

The methodological inclinations of gender scholarship in mainstream sociology journals

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Abstract:

This article examines the types of research methods sociologists studying women and gender use in articles published in mainstream journals. The research is based on an analysis of 1,826 gender-content articles published between 1984 and 1993 in 15 major sociology journals. Specifically, we explore whether feminist-oriented articles use different types of data, data collection methods, and statistical techniques than other articles addressing women and gender. The relationship between the rank of an academic journal, author's sex, and type of research method is also examined. We find that a large majority of gender-content articles are based on secondary, quantitative data. When the first author is a man, articles are somewhat more likely to be based on secondary data and to use quantitative statistical techniques. In general, we find that feminist research in the discipline is based on a melange of methodological approaches, reflecting the contested nature of feminist epistemologies.

Keywords: research methods | gender | women | sociology journals | data collection

Article:

For well over a decade, feminist scholars have focused on improving processes of inquiry so as to reconstruct and expand knowledge of women and their experiences. Arguing that traditional methods of inquiry are male created and thus privilege the subjectivity of men and that they involve the detachment of the participant from the researcher, many have advocated the development of feminist research methods (DeVault 1996; Maynard 1990; Reinharz 1985; Stanley and Wise 1983). For some, feminist methods are conceived of as qualitative; quantitative methods are shunned as they are considered partially responsible for the androcentric bias in traditional methods of knowledge production (Cancian 1992, 1993; Cook and Fonow 1986; MacKinnon 1982; Mies 1991; Smith 1987, 1988, 1990; Stacey and Thorne 1985; Ring 1987). More recently, a number of writers have stepped forward to defend the use of quantitative methods in feminist scholarship, arguing that these methods can be equally useful tools for understanding women's experiences and improving their lives when properly used by feminist-oriented researchers (Jayaratane and Stewart 1991; Reinharz 1992; Reinharz and Davidman

1992; Risman 1993; Sprague and Zimmerman 1989). These proponents of quantitative feminist scholarship have also pointed to problems associated with qualitative techniques such as the absence of safeguards against researcher bias (Jayaratane and Stewart 1991; Risman 1993).

Harding (1987) argued against the idea of a singular, distinctive feminist method of research. She asked, “What would be the point of elaborating a theory of the distinctive nature of feminist inquiry that excluded the best social science research from satisfying its criteria?” (p. 5). To provide guidance in recognizing feminist research, Harding identified three characteristics distinguishing exemplars of feminist research—a focus on women’s experiences, the provision of explanations for women, and the location of the researcher on the same critical plane as the overt subject matter. She concluded that these methodological features, rather than a particular technique for gathering evidence (qualitative vs. quantitative), typify feminist methods.

Reinharz (1992) argued that feminist scholarship embodies a multiplicity of research methods. She indicated that feminists have not only used all existing research methods, but have also invented new ones. Treating the question “What is feminist research?” as an empirical problem, she set out to identify the range of methods that feminist researchers use. Deliberately avoiding the imposition of her own definition of feminist research on the work of others, she relied on a criterion of self-definition. She found that when feminist researchers use traditional methods, they often adapt or modify them to better suit their needs.

We follow Reinharz (1992) and Harding (1987) and reject the notion of a monolithic “feminist method.” Instead, we conceptualize feminist scholarship as diverse, deviating from epistemological orthodoxy in myriad ways. We examine the types of research methods sociologists studying women and gender use in articles published in mainstream journals. Specifically, we address three questions about the use of research methods in this published scholarship:

1. Do feminist-oriented articles addressing women and gender use different types of data, data collection methods, and statistical techniques than articles addressing women and gender that are not feminist oriented?
2. Is the sex of the author of published articles addressing women and gender related to the types of data, data collection methods, and type of statistical analyses employed?
3. Is there a relationship between the rank of an academic journal and the research methods used in articles addressing women and gender?

As is apparent from the nature of these questions, our main intent is to shed light on the actual research practices of scholars publishing gender-content articles.

