

Voices and paradigms: Perspectives on critical and feminist theory in nursing

Nurse scientists have explored a variety of research methods and a number of philosophic approaches to expand the discipline's ability to describe and investigate nursing's phenomena of interest. This article discusses the similarities and differences in world views, epistemologies, methodologies, and methods of two of these paradigms: critical theory and feminist theory. Attributes of these two stances are contrasted, and the relationship between the methods of analysis and the philosophic point of view are explored. An example of nursing research is given, with discussion of how the approach would differ if the nurse scientist were using critical versus feminist theory as a frame of reference.

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SEEKING WAYS TO expand the discipline's ability to identify, describe, and research nursing's phenomena of interest, nurse scientists have experimented with a variety of research methods and have explored diverse philosophical approaches. Two such approaches that have intrigued nursing scholars^{1,2} and have been compared and sometimes equated with one another are feminist theory and critical theory. Using Harding's³ descriptive categories of epistemology, methodology, and method, this article will describe the similarities and differences in world views and assumptions of these two theoretic stances. The relationships between the methods of analysis and the philosophical points of view also will be examined, and methods of research that have been used for investigation from each paradigm will be discussed. An example of nursing research, approached separately from each of the two points of view, will be presented, and the differences and similarities in epistemology, methodology, and method will be analyzed.

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Differentiating feminist and critical theory approaches is important as a political stance, while recognizing that the two have significant similarities. If feminist theory is considered as a strand or type of critical social theory, this schema again subsumes a fem-centric approach to an approach originally developed by men in a period of history when androcentrism dominated academic thought.

Feminist theory, like critical theory, is a family of theories, and the members of that family often disagree on philosophy and strategies. Feminist theories range from those positions that advocate adaptation of the incumbent system to make it more amenable to the progress and promotion of women's interests to those positions of radical separatist feminists.^{4,5} For instance, Raymond⁶ asserts that feminism means the equality of women with themselves and with all of the women who have fought for women's freedom through the ages. She feels that the issue of women's equality with men obscures the greater liberating potential that women have for empowering each other. Azizah al-Hibri⁷ theorizes that prehistoric man turned to production for a sense of power when he realized he was denied the connection to immortality (menstruation and birth) that was inherent in womanhood. Eisler⁸ has taken a different but related stance in using "prehistoric" evidence to show that before our aggressive, violent, and domination-oriented culture existed, there was a partnership society based on the characteristics that we now call "feminine," a type of society that can be recreated. Thus the full spectrum of feminist theory takes into account ontologic issues that go beyond the issue of oppression of women, the part of

feminist theory that is particularly close to critical theory.

Similarly, critical theory encompasses many different theories and has evolved from a primarily Marxist-based scholarship to a broader emphasis on oppression in general, as well as class oppression. Similar to feminists, some critical theorists have attempted to synthesize and extend other major theories, such as those proposed by Freud, with their premises. Contemporary critical theorists encompass those who emphasize communication (followers of Habermas) and those who emphasize political action through education (followers of Freire), as well as those who espouse a variety of critical theories within other disciplines more specific in their focus. This presence of critical theorists in many different disciplines is another similarity they share with feminist theorists; thus the efforts of nurse scientists to understand and incorporate these paradigms with our own is paralleled in other areas.

THE MEANING OF "METHOD"

Controversies among nurse scientists have often focused on the appropriateness of quantitative versus qualitative methods for the conduct of nursing research.⁹ Many maintain that human behaviors cannot be isolated and quantified and that the attempt to do so results in misleading and dehumanizing outcomes rather than in knowledge that is useful for nursing practice. Some suggest, as a compromise, that quantitative and qualitative methods may each serve its own purpose—a "separate but equal" argument—whereas others insist that the two methods

can be used at different stages of the same investigation.^{10,11} Presently, most nurse researchers consider themselves to belong to one camp or the other, valuing one type of method while acknowledging that the other (less valued) method has its place.

