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FEMINIST THEORY AND RESEARCH

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The *focus* of this chapter is the ways in which communication theory and method can provide a richer, more complex and enlightening canvas of the human condition, when they draw their attention *from the abstract to the specific*, and when they integrate the *politics of ethical commitment* to the communities they study. These two principles refer to the feminist approach to theory and research. The *thesis* of this chapter is that the integration of (mainstream) theory and research in communications may have large parts of the scholarship missing, distorted or even silenced—and that it is our ethical and moral social responsibility as intellectual workers and leaders to acknowledge that this may be the case. In a metaphorical sense, the *call* of this chapter is for the "greening" of communication—the integration of theory and research as if "others," mattered.[1] The *difficulty* in this chapter is to provide within one section a representative sample of what feminist thought and research offer to communication studies.

Feminist enquiry is complex, comprehensive and fluid: it is as much about formulating and researching questions of fact as it is about exploring those of values and policy, thereby covering the conceptual and methodological ground of communication research and theory as Salwen and Stacks describe it in the first chapter of this book ("Integrating Theory and Research: Starting with Questions"). The challenge for communication scholars is twofold: firstly to re-enter research questions and methodologies into the process of studying communication/s, meaning re-starting from the basic question of "how social investigation should be approached" (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2006, p.11) in communication so that it can redress the gaps in knowledge deriving from gender imbalances. To achieve that, our ways of knowing and enquiring knowledge ought to be re-examined, reflected upon and revisited. Secondly, the challenge is to re-frame, re-phrase and re-design our approaches, which consist of theoretical as well as method oriented knowledge, to understanding the ontology of communications, in other words to radically expand our intellectual horizon so as to tune in to women's and gendered constructed experiences.

"Mainstream" theories and research have assumed the universality of particular (male-centered[2]) experience and used it as the yardstick of un-biased research. The "greening" (see Griswold & Swenson, 1991) of communications, which recognizes and actively seeks to learn about the lived experience of non-privileged social categories will come about if communication students are *aware* that feminist scholarship is often conspicuous by its absence in curricula, in informal conversations, and in mainstream research papers and journals. Therefore the overarching question for communication scholars should be "How do we know what we know?" This question refers not only to the theory and method of communication but also to the very study of communication institutions, processes, meanings and actors who, in one way or another, impart and construct forms of meanings, cultures and therefore knowledge.

A Beginner's Guide to Feminisms: Definitional Distinctions, Blurrings

"Feminist thought resists categorization, especially categorization based on 'fathers'' labels" writes Tong (1998) in her book *Feminist Thought*. Yet the history of feminist thought has provided its own labels (liberal, radical, Marxist-socialist. etc.), which, however, "signal to the broader public that feminism is not a monolithic ideology, that all feminists do not think alike, and that, like all time-honored modes of thinking, feminist thought has a past as well as a present and a future" (Tong, 1998, p.1). Sheryl Bowen and Nancy Wyatt (1993) suggested that there is no precise definition of *feminism* or *feminist* because by nature these concepts resist definitive statements (p. 2). Bowen and Wyatt noted that there are a number of statements that might ease the understanding, such as: feminism is concerned with women's lives; theories about humans; the nature of knowledge; the way in which knowledge is generated and legitimated; the "canon" of traditional knowledge; and process and connection (pp. 2–6).

Feminist theory and research as a scholarship field is nearly beyond a summary chapter like this because women speak with many voices. However, it is possible to discuss feminism and do feminist research and theory-building because there are common, distinctive elements in the politics of doing research and scholarship that are shared by feminists. Karen Warren (1993) used the "boundaries of a quilt or collage" to describe what she calls *boundary conditions* of a feminist ethic. Warren writes that the boundaries "delimit the territory of the piece without dictating what the interior, the design, the actual pattern of the piece looks like. Because the actual design of the quilt emerges from the multiplicity of voices of women in a cross-cultural context, the design will change over time. It is not something static" (p. 331).

The feminist theory perspectives frequently used—the quilt designs we now often recognize—are briefly summarized here. For example, *liberal feminist theory* (e.g., Friedan, 1974; Rossi, 1970; Wollstonecraft, 1792/1975) is developed out of liberal political philosophy, arguing that through legal and political avenues of the mainstream, women can change laws and politics and therefore achieve gender justice. Although liberal thought is also multifaceted, a central theme underlying much of its historical development is that of the attention to personhood and agency. Liberal feminists focus on the centrality of an ideal state that respects all its citizens, thereby granting and protecting equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men. Here, the point is not to change but reform existing norms and systems so as to include women. *Marxist-socialist feminists* (e.g. Gimenez, 2005; Holmstrom, 1982; Jaggar, 1983; Malos, 1980; Young, 1980) focus on class division as the major factor in women's oppression, paying attention to the intersections between women's work and women's self-perception. Structural conditions and macro level processes that exploit one's labor are based on the gendered division of labor and are combined with gender oppression and constitute the basis of patriarchal capitalism. Marxist-socialist thought recognizes women's agency as laborers, activists and political agents of change, albeit within conditions not of their own making. For Marxist-feminist thought the focus is on the overhauling of capitalism and patriarchy as systems inherently exploitative and the change towards a different society. *Radical feminists* (e.g., Daly, 1973; Frye, 1983; Hoagland, 1988) describe women's oppression as being grounded in reproduction, mothering, gender, and sexuality. They call for women to absent themselves emotionally and sexually from men so they may realize their full and whole selves as women. *Psychoanalytic feminists* (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1993) theorize that women's nature is not biologically determined, but socially constructed. Women's oppression is based on childhood experiences where masculinities and femininities are constructed and communicated, leading to the ways of thinking about oneself. Gender (or cultural) feminists stress that values traditionally associated with women (gentleness, modesty, supportiveness, empathy) are morally better values than those associated with men (Ton, 1998, p. 131). These lines of thought emphasize the internal ways of thinking:

