Feminist Theory and the Media

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The second feminist wave, which started in the 1960s in the United States and spread through Europe during the late 1960s and the 1970s, increased interest in media and their relations to gender. On the one hand, the role media play in creating gendered stereotypes and maintaining patriarchal values—that is, creating a distorted, male-biased view on the world—was questioned. These questions gave rise to specific fields of study for feminist scholars—stereotypes and social roles, ideology, and pornography (Van Zoonen, 1994)—which are currently investigated in three academic disciplines: psychoanalysis, social psychology, and cultural studies.

On the other hand, feminist scholars raised questions about academic knowledge itself. Relating feminist political viewpoints to academic knowledge, the androcentric character of Western understandings of knowledge was criticized, resulting in three feminist epistemologies: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism (the latter is also called postmodern feminism). These three traditions share one important view that Western understandings of knowledge are androcentric and prioritize rationality (Hawkesworth, 1989). However, their ideas on how to change the androcentric character of knowledge and how to come to alternative conceptions of knowledge differ tremendously (Smith, 1998). In feminist studies on media, the three epistemologies rarely appear in their "pure" forms; rather, insights often are mixed and used in complementary ways. Nevertheless, values advocated in each epistemological tradition have important repercussions for feminist studies on media and their audiences. To elucidate how epistemological beliefs have had an impact on feminist theory on media, the three epistemological traditions and their specific values and beliefs will be discussed briefly. Next, psychoanalytic, social psychology, and cultural studies approaches to media are discussed in terms of their epistemological beliefs and the impact thereof on the generated theoretical insights.

Feminist epistemologies

Androcentric epistemologies emphasize a strict separation of fact and value, hence prioritizing rationality over the realm of emotions, to which values belong. Feminist epistemologies start from a reverse observation, namely that academic knowledge is saturated with male values (androcentrism) that masquerade as objective truths. Martin (1991), for example, describes how research on biological human reproduction is imbued by male and female stereotypes. Though studies show how egg and sperm

work together in this reproduction, the egg is generally described as dormant while the sperm is described as having a mission, the active pursuer of the egg. Choice of words, ways of seeing, and ways of representing in reproductive biology are all heavily dependent on gendered stereotypes sustaining a biased view on reproduction. In general, feminist scholars questioned such productions of knowledge and the practices of power (Harding, 2004). The androcentric character of mainstream science (also called malestream science) is thought to produce a distorted view of the world and to sustain a patriarchal ordering of human relations. Patriarchal prejudices are translated into scientific facts (Smith, 1998). The primary challenge then was how to resolve this situation. Three different answers emanated from the debate on this issue, evolving into different feminist epistemologies with distinct values and beliefs about "who is to know," "how we can know," and "what is known."

Feminist empiricism

As the term predicts, feminist empiricism adheres to the values of empiricism. In short, empiricists believe that there is a world out there—existing outside human experience—that can be investigated and known. Knowledge is based on human experience: Everything that cannot be experienced directly is metaphysical and should not be part of the scientific domain. To produce objective knowledge, the scientific study of social life should be examined for its implicit androcentric values and then reformed by removing them. In other words, according to feminist empiricists, one should return to "good science," which is value free.

This view of "good science" is directly connected to particular methods, mostly those of the natural sciences, which feminist empiricists also tend to find suitable for studying social phenomena. Feminist empiricists therefore do not object to the methods of androcentric science but to the mingling of facts and values (Smith, 1998). Feminist empiricists believe in a certain set of specific qualities: ontological simplicity, modesty, internal coherence, external consistency, predictability, explanatory power, testability, and theoretical fruitfulness (Hundleby, 2012).

The most important point of critique on feminist empiricism is formulated by Sandra Harding (1986). She argues that feminist empiricism concentrates on the "context of justification"—the context in which hypotheses are tested, data gathered, reports written—and ignores the "context of discovery"—the context in which research objects are identified. In other words, whereas feminist empiricists' approach might improve the way topics such as human reproduction are investigated and described (topics of investigation), it does not improve the way research problems are imagined. This context of discovery also includes who conducts and writes up the research and thus relates to the question of "who knows." The latter is a core element of feminist standpoint theory.

