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Caribbean Feminist Research Methods: An Editorial Note

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Research is integral to Caribbean feminist studies on gender and sexualities and encompasses specific approaches as well as common methods and techniques. It can include participant observation, discourse or media analysis, statistical analyses, oral histories, community discussions, focus groups, archival research, interviewing, questionnaire surveys, or even research in library holdings. Research, after all, is what makes studies of social relations, practices and identities plausible, relevant, action- or policy-focussed, or, simply, interesting. Yet as we, the editors of this special issue, have found through our teaching in the academy about Caribbean feminisms, there is a paucity of materials that explicitly and consistently take up questions of how to do feminist research in the English-speaking Caribbean, that interrogate relations of power in the regional context, or are grounded in Caribbean cultural, social, or political experiences. We rely mostly on texts that are drawn from and relate to Caribbean sociology or to North American and European feminist experiences and examples. The paucity is even more evident when we are engaged in training Caribbean researchers-to-be outside the academy or when conducting research for government departments, international agencies, or non-governmental organizations. So, while there is growing interest in Caribbean gender and sexualities studies amongst different communities, and a growing demand for research in these areas by a variety of public and private organizations, there are few resources that can assist students and researchers in developing critical frameworks, analyses and skills for researching gender and sexualities. There are even fewer published resources to draw on which speak to feminist methodologies that emerge from specific Caribbean colonial and postcolonial histories and conditions. This special

issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* (CRGS) comprises, then, a first step in bringing together ideas about how to conduct Caribbean feminist research, in an effort to improve the quality of research in the region and to provide some tools that can be used in the research process that will allow for sound analysis about gender and sexuality.

Caribbean feminist research has an important history tracing back to Lucille Mathurin Mair's work in the early 1970s on women during slavery in Jamaica and to the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) in the 1980s (Mathurin Mair 2006; Massiah 1986; Senior 1991). Participatory action research was also critical to the making of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) and many other women's organizations in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as in shaping academic-based community-oriented projects such as the survey on domestic violence in Guyana and the research on the Nariva wetlands in Trinidad around the turn of this century (Deare 1995; Peake 2009; Paddington and Hosein 2002, 2006). For framing this collection, we lean heavily on Halimah DeShong's understanding of the history of Caribbean feminist research as settling into three main categories: (a) research that is explicitly feminist in orientation, which arises from Caribbean struggles against the intersection of colonialism and its legacies, racism, heteropatriarchy, class inequalities and other forms of domination, and which seeks to create more just societies for Caribbean peoples; (b) research that takes Caribbean women as the main subject of enquiry and takes gendered relations of power as the principal focus, as well as concerns itself primarily with the empowerment of the category of women; and (c) research on Caribbean women and men using the categories of gender or sex, which is most commonly found in research on masculinity, HIV and other health matters, the family, and in policy studies, but occurs in the absence of knowledge about gender and sexuality as theoretical or analytical tools. The categories help to identify some of the specificity and differences between feminist, women's, and gender studies, even while we recognize that such categories are neither static nor discrete.

This special issue of the CRGS is particularly interested in the first category—Caribbean feminist research—and the way in which gender and sexualities are taken up within that approach. It presents perspectives of a range of Caribbean-based and diasporic researchers, and provides reflections upon and guidelines for conducting multi-disciplinary empirical feminist research, while offering contextualized examples from the English-speaking Caribbean. Because the editors and contributors of this issue recognize the virtual indivisibility of a discussion of methods from an interrogation of the process of knowledge production, we have anchored the discussion of methods, methodology and research experiences within the context of broader epistemological concerns. Thus, the articles also present interdisciplinary discussions of epistemology, methodology and methods from the social sciences and humanities, and include experiences of interviewing, the textual analysis of photographs, quantitative methods, archival research, and community-based research. This special issue consists of six essays and an interview, all original work by a small group of experienced and newer researchers. And while we know that much more exists that could be included, we hope it gives students, educators, trainers and researchers alike some idea of the possibilities and complexities involved in conducting Caribbean feminist research in the twenty-first century.

The special issue starts with an essay by Halimah DeShong about the role of reflexivity in feminist research today, drawing from her recent study of intimate partner violence using one-on-one in-depth qualitative interviews. She briefly considers how methodological issues are addressed in feminist empirical research in the Caribbean before presenting insights from her own experience of applying feminist methodological approaches in her study in St. Vincent. Reflexivity, she points out, is a necessary part of data-collection processes, and taking into account the researchers' own positionality in the process is critical to producing informed research outcomes. The essay raises a core feminist problematic of how to conduct research that neither dissolves the subject through postmodernist deconstruction nor presents itself as a positivist reflection of an objective reality, but rather is able to refract gendered experiences and relations of power that shape gendered lives through intersubjective, intertextual analyses that are socially and politically relevant.

