. For example, methodology for community studies derived from Northern textbooks tend to impose particular understandings of "household" derived from dominant practices in Northern countries. But households in many cultures have very

different and fluid forms; may not have a resident, male, "head of household", marriage may mean different things, or be polygamous. Unless researchers, especially feminist researchers, are basing their work on a locally informed understanding of culture and society, their research is likely to be flawed and to reflect an imposed set of foreign norms on the study.

Dorothy Smith's core insight was that her research "proceeds by taking this experience of mine, this experience of other women...and asking how it is organised, how it is determined, what the social relations are which generate it" (Smith 1987). Her approach managed to keep the emphasis on experience and the detailed examination of it without making impossible demands of the feminist researcher. Smith's work is closely associated with a body of literature that developed "standpoint" theory (Hartsock 1998). The advantage of standpoint theory was that it justified and elaborated a position that recognised the category of "experience" without being totally limited by it. However it inherently prioritised and gave greater credibility to the standpoint of the disadvantaged. Harding (1987) began by arguing that women's standpoint was preferable to that of men because they could see both their own position and that of the dominant males – a perspective that is at the heart of standpoint theory. But as the gradations got finer and finer this theory too returned to the "sample of one" position. Standpoint theorists asserted that the researcher could legitimately speak about her own experience, about those who had more power than her in the social structure, but not those in subordinate positions. In other words standpoint theory allows the researcher to talk about oppression but not about the experience of the oppressor. Standpoint theory thus makes "studying up," i.e. studying those who hold power in society very difficult, and I would argue that this is dangerous because it removes from critical consideration the structures of power and the actions of the most powerful in society. Nevertheless, it is a valuable approach in entering into and validating the perspective of poor women in poor communities and provides these women with a legitimate "voice" in the research agenda. It also imposes on feminist researchers the obligation to seek out and truly listen to the poorest women in the communities they study.

Is it feminist methodology or simply good methodology?

By the mid-1980s, feminist methodology included highly theoretical debates that challenged all forms of existing research and, indeed, was in some danger of paralysing the actual research work of all feminist researchers. But a more practical strand also developed, and especially from those feminists committed to social change and empowering women. These feminisms trod a delicate line between trying to incorporate the kind of theoretical concerns I have outlined above and developing practical, useful and legitimate research projects. They remained suspicious about how the still prevailing quantitative research was done and kept up a constant barrage of criticism about unquestioned categories and assumptions imported into supposedly "neutral" research. However, they also accepted, as gender and fisheries researchers accept today, that large scale collection of quantitative data had its uses, provided it was used in conjunction with qualitative projects, which were based on necessarily small samples, and that the legitimacy of those small scale projects was also recognised. Meanwhile, feminist researchers were still constantly searching for qualitative methods wherever they could find them and re-shaping them according to the developing feminist principles of research.

One of the most comprehensive, and quoted, efforts to document how feminist methods should look was Shulamit Reinharz *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (Reinharz 1992). Her comprehensive account accepts both diversity and a continuity of feminist approaches – which is why she proceeds by showing how feminists have used a variety of methods, including quantitative ones, in a variety of ways but all with an identifiable feminist purpose. Feminist methodology in her view "is the sum of feminist research methods". However, despite covering in textbook fullness all the possible methods she ends by insisting that "Feminism is a perspective, not a research method; feminists use a multiplicity of research methods, feminist research involves ongoing criticism of non-feminist approaches and feminist research is guided by feminist theory" (Reinharz 1992). Indeed, towards the very end of her book she writes about the involvement of the researcher as a person – usually a woman – as a key ingredient of feminist research.

All these approaches were taken up by different researchers and during the 1990s a formidable body of feminist research existed on a wide diversity of topics and using all the methods I have mentioned, and many more. Exceptions, however, existed. Feminist concerns took much longer to penetrate traditionally male fields, and that included aquaculture and fisheries sciences. Even geographers found themselves isolated and feminist political scientists formed a small band of determined scholars, eventually forming their own scholarly journal to publish their work (*Feminist Journal of Politics*). But meanwhile, the matter of the principles and issues of feminist methodology were still not settled. I will briefly describe two of these debates although there were, and continue to be, many others.