Answering the first question will provide insight into the extent to which researchers addressing women and gender, and particularly feminist-oriented scholars, are influenced by a feminist critique of quantitative methods. Prior research conducted by Grant, Ward, and Rong (1987) found that gender content in published articles was actually associated with an increased likelihood of using quantitative methods. These researchers did not, however, explore whether feminist-oriented articles differed from other articles addressing women and gender in their use of methods. Although we do not have the data required for comparing gender-content articles with all other published articles, our research examines the use of methods across two distinct types of gender-content articles (feminist oriented and gender issue) and does so for a more recent time period. The former comparison awaits future data collection efforts. To the extent that feminist-oriented scholarship comprises an array of research methods, our research provides a systematic analysis of the methods of data collection and the analytical strategies used in these scholarly works published in sociology journals.

The second question is of interest owing to widely held assumptions about differences in the research skills, abilities, and preferences of female and male researchers. Traditionally, women have been considered, because of their socialization, to be more likely than men to be math avoidant, and thus predisposed toward using research techniques that do not require complex mathematical skills. Qualitative techniques, on the other hand, which are more likely to involve close emotional ties with participants, are thought to be better suited to women's personalities and skills (Bakan 1972). Grant et al. (1987) also examined the relationship between sex of author and type of method in published articles with gender content in their research, funding support for the claim that female authors are more likely than male authors to use qualitative methods. Examining this relationship in a more recent time period provides a barometer for change—has the call for qualitative feminist methods gained influence among female authors in the recent decade of published research in mainstream sociology journals, or has the more recent feminist defense of quantitative techniques in feminist scholarship begun to impact the work of female authors?

Documenting the relationship between a journal's prestige ranking and research techniques used in gender-content articles is important because it is widely held that quantitative and qualitative methods are not valued equally in sociology (Cancian 1992; Jayaratane and Stewart 1991; Risman 1993; Grant et al. 1987). Assadi's (1988) analysis of a stratified random sample of one quarter of nearly 50 years of American Sociological Review articles found that up until 1985, the number of articles containing only descriptive statistics or no statistics at all dropped sharply, whereas the number using quantitative analytic techniques rose rapidly. Bakanic, McPhail, and Simon's (1990) examination of manuscripts submitted to the American Sociological Review also found that articles based on complex statistical analyses were favored in this top-ranked journal. Quantitative methods are often touted as more objective and thus superior, and for this reason many have alleged that a quantitative focus characterizes the discipline of sociology (Bernard 1973). Further, it has been suggested that because quantitative techniques are more often associated with men, they are preferred in a gender-stratified society (Grant et al. 1987). The preponderance of one type of method or another in gender-content scholarship in the most highly ranked journals in the discipline will provide support for claims of a prestige hierarchy of methods. Further, if the incidence of quantitative methods in these articles is markedly higher than the use of qualitative methods, and if women are found to be disproportionate users of qualitative methods, this may provide a partial explanation for the less-than-proportionate representation of women as authors in mainstream journals in the discipline. Cancian (1992) actually suggested that feminists' methods are often avoided because feminists who publish in mainstream journals fear their use will decrease the probability that the research will be accepted for publication.

Data and Operationalization Issues

This research is based on an analysis of 1,826 gender-content articles published between 1984 and 1993 in the following 15 major sociology journals: American Journal of Sociology, American Sociological Review, The American Sociologist, Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Journal of Marriage and the Family, Social Forces, Social Problems, Social Psychology Quarterly, Social Science Quarterly, Social Forum, Sociological Perspectives, Sociological Quarterly, Sociological Spectrum, Sociological Theory, and Sociology of Education.¹ These journals, with the exception of American Journal of Sociology and The

American Sociologist, are publications of the American Sociological Association (ASA), major regional sociological associations, the Society for the Study of Social Problems, or the National Council on Family Relations. The American Journal of Sociology, the second-ranked journal in the discipline (Allen 1990), published by the University of Chicago Press, and The American Sociologist, previously sponsored by ASA but currently lacking professional sponsorship, are included in our study owing to their strong identification as sociology journals.

