



Feminist Methodologies in Prison Health: Strategies for Successful Policy Change

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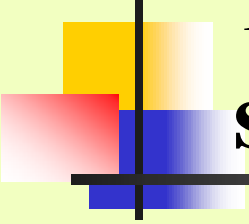
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Characteristics of feminist research

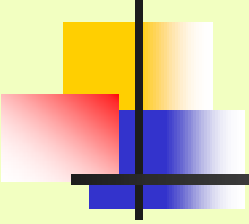
1. **A perspective, not a specific research method**
2. **Uses a multiplicity of research methods.**
3. **A critique of patriarchal bias**
4. **Guided by feminist theory**
5. **Trans-disciplinary**
6. **Aims to create social change**
7. **Examines diversity**
8. **Includes the researcher as a person**
9. **Special relations with the people studied**
10. **Special relation with the reader**

Adapted from *Feminist Methods in Social Research*,
Shulamit Reinharz, Oxford Press, 1992



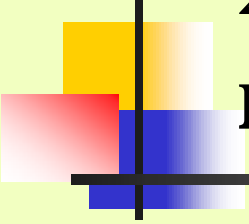
1. Feminism is a **perspective**, not a **specific research method**.

- The feminist perspective is that women's lives as individuals and as members of the social category "women" are valuable and worth studying.
- But this perspective does not tell us which methods to use in our research.



.....a perspective, not a specific research method... (cont'd.)

- **Example:**
- On today's panel, of the two research studies presented, one is a cross-sectional survey of prisoners at a Brazilian prison, the other a mailed questionnaire to health care providers in the U.S.



2. Feminists use a **multiplicity of research methods.**

- **Key concepts:**

- Using a variety of disciplinary methods.
- Inclusiveness is seen as more important than orthodoxy, so new approaches are sometimes invented.
- Multiple understandings of the same raw data are acceptable (a post-modernist perspective).



2. ... a multiplicity of research methods... (cont'd.).

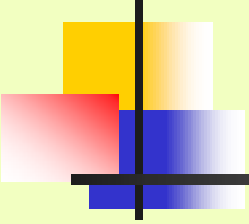
- **Example:**
- In my own work, I have used photography, surveys and interviews of prisoners, participant observation, examination of “found materials” (log sheets, legal files), medical record reviews, and secondary data.



3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of non-feminist scholarship.

- **Key concept:**

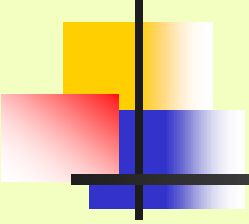
- **A critique of patriarchal bias and of the invisibility of women as subjects and scholars.**



... an ongoing criticism of non-feminist scholarship... (cont'd).

Example:

The Dignity for Women Prisoners Campaign, which is part research and part action, is focused on removing the invisibility of the harm to women prisoners caused by male guards.



4. Feminist research is **guided by feminist theory**.

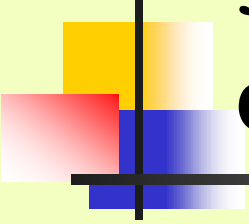
- Feminist theory always examines gender, but may also focus on race, class, disability, age, legal systems, incarceration, health care, etc., as they affect the deployment of gender and the experiences of women.



...guided by feminist theory... (cont'd.)

Example:

Juanita Diaz-Cotto's studies of Latin@s in prison in New York and California, based on interviews and oral histories, examine ethnicity (Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Chicanos, African-Americans, whites), gender, racism, violence, sexuality, as inflected by one's specific social location before and during incarceration.



5. Feminist research may be **trans-disciplinary**

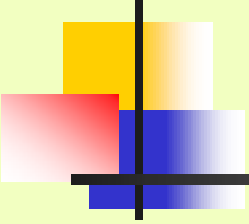
- For example, historical and sociological analysis may be crucial to understanding of the contemporary epidemiology of female illness and trauma in a specific prison.



....trans-disciplinary... (cont'd).

Example:

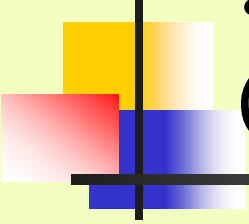
Research by Catherine Fogel on reproductive experiences of women prisoners in North Carolina examines the sociological context of incarceration, their social-psychological histories, and the clinical the outcomes of their pregnancies.



6. Feminist research aims to create social change.

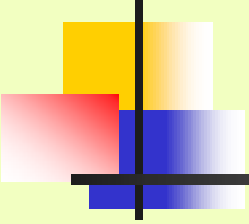
Key Concepts:

- Feminism includes a goal of full human and social rights for women.
- Feminist research projects are chosen and designed so they can contribute to this goal.



...aims to create social change... (cont'd).

- **Example:**
- A study of dental needs of pregnant women by Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (co-sponsored by the MPH program at San Francisco State University) was explicitly created to document dental care barriers that prevented women's assignment to community maternity centers. Its ultimate and successful goal was to create documentation to support legislation.

