Chapter 5

Feminist research principles and practices

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INTRODUCTION

Feminist values in research are primarily concerned with the politics of power. By their very nature, feminist research approaches endeavour to "create spaces and opportunities to reveal lived realities of power inequalities and provide evidence that can be deployed in working towards addressing these engrained inequalities" (Jenkins, Narayanaswamy, & Sweetman, 2019, p. 414). Embedding feminist values in every stage of the research process means that feminist researchers need to reflect on their own positions and locations in relation to their research participants and strive, wherever possible, to equalise the relationship between the two. Accordingly, feminist research epistemologies have recognised that progressive and innovative methodologies and methods of analysis are needed to include the various factors contributing to the lives and motives of participants. These encourage not only the study of the differences between males and females but also the varied experiences that occur within gender and sexuality as well. Documenting gender-differentiated aspects of the research agenda means understanding not only participants' individual characteristics of gender, race, class, etc., but also untangling broader social dimensions of history and power. This chapter will endeavour to explain the development of feminist research methodology, and demonstrate its adaptability with other research methods, as well as its flexibility within the various contexts that may be encountered by researchers. Practical methodological tools will be discussed, along with the ethical considerations of engaging with participants respectfully and valuing their contributions.

WHEN IS RESEARCH CONSIDERED TO BE FEMINIST?

The development of feminist research cannot be understood outside of the development of the feminist movement itself. Many of the inquiries that concern feminist researchers are mirrored by the concerns of feminist ideologies, which, themselves have advanced and expanded over recent decades. Dissatisfaction with a singular notion of feminism, as a women's movement concerned only with European and western perspectives, led to the augmentation of many varying forms of feminism that are more inclusive of women from different countries, cultures and contexts, examples of which can be seen in the table below (Table

1) The existence and contributions of these multiple or intersecting feminisms disrupted the traditional understandings of power and difference in the women's movement, while recognising the importance of the connection of manifold discriminations and inequalities (racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, etc.) in women's daily lived experiences. Feminist ideologies no longer relate to a single narrative of gender equality, but are rather inclusive of varied feminist ideals, including individuals of different ethnicities and the marginalised sectors of society. These principles demand an ambitious and transformative agenda that put human rights at the centre, "to address the structural factors that perpetuate inequality, with the potential to respond to the real needs and interests of all people, including marginalised women, men, boys, girls and transgender and inter-sex people" (Musindarwezo, 2018, p. 26). As a result, feminist research aims to represent diverse and unique lived experiences across gendered and cultural divides in order to address issues of inequality, gender-based violence, body politics, the discrimination of marginalised groups and the distributive nature of agency.

Table 1. Examples of the varying ideologies of feminism (Source: Author)

Liberal feminism	Focus on the empowerment and emancipation of women through political action; sees men and women as equal and women as being entitled to the same rights, resources and opportunities afforded to men
Socialist feminism	Emphasis on understanding gender discrimination in private and public spaces; views gender relational systems as the root cause of women's oppression; gender relational systems include family, work and social spaces
Postmodern feminism	Acknowledges various systems of oppression; challenges dualistic narrative of gender; recognises many forms of oppression among women but does not identify with the victimisation narrative of women
Black feminism	Centres women's oppression through racism; dissatisfaction with singular feminist theory misrepresentation; black women must inform and address their own needs; theorisation of "otherness" and a focus on inclusivity of all women

African feminism	Critical of the limited, singular and homogeneous perspectives of Western feminism and its failure to take into account particularly African issues; it specifically addresses the conditions and needs of continental African women and pre-colonial history
Womanism	Considers race and class in women's lived experiences; developed and informed by black female scholarly works; basis to create forms of decolonised knowledge, but includes all racial groups of marginalised women
Intersectional feminism	Women's social identity categories (race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, etc.) is considered to be interconnected (Crenshaw, 1989); larger oppressive institutions are understood to operate together to produce experiences of privilege or marginalisation for women
Feminist new materialisms	Diversely situated and transdisciplinary thinking that moves beyond the sole focus of the human experience, towards understandings of agency and gender inequalities by diminishing the historical authority of masculinist ways of knowing

While no single definition of feminist research exists, and indeed some feminists argue a universal definition is not desirable, there are, broadly speaking, three key features or attributes of feminist research that differentiate it from traditional social science research (Wilkinson & Morton, 2007). The first key feature states that feminist research is characterised by the acknowledgement of various types of knowing, in order to build new knowledge foundations and achieve real social change. The latter of these is recognised by African feminist theorists and researchers to be of the utmost importance, with the endeavours of scholarship and activism being indivisible from one another (Arndt, 2002; Barnes, 2007; Gqola, 2002; Lewis, 2003). Feminists in African contexts are committed to radically transforming the unequal gender relations that continue to be a pervasive feature of African social realities, through research, analysis, lobbying and institution building that acknowledges women's personhood (African Feminist Charter, 2016). Logically, the second key feature follows on from the first by stating that feminist research is based on the values and beliefs of feminist ideologies and includes feminism within its research practices. This involves building and expanding knowledge and shaping research analysis and strategies