Feminist standpoint theory

Harding, one of the key figures in feminist standpoint theory, argues that individuals who know should be positioned at the same level as the objects of knowledge (what is

known). Her argument has important epistemological consequences and stipulates that all knowledge is socially situated. Social–cultural values are always part of what is considered as knowledge and how knowledge is constructed. Harding's standpoint theory locates knowledge in human experience: Who we are and what we do shapes what we can know (Harding, 2004). This means that the lived experiences of particular groups generate knowledge, perspectives, and a way of thinking that cannot be obtained by or in other groups. Because marginalized groups have a strong motivation to understand power (the structures that maintain the status quo), their standpoints generate a more objective knowledge, according to Harding, than the viewpoints of those in power. Standpoints are collective, not individual. Being a member of a marginalized group does not suffice to develop a standpoint; the lived experience and reflection thereupon do. A standpoint is developed over time, an achievement that is required by both science and politics. Standpoint theorists believe that the standpoints of marginalized groups should be the starting point of research, especially when that research is concerned with questions of power. Members of marginalized groups have privileged access to knowledge that in no other way can be accessed, and hence enable the revealing of formerly obscured truths (Harding, 2004). The way to "correct" androcentric science is thus based on the idea that we first need to unravel the actual social structures (Smith, 1998). To achieve this, all knowledge is approached as socially situated, and standpoints of marginalized groups are taken as starting points in research to construct "objective knowledge."

Like feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory is criticized for its essentialism and for its relativism. First, positioning members of a marginalized group as the starting point of research runs the risk of essentialism. Being a woman, critics argue, does not equal epistemological privilege. Additionally, questions are raised about the differences between women. Complementary to patriarchy, class, race, sexuality, and other markers structure social and power relations. Second, situating all attempts to know as valid runs the risk of epistemological relativism, in which every viewpoint is treated equally but none is "true." This latter point of critique is also part of feminist postmodernism.

Feminist postmodernism

Feminist postmodernism is a term related to postmodern, poststructural, and critical theories, which are not always easy to distinguish as they overlap considerably (Gannon & Davies, 2007). For purposes of clarity, the term *feminist postmodernism* is used throughout this entry.

Both feminist empiricists and feminist standpoint theorists believe that there is an objective reality outside human experience that can be described adequately (although their opinions on how we can gain access to knowledge about this reality diverge). Feminist postmodernists, however, believe there is no universal reality nor a universal way of getting to know this reality (Gannon & Davies, 2007). Feminist postmodernism started with the argument that the universal experience of women, as formulated by standpoint theorists, does not exist. Authors such as Judith Butler criticized the way gender (femininity) was taken as an essential universal female experience in feminist

research. Two essential principles emanated from these critiques: First, plurality, diversity, and complexity should be central elements in social science research and, second, identities are fluid and fragmented, always in process (Gannon & Davies, 2007; Smith, 1998).

The key concept in feminist postmodernism is *discourse*. Inspired by Michel Foucault's thoughts on knowledge and power, feminist postmodernists postulate that research should pay particular attention to the discursive and social processes that attribute the status of truth to particular forms of knowledge (Gannon & Davies, 2007). The second element of feminist postmodernism, that identities are fluid, fragmented, and perpetually in process, has led to a critique of the former two epistemologies, which are thought to produce binary and essentialist conceptions of gender.

Feminist postmodernism was and is subject to criticism. The core of the criticisms turns around relativism, as notions such as "truth" and "reality" are challenged by this epistemology. Most importantly, it is argued, this relativism hinders political action. When we view identities as fluid and fragmented, there is no communal experience on which to base the shared identity that is necessary for political action. Hence, the desire and ability to change the scientific and social world that marks feminist standpoint theory is undermined. A second important point of criticism is that feminist postmodernists tend to favor discourse at the expense of the body and materiality (Gannon & Davies, 2007). As we will see, these two points of criticism—relativism and rejection of material bodies—often form interesting points of departure for contemporary research on media.

The three epistemologies that are briefly described here are somewhat artificially distinguished from each other. Most of the current work on media builds on ideas from two (and sometimes even three) epistemologies. While psychoanalysis and cultural studies seem mostly characterized by feminist standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism, social psychology appears to mostly thrive on feminist empiricism and a little on feminist postmodernism. These epistemological mixes result in particular benefits and limitations for feminist media research. In the next section each discipline and its epistemological values are illustrated via one of the major theories within that discipline. This approach has the benefit of clearly illustrating the epistemological roots of each discipline. However, it also runs the risk of narrowing down the rich insights of each discipline to one of the major theories. Therefore, the reader is kindly asked to keep in mind that the illustrations used are meant to elucidate epistemological differences and are not intended as a manner of categorizing research disciplines.