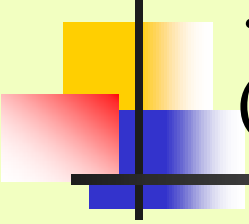


7. Feminist research strives to represent human **diversity**.

Key Concepts:

When research about women does not address the diversity of women's lives, it is seen as biased; its generalizations are limited.

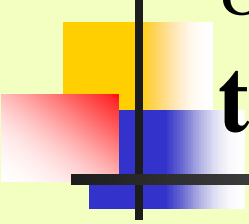
No woman is only female, so the research model must be intersectional in scope.



...strives to represent human **diversity...**
(cont'd.)

Example:

Without research on the specific needs of pregnant immigrant detainees (and not just “pregnant prisoners”), we make the immigrant women’s situations and lives invisible.



8. Feminist research frequently **includes the researcher as a person.**

- **Key concepts and strategies:**
 - Personal experience of the researcher can be acknowledged during the study and in the transmission of results.
 - Self-reflexivity is encouraged.
 - Research decisions are not seen as value neutral and are acknowledged as arising from the researcher's own experience, ethics, or goals.
 - Objectivity and subjectivity are not at war. The goals of reliability and validity are still valued.



...includes the researcher as a person...
(cont'd.)

Example:

In many of the studies cited, the investigators presented themselves as more than researchers; they were nurses, students, prisoner advocates, lawyers who spoke to prisoners. They did not let go of these identities or hide their feelings or pasts.



9. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop **special relations with the people studied**

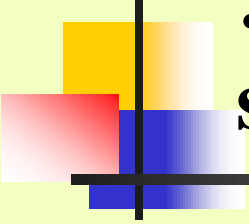
Key activities:

Demystifying the research relationship.

Examining power relations in the establishment of rapport.

Collaborative work with subjects and others.

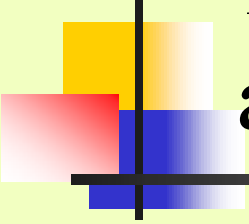
Returning value to the subjects.



**...special relations with the people
studied... (cont'd.)**

Examples:

Research projects by LSPC and Justice
Now in California always incorporate
prisoners as researchers and as co-editors
of their reports.



10. Feminist research frequently defines a **special relation with the reader.**

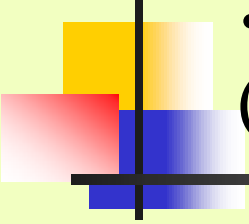
Key activities:

Stepping aside in favor of long quotations from the interviewees.

Speaking in the first person about the research.

Presenting the research in non-academic settings and formats, as well as in scientific meetings and journals.

Advocating policy change



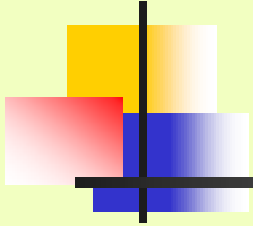
...a special relation with the reader...

(cont'd.)

Examples:

In my article, “Space, place, and movement as barriers to health care in three women’s prisons,” I focus the writing around one woman’s experience of illness and death.

LSPC published *Dignity Denied*, based on its research on older women in prison. The report was distributed to hundreds of policy makers in the state and made available on its website where thousands of copies have since been read and/or downloaded.

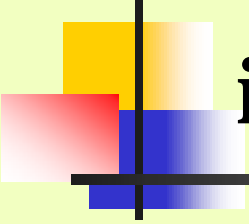


Why should you bother to use
feminist research methods ?



...because feminist methodology:

1. produces more successful research,
2. mobilizes the subjects you are working with, and
3. provides an educated and activated group of stakeholders.



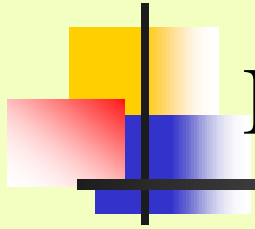
Case study: research on the impact of incarceration on older women

- Presented at APHA in 2006
- “Being old and doing time: functional impairment and adverse experiences of geriatric female prisoners” by Williams BA, Lindquist K, Sudore RL, Strupp HM, Willmott DJ, Walter LC. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2006 Apr 54(4):702-7.
- Apr 54(4):702-7.
- Also available in expanded form as *Dignity Denied*, available at the LSPC website



Aspects of the study:

- Prisoners as researchers
- 350 women over 55 interviewed in 3 prisons
- New index for PADL (prison activities of daily living)
- Academic and policy publications
- Legislative work
- Policy and practice work with wardens
- Convening of stakeholders



In conclusion:

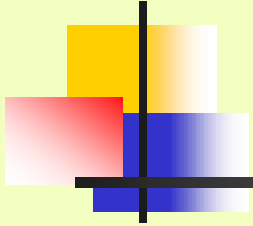
Using a feminist perspective in research with women prisoners...

...produces more successful research

...mobilizes the subjects you are working with, and

...provides an educated and activated group of stakeholders.

Therefore...



Feminist research helps create the social and political conditions for the policy changes that significantly improve the lives of women in prison and/or lead to their release.