Feminist Research Dilemmas in *How Young Women Move* ®

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Abstract: Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork challenge our work and integrity. They often revolve around power and tend to display contradictory and irreconcilable positions for the researcher. This paper discusses the experiences of a feminist researcher working with senior secondary girls in local metropolitan schools. The main aim of the fieldwork was to investigate the social construction of gender within the context of sport and physical activity. This paper examines the power relationships between the researcher and the participants as well as issues of empowerment for the participants in the light of feminist research goals. Whilst it is recognised that fieldwork is still useful and important, reconciling the contradictions between theory and practice can be a major challenge.

**Commitment to Women**

Feminism is a perspective, not a research method, which is based on the understanding that the construction of gender is a central organising feature of societies (McInnes, 1994). It is a philosophy of the equality of women and is concerned with intervening in cultural practices which are oppressive (Adair, 1992). The feminist movement attempts to place women’s experiences at the centre of analysis and political action. Collectively, it takes the standpoint of women, recognises shared experiences and opposes domination (Scraton, 1992). From this point on, feminism diverges into many forms including Liberal, Radical, Marxist and Socialist depending on emphases and the understood causes of the oppression. Some forms of feminism contradict (Duran, 1991; Scraton, 1992). However, generally they share the outlook that it is important to centre and make problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations (Olesen, 1994).

Different feminist approaches to research represent different feminist perspectives. Collectively, they are moved by a commitment to women. Though feminist research may not focus entirely on women, it aims to make women's lives and experiences central and seeks to uncover oppression and inequity in everyday experiences. Poststructuralist challenges to feminist research recognise multiple female positions and subjectivities as opposed to a universal female experience (Hall, 1996; Wright, 1995).

Feminist research is guided by feminist theory. It seeks to benefit or empower the researched population in a direct and personal way (McInnes, 1994). Feminist researchers clearly articulate these commitments and political priorities in their work. For this reason, fieldwork dilemmas can directly challenge the underlying tenets of their feminist beliefs. This paper will illuminate some of the dilemmas and contradictions I experienced as a feminist researcher within the fieldwork process.

**Failure of Positivism and Neutrality**

Feminists use a variety of research methods which generally provide a powerful critique of positivism and the level of ‘value free’ objectivity that must be attained by the researcher in order to uncover facts and truth (Duran, 1991; Olesen, 1994; Hall, 1996; Wolf, 1996). Feminists reject the view that any research can be value neutral. Hence, they renounce
research methods which participate in the notion of a 'detached objectivity' and distance between the researcher and the researched (Roman, 1992; McInnes, 1994; Wolf, 1996).

Feminist research clearly challenges traditional notions of objectivity and argues that all research in some way is subjective. As a result, reflexivity is understood to be a crucial and ongoing aspect of the research process involving continuous deep reflection and critique (Humberstone, 1997).

Feminist researchers aim to investigate a socially constructed world 'from within' and seek to breakdown the hierarchical and potentially exploitive relationships often created within the research process. They strive to cultivate relationships which lead to a richer picture of women's lives. The strength of feminist research lies in its ability to open contradictions and denaturalise what appears to be natural (Fine, 1994). This approach to research opens further important debates and questions with which feminists continue to struggle, including the kinds of knowledge needed, how best it can be produced and how it can be used to bring about change in women's lives for the better (Flintoff, 1997).

The complexity of feminist research has led to a highly reflexive stance among many about: the conduct of research; the researcher's place in the research; the researcher's relationship with participants; the philosophical location and nature of knowledge; the handling of the report; and the impact of the research on the researched (Duran, 1991; Olesen, 1994; Fine & Weis, 1996; McDermott, 1996). Feminist research tackles the fundamental question of who can be a 'knower', referring to women both as participants and as researchers. Ethnography as a method of research shares these aspects with feminist research in that there is an attempt to build theory which is 'grounded' in everyday experiences and lives (Flintoff, 1997).

**Personal perspective**

As a feminist, physical education teacher, and lecturer I have been conscious for many years of a personal struggle to develop in women a commitment to their physical being. To value themselves and their body enough, to participate in lifelong physical activity. Of concern to me also is equity in support, encouragement and opportunity for physical activity.

Most alarming has been the decreasing value and time allocation given to anything that is 'physical' within the education system. Whilst fitness and participation levels of children and adolescents continue to decline and numerous inquiries into the state of Physical Education and Health in schools are ignored, the physical space within the curriculum for physical activity is all but disappearing.