for psychoanalytic feminism women must fight not only for their rights as citizens but also to free themselves from the "father within" and allow the space to think for themselves (Tong, 1998, p. 171). *Cultural feminists* (e.g., Faderman, 1981; Gilligan, 1982) propose women should provide ways of being, thinking, and speaking that allow for openness, diversity, and difference. In addition, *postmodernist theory* has moved feminist debates significantly forward in recent decades. *Postmodern feminists* (e.g., Bonner, Goodman, Allen, Jones, & King, 1992; Butler, 1990; Radway, 1984) focus on questions of meaning and identity, contending that these categories are fluid rather than fixed, and proposing that men and women may perform characteristics of either gender, or even slide between gender identities. Claiming that reality can never be fully known, they challenge universal notions of History (with a capital H) or Theory (with a capital T). As Tong observes: "although postmodern feminists' refusal to develop one overarching explanation and solution for women's oppression poses major problems for feminist theory, this refusal also adds needed fuel to the feminist fuel of plurality, multiplicity, and difference" (1998, p. 193). Related to postmodern feminism, a *Cyborg feminist perspective* has emerged as a way of theorizing women's relationship to science and technology. Specifically conceived by Donna Haraway, cyborg feminism has produced a major intervention in communication scholarship because it appropriates "androcentric" language to expose both bodies and science as socially constructed. Valuing hybridity, as she searches for ways to negotiate the difficulties posed by feminist research and women's political differences, Haraway declares: "Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be man, the embodiment of Western logos" (1991, p. 173).

Postmodern feminists "take their intellectual cue from existentialist Simone de Beauvoir" (Tong, 1998, p. 194) as they focus on women's "otherness" and Jacques Lacan, with their attention to the symbolic order of society and its internalization; and Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism that challenges "dualistic" thinking, speaking, and writing, and the artificial separation of body and mind, reason and emotion, self and other—as well as those between science and art or psychology and biology (Tong, 1998, p. 195).

Contributions by women of color (e.g., Anzaldua, 1990; Hill-Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984) have been influential, as they argue the condition of otherness enables woman to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and practices that the dominant culture seeks to impose on everyone. One such framework is *African Feminism* (sometimes called *Womanism*) (Kolawole, 1997; Oyewumi, 2003), which foregrounds the diasporic experiences of women of African descent, finding links transnationally between Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. African and African-American women often find that they have more in common with men from their communities than with white American, Anglo, or European women and they sometimes organize around diasporic issues that would otherwise be overlooked, such as forced marriage, female circumcision, or neo-colonialism (Guy-Sheftall, 2006, p. 26).[3] bell hooks (1994) spoke directly to this point:

> Visions of solidarity between women became more complex. Suddenly, neither the experiences of materially privileged groups of white females nor the category of "woman" (often used to refer to white women's experiences) could be evoked without some contestation, without white supremacy looming as the political ground of such assertions. These changes strengthened the power of feminist thought and feminist movement politically. (p. 42)

In the search to "integrate viewpoints, improve inclusivity, and promote solidarity" is *ecofeminism*: "Ecofeminists claim that environmental issues are feminist issues because it is women and children who are the first to suffer the consequences of injustice and environmental destruction"

(Gaard & Gruen, 1993, p. 11). Gaard and Gruen also note that "ecofeminists believe that the current global crises are the result of the mutually reinforcing ideologies of racism, sexism, classism, imperialism, naturism, and speciesism" (p. 25). Ecofeminist theory is theory in process, built on community-based knowing and valuing; the strength of this knowledge is dependent on the inclusivity, flexibility and reflexivity of the community in which it is generated. Further, ecofeminist theory grows out of dialogue and focuses on reaching consensus (pp. 32–33). Karen Warren (1993) wrote that

> Ecofeminists insist that the sort of logic of domination used to justify the domination of humans by gender, racial or ethnic, or class status is also used to justify the domination of nature. Because eliminating a logic of domination is part of a feminist critique—whether a critique of patriarchy, white supremacist culture, or imperialism—ecofeminists insist that naturism [discrimination against nature and other living organisms] is properly viewed as an integral part of any feminist solidarity movement to end sexist oppression and the logic of domination which conceptually grounds it. (pp. 325–326)