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Feminist research has faced questions similar to those nursing has faced concerning the relationships between ideology and method. Can research be quantitative and still be feminist in orientation? Is there a method of inquiry that can be identified as distinctly feminist? Is there a method that could not be considered feminist, regardless of the goals and underlying values of the researcher? Because women's frame of reference has been characterized as relational and contextual,^{12,13} qualitative research approaches have been proposed as the only appropriate procedures for investigation of feminist phenomena, both within and outside nursing.^{3,9}

Harding³ states that confusion of the meanings of the terms "method," "methodology," and "epistemology" is at the root of much of the controversies and questions discussed previously. According to Harding, it is not the method used to gather information, but rather the unique purpose of the inquiry, the alternative explanatory hypotheses, and the altered relationships established between researcher and informer (or "subject") that

make feminist research distinctive. Her conceptualization will be used to explore the questions posed in this article.

METHOD VS METHODOLOGY VS EPISTEMOLOGY

Harding defines *method* as "a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence" and makes the argument that all such techniques can be subsumed under (1) observation, (2) listening to or questioning informants, or (3) examining records (eg, historical documents, existing texts, or medical records).^{3(p2)} Each of these concretely described methods has been and can be used in new and creative ways by feminists and by nurses to produce alternative views and explanations of phenomena, but the methods themselves are not bound to a philosophical stance. Consequently they can be used from any world view; thus *the methods do not drive the assumptions*.

Methodology is defined by Harding as "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed."^{3(p3)} Traditionally, theories of the natural and social sciences have been formulated and applied in ways that assume the masculine viewpoint as the normal viewpoint. It is a critique of methodology when feminists maintain that scientists have chosen study phenomena and explanations for those phenomena from an essentially male point of reference. Examples of feminist methodologies can be found in the discussions of how phenomenological approaches can be modified and used to investigate women's worlds³ or how Marxist critique can be used to understand the exploitation of women in the plans for care of the commu-

nity-based elderly.¹⁴ How methods are or should be used are issues of methodology rather than of method in Harding's schema.

An *epistemology* is a theory of knowledge. Epistemology guides methodology, because epistemology concerns the questions of what can be known and who can be a knower. Can subjective truth be thought of as knowledge? Can women be knowers? Epistemology also dictates what criteria beliefs must meet to be considered knowledge and what constitutes justification, or authority against which "truth" is measured (eg, God, common sense, statistical significance, or "scientific proof").³

ROOTS OF CRITICAL THEORY

Critical theory evolved in Germany during the early 1920s as a response to the technological knowledge being developed by logical positivistic science and its contribution to the oppression of the working classes. The Institute of Social Research was founded in Frankfurt in 1923 and became known as the Frankfurt School. The original group of scholars was interdisciplinary and included Max Horkheimer, philosopher and social psychologist; Friedrich Pollack, economist; Theodor Adorno, philosopher and musicologist; Erich Fromm, psychologist; Herbert Marcuse, philosopher; and Leo Lowenthal, popular theorist of culture and literature. They were concerned with the insistence on deterministic objectivism advocated by the natural scientists, who accepted only empirical observations or logical deductions as knowledge.¹⁵ Their goal was a revision of Marxism and its objectivist interpretation of historical materialism. They wanted to integrate a recognition of subjective

forms of knowledge into traditional Marxism so that the perceptions and experiences of human beings, as well as "objective" observations, would be considered as having scientific value.

EPISTEMOLOGY OF CRITICAL THEORY

In keeping with its Marxist roots, the critical theory epistemology from its inception dictated that knowledge should be used for emancipatory political aims. Lukacs,¹⁶ an early critical theorist, believed that the purpose of theory is to analyze the difference between the actual and the possible. He saw reification, the perception that one's productive activity is something alien to one's self, as a major barrier to revolutionary consciousness. Another barrier to consciousness was ideology, belief systems that were presented and treated as facts by the ruling class as a way of controlling workers. Geuss stated that "the heart of the critical theory of society is its criticism of ideology. Ideology is what prevents the agents in the society from correctly perceiving their true situation and real interests."^{17(p3)} Thus the goal of critical theory was to nullify the effects of ideology so that the agents' perceptions were freed or "emancipated" to evaluate their true situation. "A critical theory, then, is a reflective theory which gives a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation."^{17(p2)}

Because perceptions are greatly influenced by past experiences and culture, critical theory epistemology maintains that standards of truth or evidence are always social and that social life itself is structured by meaning (ie, by rules, conventions, and hab-

its).¹ All meaning and all truth are interpreted within the context of history. History includes the time and other occurrences that contribute to the significance of individual events. Therefore understanding patterns of human behavior involves an understanding of societal structures, such as class structures, which are more important in critical theory epistemology than individual personal meanings. This is a key difference in the epistemologies of critical theory and phenomenology. For the critical theorist, personal meanings are shaped by societal structures and communication processes and are therefore all too often ideologic, historically bound, and distorted.