Faced with the compelling evidence of girls' lower rates of participation, I felt obliged to ask Why aren't girls more involved physically? Why aren't women more interested in being physical? Are they physical in other ways? Why are they excluded? How do young women like to move and what is the nature of the relationship between young women and physical activity? These questions demand a far different research methodology compared to those that solely measure patterns of involvement (Birrell, 1994).

Flintoff (1997) also believes that feminist research "must be more than simply a description of women's lives"(p.169). Whilst female experiences might establish a starting point for the production of feminist knowledge, it is not sufficient for understanding the processes and social practices though which this is organised. It is the ways in which women's lives are interpreted by feminists that allow feminist knowledge to accumulate. Thereby using theory to investigate practice.
Being a feminist and committed to educational opportunities for girls I am particularly interested in constructions of gender in Australian society, how this is acted out in school and community settings and what impact it might have on female involvement in physical activity throughout life. Drawing on gender construction theory, I consider human experience far too complex to accept a positivist approach in which gender differences in relation to physical activity have primarily a physiological base (Alloway, 1995). Being female may in fact be a potentially lifeshaping attribute. From a young age children are nurtured in certain behaviours deemed socially acceptable. These behaviours are both actively and sometimes unconsciously reinforced by adults, media, language, toys, opportunities and role models (Davies, 1989; Alloway, 1995). Children quickly come to understand gender as opposition and difference. Over time the human mind and personal experience produce biological states which in turn influence skill, confidence and motivation to move (Scraton, 1992; Vines, 1993; Creedon, 1994). These ideas have led me to question practices in Physical Education and the appropriateness or perhaps the limitations of 'sport' as a means to educate the physical dimension of the person.

It has become apparent to me that while Australian cultural identity is closely connected to its sporting prowess, sport does not necessarily meet all of the needs of ones' desire to be physically active. This may be especially the case with girls and women. However, there is increasing evidence to suggest that many boys and men are also reluctant to be physical or involved in competitive sport (Drummond, 1997).

**Context of the Fieldwork**

It was the intention of this research to explore the way in which the lived experiences of gender and attitudes toward the body impact on young women's physicality and commitment to physical activity.

In attempting to analyse the social construction of gender in the context of sport, dance and physical activity I utilised reflexive interviewing, observation and storytelling as my main methodological approaches. Through participant observation, conversation and the mutual construction of stories I endeavoured to gain an understanding of how my participants came to know their bodies and how they see themselves in relation to physical activity.

In this way, I hoped to identify what motivates and what 'stops' young women being physically active. The body as a feminine construct is a major focus in the study because of its significant role in the social construction of femininity. Via the interpretation of shared stories I intended to illuminate on how gendered ways of being evolve and how girls might be controlled and restricted in relation to physical activity.

The study focused on four categories of senior secondary girls. Those who identified themselves as accomplished athletes in traditional competitive sports, those who participated on a regular basis in non-typical physical pursuits, those who identified themselves dancers, and those who did not involve themselves in any form of physical activity.

A survey was initially carried out to identify research participants. Each consenting participant was then involved in a series of guided interviews. Some of these interviews or conversations occurred in the school grounds while others occurred out of hours and in various locations including sporting venues and dance halls. Group interviews were later set up with individuals from each of the identified categories.

The interviews were carried out with a view to drawing out individual interpretations of a range of topics such as perception of physical activity; body image and its impact on
involvement in physical activity; how their bodies and desired way of being became
gendered; personal experience of physical activity; understanding of femininity; restrictive
understandings; experience of physical education and the ways in which physical activity
had and had not been made available to them. Through the guided interview process mutual
stories were constructed which depicted a memorable event in the life of the participant.
These stories were either, initiated by myself and then shared with the participant for
comment and development or written entirely by the participant herself.

Self as Source

A key feature of feminist research is the acknowledgment that the production of knowledge
is a social process in which the researcher herself plays an important part (Wolf, 1996;
Flintoff, 1997). Feminists along with other critical researchers concern themselves with what
constitutes valuable knowledge and in whose interests it operates (Humberstone, 1997). For
these reasons, in feminist research the researcher is encouraged to 'place' herself within the
research process.

