

# Three briefs - feminist inquiry

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Feminist inquiry: Three briefs 27 March Sandra Harding, "Is There a Feminist Method?" Sandra Harding has a Ph. D., Philosophy from New York University. Her teaching and research interests are in feminist and postcolonial theory, epistemology, research methodology and philosophy of science. Harding's position on feminist research is that there is no single feminist method. In her article, "Is There a Feminist Method?," Harding argued that feminists should not be preoccupied with the pursuit of a single feminist method, because this neglects the unique aspects of feminist research. Instead, she aspired to describe the distinctive elements of feminist biological and social science research that makes feminist studies, exciting and challenging. Harding explained that traditional approaches to biology and social science research regarding women's nature, thinking, and behaviors hardly focused on female targets and only emphasized the "fetishization" of methods (Harding, 1989, p. 18). Lawrence Kohlberg, for instance, did not find it perplexing that women's responses to his moral dilemmas were "less easy" compared to men (Harding, 1989, p. 18). Biologists also prescribed cosmetics tested on male than female rats, because menstruation cycles muddled the product effects for female rats (Harding, 1989, p. 18). In essence, these sciences followed methods that were based on male models of human biological or moral development (Harding, 1989, p. 18). Harding also complained about the fetish of researchers, which mimicked other scientific methodological approaches, without understanding its relevance and validity to their own fields and inquiries (Harding, 1989, p. 18). Harding examined and criticized the calls for single or multiple feminist methods; for her, these methods either focused on method, or methodology, or epistemology, without fully appreciate the wide range of feminist writing and <https://assignbuster.com/three-briefs-feminist-inquiry/>

research methods, methodologies, and epistemologies. MacKinnon asserted that “consciousness-raising is feminist method” (Harding, 1989, p. 18). Harding argued that this method overlooks other equally valid methods of studying women’s nature, thoughts, and behaviors. Hartsock stresses the need for “specifically feminist historical materialism” (Harding, 1989, p. 19). For Harding, this approach is a methodology, not a feminist method. Other sociologists emphasized the value of phenomenological research to feminist inquiries. For them, the feminist method directly opposed extreme empiricism or positivism in research and proposed the use of Marxist epistemology. Harding was concerned of the limitations of phenomenology, because it constrained feminist inquiries, does not address the lack of awareness of subjects to local forces that shape their conditions, and it does not sufficiently consider the role of studies of masculinity and men and critical studies on feminist works in feminist research. Harding proposed an understanding of what feminists do in their research, in order to appreciate feminist research, which for her, is more meaningful than striving to define a feminist method. First, feminists study gender. Gender includes masculine, feminine, and other genders. Gender studies also entail criticizing gender roles and expectations (Harding, 1989, p. 27). Gender is turned into a variable like class and social status, which other traditional studies do not explore (Harding, 1989, p. 27). Second, feminist research is focused on women’s experiences as legitimate source of data (Harding, 1989, p. 27). Feminist questions come from women’s experiences and not from how society wants to mold women (Harding, 1989, p. 27). Finally, feminist research is robustly reflexive, where interactions between gender and other social variables, such as class, race, and culture, provides a deeper

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understanding of the feminist inquiry (Harding, 1989, p. 28). Hence, Harding stresses that it is not important that there is a feminist method. Feminist research should be free to use different methods, methodology, and epistemology that fit its line of inquiry and nature of its participants. George Noblit, "Critical Theory" George Noblit is the Joseph R. Neikirk Distinguished Professor of Sociology of Education. His teaching areas are qualitative research methods and social foundations of education. He currently teaches at the School of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His main position on critical theory methods is that there is no single critical method. In his article, "Critical Theory," Noblit explored the nature and aims of critical theory. Critical theory aims to examine the "dynamics of power and ideology" (Noblit, 2005, p. 76). Critical researchers seek to dissect power and ideological dynamics, so that they emancipate those who are oppressed in the present socio-economic and political system. Noblit argued that critical theory has no single method, because it should use all methods and methodologies that can help it attain its primary goal of revealing and dismantling unequal power relations in society. Noblit discussed the value orientation and epistemology of critical researchers. Critical research has a value orientation that: 1) uses social and cultural criticism, 2) opposes all kinds of inequality, 3) exposes oppression and fights it, 4) studies all forms of oppression, and 5) avoids mainstream epistemology that supports status quo oppression and uses critical epistemology to dismantle unequal power relations (Noblit, 2005, p. 77). Critical theory is more than research; it is an action-oriented research that aims for emancipation for all oppressed sectors. Noblit did not support a single critical method or methodology, because in the study of all forms of oppression and fighting it, any form of

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valid method and methodology can be used. There are different ways to explore critical research: critical theory, critical ethnography, and “science with an attitude” (Noblit, 2005, p. 78). Critical theory itself criticizes mainstream ideology. Critical ethnography employs critical philosophy to interpret findings of ethnographic studies (Noblit, 2005, p. 78). “Science with an attitude” questions the dominance of critical ethnography in critical research (Noblit, 2005, p. 78). Ladwig argued that rejecting positivism is wrong, since winning the war against mainstream research and epistemology means dominating their own methods and methodologies (Noblit, 2005, p. 78). Noblit asked critical researchers to not limit their methods and methodologies, as long as they serve the overarching purpose of social emancipation for the oppressed. Crotty, “Feminism: Re-visioning the Man-made World” Michael Crotty has written numerous books on feminism and social research. In “Feminism: Re-visioning the Man-made World,” his main position is that he can be a feminist too, even if he lacks “feminist consciousness” (Crotty, 1998, p. 161). He argued that it is wrong to see feminism as a work by and for women alone, because masculinity is a gendered experience that affects feminist inquiries and masculinity studies can also support feminist liberation efforts. He emphasized what Freire said that people cannot free others or even themselves. Instead, people can liberate each other (Crotty, 1998, p. 162). His point is that as a man, he supports the idea that feminism should free men and women alike. His main argument is that as a man, he can also support feminism, because patriarchy limits men by empowering them through traditional roles and norms, and that feminism may have different strands, but they are all connected by their aim of understanding gender experiences and fighting for

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gender equality (Crotty, 1998, p. 162). Crotty described the different forms of feminisms to understand that feminism may have different methods, methodologies, epistemologies, and assumptions, but they are still connected by similar goals and data sources. The main goal of feminism is like critical theory. It aims to understand social phenomena from a feminine perspective, so that it can identify gender oppression and then challenge and end it. Women may be the main sources of feminist studies, but the views of men are also important in understanding how gender empowerment can be sustainably attained. Crotty agreed that feminist research entails re-visioning history as people generally know it. Feminism is a gender liberating movement and process, where in the end, men and women benefit from a new world system, where genders are viewed as and develop as equals.