METHODOLOGIC ISSUES IN CRITICAL THEORY

To make the epistemological statement that standards of truth are always social (ie, that they are based on negotiation and agreement by a community) would, in Harding's schema, assume certain ensuing methodologies or statements about how research does or should proceed. For instance, agreement about a meaning (or consent to participate) by participants would have to be free from both conscious and unconscious constraints in order to reach the most correct decision. If agreement by participants is coerced, even by hidden ideology, it is not a responsible representative contribution from the community—in effect, not an agreement at all.

The idea of coming to an agreement or negotiation sets the stage for the kind of dialogue that characterizes the interaction between a researcher and the person from whom data is gathered in a critical theory investigation.¹⁸ Because of the emphasis on

emancipatory action as an outcome, we believe that an appropriate term for that other person in the critical theory paradigm is “agent.” Obviously this contrasts with the use of the term “subject” in logical positivism and “informant” in naturalistic inquiry.

In the critical theory paradigm, knowledge, or warranted belief, is not discoverable or universal but is created, and its creation and interpretation are grounded in language.¹ This epistemology has implications for the methodology of the study to explore that created knowledge and the language used to communicate it. Either an interview or a text review could be used, with careful attention given to the level of understanding of language as well as to the symbolic and value-laden nature of the words and their meanings to the agent or author. Interviews take the form of dialogue wherein the researcher and agent negotiate and decide together on meanings. Thus, rather than concentrating on the subject's personal meanings, as in phenomenology, the meanings evolve from both the researcher and the agent.

If one's epistemology involves belief that the purpose of knowledge is to release the individual from domination (emancipate) and to further autonomy and responsibility, as is the case in critical theory, then one would expect analysis to be designed to expose hidden power imbalances and enlighten agents about how they ought rationally to act to realize their own best interests.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Methods, or techniques of gathering information based on this epistemological stance, would include a dialogue similar to that in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.²⁰ Reflective interviews using “dialogic introspection” were used by McLain² to encourage subjects to be aware of the power rela-

tionships in collaborative practice situations and to approach the "ideal" open communication advocated by Habermas.²¹

The most frequent kind of method used by critical theorists has been critical review or "critique."

Actually, the most frequent kind of method used by critical theorists has been critical review or "critique." The majority of writings of the critical theorists have been examinations of existing knowledge in various fields using the historical and political context of that knowledge development as background for the "immanent analysis." Adorno²² described this type of critique as an analysis of the degree of consistency of the interpretations (social opinions) of respondents to questionnaires with the reality of their social structure, a social structure not apparent to the respondents, who are therefore only restating ideology. It was clearly up to the critical theorist to decipher the ideology or determine the "social illusion" in order to juxtapose these subjective findings with objective ones and find a new theory to illuminate the whole.^{22(pp254,256)} Even though later critical theorists, such as Habermas and Freire, emphasized the dialogic process toward mutual enlightenment, the assumption can be made that agents (the oppressed) begin the process as less emancipated than the theorists.^{20,21} This attitude can result in paternalism, a problem for feminists also.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMINIST THEORY

In exploring a world view categorized here as "feminist," we are attempting to describe

a frame of reference often associated with women. Yet biologic female sex is neither necessary nor sufficient to be a feminist, as this paradigm could be espoused by either men or women, and many women would find it untenable.

Characteristics of a feminist approach to theory and research identified by Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley²³ include a women-centeredness in that (1) women's experiences are the major "object" of investigation, (2) the goal of inquiry is to see the world from the vantage point of a particular group of women, and (3) it is critical and activist in its effort to improve the lot of women and all persons. In addition to these characteristics, dominant threads and patterns that appear and reappear in feminist writing include (1) unity and relatedness of perception, (2) contextual orientation, and (3) emphasis on the subjective.