How can we bring theory and practice together?

a. The issue of ethical accommodation

As feminist thinking about the work they were doing became more nuanced and complex they began to run into increasingly difficult issues, in particular around feminist ethics. I will describe the debate between Judith Stacey and Elizabeth Wheatley in the pages of *Women's Studies International Forum* (1988; 1994) because it illustrates some of the conundrums feminist researchers were encountering during the late 1980s and the arguments they were having. The issues that Stacey raised initially reflected common concerns at the time – that the actual practice of feminist methodology did not match the ideals and that the problems that occur are often worse than we imagined.

Like many other feminist researchers, Stacey began her research armed with a commitment to "an integrative transdisciplinary approach to knowledge which grounds theory contextually in the concrete realm of women's everyday lives". The "actual experience and language of women is the central agenda for feminist social science and scholarship" (Stacey 1988). In practice she found things were more difficult. As she developed close research relationships with her participants, that very closeness opened the way to more exploitation. She was being provided with knowledge that, if she published it, would enhance her academic reputation but could well damage her participant. This issue is often raised when feminist researchers discover details of personal experience, such as transgressive sexuality or a pattern of domestic violence, which the

participant does not want revealed. She also noted that while she worked hard to develop an equal and collaborative relationship with her participants it was she, as the academic researcher, who had control over the final product. Particularly in these difficult cases, feminist researchers need clear and careful understandings of the feminist ethical obligations to their participants – something which is often not covered in standard ethics procedures or consent forms.

As Stacey concludes her discussion of a particular case in which after many months her participant did not want her to publish certain details of her personal life. "What feminist ethical principles can I invoke to guide me here? Principles of respect for research subjects and for a collaborative, egalitarian research relationship would suggest compliance but this forces me…to consciously distort what I consider a crucial component of the ethnographic "truth" in my study. Whatever we decide, my ethnography will betray a feminist principle" (Stacey 1988). Stacey's angst resonated with many feminists grappling with trying to produce a feminist methodology, especially one focused on qualitative ethnographical practices. However, Wheatley, saw things differently. She saw Stacey's dilemma not as a rebuttal of feminist methodology but as "a potential site for engendering ethnology (or ethnography) with feminist sensibilities" (Wheatley 1994a), in other words she is not claiming ethnography as a feminist method but is claiming that feminist approaches can improve and enrich already established methods. Later in the debate, Wheatley moves into a more theoretical realm, discussing how "various versions of feminist theory or politics focus and frame our gazes in particular ways" (Wheatley 1994b) which, in turn allows us to challenge categories and oppositions that are normally taken for granted – including those that distinguish between men and women.

Stacey's and Wheatley's positions reflect the real divide between highly theoretical feminists pushing the boundaries of knowledge and more practically inclined feminist researchers trying to carry out their work in the most sensitive and ethical way possible. New and emerging research in the field of gender and fisheries will also have to engage in these issues as they move into conducting more in-depth interviews and involving their participants in both the process and the outcome of their research.

b. The issue of political engagement

The second issue also represents a disagreement between feminist methodologists. Postmodern theory emerged first in the area of literary and critical studies (in the form of post structuralism) and has been taken up with enthusiasm in the social sciences. It is a complex field but suffice for this discussion to say that it challenges many of the things we take for granted as the "meta-narratives" that depend on an essentially 18th century rational view of the world. Instead postmodern scholars challenge us to question all the seemingly obvious categories of our experience – including our understanding of gender. As an approach it has been valuable in questioning all kinds of taken-for-granted assumptions we make about our world, and especially our social world. Feminists, especially those inclined to highly theoretical and abstract work, such as Judith Butler (Butler 1993) have challenged and "complicated" much of what we thought we knew, especially about sexuality.

However, I would argue that its impact on the kind of feminist research we have been discussing is much more problematic, and, I would suggest, it is even more of a problem for the kind of engaged research on gender and aquaculture and fisheries we are aiming to encourage. Some scholars argue that postmodernism in and of itself is antipathetic to the kinds of activist, politically inspired, community based, research that had emerged as the dominant paradigm of feminist research.