to centre on the meaning women give to their lived environment, while simultaneously having a critical awareness of research undertaken by patriarchal organisations. Feminist values inform all stages of the research process, starting with the selection of the research question and ending with the data presentation, thus forming part of the researcher's decision making with every step (Wilkinson & Morton, 2007). Lastly, the third key feature of feminist research is that practises are diverse, adopting various methodologies and continuously being redefined by concerns that recognise and represent women, particularly in the African context, as the subjects, rather than the objects of research, and as agents in their lives and societies (African Feminist Charter, 2016). Thus, it requires that issues such as the empowerment of those traditionally excluded from research are attended to, as well as issues of diversity, racism and democratic decision making (Wilkinson & Morton, 2007). This diversity also extends to interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary integration, as well as expanding and strengthening a multigenerational network of differing viewpoints or perspectives.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMINIST RESEARCH

While feminists hail from different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and cultures, with different lived experiences, many share common goals. These may include challenging traditional meanings of gender and sexuality to beget equality through social justice and emphasising the concerns of marginalised and oppressed groups (Kiguwa, 2019). Feminist research can also move beyond discourses on gender and sexuality to considerations of agency and exclusion and inclusion within marginalised communities. Once such example would be engaging in discussions concerning disability and feminism, since scholars such as Muyambo (2017) believe the notion of disability, much like gender, is socially constructed through biological reality, as well as perceptions and understandings of how the "normal" body should function. As Muyambo (2017, para. 4) argues, "[t]his lack of knowledge is what is problematic, as a disabled person cannot take full part in the society, not because of what they can or cannot do, but rather as a result of the society's fears and misunderstanding".

The values that encompass feminist research influence the entire practice of conducting the study from "(1) the types of research questions asked, (2) the theory or theories driving the research, (3) the methodology used, (4) the ethics of the researcher, and (5) the importance or significance of the results for advancing a feminist agenda" (Dankoski, 2000, p. 7). This means feminist research that primarily documents the lived experiences of marginalised groups and minorities, also elucidates socially constructed stereotypes and in so doing unearths subjugated forms of knowledge. Thus, the research questions in a feminist study should consider not only the researchable variables but should also be directed towards unsettling inequitable dynamics of power and patriarchal forms of knowledge that are evident in other mainstream research studies. By highlighting the unconscious masculine bias embedded in apparently universal, value-free research, feminist studies concerning the diverse and subjective lived experiences of subjugated individuals and groups, can uncover and remedy the rectilinear binary discourse that reproduces patriarchal thinking.

Research questions should also be consistent with feminist research goals to foster empowerment and emancipation. Feminist research does not strictly delineate the theory and methodology used in a study, but rather emphasises the correlation and interconnection of epistemology, methodology, and method (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). The epistemology, or theory of knowledge, the methodology or theory of how research is done, and the method or technique for collecting data, are entrenched in feminist theoretical frameworks inherent with the feminist agenda: challenging and questioning power imbalances. These are not based solely on gender, but also on the intersections of sexuality, race, class, and power (Dankoski, 2000). Just as we cannot apply reductionist theorising of a universal lived experience to feminist research, there is no single epistemology, methodology, or method that informs feminist research. Feminist researchers hold different epistemological perspectives, drawn from a wide array of methods and methodologies, and apply multiple reflexive lenses that heighten activism against sexist, racist, homophobic, and colonial systems and practices (Harnois, 2013).
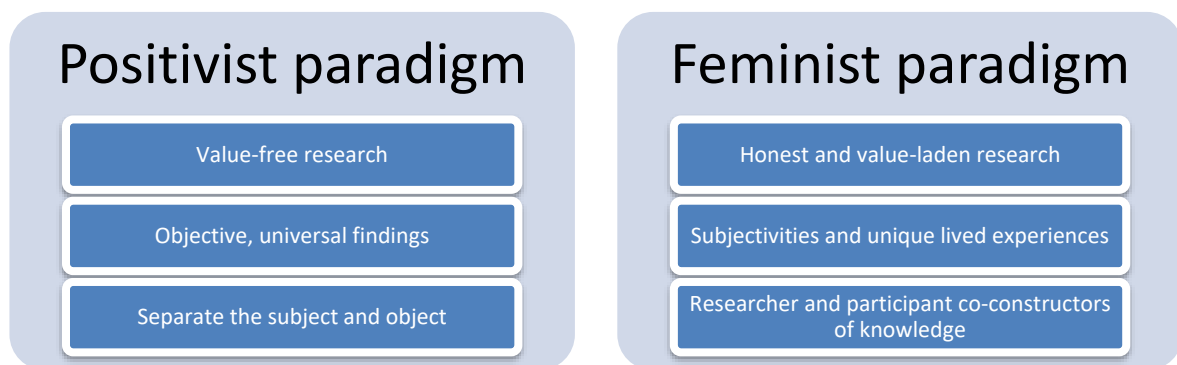
Epistemologically, the relationship between feminist theory and quantitative social science research remains uneasy, with feminists typically rejecting the positivist notion of a singular, objective truth (see Table 2). This is because many feminist researchers particularise a form of objectivity known as "strong objectivity" in their research process. Strong objectivity was first articulated by feminist philosopher Sandra Harding in 1987 and argues that knowledge produced from the point of view of smaller, marginalised groups may offer greater objectivity because of the intense motivation of these groups to comprehend the views or perspectives of those in positions of power (Naples, 2017). Westmarland (2001), and Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007), however, report that some feminist researchers do find affinity with the basic epistemological and methodological characteristics of positivist research and have utilised the accuracy and objectivity of positivist research to expound on women's activities and experiences. In such studies, priority is placed on the non-exploitative involvement of participants so that their voices are heard, and their knowledge bases are respected, with the views of participants seen as legitimised through publication in the public domain (Dankoski, 2000).