Two ASA-sponsored journals, Contemporary Sociology and Teaching Sociology, were not included in our research due to the nature of their content (e.g., scholarly book reviews and pedagogical articles). Journals focused on gender issues, such as Gender and Society, were not included in our sample, as our aim was to assess the use of methods in mainstream sociology journals. We acknowledge, however, that the inclusion of the Journal of Marriage and the Family results in a disproportionate increase in the number of gender-content articles in our sample. We do not consider this to be a problem, in that our focus here is only on the use of methods in such articles, not on the total number of gender-content articles found in mainstream journals. In addition, the visibility and impact of the journal on the discipline justifies its inclusion. When data were collected for this study, 1993 was the last full year for which every issue of each of the journals was available. The first year of data collection, 1984, was selected because the only other major empirical study of gender-content articles (Ward and Grant 1985) covered a 10-year period ending in 1983.

Gender-content articles were identified through a keyword search of the CD-ROM version of Sociofile, an index of periodical literature in sociology, and by visual examination of the titles and abstracts of all articles in the journals included in this study. Articles were included in our sample if they contained in their title or abstract any of the following search terms (or variants of these terms): women, woman, girl, sex, sexuality, gender, female, and feminism.² As is evident from the search terms used, an attempt was made to locate all articles addressing women and the female gender; articles focused on men only were not included in this study. We chose to exclude articles focused exclusively on men and the male gender as the literature on feminist methods focuses primarily on scholarship on women. The gender-content articles selected for inclusion in our sample were classified into two categories—feminist-oriented articles and other articles addressing gender and women (which we refer to as gender-issue articles). To be classified as feminist oriented, articles had to both focus on women and their experiences and problematize and/or challenge female disadvantage.³ This operationalization of feminist-oriented articles is consistent with criteria found in the literature for distinguishing feminist scholarly contributions (Alway 1995; Chafetz 1999, DeVault 1996, Harding 1987; Komarovsky 1991, Reinharz 1985, 1995). Gender-issue articles is the residual category; it contains all gender-content articles not coded as feminist oriented. Although sex/gender has become a rather standard control variable in sociological research, many gender-content articles incorporating this variable have devoted little to no attention to explaining any sex/gender differences they may find (Andersen 1988; Stacey and Thorne 1985). It is highly unlikely that the authors of sex-as-a-control-variable studies would be influenced by a feminist critique of quantitative sociology. The authors of feminist-oriented articles, on the other hand, would be more likely to be influenced by such criticism. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between the two types of articles when examining the use of research methods in gender-content articles.

Three aspects of the research methods used in articles were coded in this research—type of data, data collection method, and statistical technique. As DeVault (1996 :35–6) noted,

“Those working with survey techniques or doing secondary analysis of large data sets . . . are more likely to stress that their methods are those of a rigorous and mostly conventional social science.” Articles were coded as primary if they contained original data collected for the purpose of the article. Methods of collecting primary data were classified as experiment, questionnaire, inter- view, survey, observation, secondary, archival, case study, historical/comparative, simulation, content analysis, mixed, and other.⁴ If data were collected for a purpose other than use in the present article, the article was coded as having secondary data. A separate code was also used for articles that were not based on quantifiable data. Statistical techniques were coded as qualitative, quantitative, and no statistical analysis. In the small number of cases where both qualitative and quantitative analysis was used, the quantitative code was assigned. Articles using qualitative analyses were those that used only simple descriptive statistics—frequency counts and measures of central tendency and dispersion. All other articles using more complex statistical techniques were coded as quantitative.

Sex of first author was determined by a visual inspection of first names. First names that are commonly used for both sexes were coded “unable to determine” unless we had personal knowledge of the author’s sex. Data were also collected on the sex of second and third authors, as only 41 percent of all the articles examined had only one author, but this information is not reported here. Order of authorship commonly reflects the magnitude of contribution to the scholarly work (Endersby 1996); thus, we judged an examination of first authors to be of the most interest.

