

## Book Review: Feminist Research Practice: A Primer

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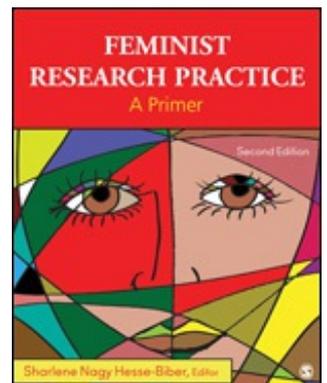
*The fully revised and updated Second Edition of **Feminist Research Practice: A Primer**, edited by **Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber**, draws on the expertise of a wide group of interdisciplinary scholars who aim to cover cutting-edge research methods and explore research questions related to the complex and diverse issues that deeply impact women's lives. **Emma Smith** finds that it will be valuable for academics already working from or looking to develop their understanding and use of feminist research practices.*



**Feminist Research Practice: A Primer. Second Edition. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber. SAGE Publications. July 2013.**

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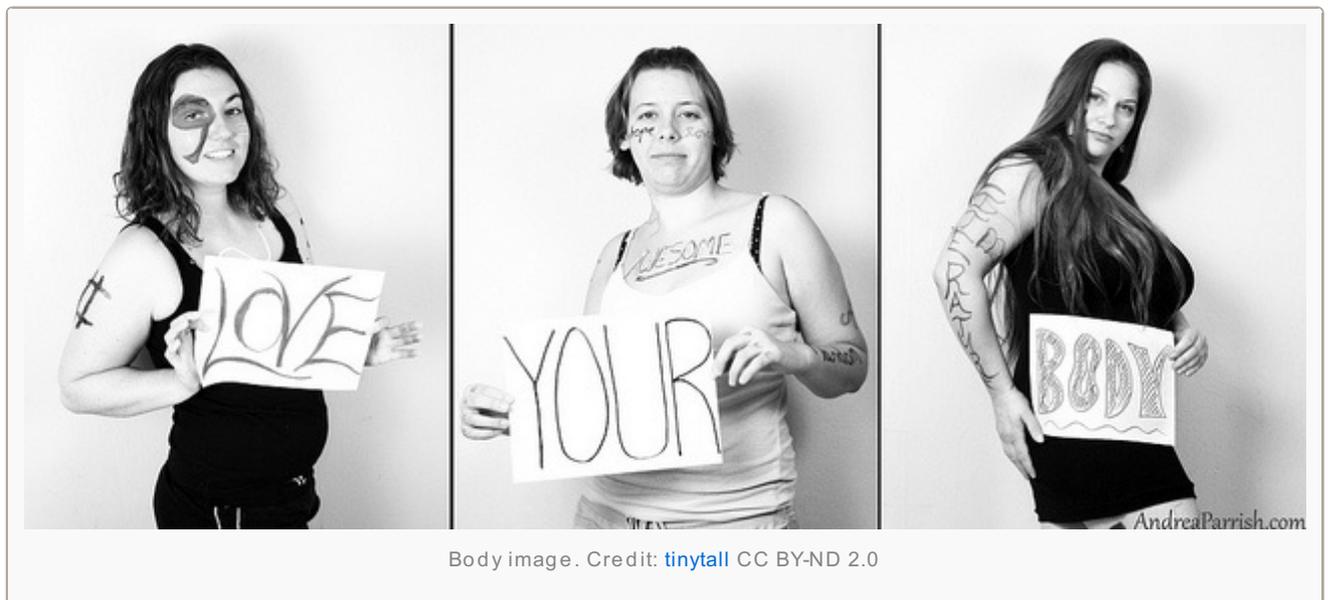
In this collection, edited by [Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber](#), readers are presented with an accessible and engaging resource on feminist research practice. Encompassing various aspects of feminist research and topics, the collection delivers key examples, supplemented by exercises and resources for encouraging further reflection and discussion. Each chapter features insight and expertise from feminist researchers, written in a clear and concise format, which posits this text as a useful and continuous point of reference, for readers both familiar with or looking to develop their knowledge and understanding of feminist research practices.