Mixed methods research that combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are also used by feminist researchers to recognise multiple ways of knowing, particularly of those who have been historically marginalised. This is achieved through the use of multiple methodological frameworks that try to make sense of the social world and lived realities of many women. In general, however, feminist researchers take a strong stance against positivistic methodologies, viewing the values of these methodologies as problematic and preferring non-positivist frameworks such as social constructionism, for incorporating interpretation, subjectivity, emotion, and embodiment into the knowledge-building process (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006).

Regardless of these preferences, feminist researchers often rework, or radically upset, traditional epistemologies to develop innovative methodologies and methods of knowledge building. The methods employed by feminist researchers are purposefully selected to avoid exploitation of participants at all costs, while

highlighting the importance of interdependence between the researcher and research participant, thus allowing both to become a tool for fostering knowledge. Feminist research is a holistic endeavour that incorporates its activist agenda in all stages of the research process, from the theoretical to the practical, in the formulation of research questions to the write-up of research findings (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007).

Table 2. Core values of the positivist and feminist paradigms (Source: Author)

Positivist paradigm	Feminist paradigm
Value-free research	Honest and value-laden research
Objective, universal findings	Subjectivities and unique lived experiences
Separate the subject and object	Researcher and participant co-constructors of knowledge

SUBJECTIVITY, POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY

The practicalities of collecting data within a feminist epistemological framework influences not only the research questions asked, and the methods used, but also important issues of positionality and subjectivity within the feminist research process. Essentially, this is a process that refutes the notion that there exists a predetermined social reality or universal truth waiting to be discovered and disputes the viability of a researcher that is objective and removed from the subject who utilises value-free data collection tools. Feminists challenge these claims of objectivity and neutrality and argue that the very nature of research is that of a political practice, both in the conceptualisation phase and in the effect of its findings (Kiguwa, 2019). This is evident in the various ways that certain groups have been "excluded and marginalized from dominant Western knowledge canons throughout the course of history" (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 6). To counteract this vestige of discrimination, feminist researchers and scholars seek to uncover knowledge within the lived experiences, interpretations, subjectivities, and situated perspectives of human beings, arguing that these sources are not contaminants of understandings but rather resources for new forms of

knowledge. This form of feminist positionality refers to situated knowledges, otherwise defined as "a form of ethical action that arises through recognizing one's own location within "wider, more-than-human kin ship network" (Truman, 2019, p. 7). Furthermore, feminist researchers state that the researcher cannot claim to be removed from the subject, as their worldview has most likely influenced their development of a specific research question in the first place.

So how do feminist researchers work to accurately reflect the knowledge co-constructed with participants, and reduce any bias presenting in their own worldviews? To begin with, they view the research process as a collaborative one, whereby the interaction between researcher and participant results in comprehensible findings which accurately reflect the respondent's feelings and experiences. In order to do this, the feminist researcher acknowledges the need for complete transparency regarding their own position within the research process, and how their perspectives or worldviews may influence the research practices and outcomes. This is known as practising reflexivity, which requires the researcher to be mindful of, and critically reflective about, their situated knowledge and the different ways their positionality in the study could serve as a hindrance or resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research process (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Reflexivity on the part of the researcher also accounts for the dynamics of power in feminist studies. There are particular interactions and intricacies of power that exist between the researcher and participants of any study, but feminists use reflexivity to not only consider their situated knowledge in the research, but also the possible and powerful positional potential of the researcher and its unintended consequences of imparting feelings of powerlessness on participants.