The ranking of the academic journal was taken from Michael Allen’s (1990) “The Ranking of Sociology Journals,” published in the ASA’s Footnotes. Allen’s rankings provide a measure of the influence of the journal on the discipline of sociology. Four of the journals included in our study, the *American Sociologist*, *Sociological Forum*, *Sociological Spectrum*, and *Sociological Theory*, were not ranked by Allen, and are thus excluded from analyses addressing journal rank.

Findings

Seventy percent, or 1,282 of the 1,826 gender-content articles identified through the keyword search, were coded as gender issue articles and 30 percent, or 544 articles, as feminist- oriented. Table 1 cross-classifies article type by data collection method. A large majority of all articles were based on quantitative data (93 percent of gender-issue articles and 83 percent of feminist-oriented articles), but gender-issue articles were more likely than feminist-oriented articles to contain quantifiable data. Secondary data was the data type most often used in both types of articles. Surveys, both interviews and questionnaires, were the most commonly used methods of primary data collection in both gender-issue and feminist-oriented articles. The incidence of other methods of primary data collection was rather low, with no other single method representing more than 5 percent of all articles. A significant relationship existed between article type and data collection technique ($\chi^2 = 65.77$, $DF = 12$, $N = 1826$), but the association was rather weak ($V = .19$). Table 2 cross-classifies article type by type of statistical analysis. Eleven percent of the total articles did not contain statistical analyses. Feminist-oriented articles were more than twice as likely as gender-issue articles to refrain from using any type of statistical analysis (18 percent and 8 percent, respectively).

TABLE 1 Type of Data Collection Method Employed in Gender-Issue and Feminist-Oriented Articles, 1984–1993

Data collection method	Gender-issue articles		Feminist-oriented articles	
	N	%	N	%
Archival	29	2	17	3
Case study	9	1	4	1
Content analysis	20	2	14	2
Experiment	53	4	7	1
Historical/comparative	2	>1	2	>1
Observation	18	1	9	2
Secondary analysis	583	45	220	40
Simulation	1	>1		
Interview	207	16	85	16
Questionnaire	211	16	63	12
Mix	56	4	25	5
Other	1	>1	3	1
No data	92	7	95	17
Total	1,282	98 ^a	544	100

^a Total does not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

TABLE 2 Type of Statistical Analysis Employed in Gender-Issue and Feminist-Oriented Articles, 1984–1993

Type of statistical analysis	Gender-issue articles		Feminist-oriented articles	
	N	%	N	%
No analysis	98	7.6	97	17.8
Qualitative	118	9.2	59	10.8
Quantitative	1,066	83.2	388	71.3
Total	1,282	100	544	99.9 ^a

^a Total does not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Quantitative techniques were far more common than qualitative techniques in both types of articles, though somewhat more common in gender-issue articles (83 percent and 71 percent, respectively). A significant, though weak, relationship existed between article type and type of statistical technique, owing largely to the higher incidence of feminist-oriented articles containing no statistical analysis ($\chi^2 = 544.88$, $DF = 5$, $N = 1826$).

Table 3 shows that men were first authors of more gender-content articles than women (912 and 850, respectively). Sex of the first author of gender-content articles had a weak, significant relationship to both data collection technique and type of statistical analysis ($\chi^2 = 46.15$, $DF = 12$, $N = 1826$) and ($\chi^2 = 46.15$, $DF = 12$, $N = 1826$), respectively. Articles with male first authors were somewhat more likely than those with female first authors to be based on secondary data (48 percent and 40 percent, respectively) and to use quantitative statistical techniques (83 percent and 77 percent, respectively). Female first authors were somewhat more likely than male first authors to collect data through interviews (20 percent and 13 percent, respectively). Only minor differences existed between female and male first-authored articles for the remaining data collection techniques. Female first authors were also somewhat more likely than men to publish gender-content articles that did not contain statistical analysis (13 percent

and 9 percent, respectively) and articles using qualitative techniques (11 percent and 8 percent, respectively).