Unity and relatedness

A feminist world view tends to reject dichotomies and exclusive categories. Women are less comfortable with absolutes than are men, and they tend to blur the boundaries of their experiences. The personal is political in the minds of women, and they do not make sharp distinctions between work values and personal values or between theory and practice.^{24,25} Wheeler and Chinn describe an integration in which "knowing and doing are the same."^{26(p7)}

Contextual orientation

It is characteristic of the world view of women that not only do they value personal human relationships, but they also look for

and selectively perceive relationships between objects, ideas, and actions. Wheeler and Chinn²⁶ state that feminist thought is oriented to the power of the whole as opposed to the power of division. Harding and Hintikka²⁷ point out that women are less likely than men to think in terms of independent discrete units. As an extension of this propensity for context, feminist theory has introduced historicity, materiality, and values as fundamental categories of knowledge.

Emphasis on the subjective

Women value the lived experience, including the feelings, of themselves and other women. For this they are often accused of being “unscientific” in the logical positivistic sense of science. Women have been known to ignore “hard” data and make decisions on the basis of empirical evidence from their own lives—harking back to the intuitive sense of reality that has provided women with the courage to refute damaging masculine constructions of womanhood throughout history.

Centrality of gender and idealism

Very consistent throughout feminist theory is the emphasis on gender. Women provide both the object of study, planning, and concern and the subjective framework through which to view the world.^{23,26} Critical in the sense of confronting issues and activist in its stance of fighting for a better world for women (and therefore for humanity), feminist theory is idealistic and optimistic in orientation.²³ This quality of idealistic optimism is expressed by Bartky, an existential

philosopher, when she describes feminist consciousness as the “apprehension of possibility.”^{28(p254)} Feminist theorists struggle to communicate their dream, because they have hope for a better future for women and for all. The emphasis is on development, growth, and change—always change for the better—promoted by nonviolent means. Feminist idealism embraces the vision of peace and cessation of racism and class exploitation. Men credited with such feminist attributes by Eisler⁸ are Martin Luther King, Jr and Ghandi. Many people believe the time has come to implement the feminist principles of nurturing and conservation to save the earth from ecological devastation.

EPISTEMOLOGY IN FEMINIST THEORY

Epistemological issues, or issues regarding adequate theory of knowledge or justification strategy in feminist theory, that derive from the characteristics discussed previously include

- women’s experience can be a legitimate source of knowledge—women can be knowers;
- subjective data are valid;
- informants are “experts” on their own lives;
- knowledge is relational and contextual; and
- definitive boundaries between personal and public or personal and political spheres are artificial, as are sharp distinctions between theory and practice.^{24–26}

Additional issues addressed by Harding include bias that can exist in the research questions, as well as in the conduct and

interpretation of research; thus research questions in the past have addressed questions others wanted answered about women.³ The questions and the interpretation of the "answers" are very much influenced by the point of view of the person(s) asking the questions. It follows that the researcher's point of view (ie, background, ethnic and social class) will greatly affect the analysis and therefore should be included as part of the data. This is part of the "reflexive" research stance that Harding advocates, a stance that also recognizes that all women experience patriarchy differently and that all of the consequent divergent viewpoints are valid.²⁹ Thus one woman's "emancipation" may not look at all like another woman's. This position better deals with the paternalism previously mentioned and the criticism that the "women's movement" does not represent all women as it was originally formulated.

METHODOLOGIC ISSUES IN FEMINIST THEORY

Based on the previous epistemological assumptions, the methodologic conditions include

- research should be based on women's experiences,³ and the validity of women's perceptions as the "truth" for them should be recognized;
- artificial dichotomies and sharp boundaries are suspect in research involving women and other humans and should be carefully scrutinized;
- the context and relationships of phenomena, such as history and concurrent events, should always be considered in

designing, conducting, and interpreting research;

- researchers should recognize that the questions asked are at least as important as the answers obtained ("discovery" and "justification" in Harding's terminology³);
- research should address questions women want answered (ie, should be *for* women);
- the researcher's point of view (ie, biases, background, and ethnic and social class) should be described and treated as part of the data, one aspect of ensuring that the researcher is on a plane with the researched;
- research should be nonhierarchical; informants and researchers should be partners; therefore the term "participant" is an appropriate term for the other person electing to be a part of a research study; and
- interpretations of observations by the researcher should be validated by and shared with the participants so that they may benefit from the research in which they have taken part.