The next two contributions provided by Angelique Nixon and Rosamond King and by Latoya Lazarus critically interrogate the role and place of diasporic researchers in conducting Caribbean research. In this regard, Nixon and King argue that embodied theories which focus on one's location and the ways in which the body is implicated in studies of sexuality are important points for reflecting on how this kind of research is produced in the region. Equally important are how these issues intersect with other social relations of power in the process of conducting research. In addition, they engage in a careful discussion of the potentiality of language to distance, obscure, misconstrue and misrepresent people's lives. While we accept that this is a concern for every research project, Nixon and King suggest that when conducting sexuality research, it is important to consider how individuals define their own actions, experiences and relationships. In sum, Nixon and King address the politics of publication, research as inherently political, and how embodied approaches can be applied to community organizing to transform the narrow discussions around sex and sexuality within Caribbean societies in general, and sexual minorities in particular.

In her essay, Latoya Lazarus confronts the ethical and epistemic issues associated with working with so-called marginalized and hidden populations in the region. She outlines not only the possible challenges that can be encountered, but also speaks to best practice that can be applied when engaging in this kind of research and, like Nixon and King, she focuses on research on sexuality in the region that has been conducted by diasporic researchers. In particular, she problematizes the insider/outsider subject position around a number of axes, including diasporic/regional situatedness, and national/Caribbean resident status. In so doing, she raises questions about claims to authenticity or "a monopoly on advantage or objectivity", which are relevant to the discussion of a number of other subject positions in the research process.

Bridget Brereton examines the work of historians of women and gender in the Caribbean who have utilized a range of sources, and provides rich detail about data collection methods from archives of official and unofficial records, oral history traditions, and visual and media sources. She discusses the shift from a focus on "women" to "gender" in the research, and argues that despite these shifts, historians have not necessarily introduced new methods, but rather, they have asked "new questions of the sources, read

them consistently against the grain and with critical (feminist eyes), chosen new areas for investigation, and insisted on different perspectives.” This, she says, has changed Caribbean historiography.

The use of photographic practices and technologies to excavate the experiences of Trinidadian women between 1860 and 1960 is the focus of the second essay on research in historical archives, by Roshini Kempadoo. She explores techniques and conceptual approaches to the research process that inform the textual analysis of the photographs. This, she says “necessarily involves an embodied awareness of the practice of research itself through a self-conscious and contested reflection of the materials and the places they are found such as the library or archive documented by creating written notes, audio and/or photographic recordings.” Roshini Kempadoo provides a theoretical approach in which to explore and analyse colonial photographs including references to photographic and screen-based texts, feminist approaches, historical perspectives and postcolonial positions.

In the final essay of the main section of this issue, Caroline Allen demonstrates how quantitative research, when approached from feminist perspectives, can provide powerful ways to reveal and highlight inequalities and to influence policy and action. In this way, its role in relation to qualitative methods is complementary, rather than contradictory. The essay details some standardized methods typical of quantitative methods and discusses the importance of sampling, drawing examples from research on public health issues in the region. She argues that when used appropriately, feminists in the region need not be sceptical about engaging in this kind of research.

In the section Gender Dialogues, we present an interview with Andaiye, in which she reflects on specific research projects of, and the meanings of research to, the Guyanese women’s organization Red Thread. She categorizes Red Thread research into three phases—activities at the first income-generating era of the organization, those that were initiated by external researchers in collaboration with the organization, and research formulated from within Red Thread itself and which strengthened women’s self-organizing. Of particular interest is the consciousness-raising that occurs, especially in the third phase, and the organic emergence of research methods that involve a sharing between women in the organization of different qualities, skills, insights and knowledge. A vibrant, empowered, politicized community of women is the result. The Red Thread story is one that can be told in a number of ways, and through this recent account by Andaiye, we are offered a glimpse into the ways in which knowledge gained through an unmediated relationship between action and research is part of a broader politics of social change.

It is undeniable that Caribbean feminists utilize a variety of methods in the production of social research. Regrettably, while we actively solicited essays on a wide range of research, only a small selection made it through to publication. Thus, although the diversity of methods used by feminists in the region are not fully represented here, we hope that this collection demonstrates some of the wealth of Caribbean feminist knowledge available to researchers, and provides an impetus to build a larger archive of

feminist reflections on research on gender and sexualities in the Caribbean and its diasporas.

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