Table 5 presents the relationship between journal rank and data collection technique.⁵ Knowledge of journal rank reduced the errors in predicting data collection method by only 7 percent (values are indicated by Goodman and Kruskal's tau). The top three journals—American Sociological Review, American Journal of Sociology, and Social Forces—and Social Science Quarterly, an interdisciplinary social science journal (the lowest ranked journal in our sample), were particularly likely to use secondary data. Social Problems, ranked fourth, was unique among the highly rated journals in that secondary analysis was used in fewer than a quarter of its gender-content articles.

Journal rank was also associated with the type of statistical technique used in gender-content articles (see Table 6). The reduction in prediction errors for type of statistical technique resulting from knowledge of journal rank was 11 percent (as indicated by Goodman and Kruskal's tau). As noted earlier, quantitative statistical analyses were most common in the majority of journals, with the exception of *Social Problems*.

TABLE 3 Sex of First Author by Data Collection Method Used in Gender-Content Articles

Data collection method	Sex of first author					
	Male		Female		Don't know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Archival	28	3.1	18	2.1	—	—
Case study	8	0.9	5	0.6	—	—
Content analysis	17	1.9	17	1.9	—	—
Experiment	25	2.7	28	3.3	7	10.9
Historical/comparative	1	0.1	3	0.4	—	—
Observation	13	1.4	13	1.5	1	1.6
Secondary analysis	434	47.6	338	39.8	31	48.4
Simulation	1	0.1	—	—	—	—
Interview	118	12.9	163	19.2	11	17.2
Questionnaire	146	16.0	120	14.1	8	12.5
Mix	37	4.1	43	5.1	1	1.6
Other	3	0.3	1	0.1	—	—
No data	81	8.9	101	11.9	5	7.8
Total	912	49.9	850	46.5	64	3.5

Note. Gender-content articles include both feminist-oriented and gender-issue articles.

TABLE 4 Sex of First Author by Type of Statistical Analysis Used in Gender-Content Articles

Statistical technique	Sex of first author					
	M		F		Don't know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No analysis	83	9.1	107	12.6	5	7.8
Qualitative	73	8.0	96	11.3	8	12.5
Quantitative	756	82.9	647	76.1	51	79.7
Total	912	49.9	850	46.5	64	3.5

Note. Gender-content articles include both feminist-oriented and gender-issue articles.

TABLE 5 Journal Rank by Data Collection Method (in Percentages)

Journal rank	Data collection method												No data
	Archival	Case study	Content analysis	Experiment	Historical comparative	Observation	Secondary analysis	Simulation	Interview	Questionnaire	Wik	Other	
1 (ASR)	1.6	2.5	0.8	6.6	—	0.8	71.3	—	2.5	4.1	0.8	0.8	8.2
2 (AJS)	5.7	1.1	—	3.4	1.1	—	52.9	—	14.9	—	8.0	1.1	11.5
3 (SF)	1.6	0.8	—	1.6	—	0.8	69.9	—	8.9	10.6	3.3	—	2.4
4 (SP)	1.8	—	2.6	—	0.9	8.8	22.8	—	19.3	8.8	9.6	0.9	24.6
8 (SOE)	2.9	—	—	1.5	—	7.4	48.5	—	27.9	5.9	5.9	—	—
9 (SPQ)	—	0.8	4.1	33.3	—	0.8	14.6	0.8	9.8	29.3	6.5	—	—
10 (SQ)	3.3	3.3	4.4	—	—	—	43.3	—	20.0	10.0	2.2	—	13.3
15 (JHSB)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	—	—	41.8	—	30.6	12.2	5.1	—	6.1
20 (Spersect)	3.3	3.3	3.3	—	—	—	45.0	—	18.3	13.3	3.3	—	5.8
23 (JMF)	1.3	—	0.8	0.3	0.2	1.2	44.1	—	17.8	24.9	4.7	0.2	4.4
35 (SSQ)	8.1	—	2.0	0.7	—	—	63.1	—	10.1	10.7	3.4	—	2.0
Total	2.4	0.7	1.5	3.6	0.2	1.5	46.6	0.1	16.0	16.0	4.7	0.2	6.4