The historical development of the feminist movement is also expressed and identified in "waves" which have prioritized specific social demands in different socioeconomic historical periods. If, in simple terms, the first wave has demanded a civic, legal entity for women as proprietors and voters, with the suffragette movement, the second wave, working with and from the civil rights movement, has focused on expanding the agenda of legal recognition into women's equality in work, pay, welfare, control over one's body and access to child care and abortion, eradication of violence against women and generally extend full human rights for women (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, p. 9). Some cultural critics (Walker, 1992) observe that there was a major tidal shift when more voices by women of color and global women began to be incorporated. The, current, Third Wave highlights differences between and among women, often making visible the positive aspects of woman as "other." For example, with increasing globalization, women around the world have looked for ways to come together across national borders, mobilizing the universal category "woman" in order to fight for such common goals as human rights, poverty or illiteracy, while remaining loyal to locally specific (or national) struggles. This framework, emerging out of international feminist movements, is called *global feminisms* (Mohanty, 2003; Rupp, 1997; Smith, 2000), invoking the plural form to signal that these activists constantly strive for multiplicity of perspectives.

This brief overview of the plurality of feminist theoretical frameworks demonstrates the complexity and sophistication of feminist thought, but also its flexibility and responsiveness to the real world of lived, material or other, experience. Readers will of course make up their own minds as to the most suitable analytical approach explored here, but it is important to recognize and respect the enormous contribution that each approach makes to our understanding of the human condition.

Feminist Communication Theories and Research

Although numerous works by feminist scholars who draw upon all of these frameworks have documented and analyzed women's communication concerns, Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) assert that it was only after the second half of the 1980s that feminist theory was brought to the communication studies field in a significant way (p. 5). Yet like them, other authors, too, observe that the impact of feminist scholarship on the field is disappointing (Rush, Oukrop, & Creedon, 2004; Sarikakis & Shade, 2008); the compartmentalization and artificial separation of sub-disciplines/sub-fields and sub-groups, with their methodological and ontological tensions

and rivalries does not enhance a project of intellectual multi-vocality such as feminist theory and research. Feminist communication theory and research draws from multiple fields of study, from technology and science studies to policy, cultural studies and linguistics, sociology and political sciences. Feminist communication theory and research have sought to address the macro and micro levels of communication through the study of processes, institutions, politics and actions as they impact upon and are shaped by women's agency. Yet mainstream scholarship has difficulty in accepting the non-conformist approach of multi-perspectival research and theory that does not privilege "objectivity" or "anonymity" (the "superior" values of scientific research whereby "data" is dislocated and decontextualised from the subject/s studied).

> Feminist claims are "unthinkable" within the domain assumptions of established social science not only because they forthrightly assert that the discourses of science are manmade, but also because they ascribe to the far more radical claims that the epistemologies and the theories of knowledge that produced these discourses are systematically skewed by both Eurocentric and masculinist interpretative and textual practices. (Jansen, 2002, p. 30)

In Rush et al. (2005) we learn that from 1989 to 1999, *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* and *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* have published articles that deal with gender/women and/or utilize feminist methodology an average of 4.5 percent of their total articles in 10 years. Studying entries for "women's/gender studies" in *Communication Abstracts* from 1983 to 1992, Kathryn Cirksena (1996) found a relatively small percentage increase over the 10-year period. Cirksena wrote that:

> while some renditions of the development of communication studies in these years would attribute undue influence to feminist critiques and reworkings and others would hope to claim that feminist ideas have received increasingly wide discussion and use, the volume of work found in this analysis does not suggest that either is occurring. The pervasiveness of feminist re/formations of communication is not a claim that can be supported by this data.

Thus, even when feminist theory and research is conceived, researched, written, and published, getting it into the traditional academic curriculum through mainstream scholarship journals and books remains an obstacle. The traditional members of faculties and editorial boards of scholarly publications are conspicuous by their *presence*. As Dale Spender (1983) wrote, "while both sexes may have been making theories for as far back as we can trace, only one sex is seen as the theorists, one sex has its theories accepted as legitimate, only one sex owns the realm of theory" (p. 1). The view a decade later is hardly any different (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004; Rush et al., 2004; Rush, Oukrop, & Sarikakis, 2005).

For researchers of women's issues in communication in the early 1970s, there was little preserved or shared information about the role and status of women in society, and few theories or methods to guide research. Women's theories had been around for a long time but were destroyed, silenced, distorted, or co-opted. When Rush (1972, with Oukrop & Ernst) formulated the initial study about the role and status of women in journalism education, for example, she borrowed and used as a guide a questionnaire developed by women sociologists, not knowing how to ask questions about inequality and discrimination. In the mid-1980s when Rush and coeditor, Donna Allen, the founder of *Media Report to Women* and the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, were trying to bring together written voices for *Communications at the Crossroads: The Gender Gap Connection* (1989), feminist theories were in their formative stages, especially in

communication. In the early 1990s, a female reviewer pointed to a need for more feminist theory in *Crossroads*. This statement indicates the tremendous progress made from those initial descriptive studies and beginning publications about women's issues in the late 1960s and early 1970s to the 1990s, when feminist theories and research were abundant enough to notice that they were largely conspicuous by their absence.