In addition, feminist scholars have recognised the existence of marginalised feminisms. Marginalised feminisms are the consequence of the experiences of privileged middle-class white heterosexual feminists taking precedence in the research narrative. The dominance of these knowledge structures results in the "othering" of the experiences of disadvantaged women and marginalised groups. In order to remedy such data distortions, feminist researchers have considered new and alternative ways to broaden the scope of feminist research. One such

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example is seen in the research of self-proclaimed proud trans woman and unapologetic feminist, Leigh Ann van der Merwe, who has documented the lived experiences of trans women in South Africa. In her 2017 article "*Transfeminism(s) from the Global South: Experiences from South Africa*" she asserts that members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersexed (LGBTI+) community remain marginalised, are often disregarded in local feminist discourse and are excluded from feminist spaces (van der Merwe, 2017). In response, van der Merwe and Padi (2012) posit "transfeminism" as an ideology concerned with women's rights and upliftment, that is also all inclusive; "an alternative feminism dictates that feminists can also be black, poor, transgender, disabled, unemployed, sex worker, homosexual, and the list goes on" (p. 111). This critique of feminist research and researcher positionality has generated numerous debates amongst feminist researchers, theorists and activists concerning agency and representation in the research process. It is for this reason that these important discourses are considered in more detail later in the ethical considerations section of this chapter.

FEMINIST METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS

As discussed earlier, both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used in feminist research. Some feminist researchers continue to find affinity with the basic tenets of positivism but advocate improving the accuracy and objectivity of traditional positivist approaches by reworking and adapting these to represent a greater inclusivity of women to reflect their lived experiences. In contrast, other feminist researchers unequivocally reject positivism, refuting its core notion of a fixed and unchanging social reality, and rather strive to develop alternative ways of thinking through the use of alternative epistemological and methodological frameworks that advance innovative research methods. What follows here are examples of both quantitative and qualitative methodological tools that have been adapted, adopted or developed by feminist researchers, for feminist research.

The statistical survey and mixed method design

Feminist researchers who remain committed to the methodological characteristics of positivist research have drawn on the strengths of these

quantitative methods to garner new empirical evidence that challenge dominant patriarchal norms in society. One such method utilised is the statistical survey, where new empirical data, or new interpretations of previously collected data, are gathered by feminist researchers by sampling individual units in a population. In other words, survey research is the collection of data attained by asking individuals questions, either in person, on paper, by phone or online. In a statistical survey, those responses from the sample are coded with variable labels and statistically analysed, with the results being considered generalisable to the wider population (Westmarland, 2001). For feminists, this means applying these results to expose previously unheard and subjugated experiences that are reflective of important social issues, thus allowing these results to be generalised to reflect society as a whole.

Feminist researchers and scholars who utilise statistical survey data argue that focusing on gender at the level of the individual alone, through qualitative methods, restricts the view of the broader societal processes through which gender inequalities are socially constructed and maintained (Harnois, 2013). Critique of this, however, stems from the very idea of generalisability in feminist research, especially when the sample context is not taken into consideration. Feminist researchers and scholars who utilise statistical survey data should not reduce participants' narratives to overly simplistic universal units of measure, but rather consider the contexts and social structures that pervade their lived experiences. It is because of this danger of oversimplification that feminist researchers need to be cognisant of the nature of the questions asked in a statistical survey. Should feminist researchers endeavour to utilise this methodological tool, they need to be cognisant of their responsibility towards participants by sharing and accurately understanding the opinions, values and beliefs of the participants, so as to reflect the complexity of participants' lived experiences.

For the feminist researchers who argue in favour of such methods, their case is sustained through examples of the effective use of statistical survey research, particularly when such survey-based data reveals the prevalence or distribution

of particular social problems. A local example of this was demonstrated in a 2017 report by the Department of Statistics South Africa entitled "Women in power: what do the statistics say?" This report uses results from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey in 2017; the Mid-year population estimates in 2017 and the Non-financial census of municipalities in 2016. Utilising the data collected from the aforementioned statistical surveys and censuses, the report demonstrates the lack of equal gender representation in decision-making positions (See Figure 1 below). The inclusion of women in such research samples guides research toward topics and issues that hold relevance for them (Westmarland, 2001). The concluding section of the report claims that "South Africa has made progress towards the realisation of a non-sexist society, but there is still a way to go" (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2017, p. 10). This highlights the need to further instil gender equality in all sectors of South African society. Obtaining figures such as these using qualitative methods would be extremely time-consuming, expensive and challenging to implement and obtain on a national level.
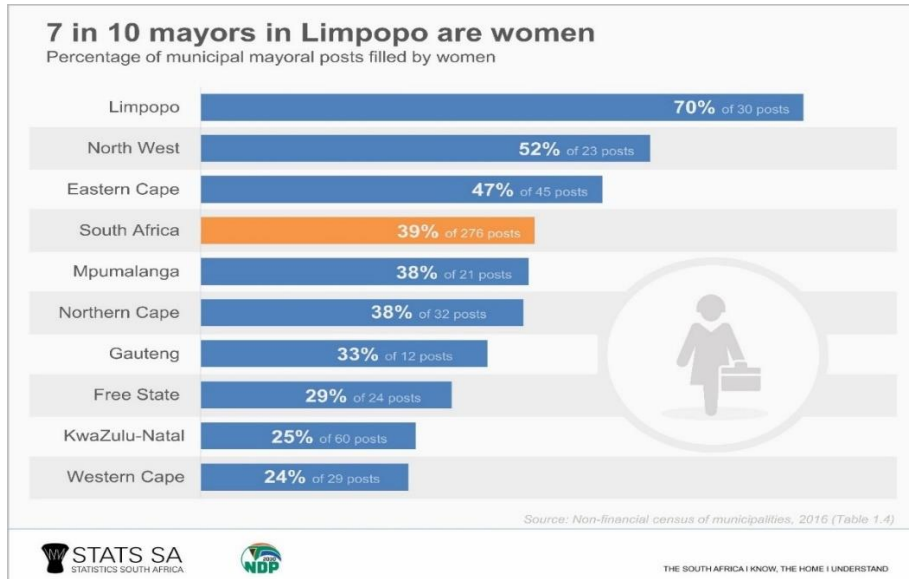