Martha Nussbaum is a well-respected feminist philosopher who has concerns about the rise of fashionable postmodernism. Working with the economist Amartya Sen on issues of development and using extensive work in India, she sees the danger coming from a related angle, asserting that the basic tendency of postmodern thought is leading to a failure to engage with the real issues facing real women. In her article in *The New Republic* (Nussbaum 1999) she associates feminism at its heart with "the practical struggle to achieve justice and equality for women", a struggle with which many gender and fisheries researchers identify. Nussbaum singles out Indian feminists, in particular, as holding to this ideal. In contrast she is profoundly unhappy with a trend she sees among young feminist researchers in North America, where she claims that there is "the virtually complete turning from the material side of life toward a type of verbal and symbolic politics that makes only the flimsiest of connections with the real situation of real women". This approach is dangerous and misleading and, in Nussbaum's view, is profoundly pessimistic in its denial of the "hope for a world of real justice" (Nussbaum 1999). While the philosophical arguments she makes are complex her passion for a world with greater equality and economic justice for women is clear – and shared by most practically based feminist researchers working on issues of gender and fisheries today. In fact, practical feminist research on the ground has been making progress, much of it led by researchers in the economic South, for whom the DAWN commitment referred to earlier is still relevant.

A proliferation of strands thus work themselves out in feminist methodology. We can see feminists experimenting with new ways of making knowledge and new ways of sharing it. While many of these are fruitful, the very fact that such experimentation and debate continues points to the fact that we have not, as yet, identified a definitive feminist methodology. We have established a feminist approach to research that goes deeper than traditional qualitative interviewing. The feminist approach is deeply ethical and respectful of participants and is founded on the commitment to increasing equality and justice between men and women. While these ideals have been developed primarily by feminist researchers they are now shared by many male researchers, who also have philosophical and ethical concerns about why and how we do research.

Where does this leave feminist research on gender and fisheries and aquaculture?

The practical implications of my discussion in this article are that if we are to study women (and men) with a feminist perspective, then we have to think carefully about how we do this. Our research must be primarily faithful to feminist principles of equality and respect between women and between women and men – but – feminist methodology must also produce research that is respected by academic and other audiences. My experience of GAF over the last few years is that it has become a focal point for many researchers wanting to put women and gender relations at the

centre of their research. The field of gender and fisheries is ideally positioned to encourage genuinely and innovative research that is both feminist and significant. The field of gender and fisheries and aquaculture is still in its infancy. Researchers are searching for methods and methodologies that will suit both their existing skills and knowledge and also their new need to frame their knowledge in a feminist understanding. GAF offers a forum, and a supportive context, in which new gender researchers can try out the approaches that seem most productive to them and benefit from other researchers who are wrestling with the same issues. The GAF website increasingly offers links to articles and projects that make use of the new feminist methods and methodological thinking behind them. It is important to stress that in feminist research, there is no "right" answer, applicable to all research projects. When researchers have identified an approach that seems appropriate to their needs, they must be ready to adapt them and re-theorise them according to the particular context in which they are working, and as result of discussion with other gender researchers. It is the responsibility of researchers, especially ones working in a relatively undeveloped field such as gender and fisheries, to refine and articulate their methodology and methods so as to enrich the field as a whole.

This short account of the development of feminist methodology since the 1970s may serve to indicate both the range and depth of the debates, but also the range and depth of the possibilities of applying feminist approaches to the particular problems of gender in aquaculture and fisheries. In GAF we need to both create a knowledge base of the best and most fruitful of the feminist methods, and help our researchers to navigate through the methodological debates to find the most valid approach to their particular research problem. In future, gender researchers in fisheries will be carrying out a broader range of research and using a wider range of methods to do so. More importantly, we will be discussing why we want to know something, what the ethical implications of our proposed research might be what use it might be to our participants and their communities. Supportive colleagues in an institution such as GAF will allow us to take risks and try new methods. It will also allow us to be comfortable with the fact that our knowledge can only ever be partial. It will, at best, allow our participants to speak their needs and their knowledge to a wider world. In this respect, GAF is an exciting place to explore these new possibilities and contribute perspectives that will enrich both feminist knowledge about the world and the marine sciences. It is an agenda that will occupy GAF for some time but offers the possibility of truly new, innovative and progressive work. GAF researchers have much to offer to the fields of both gender and fisheries and feminist methodologies and the work must begin now.

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