Theories of feminism and feminist research have provided communication scholars with insights into the ways in which the scientific model has figuratively and literally paled in comparison with other frameworks which indicate sexist, racist, homophobic, and classist social projects (Harding, 1991). Through nearly four decades of current feminist scholarship, we have learned that women's communication, along with minorities of both gender, have been "othered" or silenced in mainstream research. Gender theories and feminist research in communication have helped to reveal that we must be mindful in future research of actively refusing to continue the silencing, drawing out instead and making visible those who have been silenced, revealing their voices in social and historical contexts.

Lana Rakow (1986) argues that in the early stages of integrating feminism and communication, two major research foci predominated: sex differences and gender studies. Leslie Steeves (1988) delineated three approaches to feminist scholarship in speech, media, and literary studies in the United States: liberal, radical, and socialist. She explained that each branch of feminism makes different assumptions about the role of the media and the function of communication in society.[4]

Kathryn Carter and Carole Spitzack (1989) examined *problematics* of feminism and social science, *theoretics* of feminism and communication studies, and *methods* for studying women's communications. Their introductory comments about the difficulties faced by feminist scholars are as important reading now as they were in 1989.

Kathryn Cirksena and Lisa Cuklanz (1992) examined five feminist frameworks for communication studies—liberal feminism (reason and emotion), socialist-feminism (public and private), radical feminism (nature and culture), psychoanalytic feminism (subject and object), and cultural feminism (mind and body). They also looked at feminist critiques of communication research methods, as well as discussing whether the set of oppositional dualisms which are the central organizing principle for much of Western thought is necessary. They noted that

> First, [feminist critiques] elucidate the constructed nature of knowledge, seeking to elaborate the ways in which knowledge depends on factors such as habit, language use, perspective, and personal experience. Second, feminist work argues that what has traditionally been considered the personal or private constitute valid areas for scholarship. Third, they point out and discuss perspective, both within text and audiences, and among scholars themselves. Feminist work in the humanities has most recently focused on the contingent nature of knowledge. (p. 40)

Bowen and Wyatt's 1993 book[5] explored the role of feminist scholarship in interpersonal, small-group, organizational, mass communication, and intercultural communications as well as theatre studies and rhetorical criticism. Many of the feminist critiques in Bowen and Wyatt about traditional research groupings are briefly summarized in Rakow (1992):

> In media studies, feminist scholars have moved past initial work on women's images in content and women's employment in industries to more complex questions that make it impossible to separate study of the media from all other communication contexts. (p. 12)

Important and oft-used and -cited contributions to women in the mass media are included in Pam Creedon's (1989, 1993) work on the topic. One of the "mothers of mass communication" is Margaret Gallagher's international account of *Unequal Opportunities: The Case of Women and the Media* (1981) providing some of the first reflections towards the global and internationally observed condition of women and their relation to the media. Liesbet van Zoonen (1994) contemplated using the typical liberal, radical, socialist feminism classifications in *Feminist Media Studies*, but was dissuaded because of the many *-isms* or standpoints emanating from current feminist literature. Instead, she begins by outlining her position on feminism (including gender and power) and cultural studies followed by identification of feminist themes in communication studies, such as stereotypes and socialization, pornography, and ideology. Van Zoonen goes on to examine key questions posed by a gendered approach within communication and cultural studies, including theories of transmission, representation, construction and discourse; structures of media organization and production; interpreting media representation through content analysis and semiotics; contradictions of the gendered image as spectacle; new approaches to understanding the audience and the politics of media reception; the potential of feminist and interpretative research strategies.

In concluding van Zoonen noted that:

> It would be my assertion when assessing the relevance of (studying) media and popular culture for feminist concerns, that one should distinguish at least between the different struggles feminism is involved in. As a social movement it has the double edge of being an interest group lobbying and struggling for social and legal changes beneficial to women and of challenging cultural preoccupations and routines concerning femininity and gender. Undeniably, both struggles are political and inform each other, nevertheless, they are of a different kind resulting in different interactions with the media and different requirements of media performance. (pp. 151–152)

In 2004 Rakow and Wackwitz identified three main themes of feminist communication theory: difference, voice and representation. Difference refers to the ways in which political, symbolic and other systems establish oppressive relationships between "racial" and ethnic groups, sexualities, economic classes and political orientations. Feminist communication theory addresses the differences among and between women problematizing their contexts, consequences and possibilities for common action (pp. 8–9). The theme of voice refers to the possibility of women's access to communicative fora, the conditions and obstacles to them being heard and the systems and processes through which women are being silenced (p. 9). Representation refers to the consequences of women's misrepresentation in popular culture and the media, processes of exclusion and the imposition of boundaries such as class, age, etc. The authors argue that Feminist Communication Theory theorizes *gender*; *communication*; and *social change* (p. 5).

This underlying "solidarity with the oppressed," which calls for an ethics of social justice and change intertwined in research and theory building, evident in the conceptualization of feminist communication scholars described above is Jansen's (2002) central action oriented argument in her analysis of "commitment" of critical scholarship (p 11). For Jansen, critical feminism and critical social theory share many of such commitments. In her book *Critical Communication Theory* Jansen approaches communication as a process in democratic opinion formation (the limits of deliberative democracy), a set of technologies from information to artificial intelligence, a discursive "battlezone" and a material context of domination, from war to sports and the news paradox. Her theorization rests on the understanding that in individual terms and as a totality, these processes are parts of social and cultural processes, socializations, actions and constructs.

