



FEMINIST FRONTIERS IV

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To our mothers,
Rose Foreman Richardson,
Alice F. Houston,
and Sally A. Kennedy;
and to our sisters,
Jessica Richardson Phillips,
Betty Jo Hudson,
and Sarah Whittier

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FEMINIST FRONTIERS IV

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Professor Taylor is the coauthor (with Leila J. Rupp) of *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s*, which received scholarly research awards from the Collective Behavior and Social Movement Section of the American Sociological Association and the North Central Sociological Association. Her most recent book, *Rock-a-by Baby: Feminism, Self-Help and Postpartum Depression*, centers on the transformation of feminism in modern women's self-help and sets forth a framework for analyzing the intersections of gender and social movements. Her writings have appeared in numerous scholarly collections and in journals such as *The American Sociological Review*, *Social Problems*, *Signs*, *Gender & Society*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *Mobilization*, and *Sociological Focus*. She has served as investigator of grants for the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Ohio Department of Mental Health. In addition, she is a member of the editorial boards of *Social Problems*, *Teaching Sociology*, *Gender & Society*, *Mobilization*, and the *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality Volume on Lesbianism*; an associate editor of the University of Minnesota Press book series "Social Movements, Protest, and Societies in Contention"; and has served on the editorial boards of *Mass Emergencies* and the *National Women's Studies*

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P R E F A C E

The first edition of *Feminist Frontiers* was conceived in the late 1970s, at a time when many women inside and outside academia were beginning to recognize and challenge male domination. At the time of its publication, only a handful of books and anthologies written for classroom use presented a feminist perspective on women's status. The evolution of this book through four editions reflects both the successes of the women's movement and the development of feminist scholarship over the past two decades. Women's studies courses have blossomed and spread to campuses in even the most conservative regions of the country. Feminist scholars in the meantime have refined and enlarged our understanding of how gender inequality operates and how it intersects with other systems of domination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexuality. There is no doubt that the situation of women has changed since the publication of the first edition of *Feminist Frontiers*. Gender inequality has not, however, disappeared.

With pride and excitement we write this preface to *Feminist Frontiers IV*. We are proud to be part of the continuing women's movement which struggles to reform the structure and culture of male dominance; and we are excited by the burgeoning of knowledge about diversity and differences among women. We feel fortunate to be writing, teaching, and learning at a time when feminist thought and research are flourishing and deepening. It is simultaneously a time to enjoy the bounty of feminist scholarship and to sow new feminist seeds. This fourth edition of *Feminist Frontiers* includes a new coeditor, Nancy Whittier. We are proud that this book is the collective effort of two established feminist scholars, Verta Taylor and Laurel Richardson, and a member of the new generation of feminist scholars, Nancy Whittier. We have enjoyed this collaboration across feminist generations, and we think it has enriched the book.

Feminist thought seeks to transform, in fundamental and profound ways, all the old patriarchal ways of seeing, defining, and understanding our experiences and the social world. Feminists view the accomplishment of this transformation as a global activity that must take account of differences and diversity. The articles in *Feminist Frontiers IV* underscore the pervasive cultural, racial, ethnic, sexual, and other differences that interact with gender. The experience of being a woman is not the same for different groups.

We developed this book for use as the major or supplementary text in courses on the sociology of women, women's studies, gender studies, or sex roles. In addition, because the book offers a general framework for analyzing women's status, it can be used as a supplementary text in introductory sociology courses and in courses on social problems, foundations of society, comparative studies, and American studies. Although we have retained some of the articles from previous editions of *Feminist Frontiers*, particularly writings that have become feminist classics, approximately half of the readings are new to this edition. We have selected readings that continue to emphasize the diversity of women's experiences and multicultural perspectives, while strengthening several sections and bringing in the most current issues in feminist scholarship.