The collection is divided into thirteen chapters, relating to different methods used and issues inherent within feminist research practice. Given the nature of feminist research, the collection accordingly tends to devote discussion to methods and approaches of a largely qualitative nature; among the topics covered are discussions on participatory and community research and focus groups, although this is balanced to a degree by the inclusion of chapters dedicated to feminist quantitative survey research as well as mixed methods research.

In chapter seven, focused on in-depth interviewing, Hesse-Biber presents an extensive commentary on the method, supplemented by extracts of her own interview material; an insightful example is presented in the form of the author's interview with university-level female students and their experiences and perceptions of body image issues. Readers are guided through every aspect of the interview process, from design, to the execution and analysis of interviews. The applicability of this particular method to feminist research is reiterated, as Hesse-Biber draws upon concepts such as researcher reflexivity, the role of listening, and the implications of recognising and working with difference (between researcher and participant) within interviews; all central components of best practice within feminist research. The chapter is also progressive in feel, including guidance on the practice of online in-depth interviewing, peer interviewing, and computer-assisted analysis.



From the outset, Hesse-Biber articulates her position in relation to research; this continues throughout the chapter and is once again summarised at the close, where she re-emphasises the use and relevance of the in-depth interview as a feminist research method – particularly its ability to shed light on women’s (and individuals more generally), lived experiences. Hesse-Biber again draws parallels between this method and feminist research practice and principles, highlighting the complimentary nature of the two, in terms of seeking to capture participants’ perceptions and experiences, both mindful of the importance of researcher positionality in the research process.

As suggested by its title, this collection is primarily concentrated on feminist *research practice*, with comparatively little commentary relating to feminist *theory*. Two out of the thirteen chapters do address issues of theory, and encompass discussions of feminist empiricism and standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism, poststructuralism and critical theory. The former chapter, in particular, is a useful addition to a predominantly, practice-based collection. Naples and Gurr, in this chapter, begin by drawing on the importance of epistemology. The authors note how epistemology can influence what methods are chosen by a researcher, and subsequently, how they define their roles and practice, and conceptualise the issue of ethics. Two epistemological stances – empiricism and standpoint theory – then form the focus of discussion for the remainder of the chapter. Though less detailed than the chapters on practice-based feminist research, numerous examples (drawing on scholars from various disciplines, with different research interests) are presented, including Pence’s (1996) research on women’s safety following the disclosure of domestic abuse to police, to support the discussion surrounding feminist empiricism and standpoint theory.

Naples and Gurr first introduce us to the differences between empiricism and standpoint theory: the former, defined in terms of a view of the social world being based upon scientific methods and a goal of objective, replicable measurement; the latter, distinguished from empiricism, based on its focus on locating subjective knowledge of women's experiences, in different contexts, and its lack of focus on achieving objectivity and measurement of individuals' behaviours or experiences. The varying uses of these concepts are then demonstrated, with somewhat more discussion on standpoint theory, including a useful breakdown of different standpoint approaches, for example, the view that situated knowledge is formulated and developed collectively, and the development of a queer standpoint epistemology. The chapter is finalised with a series of reflections, which draw our attention back to the importance of theory in shaping feminist research practice. Standpoint theory is again discussed and critiqued at length—along the lines that it enables a greater understanding of the 'relations of ruling' (p. 32) by collecting and producing knowledge based on the standpoints of subordinated individuals. The benefits of empiricism are addressed (its potential to understand larger social processes relating to inequality and change, in particular), albeit to a lesser degree. Finally, the authors end their discussion, with a positive analysis of the intersection of theory and practice. They highlight in particular, the transformative potential of feminist research, in terms of how it has enabled and continues to enable the development of new methodological and theoretical approaches, in turn, effecting new ways of knowing about the social world.

In sum, this collection offers an engaging look at feminist research practice. It is particularly strengthened by examples of feminist research in practice throughout, and the addition of exercises and resources to initiate further discussion and reflection. There tends to be more emphasis, however, on qualitative methods and approaches, and research practice rather than theory, which may deter some readers. Moreover, the collection appears to be directly aimed at academics/researchers already working from or looking to develop their understanding and use of feminist research practices; this may not ensure a wider, non-academic readership, despite the collection's overall accessible and readable format.

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