The inherently gendered character of these processes rests in the absence as well as presence of gender.

In an attempt to showcase and further feminist scholarship that deals with the global, international and transnational aspects of contemporary communications, Sarikakis and Shade (2008) in their anthology *Feminist Interventions in International Communication* approach the relationship of women and media in the following four dimensions: they identify international policy regimes and explore the ways in which international/supranational structures of decision making serve to maintain the status quo of gendered discrimination, violence and expediency. For example, the current structural controls of mobile technologies are explored as gatekeeping mechanisms impacting upon women's access to technologies (Crow & Sawchuk, 2008); the need for gender sensitive communication policies is discussed by Prasad (2008); the ways in which cultural policy—which includes communication policy—uses the idea of women for specific treaties, but does not benefit women, are analyzed by Beale (2008), while the limitations of current pornography regulation are explored from the perspective of the socialization of porn and the conditions of labor for porn workers (Sarikakis & Zaukhat, 2008). Second, the book turns its attention to the mediation of meanings as mediations of power relations in the global media-sphere through the contributions of authors who look into the expressions of violence and sexualization in the Western (Jiwani, 2008) and Arab world (Al-Mahadin, 2008), but also through the promises and limitations of new technologies in mediating liberatory meanings and subvert power relations as in the cases of HIV/AIDS (Made, 2008), online media (Rodgers, 2008) and the millennium development goals (Van Leuven, Giffard, & Cunningham, 2008). The third locus of the anthology's attention is that of labor. The authors (McLaughlin, 2008; Mosco, McKercher, & Stevens, 2008; Shade & Porter, 2008) address the multifaceted and hidden dimensions of the making of international communications. The fourth dimension explored in the book is that of the global/local effect. Contributions in this area include those from authors locating their analyses in the ways in which globalization impacts upon local relationships of women and the media; by exploring feminist presses (Murray, 2008); the impact of globalization on women's access to and representation in the media in the former Eastern European countries (Marinescu, 2008); local/national responses to the globalized porn trade (Griffiths, 2008); and efforts to develop and utilize gender evaluation methodologies for telecentres in developing countries (Bure, 2008). The book identifies as core cross-sectional elements in a feminist analysis of inter/transnational and global communication the need to revisit the field of international communications with a feminist lens, the need to address questions of structural constraints in accessing, changing, controlling the media, dichotomies such as public/private, and the potential and actuality of communication technologies for democratization.

More than a decade ago Cirksena (1996) wrote that overview critiques of communication from a feminist perspective that attempt to define a feminist paradigm converge on the following five points: (1) communication studies should foreground and make explicit the inequitable power dimensions of gender relations in all human communication; (2) communication studies should "put women at the center" of research; (3) scholarship should not attempt to abstract gender from other aspects of identity, especially, but not be limited to identity based on race and class; (4) it should be "action-oriented"—part of the research should be linked to improving the status of women; and, (5) the "researched" (those people at the center of the investigation) should have some input into the framing of the issues and the research process.

Rush (1996) attempted a boundary-spanning approach of a normative character, with the following "10 Tenets of Deeper Communications" to transform theory and research:

1. A theory and its research will be ecologically based, inclusive and, thus, diverse.
2. A theory and its research will go beyond dualistic thinking and action.

3. A theory and its research must basically be concerned about human spirituality and sexuality—sometimes interchangeably, often interactively.
4. A theory and its research will be healing and liberatory.
5. A theory will employ realistic frameworks and will not be disregarded or discounted if it supports social action research.
6. A theory and its research will assess the traditional mass media, in their current corporate state, as demographic investigators and reporters of "who we are."
7. The alternative media will be included in a theory and its research as scenario servers for the strategic role they assume.
8. A theory and its research will emphasize peace, equality, and justice as dynamic growth forces through peace education and the processes of conflict resolution, especially mediation.
9. Envisionary media are possible when theory and research include both destructive and constructive roles and functions of communications.
10. A theory and its research will have a global civil society worldview with concern and respect for the integration of, through proactive and interactive communication and information with, its citizenry.

Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) identify the properties of feminist communication theory as "political, polyvocal and transformative" (p. 6). For them, feminist communication theory is explanatory ("It speaks of and to experience," p. 6); political (and "because it is political it is personal," p. 6); polyvocal (is "generated by multiple voices and experiences, with sometimes conflicting interpretations of reality," p. 6); transformative ("contributes to intellectual and spiritual growth by providing different perspectives through which to conceptualize experiences and the structures of society," p. 6). As it is obvious, feminist communication theory is charged not only with the intellectual task of research and analysis (which, however, obeys an enhanced sense of responsibility towards research subjects and for self-reflection) but also with that of transformation; therefore with the task of social responsibility to speak truth to the power.