Feminist Frontiers IV is organized into four parts, each introduced by a sociological-feminist analysis. Part One, "Introduction," begins with a section representing the diversity of women's experiences and gender systems, and contains a new second section, "Feminist Perspectives," which presents engaging and accessible feminist theoretical approaches. Part Two, "Learning Gender," has two sections, "Language, Images, and Culture" and "Socialization." The five sections of Part Three, "Social Organization of Gender," provide readings on work, families, intimacy and sexuality, bodies and medicine, and violence against women. Part Four, "Social Change," includes articles on politics and the state and on social protest and the feminist movement.

The new edition has an expanded focus on conceptualizing gender, with a new section on Feminist Perspectives that combines new work on gender categories, the social construction of gender, transsexualism, and black feminism, with feminist classics. We have also strengthened the sections on Language, Images, and Culture; Bodies and Medicine; Politics and the State; and Social Protest and the Feminist Movement by adding many new selections that reflect the growing body of research in these areas, on topics including women's music, hate radio, eating disorders, breast cancer, welfare policy

toward single mothers, social policy regarding people with AIDS, women elected officials, and the experiences of employees at abortion clinics. In addition, all the sections have been updated, with new selections on topics such as adolescent girls' sense of self, comparable worth, sexual harassment, rape as a war crime, and lesbian mothers. We have added numerous new boxed inserts that keep the text lively and raise important issues that are not dealt with in the regular selections. Although analyses of women's experiences remain the core of the book, we have added selected articles and boxed inserts dealing with the construction of masculinity and men's resistance to the structure and culture of male dominance.

As we set about the task of selecting articles for this edition, we found an abundance of excellent pieces. We used the following criteria for choosing what to include: First, we wanted each selection to be engagingly written and accessible in style and language to readers from different disciplinary backgrounds. Second, as a testament to the tremendous growth in depth and understanding of feminist scholarship, we sought selections exploring a wide range of theoretical and substantive issues. Third, we wanted the anthology to reflect a diversity of racial, ethnic, generational, sexual, and cultural experiences. Fourth, we sought to capture the cross-disciplinary nature of gender research. The result is a collection that links well-written and significant articles within a general feminist sociological perspective.

We gratefully acknowledge the support, skill, and help of many people. We extend thanks to contributing authors, not only for writing the selected pieces but also for allowing us to reprint them here. At McGraw-Hill, we especially thank our publisher, Phil Butcher, for believing in and supporting this project; Jill Gordon, our sponsoring editor, for her encouragement and help in shaping the book; and Kathy Blake, associate editor, for shepherding the book through its development. We also thank Kate Scheinman of The Total Book for overseeing the final manuscript through editing and production, and Fred Courtright, permissions editor. Amber Ault was instrumental in shaping some section introductions for the previous edition of the book; we appreciate her contributions. Nicole Raeburn provided invaluable research assistance as we selected articles for this edition. Melissa Briggs, Eszter Hargittai, Aungela Price, and Molly Wallace provided clerical support and feedback from students' perspectives. In addition, Mary Margaret Fonow and Claire Robertson have given us valuable feedback on their teaching experiences with earlier editions of *Feminist Frontiers*. Finally, we express our appreciation to students in our sociology of women, sex and gender, and women's studies classes at Ohio State University and Smith College, who have contributed to the development of this anthology by their thoughtful responses to proposed articles.

The following scholars served as reviewers for *Feminist Frontiers IV*, and we thank them for their expert and generous comments: Lisa Brush, University of Pittsburgh; Naomi Gerstel, University of Massachusetts; Elizabeth Higginbotham, University of Memphis; Valerie Jenness, Washington State University; Michael Kimmel, State University of New York-Stony Brook; Judith Lorber, City University of New York Graduate Center; Debra Minkoff, Yale University; Sarah Projansky, University of California-Davis; Brenda Phillips, Texas Woman's University; Jennifer Reed, California State University-San Bernardino; and Shirley Yee, University of Washington.

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Finally, we are full coeditors; our names are listed in alphabetical order.