Note. ASR = American Sociological Review; AJS = American Journal of Sociology; SF = Social Forces; SP = Social Problems; SOE = Sociology of Education; SPQ = Social Psychology Quarterly; SQ = Sociological Quarterly; JHSB = Journal of Health and Social Behavior; Spersect = Sociological Perspectives; JMF = Journal of Marriage and the Family; SSQ = Social Science Quarterly.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our research found very limited support for the claim made by some feminist scholars of a positive link between qualitative methods and feminist-oriented scholarship. We suspect that the weak relationship found in our research was due, in part, to the types of journals included in our study. We deliberately selected mainstream sociology journals as opposed to specialized gender or women's studies journals because our aim was to explore the impact of gender and feminist scholarship on the discipline of sociology and trends in such scholarship in the discipline. We suspect that articles in journals having high impact on the inter-disciplinary field of women's studies—such as *Signs*, *Sex Roles*, *Feminist Studies*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, and *Frontiers*—would exhibit markedly different patterns in the use of research methods, namely, more emphasis on qualitative approaches. Informal analysis of sociology's own *Gender and Society*, a disciplinary specialty journal focused on gender, revealed heavier reliance on qualitative methods than our research documented for articles published in the mainstream sociology journals. It is important to note, however, that when Reinharz (1992) explored the range of methods used in journals that announce that they publish only feminist research, she still found ample examples of quantitative research.

Our findings that the overwhelming majority of gender articles were based on quantitative data and used statistical analyses support the claim that mainstream sociology

journals place a premium on methodological and empirical papers using these approaches to research. Gender articles using these approaches do not threaten what Stacey (1995) referred to as the positivistic core of the discipline. The preference for quantitative methods that we find in mainstream journals, combined with competition to publish in such journals, may serve as a filter that disproportionately selects out qualitative feminist-oriented and gender-issue scholarship. Townsend's (1993) description of factors causing feminist scholars to stay away from mainstream journals may be particularly apt for qualitatively oriented feminist researchers. Townsend argued that such authors are likely to assume that because their research does not reflect the commonly held assumptions of the field it will be rejected; thus, they do not submit their work for publication there. At any rate, so far as mainstream sociology journals are concerned, we agree with Risman's (1993 :15) claim that "there are no immediately apparent methodological implications of feminist scholarship." Our findings should allay, somewhat, her concerns about quantitatively oriented researchers feeling alienated from feminist scholars. Although it would indeed be an overstatement to say that quantitative feminists abound in the discipline, a significant peer group does exist.

TABLE 6 Journal Rank by Type of Statistical Analysis Used in Gender-Content Articles

Journal rank	No statistics		Qualitative		Quantitative		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 (ASR)	12	9.8	4	3.3	106	86.9	122	7.5
2 (AJS)	10	11.5	6	6.9	71	81.6	87	5.3
3 (SF)	3	2.4	4	3.3	116	94.3	123	7.6
4 (SP)	30	26.3	41	36.0	43	37.7	114	7.0
8 (SOE)	—	—	9	13.2	59	86.8	68	4.2
9 (SPQ)	2	1.6	8	6.5	113	91.9	123	7.6
10 (SQ)	12	13.3	14	15.6	64	71.1	90	5.5
15 (JHSB)	4	4.1	6	6.1	88	89.8	98	6.0
20 (Sperspect)	8	13.3	6	10.0	46	76.7	60	3.7
23 (JMF)	27	4.5	35	5.9	532	89.6	594	36.5
35 (SSQ)	3	2.0	11	7.4	135	90.6	149	9.2
Total							1,628	100

Note. ASR = American Sociological Review; AJS = American Journal of Sociology; SF = Social Forces; SP = Social Problems; SOE = Sociology of Education; SPQ = Social Psychology Quarterly; SQ = Sociological Quarterly; JHSB = Journal of Health and Social Behavior; Sperspect = Sociological Perspectives; JMF = Journal of Marriage and the Family; SSQ = Social Science Quarterly.

