

What aspects of
feminist psychology
adhere to scientific
methods?



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The aim of this essay is to focus on the debates of scientific methods in psychology. A long-standing *debate* between psychology's traditional approach to research, quantitative 'scientific' experiments, in contrast to, qualitative research methods, that focuses on rich and detailed information. has many variable historical perspectives of scientific methods in psychology. Therefore, evaluate such benefits as well as potential limitations this has for training and education, specifically in feminist psychology will be addressed. Howitt and Cramer (2016) claim " a key assumption of psychology is that the considered and careful collection of research data is an essential part of the development of the discipline." However widespread rejection of conventional theory and method has led to the evolution of different ways of gathering and analysing data (Smith, et al., 1994). Contemporary psychological research such as semi - structured interviews, grounded theory and discourse analysis, provides the insight that a more qualitative approach can be obtained and controlled in social constructionist conditions. Thus, questioning whether qualitative research can be considered scientific or not. This essay will consider the conceptual and historical issues surrounding scientific methods, how research as a dynamic interactive process has developed and how feminist psychology adhere to these scientific methods, resulting in a critical evaluation.

Back in the 16th century, physical sciences (biology, chemistry and physics) collected evidence in a systematic, clear manner that demonstrated the value of empirical work in making claims about the world, (ref). This scientific approach invariably was based on observations of experiments rather than theory or speculation. As social sciences (psychology) wanted to gain the

same credibility and respectability, Brysbaert and Rastle (2012) state, Freud (1856-1939) proclaimed his work as a psychological theorist to be the scientific study of human nature. However, as behaviourism became the dominant approach to psychology past the mid twentieth century. This involved concentrating on only that was directly observable and dismissed research into the workings of the mind as unscientific. (REF) Nevertheless, many psychologists disagreed with this position and by the early 1980s a cognitive psychology discipline that provided radical challenges believed that it is possible and scientific to study the workings of the mind (ref). This shows that many psychologists acquire information about the world as through an experience and objectively, as to traditionally collect empirical data derived from good-quality research. Many psychologists such as (ref) support this claim (ref) and believe strongly that one of the central purposes of research methods is to enable us to collect empirical data that are objective and free from bias, *however this may present many limitations to psychologist.?*

A new psychology article is now published, on average, every 15 minutes (Adair & Vohra, 2003) which shows that research in psychology is growing at an increasingly fast pace. In addition, McQueen and Knussen (2005) portray that this field has witnessed a substantial growth reflected in its popularity as an university topic and by the sheer scope of the subject. However, inevitably all aspects of the human endeavour can be approached as the subject; the unifying set of techniques, ethics and philosophy which comprise its methodology. Matsumoto and Vijver (2010) use a good example of presenting a strong argument by claiming that the analysis of bias and

equivalence should always precede substantive analysis for example, cross-cultural similarities and differences, in much the same way as an analysis of the internal consistency of an instrument is conducted before further analyses. The replicability of finding in cross-cultural research would improve if the issue of bias is dealt with more consistently. The term adaptation is increasingly used as the generic term for translating psychological instruments such as, conceptual, cultural, linguistic and measurement, (Leung & Vijver, 2010) Nevertheless, the essential research on any topic ultimately aims to describe a phenomenon or a process which has previously been inaccessible or only vaguely understood. Certain standards in psychology are worked towards in order to promote scientific status of the discipline, as the usual way of approaching the world would be subjectively and judgementally, in addition to the intuition, feelings and beliefs that are often naturally perceived and contributed. According to (ref) this approach doesn't accurately describe, explain or predict experiments, which is why many earlier psychologists felt a scientific method approach should be taken that is rigorous, systematic and objective. Attempts to find evidence, using a methodology has evolved over the years, although generating a theory provides psychologists with an accurate balanced approach to conducting research. This therefore indicates that once the methodological approach of the researcher has been decided, the method is then chosen to specific technique to collect the data. This further argues that whether or not a discipline is a science depends on the research methods used and not on the topic investigated: psychology used the scientific method and, therefore, was a science.

In terms of the methodology, this can include paradigms, theoretical models and quantitative or qualitative techniques which essentially is the research strategy before the specific method of data collection is used (ref). There has been an underlying debate about qualitative research methods as interviews and the interpretation of subject accounts, as they may not be deemed as scientific as opposed to quantitative, data collection approach. However qualitative researchers have increased with the amount of publishing articles that advocate and explain more rigorous processes to the qualitative data collection and analysis. As a result, the more standard processes will help the credibility of the research findings. *Scientific psychology has also been criticised for being only interested in topics and research approaches specifically of western males*. The majority of history in psychology is that of middle-class males in Western Europe and America, (Brysbart & Rastle, 2012) The bias against female psychologists has ultimately been aimed in which women are treated in mainstream psychology, as a result the question of the scientific method has only been the acceptable research which is typical with a western white male. Feminism psychologist (REF) argue that, the way in which gender differences have been examined and interpreted clearly shows that science is not an objective and value free enterprise, as claimed by the positivists, but a value laden approach related to the socio-cultural context in which it occurs. Consequently, this questions the validity of the method, as it can have masculine concerns, interests, and personality (Lott 1985).