Figure 1. Women in power: what do the statistics say? (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2017)

That said, understanding the prevalence of feminist issues in society can be enhanced through fully understanding women's experiences that are recorded through qualitative research methods. Multimethod or mixed method designs,

when feminists merge qualitative and quantitative paradigms in the service of feminist research goals, are holistic research endeavours that allow for in depth theorisation of marginalised experiences with a view towards "setting the record straight" and encouraging social change on local and global levels of intervention (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 9?). One example from a local South African study utilised quantitative data from the 2013 World Values Survey, along with 11 qualitative individual interviews to explore whether gender equality and happiness are related (Rustin, 2018). As a research study grounded within a feminist framework, the empirical contributions included the convenience of the survey dataset, which was representative of the population and provided clearly identified linkages and fissures in the relationship between gender equality and happiness. However, this quantitative data revealed little about the nuances between gender equality and happiness, a deficit that was remedied by the qualitative component of Rustin's (2018) study, where in-depth individual interview data contributed to the understanding and complexities of the relationship between gender equality and happiness. This combined measure of the variables resulted in a far more robust understanding of South African women's life satisfaction and their affective states, as well as knowledge of whether or not gender equality and happiness are linked (Rustin, 2018).

Oral histories and diaries

Oral history as a data collection tool may be as old as time itself, with communities' reminiscences about past events and experiences shared through word of mouth from one generation to the next. Oral history interviews document events that have occurred during the lifetime of the person being interviewed and are often used in autobiographical research projects. This qualitative approach is valued by feminists as it enables the researcher to chronicle the thoughts, perceptions and lived experiences of participants as information related to the research topic. Oral history interviews can also be complimented through written recordings or reflective diaries, allowing participants to transcribe their experiences openly and easily, with both methods used to gather rich, thick data through recordings of experiences and perceptions (Wilkinson & Morton, 2007). Generally, these shared reflections are collated by the researcher and then

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interpretations thereof are discussed further with participants as a form of member checking, to ensure the researcher's accurate analysis and understating of the data, as well as their accountability towards more ethical research.

These methods have been used with survivors of trauma, displacement, and marginalisation and have been powerfully effective in gathering the histories of nonliterate populations, or people who are considered marginal to larger society (Dillard, 2018). An example of the power of oral history interviews and reflective diaries in uncovering hidden information from one sided historical narratives is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. The TRC gathered nearly 20,000 written statements and 2,000 public testimonials that disclosed stories of survival and regimented life under harsh domination to reveal survivor introspections of their lived experiences during the apartheid regime (Nsiah, 2019). Feminist research considers these methods, which recognise individual memory, experiences and subjectivity, as important instruments crucial to understanding the full impact of social, cultural, economic, institutional, and political elements of women's lives (Goldman et al., 2003).

Life history interviews

The life history interview method is a particularly useful qualitative approach for understanding past and present contextual influences and is used by feminist researchers to enable in-depth exploration of issues using a small participant group. One example of this is a recent feminist research study that sought to understand the pathways taken by South African female offenders towards criminality. The study selected a group of 17 sentenced, incarcerated female offenders, of various ages, racial, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as various lengths of incarceration periods and convictions, to understand the construction of these women's identities and offending behaviours, as well as the point at which these two constructs converge (Parry, 2019). The qualitative nature of the research study, with its focus on understanding the pathways and shared experiences of female offenders, necessitated the use of the life history interview method as a retrospective data collection tool, to construct researcher biographies of participants' shared experiences through in-depth, semi-structured

interviews. Each dialogue covered a number of moments significant to the participant that allowed for researcher understanding of what had happened and what was currently happening within participants' lives, as well as allowing the researcher to identify greater social dynamic forces at work (Bird & Ojermark, 2011).