Epistemology and methodology and the paradigms from which they spring, not the information-gathering techniques (ie, methods), give research investigations the characteristics of feminist research, critical theory, or naturalistic or empirical analytical inquiry.

It is these issues of epistemology and methodology and the paradigms from which

they spring, not the information-gathering and analytic techniques (ie, methods), that give research investigations the characteristics of feminist research, critical theory, or naturalistic or empirical analytical inquiry.³

DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES OF CRITICAL AND FEMINIST THEORIES

Table 1 shows some of the similarities and differences in critical and feminist theories. The categories presented are not strictly parallel, and there are subtle variations in language, as well as obvious distinctions. At the ontological level, the beliefs stated are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily

contradictory, but rather are a reflection of the emphasis heard in the collective voices of the two paradigms.

Gender, class, and race

Although both critical and feminist theories are emancipatory in that they seek to free individuals from conscious and unconscious constraints that interfere with full participation in social interaction,³⁰ feminist theory is distinguished in that it focuses on women. Feminist theory has the primary goal of presenting a woman-centered patterning of human experience.²³ As pointed out by Fraser,³¹ the original critical theorists did not consider gender issues any more than did any

Table 1. Similarities and differences in feminist and critical theories

Parameter	Feminist theory	Critical theory
Ontology (nature of reality, human beings)	Spiritual, physical, relational universe God/dess/nature/humans not separate but intertwined	Reality constructed Human beings capable of rational self-critique
Epistemology (knowledge is:)	Personal is political; affective as important as cognitive Relational, contextual Woman-centered (vs androcentric) Nondichotomous, indivisible	Subjective, rational emphasized Constructed, communal, contextual Emancipatory (vs technical) Disempowered as knowers
Methodology (shoulds to obtain knowledge, do research)	Dialogic if obtaining information from participants Critique of androcentrism and racism Nonhierarchical Validation and sharing with participants	Dialogic if obtaining information from agents Critique of ideology Reveal hidden power imbalances

of the other androcentric scientific paradigms. Even though contemporary critical theorists are now broadening their approach to include gender issues, gender is not central in critical theory.

Feminists agree with critical theorists that knowledge is socially constructed and that it does not exist outside of the context in which it was created. Both believe that the understanding of patterns of human behavior involves the understanding of both the personal meanings of social structures and the communally agreed upon meanings of those structures. Both agree that social structures can and have resulted in class oppression, but feminists choose division and domination according to gender as the fundamental oppression, although recognizing that often it is not the most important oppression for individual women at particular points in time. Feminist theory sees androcentric bias as central, with racism, ethnocentrism, and classism equally problematic but having developed consequent (but within the same historical period) to gender domination.⁸ An equally viable stance is that structures of racial domination are central, but this involves a different, although related, paradigm from either critical or feminist theory, with its own epistemology and methodology. In fact, much of contemporary critical theory has moved away from class division as primary and toward a consideration of all forms of oppression together.³⁰ This is a useful alternative but still different from feminism, which sees Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, and feminism of women of color as different members of the same family.

The recognition of racism as a crucial oppressive mechanism both historically and presently was an important development in

both critical and feminist theory and long overdue in both paradigms.^{32,33} The addition of the writing and thinking of feminist women of color has immeasurably enriched and radically altered feminist theory. The current scholarly debate on racism, encouraged within feminism with leadership provided by those most fundamentally affected, is not a part of critical theory.