Laurel Richardson
Verta Taylor
Nancy Whittier

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P A R T O N E

Introduction

What does it mean to be a woman? Thinking about women's experiences is a complicated task because women have as many differences from each other as commonalities. On the one hand, women everywhere suffer restrictions, oppression, and discrimination because they are living in patriarchal societies. Yet gender is not the sole influence on any woman's life. Differences of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, nation, region, and religion shape women's experiences. Moreover, these differences intersect with each other. Lesbians of different ages, social classes, races, and religions, for example, have different experiences.

The experience of being a woman may be quite different for distinct groups of women. For a white, upper-class, heterosexual, American woman, for example, femininity might entail being economically dependent on her husband, perfecting a delicate and refined physical appearance, and achieving social influence through child-raising and volunteer work. Womanhood for a middle-class African-American woman might mean providing financial support for her children, holding influential and respected positions within her church and community, yet being stereotyped by the dominant white culture as sexually promiscuous or unintelligent. For a Cambodian immigrant to the United States, being a woman might mean seeing herself as secondary to her husband, yet enjoying support and influence within networks of other women. In short, gender is defined in various ways for different groups. Gender definitions bring with them a distinct set of restrictions and disadvantages for women in each group, as well as privileges and sources of power or resistance.

As if matters were not complex enough, feminist scholars also recognize that individuals have unique constellations of experiences: We each have our own story to tell. Each of us has multiple alliances and identifications with groups that shift through time and social context. The religious identity of childhood may be shunted aside during young adulthood, for example, only to be reclaimed again in later years. Self-definitions as heterosexual may give way later in life to new identities as lesbian or bisexual. As biracial or bicultural or mixed-religion daughters, we might identify with either parent's heritage or that of both. Large social forces such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, and class inequality shape our biographies, but it is as individuals that we experience and make sense of our lives. Individuals do not easily attribute our experiences to class, race, or gender as *separate* or *separable* entities. We rarely see our own biographies as sociohistorically situated.

The task of feminist scholarship, and of this volume, is to illuminate the social and structural roots of women's experiences, while simultaneously recognizing the complicated and unique factors that shape each woman's life. Feminist research builds upon and links two levels of analysis: *structure* and *biography*. The *structural* level looks at social institutions and cultural practices which create and sustain gender inequalities and links those inequalities to other systems of oppression such as racism, ageism, and homophobia. The *biographical* level honors each woman's expression of her own experience. It

makes available individual self-representation and personal voice. Because feminist scholarship links structural understandings with individual biography, we learn how difference and commonality are structurally induced and personally experienced. We can see how larger social forces affect our own and others' lives.

Feminist research is not just about analyzing the ways that social structures shape and restrict the lives of women. Of course, documenting the inequalities faced by various groups of women and examining the ways that women have been oppressed and victimized based on gender are important tasks for scholars. Such experiences—discrimination in hiring and pay, sexual violence, and legal subordination, for example—are undeniably central to gender. Yet feminist scholarship also emphasizes the sources of power that women find—how women define themselves, influence their social contexts, and resist the restrictions they face. The articles in this volume view women not simply as passive victims of patriarchal social structures, but as actors who exercise agency despite social constraints. By documenting the influence of social structures and highlighting women's agency, feminist scholarship leads us to rethink the structural changes necessary to meet the needs of actual women.

Given the issues of diversity and difference, the resulting difficulty of analyzing women (or men) as a group, and the need simultaneously to document women's oppression and to recognize women's resistance, how do feminist researchers approach their work? Not surprisingly, there is considerable variation and debate among feminist scholars about theoretical explanations of gender and approaches to research. Nevertheless, feminist approaches have some identifiable commonalities. Building upon and adding to Judith Cook and Mary Margaret Fonow's analysis of feminist methodology, we will discuss five central "feminist ways of knowing."