With respect to the types of data and data collection methods used in gender-content articles, two aspects of our findings have interesting implications. First, the heavy reliance on secondary data for feminist-oriented articles suggests that existing data gathered for other purposes (perhaps for sex-as-a-variable studies) can be reanalyzed and interpreted in such a way as to make significant contributions to feminist scholarship. This finding is aligned with Reinharz's (1992) suggestion that feminist scholarship often involves the adaptation or modification of traditional data and methods. Second, the higher representation of feminist-oriented articles containing no quantifiable data suggest disproportionate attention to theory in such articles, a positive sign for the influence of feminist theory in the discipline of sociology.

We find support for the presumed link between sex of first author of gender-content scholarship and the types of methods used. The disproportionate tendency of female first authors to use methods less favored in mainstream journals may contribute to their underrepresentation as authors in these journals. An examination of authorship by sex for the journal *Social Problems*, the only journal in our sample with fewer than 70 percent of its articles based on quantitative analysis (37.7 percent of the articles in *Social Problems* were quantitative), provides support for this interpretation. Whereas men were first authors for 50 percent of all gender-content articles in our sample, they were first authors for only 34 percent of the articles published in *Social Problems*. The weak association we found between journal rank and type of methods used in gender-content articles may result from status concerns in the discipline that compel lower ranked journals to emulate top-tier journals. Our findings do show, however, that gender scholarship in top-ranked journals is particularly likely to be based on secondary data. Given our earlier somewhat surprising finding that feminist-oriented articles commonly rely on secondary data, we can conclude that the pattern of secondary data preference exhibited by top-ranked journals is not systematically filtering out feminist-oriented scholarship. The heavy reliance on secondary data exhibited in feminist-oriented research is, however, somewhat at odds with the sense of connection and involvement with the subject of study that has been suggested to be characteristic of much feminist scholarship (Reinharz 1992). We suggest that connection to the subject of study is perceived as contrary to the scientific method among mainstream sociologists, and for this reason is less likely to be evident in feminist-oriented scholarship in the journals we examined.

In sum, our data suggest that the diverse theoretical orientations and political recommendations encompassed in gender-content scholarship are accompanied by wide-ranging research methods. Not only is gender-content research arrayed at all points along the continuum of methodological approaches, so too is feminist-oriented research. Our findings are consistent with what Register (1980) referred to as Stage 4 of feminist scholarship—a stage characterized by tolerance of multiple approaches. We conclude that it is most appropriate to conceptualize feminist scholarship as a plurality of types and to speak of feminisms and feminist sociologies. The work of feminist sociologists appears to be united through its focus on women and enhancing understanding of the impact of gender on their lives, not through the use of a constricted set of methods.

What do our findings about the methods used in sociological, gender-content scholarship imply about the discipline of sociology? If one supports Becker's (1979) view that sociology is a fragmented field without a center, the wide-ranging methods evident in the gender scholarship we examined should be rather easily assimilated into a discipline that is rather weak in terms of its structure and organization. As we argued in an earlier article (Waller, Dunn, and Watson 1998), because the resources to produce knowledge in the discipline of sociology are widely dispersed, deviations from orthodoxy introduced in feminist scholarship are not likely to face united resistance from a coalition representing the mainstream. At the same time, however, we agree with Stacey (1995) that the absence of a clearly dominant paradigm suggests that although newer perspectives like feminist scholarship may take their place alongside existing perspectives, their potential for revolutionizing the discipline is limited.

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