Research: Recycled, New, and an Example

Reinharz (1992) identified 10 tenets of feminist research:

1. Feminism is a perspective, not a research method.
2. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods.
3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship.
4. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory.
5. Feminist research may be transdisciplinary.
6. Feminist research aims to create social change.
7. Feminist research strives to represent human diversity.
8. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a research subject and tool.
9. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied (in interactive research).
10. Feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader. (p. 240)

It should be clear that feminist theory and research, like other forms of inquiry, is as varied as those studying it. Shulamit Reinharz (1992) displays a whole range of feminist methods in social research, including traditional methods of research such as survey, experimental, and case studies, as well as original feminist research methods. Feminist research methods are often "feminist-enhanced" in that, as Reinharz noted, the "use of the term 'original' does not signify

a method never considered or used prior to the instance discussed here. Rather, it reflects the researcher's effort to create a new approach that met her feminist criteria" (p. 215). Such new methods included consciousness-raising, creating group diaries, drama, genealogy and network tracing, the non-authoritative research voice or multiple-person stream-of-consciousness narrative, conversation, using intuition or writing associatively, identification, studying unplanned personal experience, structured conceptualization, photography or the talking-pictures techniques, speaking freely into a tape recorder or answering long, essay-type questionnaires.

Reinharz wrote that most feminist researchers who develop original methods do not argue that these methods necessarily meet the norms of science (p. 238). Perhaps it should be noted here and sprinkled generously throughout this chapter, however, that finding or creating methods suited to feminist ideology is no different in principle than creating conventional science methods to suit a positivist ideology (Wood, 1994).

In "Some Final Thoughts" about original feminist research methods, as the chapter is titled, Reinharz wrote:

> Not all feminist social research is innovative with regard to method. In fact, some feminist scholars regard methodological innovation as counterproductive because only studies conducted according to "rigorous" scientific procedures will convince the skeptics. For those who do not share this concern, however, feminism typically leads to the study of new topics that require or allow new forms of study. For these people, the feminist spirit is one of breaking free, including breaking free of methodological traditions.
>
> One of the many ways the women's movement has benefited women is in freeing up our creativity in the realm of research. And one of the ways feminist researchers, in turn, have benefited the societies in which we live is by the spirit of innovation. Although I have listed several types of "original" research and writing, there is room for many more. As feminists gain greater control of publishing opportunities and academic positions, we will undoubtedly see evidence of more of these. (italics added; pp. 238–239).

In her dissertation, Autumn Grubb-Swetnam's interpretation of women's use of fashion and beauty magazines (1994) serves as a communication research example. In her introduction, she wrote:

> As women, we stand in grocery store lines where magazines beckon us with promises of "thin thighs in thirty days," "meals in a minute," "supermom sagas," and "make your man melt tonight." As we sweat and grunt at the spa, lithe feminine bodies in slick magazine spreads look on. As we sit waiting in doctors' and dentists' offices, these mass-mediated messages entice us to pick them up, promising the secrets to feminine happiness. In middle-and upper-class adolescent female bedrooms and mothers' kitchens, living rooms or sewing rooms, these magazines lie about the place, accessories to the well-decorated home. In school libraries and in female dorm rooms, these magazines become interspersed among academic textbooks and journals. (p. 1)

She noted that the purpose of her research was to apply a feminist interpretive approach to studying women's use of mass communication and popular culture. Explication of magazine use was limited to Euro-American and African-American heterosexuals, lesbians, and bisexuals to provide insights into understanding how race, class, gender, and sexuality are experienced by women when they negotiate and interpret mass-mediated images. The second part of her purpose involved *praxis*: to provide understanding about women's use and interpretation of mass mediated images "so that we may be mindful of our media choices" (p. 2).

To ground her research initially, Grubb-Swetnam chronicled the historical evolution of women's magazines in American culture and discussed nuances of the editorial content in women's magazines. In another chapter, she delineated feminist cultural studies approaches to examining women's use of the media, evolution and types of standpoint epistemologies, and research questions pertinent to the study.

In the method chapter, Grubb-Swetnam explained that her reliance on the standpoint of women was a methodological choice. She described the general characteristics of the sample, the interview locations and structure, her assumptions approaching the data, and the process of data analysis. Grubb-Swetnam discussed problems she encountered in the elicitation of working class, poor, African-American and lesbian perspectives. Further, she paid particular attention to how traditional methods of data collection limit and restrain the researcher attempting to document women's voices—the other in relation to White, middle-class heterosexual women.

The analysis section of the dissertation provides the reader with information about the individual women that participated in the study, the ways they used magazines, how they defined and described the magazines, and their general criticisms of magazines. She also discussed the women's talk about their bodies in relation to magazine use, and the perspective of the outsider-within as it relates to magazine use.

The magazines in the study included *Cosmopolitan, Ladies' Home Journal, Red-book, Good Housekeeping, Elle, Mademoiselle, Family Circle, Woman's Day, Upscale, Deneuve, Vogue, Essence, Glamour, McCall's, Self*, and *Working Mother.*

Feminist *Praxis* in Research

This section explains how feminist theory and *praxis* (practical application) is integrated into the research process. Earlier, we noted specific themes that exist in feminist research, as defined by Reinharz. Five of those themes are addressed in this section.