This can be supported by Ward (2002) as it can be argued that scientists are influenced by the society in which they work. Although, scientist Karl Popper

(?) claimed that statements and theories that are not falsifiable are unscientific. Declaring an unfalsifiable theory to be scientific would then be pseudoscience. On the contrast, with Kuhn (2012) the structure of scientific revolutions paradigms shift, (Lyons, 2016). This stresses the importance of not attributing traditional thought to early research, that evolution theory does not emerge from straightforward accumulation of facts but rather from a set of changing intellectual circumstances and possibilities. This shows how psychology has a symbiotic relationship with the socio-political thought of the day. There is also clear evidence that objectivity is absent in such research, and that with both of these, psychology is in a position where it can potentially cause harm to minority groups. As a result, scientists with different paradigms engage in different concrete laboratory manipulations. Therefore, this could argue following the scientific method hasn't always had the best possible outcome, especially when not adhered to properly and making sweeping generalisations based on the research.

Research by Parlee (1975) became the invention of feminist psychology, focusing on the impacts and the roles of feminism that contributed to research in psychology, (Stewart & Dottolo, 2006). In support with Vaughter (1976) the revolutionary force of women in psychology and in the psychology of women to change that structure of the belief system of science to construct a psychology of human behaviour (Vaughter, 1976, p. 146). As a result, important challenges came from feminist psychology were methodological and epistemological. Whereas, on the other hand Lui (2016) supports that the psychology of men and masculinity (PMM) primarily uses scientific outlets such as, literature syntheses, quantitative research and

phenomenological approaches and review that contribute to relevant psychological research. This shows that gender differences can attribute to supporting inequalities and cultural determinism. As the lack of women have been understudied historically, thus presenting a challenge as to what methods researchers can take to ensure capacities and processes are unbiased, (Denmark & Paludi, 2007). According to Stewart and McDermott (2004), the most significant contributions of the psychological study of women within a feminist perspective is the recognition that it is not just women's lives that need to be examined in a political context but men's as well. Noted by Spelke (2005) gender is understood to be an analytical tool, not just an empirical category, and it signifies a set of power relations rather than merely characteristics or features of individuals. However, Smiler (2005) identifies that men researching masculinity have been influenced by feminist theory and research and by the proposition that humans and gendered beings, whose gender deeply affects lives and experiences. As a result, this shows that all research methods have advantages and disadvantages. Although many feminist psychologists encourage researchers to use multiple methods, also known as 'triangulation.' (Wallston & Grady, 1985) particularly nonexperimental and qualitative research that replicates measured variables to establish the reliability. On the contrary (REF) feminist critics have argued that no type of method is inherently superior to another and that each makes a unique contribution to the progress of science.

According to Sechzer and Rabinowitz (1993) the quality and integrity of psychology's contribution to science and society, as essentially, psychology research has been collectively analysed by a male- dominated gender, which

is seen as biased and scientifically flawed. To ensure further training and education in this field, new ways of applying scientific techniques of gathering evidence and use them in different ways to observe behaviours and gain perspectives not previously thought significant, would be one solution to make such previous research unbiased. A shortcoming of qualitative methods is often the focus on individual beliefs and interpretations, however by noting systematic methodological strengths and weaknesses of past studies this will establish advanced training for future researchers. (REF).

David, (2017) claims that many feminists do not accept simplistic statistical arguments and address the question about how to go beyond the simple numbers. However, Gough et al (2013) declare that feminist psychology is complex and diverse. Not all feminist agrees with each other, and there are consequently different versions of feminism. Nevertheless, (REF) state that feminist researchers have been the forefront of critiquing scientific methods and have advocated more democratic, inclusive and reflexive forms of research. This shows that feminism psychology aids in breaking down barriers between the researcher and the researched. Although, Wilkinson, (2000) ultimately describes that feminism embraces a plurality of definitions and viewpoints, which of such puts a high value on women and can be explicitly political, as it recognises social change on behalf of women. To complement, Pickren and Rutherford, (2010) supporting that contextually specific concerns of women ad forms of political feminism have influenced the development of feminist psychology in other countries and regions. This

therefore indicates that feminism not only as a science but also a political interchangeable development worldwide.

Overall, the field of psychology has undergone a revolutionary change within the last century. Although there have been many positive and beneficial research developments that have assisted in the analysis and contribution to science. The language of science has predominately been influenced by western, white, middle- class men, therefore this not only reflects but also shapes scientific thought and practice, which is still used by psychologists today. Taking this into consideration, the main objective of feminist psychologist is to ensure the equal rights between men and women within the psychology sector, although as a consequence, it could be argued that women psychologists' impact of feminism has created this paradox of gender differences, which is what feminism was supposed to be resolving. Therefore, this shows the importance of why psychologists stress the use of scientific methods, that can be viewed in a systematic and empirical approach, whereas the holistic approach by feminism, that can be seen as a more qualitative method that is ultimately argued less scientific and consequently arising the questions that there is no such thing as perfect research. However, if there is no such thing as perfect research, if the research is insightful and reliable, feminist psychology should not have to adhere to conducting specific research that must be considered scientific.

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