Knowledge and understanding

Both feminist and critical theory orientations see historical and contextual influences as important components of information. Both schools of thought endorse subjective perceptions and experiences as knowledge. One of the contrasts between them is an emphasis on rationality in critical theory, whereas in feminist inquiry feelings are also included, respected, valued, and seen as having emancipatory potential. Even Bernstein, a contemporary scholar in the critical tradition who is moving beyond such dualisms in theory, rests his premises on logical arguments, whereas feminist theorists are more likely to use and clearly appeal to emotions in their work and to be criticized for it.³⁴ Furthermore the epistemologic feminist premise that knowledge cannot be separated into dichotomies and categories generally has not been an emphasis in critical theory.

Another distinction is that critical theory is most interested in knowledge for the emancipation of all humanity or of particular oppressed groups, whereas feminist theory is equally interested in knowledge to improve the condition of any one individual woman. This can be considered an extension of the importance of the personal in feminist thought.

Methodologies and methods

A related contrast is also based on the importance of the personal and of the individual. Feminist theorists insist on sharing their insights with other women, both their fellow participants in research inquiry and all women. One means of accomplishing this goal is writing research results in language and sources accessible to everyone, as well as in scholarly journals. The original critical theorists wrote for the intellectual world, although some spoke at activist gatherings. They envisioned a world where their level of discourse would be common when class oppression ended, but this is difficult to imagine from the difficulty of the early writings. Even though contemporary critical theorists such as Ryan³³ have made their critique accessible to all, this approach has yet to be widespread or articulated as a critical theory methodology.

In terms of methodology, the feminist condition that researchers and participants should be equal partners would be, and probably should be, critiqued by critical theorists as another example of hidden power imbalances (D Allen, personal communication, 1990). Almost always there are members of the "research team" who have more power than others, and it is equally likely that the researcher(s) will make more of the important decisions about the process than will the participants. The "equal plane" may be a useful ideal, but it is extremely difficult to realize in practice.

At the level of method, both critical and feminist scholars have extensively used critique to analyze prior knowledge and to create new knowledge. Both have been subject to criticism for lack of new theory because of their reliance on critique as method.

However, there is much current activity in feminist branches of many disciplines, using dialogic research in many different forms. Critical theory investigations that use dialogue are scarce. In fact, nursing's use of critical theory has generated two of the only investigations found in the literature that use dialogue with observation.^{2,35}

The primary means of knowledge generation in critical theory has been a type of record review, or review of previous scientific writings. Habermas describes critical theory as a combination of empirical analytic and hermeneutic methods, with the addition of careful reflection on the nature of the knowledge toward emancipatory enlightenment.^{36,37} Thus it would be a mistake to characterize critical theory (or feminist theory) as a qualitative research method or as sharing the assumptions of a "qualitative paradigm." Critical theorists censure logical positivists (and adherents of hermeneutics) for their insistence that their research is the only source of true knowledge. The other two major criticisms of logical positivism in critical theory are the use (rather than the nature) of empirical analytic knowledge primarily for technology and further oppression rather than for emancipation, and the lack of recognition of subject as object. All of these concerns are shared by feminists.

FEMINIST AND CRITICAL THEORY METHODS IN AN INVESTIGATION

To further illustrate the differences between critical and feminist theory epistemologies and resultant methodologies, we will briefly describe how one of our published investigations would have been differentially shaped by the two world views. The research report "A Test of Two Explana-

tory Models of Women's Responses to Battering" describes research that was actually influenced by both critical and feminist theory, but overtly acknowledged neither.³⁸ In both the critical and feminist theory approaches, the investigator would have clearly stated the political purpose, which was to combat some of the clinical and scientific stigma attached to battered women and to create knowledge emancipatory to women experiencing male violence.

Both the critical and feminist paradigms would have critically examined the theories tested (learned helplessness and grief) in light of the historical origins of these frameworks, and both would have discussed the oppression that has been generated from each framework. Especially pertinent would be the purely behavioral origins, laboratory research tradition, and the uses of learned helplessness. The learned helplessness theory, as applied to battered women, has contributed to their derogatory public image and to the assumption of a pathologic influence on the part of clinicians and researchers. The grief theory, however, has feminist origins, and the image conveyed by the label is more normative. A critical theory orientation would have focused strongly on these linguistic connotations of pathology versus normalcy, whereas a feminist critique of these theoretic origins would have concentrated on the androcentric biases of learned helplessness theory, even though its best known clinical group application has been to women (abused women and, more recently, incest survivors). This application has served to further emphasize presumed "feminine" characteristics and to denigrate the women involved. A feminist analysis would also highlight the inconsistencies in the theory that arise, in part, from inadequate

explanations of gender differences in research results.