The use of 'self as source' presents a very different relationship between the researcher and
the researched compared to that of the traditional experimenter and subject. In feminist
research, at the very least, both are to be regarded as having the same status as
participants or collaborators in the same enterprise (Davies, 1992; Gitlin, 1994). The
researcher carries a responsibility to critically assess her own, as well as the informants’,
changing positions and subjectivities (Fine, 1994). Each researcher brings particular values,
interests and experiences to the research and has lived through particular circumstances.
While these values, interests and experience do not necessarily determine particular points
of view they do give researchers perspectives in relation to topics and discussions. The
feminist researcher must then be prepared to situate herself reflexively in the research
account and provide an analysis of the social relations underpinning the research process
(Flintoff, 1997).

The importance of this process of reflexivity for both ethnographic and feminist research is in
how it makes visible the ways in which the researcher, who is central to the research, both
influences and is influenced by the research. Of significance, is an awareness of how
feminist researchers participate as subjects in their own research (Olesen, 1994).

Interpretation by the researcher of what they see and hear during fieldwork can cause
conflict. The researcher must be continually open to reflect on her standpoint and to the
possible silences and absences in her data. The ongoing challenge for feminists is to
produce knowledge which accounts for differences between women and yet maintains the
overall goal of challenging women's shared oppression (Flintoff, 1997).

By virtue of my status as a female, dancer and sportswoman I shared many memories and
experiences with those of my participants. When studying one’s ‘own society' questions arise
about how one 'knows' and ethical protocols (Pedersen, 1998). In this case, it provokes
questions such as to what extent did I as a researcher share mutual knowledge with my
participants? Did the fact I was doing research in familiar terrain increase my possibilities of
achieving greater understanding of my participants experiences or did I view their
experiences through my own lenses? Then how did this colour my interpretations of the
participants who were less like myself? These questions are foregrounded as I carry out
further interviews. Their impact includes a change in my interview contribution to being more
one of clarification and asking for specific details rather than openly conversing and stating
my opinions.
Politics of Power

The most central dilemma for contemporary feminists in fieldwork is power and the unequal hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated created and recreated during and after the field research (Wolf, 1996, p.2).

The researcher still maintains control over the research agenda, process and knowledge creation (McInnes, 1994; Fine & Weis, 1996; Wolf, 1996). Power within research can be considered in different ways: namely, power stemming from the different positions of the researcher and the researched; power exerted during the process in terms of unequal exchange or changing positions and; power exerted after the fieldwork, in writing and representing the researched population (Wolf, 1996). In considering the relationship between the researcher and participants as well as the impact of the research on participants the researcher takes on a set of complex interests and seeks to satisfy them all, sometimes without complete success.

Entering the Field- Sameness and Difference

Feminists have clearly gained ground in the rethinking of researcher relationships with 'subjects' and with the politics of power that prevail between the researcher and the researched (Fine, 1994). Field research requires the researcher to engage in a close if not intimate relationship with those she is researching. Crucial to this relationship is acceptance and infiltration (Punch, 1994). Sameness and difference have important bearing on the acceptance of female researchers by their female informants. Differences between women in terms of their age, class, race, sexuality or physicality for example, may be far more significant than their 'shared femininity' (McRobbie, 1982).

Some difficulty in gaining initial access was experienced when defining the purposes and intentions of the research to gain 'informed consent'. I needed to explain the research in a meaningful and open way, but at the same time in a way which would not jeopardise my chances of having the proposal accepted by the four categories of participants. It was very easy to be labelled sport-based or feminist and therefore dismissed as 'biased' from the beginning simply by revealing that you are interested in gender and physical activity. For this reason my introduction of the project to prospective participants was in the broad terms of senior secondary student experiences out of school hours. The fact that I was interested in physical activity indicated to some that I only wanted to talk to physically active participants.

Early attempts to explain the topic of the research were met with a reluctance by the non physically active group to participate. They saw themselves as failures in the categories I was researching and chose, as was their right, not to be involved. By slightly altering what the participants 'believed the research was about' I was faced with the dilemma of engaging in a form of deception in order to ensure the involvement of this group. Whilst being assured that most fieldworkers at some point find a measure of dishonesty unavoidable the critical question then became how much harm might I cause in the process. Lying directly contradicts attempts at a more feminist approach to fieldwork (Wolf, 1996). For this to occur at such an early point in the fieldwork I found myself questioning my ethics and practices.