By focusing on the processual development of each participant over their lifetime, while constantly relating these experiences to their cultural and social world, the interviews revealed the female offenders' pathways of adaption or maladaptation within socially transmitted codes of conduct (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). More than simply an historical account, each narrative collected through life history interviews provided individualised meaning that then allowed for comprehensive understandings of the conduit role society and, more specifically, motherhood plays within the women's pathways to offending behaviours. Through this feminist research method, patriarchal subsidies of gender-based violence, gendered roles, feminisation of poverty and unpaid labour, as shared through the female offenders' accounts, exposed the existence of unequal power relations between men and women in South Africa and became indicators of causality towards pathways to incarceration (Parry, 2019).

Participatory action research

Participatory action research (PAR) is research which involves all relevant stakeholders examining together a challenging situation for intervention, development and transformation within communities and groups (Wilkinson & Morton, 2007). It is a collaborative method whereby people reflect on particular aspects of their lives so as to engage in action that leads to a useful solution which benefits all of the people involved, and as such it has much in common with feminist research paradigms (McIntyre, 2003). Feminist PAR allows for a contextual approach to understanding gender in historical, economic, cultural and political contexts. It is a dynamic approach in that action is taken, then participants reflect on the new situation, and then further action is taken - a continuous process that occurs until change is achieved. This bottom-up approach is a co-research democratic approach that places the participant and researcher in very

different positions when compared to traditional methods and resolves the imbalanced power positionality between researcher and participant that was noted earlier in the chapter. PAR emphasises the lived experiences of marginalised groups and requires a reflexive and activist stance on the part of the researcher as a means to drive social change through research.

Photovoice

Complementing feminist PAR is photovoice, an increasingly used research method that employs photos and annotations by research participants to tell their own stories through a contextually and culturally relevant lens. The use of this visual methodology enables individuals with relegated narratives, to share 'visual stories' about themselves, thus creating opportunities for them to express themselves in their own images, words, and reflections (McIntyre, 2003). Such visual narratives tell stories of the intersections of social categories of race, class, gender and sexuality through a methodology that allows for traditionally passive and invisible subjects and accounts to emerge in a transparent and reflective manner (Kiguwa, 2019).

An example of such a study was conducted by Kessi in 2018 where photos and accompanying narratives were used to communicate the experiences of black female students and black students of non-conforming gendered identities and sexual orientations at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The 13 participants involved in this study included black, female, working class, and LGBT students from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in a range of departments and faculties across the university campus. Participants were given cameras and, through a guided facilitation process, were asked to take photographs over a two-week period that illustrated the strengths and challenges that exist in their community, how their everyday lives are affected by these, and what needed to change and how (Kessi, 2018). In order to share these visual stories, a public exhibition of the participants' photo-narratives took place on the UCT campus with the aim of presenting their lived experiences, and recognising the possibilities and limitations of enacting change at their institution. Kessi (2018, p. 103) concludes that "[i]n this case, the combined narrative and PAR approach

was effective in unlocking the subjectivity and power of participants to counter experiences of exclusion and build understandings and strategies for change".

A similar participatory photovoice research project was conducted with 147 students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) for a third-year feminist research methodology module (Ngabaza, Shefer, & Clowes, 2018). The study's data was generated through participant narratives based on photographs they had taken of places where they felt safe or unsafe on campus and their work was presented in a public exhibition "which raised valuable issues resonating with both staff and students on campus" (Ngabaza, Shefer, & Clowes, 2018, p. 142). The resulting student narratives highlighted how gender intersects with other factors. For example, gendered experiences of mobility to and from campuses, as particularly related to fear of sexual violence when using public transport, was seen in Figure 2. below:

Figure 2. "This is a picture of the minibus I take to campus" (Ngabaza, Shefer, & Clowes, 2018).

The student who took the image related that,

> This is a picture of the minibus I take to the campus of UWC. During daytime and when the minibus is crowded I feel much safer in a minibus than when I am taking the train for example where I have experienced people being more intimidating. In the daytime, I do not feel vulnerable in the same way as after it gets dark (Ngabaza, Shefer & Clowes, 2018, p. 145).

The study visually illustrates the complex intersections between gender and sexuality on a university campus and exposes how this space operates in ways that validate heterosexual masculinities, while femininities and non-conforming masculinities are simultaneously marginalised (Ngabaza, Shefer, & Clowes, 2018). These photographs and texts illuminate both the local and the global; they reflect the participants' own unique and individual experiences, whilst providing a larger social commentary regarding their academic institution and country in which they live, in turn guiding a shift in the current understandings of gender and inspiring future transformation efforts at places of higher learning.

Ethnographic research

Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology, characterised by a long period of close connection with participants in the field, through its principal method of observational research. The developments already discussed earlier in this chapter regarding feminist epistemology have informed and influenced ethnographic research, which is reasonable considering the processes and products of ethnography are inevitably affected by the researcher's epistemological principles. Feminist ethnographers use extensive fieldwork and data collection through continuous involvement with participants to uncover how gender operates within different societies in a manner that is "reflexive, alert to power differences between researchers and informants, and recognizes diversity among and between men and women" (Aune, 2009, p. 4). Combining observational research over time with in-depth interviews and other innovative methods such as poetry, photography, diary entries and letters, results in a detailed descriptive understanding of participants' experiences that endeavours towards meticulous contextual understandings of a small participant group that is interpretive in nature (Aune, 2009).