Social psychology and media

As a branch of psychology, social psychology can be defined as focusing on the social and cognitive processes that affect the interactions of individuals. Social processes indicate the processes that are of importance in our relations to others and how other people (whether or not they are physically present) influence us. Cognitive processes refer to how our memories, perceptions, and such like influence us. Further, social psychology

is an empirical tradition, meaning that its approaches and theories are based on observation and experiments. Finally, yet importantly, social psychologists work from the premise that people construct their own reality and that social influence is pervasive.

Though social psychology has existed for over a century, it was not until the 1980s that social psychology with a distinct focus on gender emerged. With regard to media, Alice Eagly's (1987) social role theory forms a continuous source of inspiration for current research agendas. In short, social role theory suggests that human behavior is structured by social norms. Individuals occupy a certain social role in life, for example being a woman or a man, and are socialized in the behavioral norms that structure this role. These norms are formulated by social institutions such as family, education, peers, church, and media. In social role theory, media are thought to be an important contributor to gender socialization: They show us what the appropriate behavior is for either women or men. The majority of current research that adopts this approach now focuses on advertising, as it is assumed that, because of the extremely short period of time that an ad (be it in print, on a billboard, or on television) has to convey its message, the use of clear images (stereotypes) is commonplace. Advertising is therefore not considered as necessarily the most important medium with regard to socialization but as the one that contains the clearest messages about gendered social roles. Within this line of work, three elements form the focus of attention: the gender of the main character, the setting (either public or private), and the product category. Mostly, results show that women are outnumbered by men and that women promote so-called domestic products (e.g., washing detergents and cosmetics) in the private sphere (i.e., at home) while men promote nondomestic products (e.g., cars and drills) in the public sphere (i.e., places of work). Most recently, these representations seem to have shifted somewhat to a more equal balance in the numbers of women and men represented, and also in the settings and the products advertised (Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2015).

Epistemologically, social role theory relates to feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism. First, social role theory promotes a firm belief in "good science." Many of the studies on gendered social roles follow a very strict, often experimental research design in an attempt to generate "hard facts" on gendered social roles in advertising. Second, social role theory also explicitly formulates behavior as constructed by social norms, allowing for a more fluid conception of gender. Media content is thought of as an active constructor of femininity (Itzin, 1986). However, underneath this idea of constructivism lies a firm belief in the sex–gender dichotomy, which is in contrast with feminist postmodernism. According to the sex–gender dichotomy, people are born with a certain sex (male or female) and are then culturally inscribed with norms for male or female behavior (masculinity or femininity). Gender is thus seen as a cultural layer built onto one's sex, leading to a stable adult identity. Postmodernism, in contrast, sees identity as remaining fluid through the life course rather than as stabilizing at a certain point in one's psychological development.

This mix of epistemological beliefs has its benefits and limitations. The benefits are located in the numerical analyses of the representation of women and men. These show that representation of men and women is often limited to traditional ideas about the right setting for women and men (home or at work) and traditional conceptions of what women and men have on their minds (clean bathrooms or cars). The assumption

that ads offer a snapshot of contemporary societal ideas on gendered social roles is after all quite convincing. The "body count" that is performed by these researchers might serve as a firm base for other research investigating the "why" questions behind these representations. Next, because the research is conducted through standard academic means with authoritative status, it also provides convincing arguments in debates on gender equality. Many people who argue against the idea of gender inequality as a relevant social dimension that deserves political attention can be convinced by the hard facts that are produced by social psychological research. Gender inequality then is not just an interpretation but a scientific fact.

The limitations are situated in the sustenance of the sex–gender dichotomy. Though most current research carries titles such as "Gender Roles and Humor in Advertising" and "Toward Better Gender Equality? Portrayals of Advertising Models' Occupational Status in Chinese Magazines," their research design exposes that these studies are not about gender as a cultural construct (femininity or masculinity) but about sex as a biological category (female or male). This is visible in the research designs, which tend to categorize research subjects as either male or female and to subject them to the influence of particular media products. Such a conflation of sex and gender, apparent in current research, has essentialist tendencies and remains locked up in the binary gender system.

