

Book Review

Feminist Methods in Social Research. By Shulamit Reinharz. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. 413 pp. \$39.95.

According to Shulamit Reinharz, "feminist methodology is the sum of feminist research methods" (p. 240). This book is a collection of examples of research projects which illustrate the range of methods that have been or are being used in feminist research. These include applications of existing methods, singly or in combination, and examples of new methodologies developed by feminists, sometimes used in conjunction with more traditional approaches. Rather than imposing her own definition of what constitutes feminist research, Reinharz included studies on the basis of self-identification. This means that studies were chosen which some might not view as feminist; others which do belong may be excluded because the researchers did not identify themselves or their projects as feminist. Nonetheless, the resulting volume is a comprehensive and thorough treatment of the topic, including 79 pages of notes, a 51-page bibliography and a 13-page index.

The book is divided into 13 chapters, 11 of which present the survey of methods including interview research, ethnography, survey and other statistical research, experimental research, cross-cultural research, oral history, content analysis, case studies, action research, multiple methods research and original feminist research methods. These categories provide a useful organizational framework, although they overlap in many instances. For example, Reinharz included the chapter on cross-cultural research to highlight the importance of that approach, but there are also many examples of cross-cultural studies in other chapters. Each chapter is comprised of four sections containing a description of the research approach or method, an examination of its historical roots, numerous examples of its use, and a set of conclusions reflecting the au-

thor's thoughts on the issues and controversies surrounding each one. The first chapter introduces several definitions and issues central to the text and provides some of the author's rationale for the particular ways in which she chose to present the material. The final chapter contains a discussion of 10 themes that Reinharz identifies as descriptive of feminist research. She acknowledges that some of these themes may be controversial even among feminist researchers themselves and her discussion includes presentation of those conflicting views.

There are several notable features of the way in which this book is written that make it readable, comprehensible and very useful. There are many, many examples employed and these are extremely varied. Reinharz makes extensive use of actual quotes from the researchers cited, rather than relying mainly on paraphrase. She does this to give readers a chance to form their own opinions and to reduce possible errors in presenting others' views. I found that many of these excerpts also helped to give a "feel" for the actual use of various methods (and for their advantages and limitations) that more straightforward description is unlikely to convey. An especially useful feature of this book is the extensive coverage of the controversies and dilemmas associated with each method. These discussions include various viewpoints, mostly in the original author's words, as well as Reinharz's own thoughtful assessment of the issues.

For Q methodologists, probably the most disappointing aspect of this book is the omission of Q methodology. Q methodology and feminist critiques of social science share some basic tenets, including an emphasis on subjectivity. Celia Kitzinger's (1987) work on the social construction of lesbianism is a well-known instance of the use of Q methodology in feminist research. Another example is Charlene Senn's (1991) doctoral dissertation on women's views of pornography, work which has been recognized by an award from the Canadian Psychological Association's Section on Women and Psychology. I do not understand why Reinharz did not include mention of Q methodology anywhere in her book. The bibliography includes both Kitzinger's book describing her Q

methodological work and the doctoral dissertation on which it was based. Moreover, there are several references to Kitzinger's book, including two lengthy quotations from it, in the body of the text. The omission of Q methodology is especially unfortunate since the book is likely to become a widely-used resource for feminist researchers. Those seeking alternate methodologies will find many possibilities to consider here. That Q methodology will not be among them is a loss both to Q methodology and to feminist research. Nevertheless, this is a book I highly recommend to those interested in feminist research and/or methodological issues in social science.

References

- Kitzinger, C. (1987) *The social construction of lesbianism*. London: Sage.
- Senn, C.Y. (1991) *The impact of pornography in women's lives*. Doctoral dissertation, York University (Canada).

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