1. *Acknowledging the pervasive influence of gender.* Gender and gender asymmetry are basic features of social life. Women, their worlds, and their subjective experiences, including their relationships to men and to gender inequality, are the focus. Claims about "human" behavior based on research on men are subject to critique. Indeed, the entire academic enterprise is scrutinized: How do claims to scientific and scholarly objectivity disguise male bias? How do the social conditions and practices of doing research reinforce gender inequities? Feminist scholars ask how research is conducted, how it is analyzed, and how the researchers, social settings, and financial support for research affect or bias the conclusions.
2. *Uncovering the links between gender and other asymmetric systems.* Feminist researchers understand systems of oppression as interlocking: Race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other systems of domination affect how one experiences gender. Therefore, although gender asymmetry is a basic fact of social life, it is experienced differently by women situated differently in society. These differences in women's experiences are not to be ignored or dismissed, but uncovered. Just as feminist researchers challenge knowledge claims based on research on men, they question knowledge about "women" based on research on white, middle-class women. In a self-reflexive manner, feminists question how their own scholarly practices and social locations (such as in a predominantly white academic department) bias their research and lead to false generalities.
3. *Focusing on consciousness-raising.* Consciousness-raising refers to the experience of recognizing through contact with other women (reading, research, discussion) that one's own experiences and problems are shared by others, and thus are a result of structural forces rather than personal failings. Feminist research alters the consciousness of researchers. As members of a society, feminist researchers have incorporated cultural understandings about women; as feminists, they have analyzed official ideologies and practices to reveal their implications for women's oppression. They have, therefore, as Liz Stanley and Sue Wise put it, "double vision": They see women's lives simultaneously through the old lens of patriarchy and the new lens of feminism. Having double vision helps

feminist researchers to recognize the diversity of responses to oppression and the contradictions between consciousness and action. Much feminist research looks at crisis points and transitions in women's lives, such as divorce, rape, coming out, pregnancy, menopause, sexual harassment, and career shifts. These transitions rupture the taken-for-granted world; at such times the "normalcy" of patriarchy is revealed to women, giving them an opportunity to rethink their lives.

4. *Rethinking the relationship between the researcher and the researched.* Scientific research assumes that there is a separation between the "researched" and the "researcher" and that this separation produces "objective" and "valid" knowledge. Feminist researchers challenge this tenet. Treating women as "objects" of research contravenes feminist goals for equality by elevating the researcher and her agenda above the researched and her agenda. One of the major questions of feminist thought is how to do research that empowers both the researcher and the researched. How do we create social research practices that reduce the power of the researcher to collect, categorize, and name the experiences of other women? For some, the solution has been to write about their own lives; some acknowledge directly how their own biases affect their work on other women; some study groups of which they are a part; and still others do "participatory" or "action" research in which the researcher and the researched determine together the topics, methods, goals, and political action to follow from the project, so that the scholar is a participant in the project, but not its leader.

These are not only pragmatic or theoretical concerns. For contemporary feminist researchers these are important *ethical* questions. What right does a scholar have to study and write about another woman's life? For what audiences should she write? What do you do if, through your interviewing, for example, you have raised the consciousness of a woman but cannot change her life circumstances? How can feminist scholars use the skills and privileges of academic practice to improve the life opportunities of other women? Feminist research is thus characterized by a constant critique of the morality of its labors.

5. *Emphasizing empowerment and transformation.* Ultimately, feminist researchers are concerned not only with understanding the structures of gender, but also with how their research can be used to improve the lives of women through individual empowerment or social change. For example, a study of battered women might be based on interviews with women in battered women's shelters and tell the stories of individual women and the effects that the shelter movement has had on their lives. The results may be disseminated through different media with the hope of reaching other women caught in abusive relationships. The topics for feminist research are legion because the sites in need of transformation—such as work, the family, sexual socialization, education, health care, and politics—are everywhere. Therefore, the opportunities for empowering women—and oneself—through research are, also, everywhere.

We invite you to engage in reading, thinking about, and doing feminist research. We encourage you to discuss your ideas, to debate the issues this volume raises with your friends and classmates, to disagree with the authors here when necessary, and to come to your own conclusions. We hope that through this engagement, you will discover how gender has shaped your life and how gender intersects with the other systems of inequality that affect you. We hope that you will share your understandings with others, becoming a researcher yourself and a theorist of your own and others' lives so that you might help empower us all and transform society.