Critical theory would have emphasized class issues more, in terms of purpose, critique of existing knowledge, data analysis using social class as a variable, and interpretation of findings in terms of class oppression. The individual intrapsychic variables (ie, depression, self-esteem) would probably not have been measured, and more attention would have been paid to the oppressive nature of employment and educational opportunities. A feminist perspective would have been less interested in class and more interested in cultural variations. The feminist perspective would have been more likely to focus on the personal in terms of (1) demonstrating normalcy of response (comparison with other women in problematic relationships both by written report and by discussions with individual women), (2) providing clinical expertise for those emotionally troubled, and (3) explicit recognition that the personal is political.

A further distinction would be in terms of how the dialogue with participants would have been conducted. A critical theorist would be interested in all the women and would leave the dialogue with an increased understanding of their oppression within the relationship and within society. A feminist theorist would give the actual participants the kind of information and support that they sought within the interview process. If they wished to frame their experience in wider political terms, the investigator would discuss these aspects with them, but if they wanted to discuss their experience at a purely personal level, the researcher did nothing to alter that perspective. They would also be given support for whatever course of action they decided on (after having been given

safety information), so that the notion of research directed toward emancipation would be performed according to how each woman defined her trajectory, rather than according to the definition of the researcher. Thus the ideal of researcher and participant being on the “same plane” would at least be attempted. If they desired it, women would also be given information about their scores on standardized instruments (measuring depression and self-esteem) as an empowerment strategy. Finally, the results of the study would be mailed to participants who wished to have them, and the investigator would work to publicize the results in media accessible to women (radio and television talk shows). This course of information transmittal would not be considered as important in the critical theory tradition as would scholarly publication.

Thus the research described would have important differences depending on the epistemology and resulting methodology chosen. However, the “bottom line” for both paradigms is creating and using knowledge for emancipation. In the study that was actually performed, normed instruments and sophisticated statistics were used in order to plead the case for the normalcy of battered women in a world where statistics are more persuasive. Empirical evidence is needed to refute oppressive theories that have been developed from empirical evidence, unless the only interest is to convince the already converted.³⁹ The women in the study also found normed instruments extremely useful in judging for themselves how they were responding in comparison with other women. The combination of in-depth interviews with instrumentation was used to ensure that individual women gained the information they sought from the experience

and to provide the kind of context necessary for subjectivity. It was not primarily an attempt at “triangulation” as a methodologic stance. Thus, although the methods did not necessarily reflect the paradigm of the researcher, the actual implementation of the study (methodology) and the epistemology from which the study was conceived reflected the investigator’s commitment to emancipation.

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Idealism characterizes both feminists and critical theorists. Both envision a world in which equality enables all individuals to enjoy prosperity and well being, a “transformation of society.” Critical theory was rediscovered in this country during the 1960s, when traditional sources of knowledge were being questioned; the same era began the “second wave” of feminism. From that historical reality, which also generated a shared awareness and interest in Marxism, came some of the shared epistemology of the current forms of each. In terms of historical context, there were other eras when class and gender interests joined to struggle against joint oppression (eg, the French Revolution), but women always found that their concerns eventually took a lesser priority, because the acknowledged leaders of each movement were men. Thus the historical context, an important source of knowledge insisted on by both paradigms, indicates the importance of differentiation as well as connections.

Both of these relevant and powerful world views have the potential to shape nursing science so that it is emancipatory as well as knowledge generative.⁴⁰ In other disciplines, critical and feminist theorists meet and write in separate forums. Discourse and mutual

information shared between the two are needed, and in this respect nursing seems to be ahead of other disciplines. However, there is no need to blur the distinctions between the two. Just as we are making differ-

entiations between logical positivism and naturalistic inquiry, we need to be self-reflectively aware of what these more emancipatory paradigms are and are not and of their differences as well as their common ground.

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