Theme 1: Feminist Research Strives To Represent Human Diversity

Typically, traditional sample techniques have been shown to generate a majority of Euro-American, middle-class respondents (Cannon, Higginbotham, & Leung, 1991). This claim is supported in mass communication research generated in the 1970s when academicians studied commercial television's attempts at ascertainment information. These studies found that, typically, White middle-class males were the majority of ascertainment respondents, revealing that researchers do not often gather a diverse population in their sample due to sampling techniques. The techniques did not assure that diverse communities would be accessed, because they were not socially ordered—nor did they utilize the same social structures—as White, middle-class communities (e.g., Heller, 1977; Leroy & Ungurait, 1975; Walker & Rudelius, 1976).

To decrease this tendency, snowball sampling technique (a sampling technique in which respondents are asked to identify other respondents) was used to increase sample diversity. Andrea Press (1991) defended the technique as effective in building samples when respondents are needed from particular social groups. The study on women's magazine use required both African- and Euro-American women of heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual standpoints as well as from a variety of economic classes. The snowball sampling technique collected diverse voices in the data. To generate the core group of female respondents, electronic mail discussion lists were used. The women who responded were then asked to inform their friends, families, and co-workers about the research. If the women they told seemed interested in participating in the research, they were given a phone number for contact. The snowball sampling that occurred with the core group of women (through word of mouth) secured the majority of African-American respon-

dents, lesbian respondents, and working-class respondents. Because of this sample, the analyses reflected the varied—and sometimes contradictory ways—women use, interpret, and negotiate media messages aimed at them. The diverse sample provided data that made visible the complex ways in which women consume and make sense of media messages.

Theme 2: Feminist Research Includes the Researcher as a Person
Theme 3: Feminist Research Frequently Attempts to Develop Special Relations with the People Studied

Themes 2 and 3 are incorporated in the discussion of how they were integrated into the research. This section will provide specific examples of how Grubb-Swetnam intertwined themes 2 and 3 into the research process and in writing.

In-depth interviews generated data about the women's lived experience with women's magazines. During these in-depth interviews, stories that were similar to those told by respondents were shared when appropriate by Grubb-Swetnam. Because the questions were open-ended, respondents sometimes seemed unsure about question meanings. At those times, a personal story was provided as an example response to the question. Jenny Nelson (1989) supported this interviewing technique:

> In my own research, I have discovered that disclosure on my part can open the entire interview situation to more explicit descriptions on the part of my co-researchers. When I tell a story, this can help to elicit a story from the other person. The stories may not be similar (in fact, they often express variations), and my input provides the respondent with a comfortable format by which she can relate her story. (p. 228)

Nelson believed that this interviewing technique minimizes the "perceived authority of the interviewer, and promotes an intersubjective, conversation style to the situation" (p. 228).

Another way Grubb-Swetnam integrated herself into the research process and writing was to illuminate clearly for the respondents and the reader the researcher's personal experiences and knowledge about women's magazines. In the methods chapter, the section titled "Approaching the Data," for example, Grubb-Swetnam wrote:

> In order to interpret the data, it is important the reader be aware of three assumptions I make. First, I make the assumption that a variety of interpretive (Lindlof, 1988) or epistemological communities exist within the sample. Approaching the data with this assumption allows me to be sensitive to the similarities and differences in women's magazine use. It also affords me the opportunity to explicate the variety of interpretive communities.
>
> Another assumption I hold is that race, class, gender, and sexuality are not simply individual differences but function as sites of experiencing and generating oppression, as well as pleasure, resistance, and creativity. I also believe that these facets of the self interact with one another in an organic fashion, driven by the particular context of each woman's life. With this assumption I approach the data for indications of women's magazine use that explicate these sites of oppression, as well as reveal women's enjoyment, resistance and creativity in magazine use.
>
> A third assumption I use when approaching the data is that I have used women's magazines in the past and am familiar with their contents. This will assist me when analyzing data to understand the terminologies the women use to describe particular types of stories, articles, advice columns, or advertisements. These statements about the

assumptions I hold when approaching the data are meant to help the reader understand my standpoint in this research. (pp. 78–79)

Grubb-Swetnam also acknowledged her presence in the research process within the analysis section. She did this to help readers make sense of what the women were saying about their magazine use, as well as validate their experiences with magazines. For example, in one of the analysis chapters, after providing the reader with several respondent quotations about negotiating mediated images of femininity that described internal struggle, she wrote:

> I am intimately familiar with Libby's struggle with the mediated images of appropriate femininity. In 1992, I wrote in my journal about my negotiation and struggle between self and mediated cultural norms. A portion of this journal entry was: I have come to realize in myself that I could not and did not begin to generate (let alone hear) my original thought and voice until I accepted my natural, wild beauty. Until I quit putting chemicals on my hair and face; until I quit cinching my waist and chest into confining, uncomfortable clothing; until I quit hating myself as an imperfect commodity; until I explored that pain and gently laid it down I could not hear and know and believe in my original thought and voice. I could not breathe in whole breaths; could not see the background for the blinding, neon foreground; and could not move in freedom and grace as long as I accepted the commodity model for myself. Now that I know this, I must constantly recreate this knowing of self-acceptance that struggles against some unseen ideological circle that is maintained in our cultural systems. (pp. 167–168)

This conscious effort to maintain a connection to the reader and respondents by the researcher is one way Themes 2 and 3 were incorporated as feminist praxis in research.