Going hand in hand with the sex–gender dichotomy is the neglect of questions of power. Lori Wolin (2003) provides a striking example in her elaborate overview of research in gendered social roles in advertising. In her conclusion, Wolin states that, over the years, realism in ads has improved and gender disparity in representation has decreased. This conclusion could form a starting point for engagements with societal changes or changes in the political environment in which misogynist views have become less acceptable. However, Wolin (2003) focuses her attention on advertisers and whether they should continue with decreasing their portrayal of stereotypes. That Wolin assigns the relevance of her wonderful synthesis of years of research in the area to the advertising industry only (and how it can use these insights to make better adverts) ignores social and political power structures.

Psychoanalysis and media

As a theoretical approach, psychoanalysis, like social psychology, is part of the broader discipline of psychology. Psychoanalysis assumes that each individual suffers from internal mental conflicts. The conflicts are believed to be vital to the development of one's personality, though one might not always be aware of existing conflicts. Sigmund Freud's account of infant development and its consequences for one's gender identity has been of relevance to a range of feminist psychoanalytic approaches. The experiences we have as infants create sexual desires and aims and are similar for everyone. Then, the recognition of sexual difference (the fact of having or not having a penis) results in varying psychologies for women and men (Sayers, 1986). With regard to media, film studies have proven to form the most fertile grounds for the development of psychoanalytical theory and gender. Laura Mulvey's (1975) seminal essay on "Visual

Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" still offers starting points for contemporary feminist research on media.

Inspired by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Mulvey (1975) discusses two important concepts with regard to films and the pleasures evoked by them: scopophilia/voyeurism and narcissism/ego-libido. Scopophilia refers to the pleasure derived from looking at another person as an erotic object. Movies allow characters to function as objects for scopophilia, objects to be looked at, to be *gazed at*. Narcissism as a form of pleasure is also evoked, as film presents us with ideal egos that allow the viewer the pleasure of identification. However, Mulvey (1975) argues, these two pleasures are only available for men. The pleasure of looking is reserved for men, turning them into active subjects, while to be looked at is reserved for women, turning them into passive objects. Women function as objects of desire not only for male protagonists but also for male viewers of the film. As John Berger stated in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (p. 47). The ideal egos in film are largely represented by men, who feature as the active protagonists, and identification is also reserved for men.

Four decades later, Mulvey's insights are still of great importance for the study of gender representations, not only in film but also in advertising and popular culture. Especially, scopophilia, also known as gaze theory, functions as a tool to assess objectification in media. For example, studies on gender representations in print advertising often point out how women more often than men are portrayed with their eyes cast down, allowing the viewers to let their eyes wander as much as they like around their bodies, thus turning women into objects to look at. Men, on the other hand, look straight at viewers and thus make contact as subjects. Moreover, the direct look at viewers makes it far more difficult for viewers to freely let their eyes roam and enjoy the male body. In more recent years, this dichotomy has become more difficult to spot. In print advertising women more and more often look straight at the reader, resisting the gaze. Men are more often portrayed in objectified ways.

Epistemologically, Mulvey's theoretical insights seem a mix of both feminist postmodernism and feminist standpoint theory. Feminist postmodernism appears to be present in the idea of the subject and how it is positioned in film and other media products. The subject is continually constructed by identification with the ideal egos presented by movies or by the scopophilic pleasures derived from movies. This constructionist point of view points at a fluid conception of gender. Clashing somewhat with the construction of the subject is the firm belief in a fundamental difference between men and women (a feature of feminist standpoint theory). However, the difference is not entirely located in biological sex but in psychological experiences of looking at the other sex.

The advantages of this epistemological mix are multiple. First, Mulvey's insights enable research into the construction of women as passive objects and men as active subjects in society. Next, her insights take context into account. Not only media content (the film narrative) but also the societal structures it was produced and received in are of importance. As Mulvey (1975) argues, mainstream cinema exploits a style that codes "the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (p. 7). In other

words, production processes matter. Mulvey's gaze theory then triangulates the three basic aspects of media: production, content, and reception.

Criticisms of Mulvey's theory are aplenty and often interrogate the postmodern or the standpoint part of the epistemology. First, the binary opposition of the (active) male and (passive) female reconstructs and reinforces a gender dichotomy instead of radically breaking with it. This not only means there is no space left for other representations on screen but also has an impact on audiences. Women, from Mulvey's point of view, can only watch a movie from a rather masochistic point of view: seeing themselves being objectified (Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2015).