Relationship with participants

Some researchers suggest that to presume researchers and informants have common identity, interests and backgrounds might impede the capacity to learn about the multiple realities that women have (Pedersen, 1998). Certainly in sport related research the
assumption that a universal category of physical women is being challenged (Humberstone, 1997).

While the researcher has an obligation to share her position in the production of the research, this may have different consequences with each participant. In order to capture my participants' 'lived experiences' and diversity I tried to present a clear picture of myself - that of a urban, middle class, academic, dancer and sportswoman. This meant that I was similar in many ways to some and different in many ways from others within the research. As I presented the aims of my study I also talked about my own background. Whilst in some cases this was a good idea and engaged participants, in other instances I created distance and possibly even intimidation.

I felt that my appearance was also a significant factor in developing trusting relations with this age group who, although they wore uniforms were very concerned with clothes and body size. I purposely wore loose clothing in order to make my own body less noticeable. Endeavouring to present myself as a good listener I felt I could engage trust from most if not all of my participants once they had agreed to be involved in the project.

Most of my observations made were of the physically active participants. During the course of the fieldwork I attended sporting events and competitions, practices, dance rehearsals, classes and performances. In most cases my presence was well received and contributed to a more positive and trusting relationship between the participant involved and myself. They were happy that I was interested in them and had taken time to see them outside the context of school. Non active participants did not have the same physical opportunities for me to witness and even though I scheduled some of their interviews outside of school hours I still felt that I was not able to build the same strength of relationship.

The relationships I had developed with participants though at times close and friendly were shortlived. Despite being interested in physical activity, dance and sport, little held our relationships together after the fieldwork had been completed. Age difference may have been a contributing factor. However, the simple fact remains we went back to our respective worlds and our paths weren't likely to cross.

The Interview

Traditional interviewing practices create problems for feminist researchers whose primary aim is towards the validation of women's subjective experiences as women and as people. Oakley (1981) viewed the interview as a one way process in which the interviewer elicits and receives but does not give information. She identified the interview process as a masculine paradigm, one that appeals to the values of objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and science. For feminists who have a particular orientation to women's subjective experiences there is an illustrated lack of fit between theory and practise. Interviewing women may be a contradiction in terms (Oakley, 1981). What is apparent is that the goal of finding out about people through interviews is best achieved when the interviewer is prepared to invest her personal identity, and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical. Perceptions of power are supposedly minimised when the interviewer and interviewee share the membership of the same minority group. Despite this I found by virtue of my status as an adult and university researcher that power relations were still clearly evident.

In my role as a researcher I felt relaxed, comfortable and respected. As an adult within the school context I was awarded the same status as that of a teacher. Whilst some participants were wary of me at first I felt I could gain their trust quickly. However, in some instances I felt that the participants saw the interview exercise as some sort of test. They responded with
statements that I sensed they thought I wanted to hear. This impacted on our conversations at times when I put my opinions or thoughts forward. Participants were quickly ready to agree and accept my ideas without question, even if I was highly suspicious that they personally disagreed.

While conducting interviews I used a guide to focus the conversations though this was never really adhered to. I told participants that I wanted to listen to their stories about their physical and sporting experiences, their experiences of physical education and other things they felt important. During the interviews I attempted to clarify issues without interrupting respondents' personal narrative. At times I was concerned that I was directing the conversations in a way which focused more on their concerns than what I was interested in. I became clearly aware of changing power relations between myself and my participants. I shifted between positions of teacher, mother, friend, confidant and student. It may have reflected my lack of status and control over the interview process. I became aware of the limitations of semi structured interviews at times when I struggled to stay remotely connected to research topics.

As feminist researchers it can be a challenge to try to understand informants and treat them respectfully when they express opinions that we, as feminists, oppose (Pedersen, 1998). My challenge was to evaluate my participants in relation to their backgrounds and lived experiences even when they shared some very traditional and somewhat restrictive views of gender and appropriate physical states.

**Empowering Methods?**

**Young Women's Voices**

Women's experiences have been historically subject to interpretation by men or there has been an assumed incorporation of women's experiences as the same as men (Smeal, 1994). Feminist researchers seek to benefit or empower the researched population. They are keen to engage voices which have been silenced in the past. Under conditions of more balanced power relations, the research becomes an opportunity to 'tell all'. Hence, the researcher becomes a bearer of many peoples' stories and has a responsibility to value each one accordingly (McInnes, 1994).