However, a study conducted by Benita Moolman (2017) challenges this idea that ethnographic research has to be conducted with a small number of participants. Her study derived qualitative data from 15 individual in-depth interviews, 27 focus group discussions and ethnographic non-participant observations in three South African correctional facilities across the country (Moolman, 2017). The research aimed to interrogate discourses on masculinity inherent in a group of incarcerated men's understandings of manhood, gender, culture, religion and sexual relations. Moolman (2015) states that as an ethnographer, she observed her physical surroundings, observed and participated in everyday happenings in the correctional facilities, and kept a diary to record her own emotions throughout the research process which she described as "a space for my own feminist politics and feelings and a place where my own voice as a woman could have a home" (Moolman, 2015, p. 204). Ultimately, Moolman (2017) finds that, as a feminist researcher, employing ethnography as a methodological tool provided the freedom to be reflective and to consider the social differences and power relations that occur in the research process. The study's findings reflect that sentiment by undoing fixed notions of masculine identities, which, on more reflexive consideration, Moolman (2017) found to be more fluid than expected thus allowing for a re-imagining of traditional notions of gender and sexual identities.

This intersubjectivity of feminist ethnographers is sometimes criticised. Of particular concern is the researcher's intense involvement in the participants' worlds and the possible resulting influences of such immersion in the field. Feminist ethnographers concur that this form of research involves being human in a holistic fashion. It is an embodied engagement with marginalised groups that requires making sense of lived worlds, which can only be achieved through a deep personal engagement with participants (de Pina-Cabral, 2011). Feminist ethnographers argue for the necessity of relating with people, in a mutual, collaborative exchange that requires researcher reflexivity to deconstruct dominant discourses, reveal hidden assumptions and present the multiple perspectives encountered in the field.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN FEMINIST RESEARCH

Feminist research is governed by ethical considerations that, first and foremost, take into account the needs of the participants involved. Given that the ideologies of feminism necessitate research that recovers marginalised voices and explores possibilities for social justice, reflexivity becomes a core ethical principle in feminist research (Kiguwa, 2019). Chege (2012) states that in order to do this, the feminist researcher must consciously and continuously reflect throughout the research process, always asking questions that are aimed at protecting the participants:

- Does this research empower the participants?
- Will the participants be harmed by this study, either individually or as a group?
- Will the research enhance participants' personal understandings and lived experiences?

This means that the most important ethical considerations of feminist research must include researcher reflexivity and, amongst others, the tenets of subject-centeredness, mutual respect, sensitivity, empathy and flexibility (Chege, 2012). Adherence to these will also determine the extent to which the research facilitates the empowerment of a marginalised and vulnerable group. Researchers need to remember that working with vulnerable groups may affect the participant's ability to make an autonomous decision regarding taking part in the proposed research study without coercion. In order to avoid such (likely unintended) intimidation, the participants of the study need to be informed of the nature of the research, through a briefing session for example, which will provide the participants an opportunity to ask questions and to consider whether or not they want to participate in the research. It must also be made clear during the consent process that refusal to participate would not be detrimental to them, as the research study is conducted on a voluntary basis with signed consent forms and pseudonyms ensuring the respect of their right to privacy and anonymity. In her experience of working with vulnerable participants, Schlosser (2008) recommends taking cognisance of the average participant's level of literacy when constructing the written consent forms that they are required to sign, as well as in later

explanations with the participants. The use of simple language with a clear statement of research intent is advised to prevent any doubt in the understanding of the research aims on the part of the participants. Delivering and explaining the consent form is also a chance to build rapport with the participant, so this component of the research process is particularly important. Through a collaborative process, the research study should endeavour to facilitate openness and create ethical conditions that are unfavourable for the exploitation of the already marginalised group, in turn allowing their voices and experiences to come to the fore.

A feminist ethic necessitates that the employed research methods and practices must be compatible with research outcomes that are liberating and transformative. Mama (2011) specifies that as a form of activism, feminist research, particularly within the African context, is premised on a politics of solidarity (see Figure 3 below). As already mentioned, this practice demands active relation to and engagement with participants to explore ways of understanding them and supporting their struggles, as well as a high degree of self-awareness, self-criticism and reflexivity. In the ever-evolving models and ethics of feminist research and its practices, it is important to venerate collaborative experiences, participation, representation and reflexivity (Anandhi & Velayudhan, 2010). Feminist research emphasises the ethics of a collective and interactive knowledge production, over a single individual knower or research expert, thus supporting participants and other feminist activists to further social transformation and achieve successful change in dismantling networks of oppression (Gqola, 2002). As stated by Dr Richa Dave Nagar (2013, p. 1):

> Co-authoring stories is a chief tool by which feminists working in alliances across borders mobilize experience to write against relations of power that produce social violence, and to imagine and enact their own visions and ethics of social change. Such work demands a serious engagement with the complexities of identity, representation, and political imagination as well as a rethinking of the assumptions and possibilities associated with engagement and expertise.