With regard to the social structures media are produced in, they are addressed but not analyzed or challenged by psychoanalysis, as would happen within feminist standpoint theory. The question of why men look at women is hardly addressed, and how patriarchy actually shapes the gaze is also abstract and rather vague (Van Zoonen, 1994). The potential of psychoanalysis to truly triangulate media production, content, and reception is hence not fully developed.

Cultural studies and media

As a "discipline," cultural studies is much harder to define than psychoanalysis and social psychology. It is an interdisciplinary field that is not marked by fundamental, clear-cut topics, methods, or concepts (Barker, 2012). Though the study of culture has no historical beginning, as an academic discipline, cultural studies can be located at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). From the 1970s onward, scholars of the CCCS focused their attention on male subcultures and those subcultures' practices with popular culture. This starting point has evolved into a rich field of studies that can be characterized by four elements, as formulated by Tony Bennett. First, cultural studies is marked by interdisciplinarity. Second, it concerns itself with the study of all practices that inculcate particular beliefs, values, competencies, routines of life, and habitual forms of conduct in a population. Third, cultural studies explore diverse forms of power (e.g., gender, class, race). Fourth, cultural studies tries to forge relations with social and political movements. The most important concepts of study are representation, material culture, signifying practices, power, popular culture, articulation, and identity (see Barker, 2012).

Questions of gender and media have formed an important part of the discipline since its early days. In 1978 members of the Women's Studies Group of the CCCS drew attention to the androcentric focus of the research conducted at the CCCS in the group's paper "Women Take Issue." This (and other) work opened up discussion in the CCCS on including the notion of "the Other." Research at the CCCS instigated a broader academic enthusiasm for how audiences understand media.

Stuart Hall's work has made a large mark on cultural studies with regard to media. Specifically, the encoding/decoding model, developed by Hall in cooperation with other CCCS scholars such as David Morley, instigated a shift in academic thinking about media and their audiences. The core of the model is the notion of *sense making*, a process that takes place in production, content, and reception of media. The model proposes

that producers construct a message—a sign vehicle (encoding). Once this process is completed, the message is distributed to the audiences, who in turn deconstruct the message once more (decoding). Both encoding and decoding are embedded in social and economic structures. Encoding and decoding are not necessarily symmetrical. The message is polysemic and therefore interpretations of the message are potentially multifarious. In general, audiences can construct three possible *readings*: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings. While the dominant reading indicates a *full match* of encoding, the negotiated reading is one where audiences acknowledge the reference code but object to some elements, and the oppositional reading is one where audiences fit the codes into a completely different frame of knowledge (Hall, 1973).

For feminist media studies, this model brought about many groundbreaking studies, such as Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas*, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, and Joke Hermes's *Reading Women's Magazines*. All of these studies highlight questions of pleasure derived from media content instead of gender as a feature that explains certain readings. As a result, each of these studies generated important understandings of how media content relates to gendered audiences. For example, Radway interviewed women on reading romance novels, investigating their motivations to read, their judgment of quality, and so on. Radway's analysis shows that readers actively engage with and interpret the stories presented by romance novels. The underlying, deeper structures of romance novels (losing one's social identity and regaining it) were the narratives Radway's interviewees really engaged with. Radway hence shed a new light on identity construction and media. Contemporary work emphasizes the active audiences and/or the polysemic potential of media texts. For example, the polysemic potential of media texts is explored in queer studies, offering insight into the possible queer readings of TV shows that disrupt gender discourses on a societal level.

Epistemologically, the encoding/decoding model is closely connected to feminist postmodernism and somewhat to feminist standpoint theory. Feminist postmodernism becomes apparent in the difficulty of defining the discipline. Cultural studies refuses the idea of a universal reality, or an essential identity, making it harder to define boundaries of the discipline. The encoding/decoding model investigates sense making as embedded in social and economic structures that are of dynamic character and historically rooted. There is not one fixed reality. Further, the relevance of sense making with regard to questions about identity and subjectivity is rooted in the thoughts of Foucault. Each of these is a feature of feminist postmodernism.