By dealing in voices and finding voice in research, power relations are affected (Fine & Weis, 1996). To listen to people's stories is to empower them. This implies the need to be a person that someone will talk to as well as creating an atmosphere where the person can speak knowing that they will be heard.

The researched consent to an invasion by a stranger of their personal and intellectual space. It can be personally cathartic to be able to speak about aspects of their lives that have in the past been ignored or normalised. In this way, the research becomes an opportunity to 'set the record straight'. However, in some cases the process may be quite confronting.

My participants spoke freely most of the time. Nevertheless, there were times when I felt that I was pushing the conversation, times when I succeeded in complicating issues which didn't seem so complicated to my participants, and times when I 'lost the plot'. This was especially the case with participants who tended to agree with my leading statements but lacked confidence to offer further comment. One such participant responded continuously with "I don't know" even after beginning to converse. I became painfully aware that I was failing to
give her 'voice'. On the other hand, she may not have been all that concerned or interested in the topic of conversation.

Some felt empowered by their involvement in the research and responded with comments such as "I've never had the opportunity to talk about things like this before". Conversations provided opportunities for consciousness raising and particularly group interviews stimulated a sense of solidarity and shared experience. Two participants reported that since their involvement in the study they had become more aware of 'gendered' situations. Whilst many still felt powerless to change gender relations around them they were prepared to question unfair conditions, especially those connected to their sporting or physical endeavours. One participant indicated that the most enlightening aspect of her involvement was the realisation (through group interviews in particular) that "girls control each other as much as anything". This seemed to be something that she felt she could control or at least react against.

The characteristics of qualitative research can require respondents to disclose and reflect on vulnerable and aspects of themselves in what amounts to an act of faith or trust in the researcher (Ellsworth, 1989; McInnes, 1994). Faith is integral to this process both from the perspective of the researcher and the researched. The researched reveal personal aspects of themselves and trust that confidentiality will be preserved.

Certain topics covered in the interviews were confronting to some individuals. Issues around body image and physicality for those who did not fit acceptable cultural norms of slim or athletic were problematic and possibly painful. I felt that I had to be extremely sensitive to their feelings whilst encouraging them to reflect and comment on aspects of themselves that were a likely source of lowered self esteem.

Other instances involved discussion surrounding physical ability and physical skills. For those who considered themselves 'not sporty' the conversation seemed to contribute towards feelings of inadequacy rather than empowerment. My supportive comments and objections to their negative responses were futile against entrenched ideas about their personal lack of skill. It was in these contexts that I felt most confronted with the idea that my research was not empowering or contributing to the interests of the researched. In these cases it seemed to be more likely a source of grief.

**Storytelling**

Co-authoring is another method that feminists have employed in order to give up some of the control the researcher has over the research agenda and knowledge produced form it (Witherell, 1991; Wolf, 1996). Storytelling is one example of co-authoring (Barone, 1995).

By capturing much more than numerical scores or mathematical formulae, stories appeal to those who are weary of reducing human experience to variables and quantification (Casey, 1995). Stories capture the richness and nuances of meaning in everyday human existence. They give insight into the complexity of our experiences and understandings. However, only recently have stories and narrative appeared as legitimate forms of knowledge construction and focus for conducting research (Fairbanks, 1996). Narrative is seen as an especially appropriate form of women's expression and allows for the authentic presentation of women's experiences and concerns (Carter, 1993).

Through the mutual construction of a story, I attempted to create a small cameo of a personal yet significant experience in the life of my participant. These varied considerably in both content and style from participant to participant. However, collectively they provided a series of events and scenarios in which many women could see themselves, myself included.
Through stories, the taken-for-granted ordinary events of women can be explored and critically examined. Stories are a means of making 'visible the invisible' (Fairbanks, 1996). Storytelling is also a negotiation of power. By giving voice to previously silenced groups, and by describing the diversity of their experiences, readers gain insight into their own practices and life events. A 'narrative persuasion' may be constructed through the use of analogy and repetition (Fairbanks, 1996).

As researchers we often fail to see ourselves as storytellers or to notice the attention we give to some information over other. Care must be taken not to give the impression that subjective judgement has shaped the story being told. We need to respect the authenticity and integrity our participant's stories, to see them as subjects creating their own history rather than as objects of research. The tendency to draw and code the exotic, the bizarre, or the violent, is great. Often the mundane events are left out as they don't make such interesting reading. The challenge for the researcher is to 'make the familiar seem strange' and take care not to construct narratives 'spiked with only the hot spots' (Foley, 1992; Fine & Weis, 1996).