The future directions of feminist research, specifically within the South African context, are discussed further in the concluding sections of this chapter.

INDIVIDUAL ETHICS

As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles which are:

- The indivisibility, inalienability and universality of women's human rights.

- The effective participation in building and strengthening progressive African feminist organizing and networking to bring about transformatory change.

- A spirit of feminist solidarity and mutual respect based on frank, honest and open discussion of difference with each other.

- The support, nurture, and care of other African feminists, along with the care for our own well-being.

- The practice of non-violence and the achievement of non-violent societies.

- The right of all women to live free of patriarchal oppression, discrimination and violence.

- The right of all women to have access to sustainable and just livelihoods as well as welfare provision, including quality health care, education, water and sanitation.

- Freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues, including reproductive rights, abortion, sexual identity and sexual orientation.

- A critical engagement with discourses of religion, culture, tradition and domesticity with a focus on the centrality of women's rights.

- The recognition and presentation of African women as the subjects not the objects of our work, and as agents in their lives and societies.

- The right to healthy, mutually respectful and fulfilling personal relationships.

- The right to express our spirituality within or outside of organized religions.

- The acknowledgment of the feminist agency of African women which has a rich Herstory that has been largely undocumented and ignored.
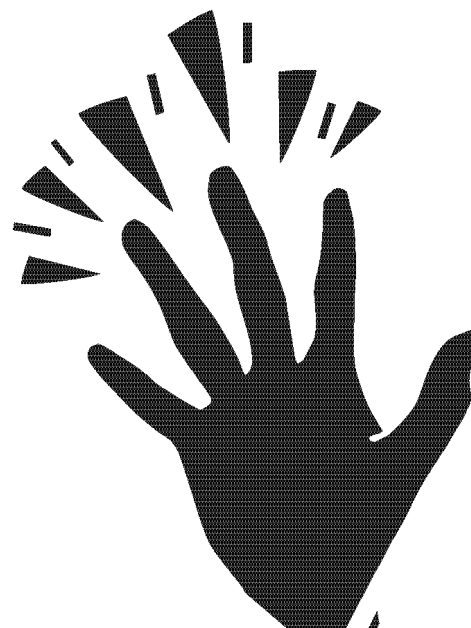
Figure 3. Individual ethics practiced by the Charter of feminist principles for African feminists (African Feminist Forum, 2016, p. 7).

DISCUSSION, FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

South African feminist researchers and scholars are responsible not only for advocating women's rights while challenging structures of power and privilege, but also for conducting research driven by authentic South African needs. Steyn (1998) argues that despite the calls for more indigenous South African feminist theories, there is a tendency for local scholars to draw heavily on theory from overseas feminists, and then to apply these understandings when analysing circumstances in Africa. This lack of specifically South African feminist epistemologies is a major constraint on the practical process of research in a

country that has so much to offer regarding understandings of women and the manner in which race, class, and gender intersect. This limited availability of quantifiable research data about the lived experiences and social conditions of South African women and marginalised groups is one of the largest barriers facing the advancement of African feminist research. The unavailability of relevant statistics regarding South African women and marginalised groups becomes even more problematic when considered alongside the challenge of accessing local data. This means that feminist researchers and scholars often rely on foreign data, which may be useful for understanding the global reach of a problem, but cannot speak to the realities of South African participants.

Much work still needs to be done on differentiating and conceptualising the interests and intersects of various groups of women and to reject the denial of respective differences. By building bridges across the divides of class, ethnicity, race and sexual identity, Mouzinho and Sizaltina (2017) postulate that patriarchal structures, which have for a long time been used to keep women oppressed and separated, are dismantled. Encouraging the engagement of feminist research and analysis regarding the conditions facing South African women creates a much-needed space for strong objectivity and the transfer of feminist knowledge. Safe spaces for women are few and far between in South Africa, and for women across the globe, so for feminist researchers these spaces are vital for the necessary dissemination of knowledge. As indicated by Mouzinho and Sizaltina (2017, p. 47), "[b]uilding solidarity and forging connections with other African feminist organisations and movements will be important in order to address the challenges of access to feminist resources".

Feminist research, and publications thereof, make important contributions towards the development policies of societal reconstruction by infusing them with feminist awareness. For Steyn (1998, p. 50), "South African feminists are in a position to gain a rich theoretical understanding of the mechanisms by which the society has been gendered". Their contributions can deter the arduous local conditions facing women and marginalised communities across much of the country and indeed the continent. Dissemination of these contributions, with a

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degree of organisational and intellectual autonomy, will articulate any political agendas rooted in a clear analysis of the material and cultural conditions of women's lives, and through solidarity, encourage feminists to stay connected in ways that allow their ideas to challenge power (Mama, 2011).

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