Many studies take women's experiences with media (and in specific popular culture) as a starting point, assuming that these experiences are different from those of men. Like feminist standpoint theorists, cultural studies scholars believe in socially situated knowledge. However, contrary to standpoint theorists, cultural studies scholars do not believe that "objective knowledge" can be generated at all.

These mixed epistemological beliefs have benefits and limitations for the research and knowledge generated in cultural studies. One of the most important benefits is that the essentialist notion inherent in the sex–gender dichotomy is transcended. Instead of determining audiences by their sex only, gender is seen as just one of the structures that informs identity. The theories assume that audience members have some agency to

construct their own gender identity and to change their minds about it (as notions of gender are thought to be fluid).

Second, the triangulation of production, content, and reception, which is essential to the encoding/decoding model, denies the textual determination of audiences that is present in, for instance, psychoanalytic perspectives. It is impossible to predict anything about the audiences' experiences from the media text itself.

The limitations of the model are found in questions concerning relativism and exaggerated activity of audiences. The major point with regard to relativism lies in the three readings and questions of identity and agency. Most studies show that most readings by audiences are *negotiated readings*. When all readings are negotiated, the model does not explain that much about sense making. Additionally, when all identity is considered as fluid and dynamic and when individuals are granted the agency to construct their identities, social structures that impact the construction of one's identity are ignored. After all, gender is an important structure in everyday life, even though gender is not always relevant to, or the determinant of, our experiences.

This point of view touches upon the exaggerated activity of audiences. Not only do some studies show that audiences are not that active at all (Hermes, 2005; Krijnen, 2011) but also others argue that texts are not really as open as is argued, and that instead the dominant reading in the text steers audiences' readings more than the model allows. Viewpoints on new media technologies also offer celebratory accounts of audiences, who are now seen as more powerful than ever in their relationship with producers. Structures that confine this power are often overlooked, and the danger of constructing a new dichotomy—an active audience versus a passive audience—might be underestimated. Such a dichotomy would undermine the fluidity of identity and the belief in there being no universal truth.

Discussion

This entry has shown how feminist media research is articulated within particular feminist epistemologies, which has consequences for the questions asked, the methodologies used, the outcomes generated, and the academic political/feminist status of feminist media research. The epistemologies and research traditions have in common that they take gender as a relevant topic or angle for the study of media, sometimes by prioritizing the views of women, other times taking men and women as categories to compare, and yet other times by analyzing how gender intersects with other identities and experiences of oppression. In that sense the early aim of feminist scholars to redress the androcentric bias of science has been successful, and this has been remarkably visible in media, communication, and cultural studies. However, simultaneously, particular academic and political trends tend to modify and counter this success.

First, there is the growing interest in sociobiology and neurosciences. Sociobiology suggests that social behavior is genetic and evolutionary, and hence attributes gender inequality to genetics. For example, in her publication *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*, Hrdy (2009) grounds the development of humans from apes in the extended family and its traditional structure, defining women's

traditional role as a mother as innate and vital to humans' evolutionary history. These naturalizing discourses on gender differences are commonplace in contemporary society. Contemporary magazines and television are swamped by sociobiological remarks. As Hasinoff (2009) shows in her analysis of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, sociobiological statements, such as relating the habit attributed to men of drinking straight from a milk carton to men's caveman nature, are presented as undisputed scientific truths that validate, among other things, men's bad behavior and standards of conventional beauty.

Second, current research developments that address issues of gender often do so in a decontextualized way, ignoring political and social structures. An example is the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* by the American Psychological Association (2010). The report rings alarm bells concerning the effects of sexualization on young girls. The report is filled with tentative statements that employ wording such as "might effect" and "maybe suggests," yet it suggests that all girls are at risk of sexualization and in need of protection. Media are blamed for sexualizing young girls. By positioning girls as being at risk, not only is girls' agency denied but also political and societal structures enabling sexualization are obscured.

Debates are taking place in many (Western) universities concerning the diversity of academic staff and its repercussions on the context of discovery and justification. Diversity is formulated in terms that reach beyond gender and hence are inclusive of ethnicity, sexuality, and so on. Standpoint theorists, feminist postmodernists, and feminist empiricists all contribute to this debate. However, new challenges posed by current developments need the careful attention of feminist scholars and show that epistemological debates are current and worthy of our attention.

SEE ALSO: Critical–Cultural Theory, Media Power, and a Multieffect Reality; Encoding and Decoding; Feminist Film Analysis

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