Theme 4: Feminist Research Is Guided By Feminist Theory

Generally, feminist theorists study, describe, and analyze issues impacting women's lives. This underlying assumption of the worth of women's lived experiences does not tend to be shared in traditional research goals. Specifically, Grubb-Swetnam's dissertation drew from feminist standpoint theorists such as Patricia Hill-Collins (1990), Gloria Anzaldua (1990), bell hooks (1984), and Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993).[6] Standpoint theorists discuss the position of individuals in society who must function both in the mainstream and the margins. Explicating and analyzing the political and social positions marginalized individuals must juggle help to illuminate how a society acts out race, class, gender, and sexuality as social relations.

Feminist cultural and media audience theorists provided a second framework for the dissertation. At the time of writing, for example, Angela McRobbie (e.g., 1991) and Janice Radway (1984) provided a theoretical understanding of women as active, complex media users.

Theme 5: Feminist Research May Be Transdisciplinary

The feminist theorists who grounded and guided Grubb-Swetnam's study represent a variety of disciplines: Patricia Hill-Collins, sociology; Gloria Anzuldua and bell hooks, English and literature disciplines; Stanley and Wise, philosophy; Angela McRobbie, media and cultural studies; and Janice Radway, literary criticism. Investigating their theoretical writings, we find their work also represents a transdisciplinary approach that includes Marxism, psychology, semiotics and theology. This transdisciplinary approach allows for new opportunities in communication

research. Rakow (1992) posits a cross-discipline approach evident in feminist theories offers an ability to ask new research questions. Additionally, she argued:

> Feminist scholarship is essential because it will help transcend the traditional, theoretical boundaries between domains of communication research such as socio-linguistics, speech communication, interpersonal, organizational, and mass communication which are currently informed by incompatible theories and methods. (p. 24)

Summary

In summary, the examples provided in this section have made visible the ways in which feminist praxis in the research process calls for an open acknowledgment of the positioning of the researcher as a person engaged in the research process. Second, these examples made visible how feminist praxis in research strives to break down barriers of authority between the researcher and respondents, and attempts to incorporate ways for the respondents to be co-researchers. Moreover, the examples provided in this section have made visible how feminist praxis strives to reveal humanity in all its complex diversity.

We hope that this chapter conveys successfully, despite its limitations, the underlying priorities and principles for feminist communication theory and research and makes visible that in this case, perhaps more than any other approach, *integration* of theory and research is of paramount importance. Not only are theoretical and analytical frameworks integrated with the methods and methodology employed by feminist researchers but also researchers themselves are "integrated" in the research process by self-reflecting on their praxis—and therefore dispelling the myth of "objectivity" or "neutrality," which in most cases perpetuate the status quo, thereby already taking a position. Subjects are integrated in the research process as active participants, whom academic research seeks to serve.

Feminist communication theory and research have left no stone unturned in their pursuit of explanation and transformation in our field. Nevertheless, given the new imperatives deriving from the intensified processes of globalization, human mobility and technological and economic integration, large scale, comparative, as well as ethnographic research is needed to explore in a longitudinal manner the experiences of women across different socioeconomic contexts. International in design and global in scope feminist projects are needed in order to address the shifts in decision making powers on the globe, women's changing experiences of material and symbolic worlds, and the connection of macro level analysis to the micro level exploration of globalization's consequences.

Notes

1. The initial title of the first version of this chapter in 1996 was: "The 'Greening' of Communication: The Integration of Theory and Research as if 'Others,' including Women, Mattered." E. F. Schumacher's (1973) classic contribution is acknowledged by paraphrasing the subtitle from *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered.* New York: Harper & Row.
2. The categories of "woman" and "man" are understood as socially constructed. We follow Ramazanoglu and Holland's approach to "social research on gendered lives" (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2006, p. 5).
3. It should not escape the reader's attention that this chapter primarily reflects the work of White women, complete with attitudes, biases, and class and racial blindness forced by "White privilege."
4. See Bowen and Wyatt (1993) for a distillation of Steeves's work.

5. Bowen and Wyatt edited a volume about feminist approaches that was envisioned as supplementary reading for any course in speech communication where "very few courses…incorporate either feminist readings or feminist principle or practices" (p. ix). They noted that:

> Feminism advocates interdisciplinary study by breaking down artificial barriers between areas of scholarship. We had to decide whether to live up to our principles by spanning boundaries and creating new areas for communication study based on feminist perspectives or whether we should limit ourselves in this initial effort to the critique of traditional areas of study within the relatively amorphous discipline called speech communication. Meeting as a group of authors, we decided that our primary goal was to reach the widest possible audience that could be achieved most easily by working within familiar areas of scholarship, providing critiques and correctives to the traditional scholarship that has historically excluded women's and minority concerns and perspectives. By detailing the distortions within traditional areas of our discipline, we could position ourselves to argue for new definitions and new connections among the disparate areas of our discipline. (p. vii)

6. In this chapter we make use of "old" but classic texts in feminist research. The plethora of feminist writing is such that we can only use a small section in order to illustrate the underlying ethics, philosophy and praxis of feminist communication research.

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