The construction of stories in this research project was an interesting process. The starting point for each story was difficult to pinpoint. Somewhere within the interview series I would highlight what seemed to me to be a significant event for my participant and discussed this in depth. At a later date I would suggest that I would like to write a story about such an event with created characters. Engaging my participants to be part of this process provided a series of dilemmas. For some enthusiastic respondents, I have no doubt comfortable with written language, I merely presented a frame of events and they created the entire story by themselves. However, this definitely was not the case with all. Some saw the exercise as yet another assignment in an already crammed academic year and opted out. Others preferred me to begin the process and then contributed to varying degrees to the creation of the final product. In many cases the participants read the story and thought "it was fine". A clear lack of confidence as was similar in the interviews stopped them from being openly critical, making only minor adjustments if any.

As it turns out the stories do present an interesting array of memorable and influential events. Some seemed bland and uninteresting in writing whilst others seemed full of 'hot spots'. Collectively, they have helped me significantly in my analysis and understanding of how young women come to know their bodies and see themselves in relation to physical activity. However, I am unsure as to what effect or how empowering this process has been for my participants. My interests were certainly served but was this just another burden for already busy senior secondary students?

Conclusion

The research process has the greatest potential for feminist process but is the weakest link in feminist research (Wolf, 1996, p.3).

Wolf suggests here that there is great scope for feminist research. Passion and enthusiasm in the researcher to attain emancipatory outcomes, to meet complex goals and seek social change can only contribute to the interests of the researched population in powerful ways. However, feminist researchers may be hindered by the research process itself. A process which often contributes to the development of hierarchical relationships and an imbalance of power. What remains a pertinent question is whether the interests of the research can in fact contribute to the interests of the subject population. Although feminist researchers may use methods which give research subjects more power it is not clear that they have succeeded.
It is difficult to change the power differences that occur in research without radically changing the kind of research that is done, the structure of academia and the way in which research products are judged (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998).

Through this exposition of personal experience I have drawn attention to the importance of reflexivity and have revealed some of the struggles that occur at the interface of feminism and the research process. My intention was not to hide from problems and dilemmas but to explore and expose them. The tensions and dilemmas I encountered during field research were very real and confronting to my feminist ideologies. I feel compelled to 'come clean' and reveal the reality of the research process as well as my place within (Fine, 1994).

Whilst feminist research may give participants the opportunity for supportive discussions and consciousness raising it does little to change the oppressive environment in which individuals exist. At the end of the fieldwork I left my participants to it and I had probably benefited more than them from our relationship. Although an intention of the study was to make young women's lives visible and their voices audible, the paradox is that some young women had a tendency to 'disappear' or stay hidden. These young women may or may not have chosen to stay silent. They may or may not have been motivated to comment. They may or may not have been hindered in their physical pursuits. They may or may not have been interested in my research topic. I am left to contemplate the multiple realities and subjectivities that young women have in relation to their physicality.

Often what goes on in the research process and what is intended may be entirely different. Although I had attempted to change traditional power relationships between myself and my participants, I admit to becoming lost in the changing and multiple relations we sometimes shared. In other instances traditional relations held firm and influenced the research in ways not always intended. Some believe that the relationship between researcher and researched can never be equal or reciprocal or egalitarian (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998). In retrospect I feel that it is far more difficult to change power relationships that previously imagined and prescribed within the feminist paradigm.

The dilemmas outlined in this paper are related to the power relations within research as well as the distinctive description of feminist research in terms of its insistence on challenging patriarchy and improving women's lives. However, as Maynard (1994) notes, there are several different kinds of change which might result from a feminist research project. Whilst women taking part in the research might or might not be empowered, including the researcher herself, there are also the possible longer term effects which the research could make on other women's experiences in the future (Snitow, 1990).

Fieldwork is still important and useful. Whilst it is sometimes difficult to reconcile these deep contradictions between feminist theory and feminist research practice the outcomes of feminist research have much to contribute to a more open and freer existence for women.

Clearly, there is a need to confront and interrogate these dilemmas. To face these problems without naivete and to creatively move forward and rock the epistemological boat. In this way we continue to challenge established notions about what constitutes quality research.
References


