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Chapter

Perspective Chapter: Feminist Standpoint Theory - A Lens for Counseling Psychology Research and Practice

*Megan Suehn, Anusha Kassan, Shelly Russell-Mayhew,
Tonya Callaghan and Julie Cohen*

Abstract

As a guiding critical research epistemology, Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) combines the idea that all knowledge is situated with a claim that some sociocultural locations provide opportunities to develop epistemically advantaged knowledge about overarching systems of power. FST thus represents a framework for uniting researchers and participants in coalitions of solidarity to decolonialize traditions of knowledge and research that assume researchers are objective observers. In this paper, we discuss how FST research methodologies can offer counseling psychologists a nuanced systemic and intersectional lens to better situate each person and their lived experiences, and in turn, develop collaborative, meaningful social justice-oriented advocacy and interventions across individual and community spheres. Accordingly, in Part I, we argue that an FST lens can shape counseling psychologists' approach to research. In Part II, we then discuss how this consequently influences clinical approaches that require engagement of a psychological lens to attend to the lived experiences of vulnerable groups.

Keywords: feminist standpoint theory, methodology, qualitative research, intersectionality, social justice, intersectional marginalization, multiple marginalization, counseling psychology, identity

1. Introduction

For counseling psychologists, scholarly and clinical competency requires being responsive to an individual's personal psychological, behavioral, and emotional experiences in parallel with a relational and sociological understanding of wellbeing via the bio-psycho-social-spiritual model [1]. In line with this model, feminist and social justice advocates continue to encourage psychologists to address the gap between theoretical valuing of social justice orientations and integration as visible practice for clinical training [2]. According to such a holistic and systemic approach, counseling psychologists must be comfortable managing the complexity wrought by the role of

power, privilege, and oppression as it affects clients' daily lives as well as the breadth of counseling psychologists' professional and scholarly activities. A feminist social justice perspective thus requires that counseling psychologists adopt an orientation toward advocating against systemic inequalities in various communities [3, 4]. For counseling psychology scholars, this commitment involves ongoing reflexivity to recognize and deconstruct the colonial roots of Western mental health practice and research.

One way that counseling psychology scholars can better integrate social justice values in their practice is by first adopting critical epistemologies in their research pursuits. Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) represents one example of a flexible epistemological lens that is well-suited for guiding counseling psychology scholars to embed social justice initiatives in research. FST is a tool that aids scholars in the deconstruction and redistribution of systems of sociocultural power. It does this through engaging social justice values of collective solidarity via the epistemological re-centering of marginalized standpoints in research previously excluded or pathologized [5, 6]. As Rolin [7] argues, FST is a uniquely valuable research lens for conceptualizing sociocultural power as a distinctive type of obstacle to the production of scientific knowledge due to the ways that power distorts or suppresses the collection and analysis of evidence. FST scholars argue that the relations of power are a critical object of inquiry since they are endemic to global societies rather than representing merely an individualized cognitive bias that occurs solely on a personal scale [8, 9]. From this, an FST lens can offer counseling psychology scholars an epistemic and methodological scaffolding for research. Such practices, alongside a sustained FST lens, can in turn inform clinical practice through mobilizing a richer commitment to critical inquiry and social constructionism [10].

In this paper, we discuss the fit of FST as an important epistemological lens that can support counseling psychology scholars to better embed social justice initiatives in research. Further, we argue that, by extension, adopting an FST lens within research informs practical applications for clinical practice and training, filling the gap between social justice theory and praxis. In Part I of this article, we summarize the relevant epistemological tenets and historical background of FST, which includes the ways that it naturally dovetails with intersectionality theory as its core of critical praxis. We then discuss how FST takes a psychological lens to situate critical inquiries in social science research on everyday experiences to reveal how they illuminate overarching systems of power. In Part II, we illustrate that, as a social justice informed field, counseling psychology clinical practice can be similarly enriched and mobilized by adopting an FST lens.

2. Part I: FST epistemology and methodology: critical inquiries on power

FST describes an area of feminist theory and practice first articulated by sociology, Black Feminist/Womanist, and political scholars such as Bell Hooks [11, 12], Nancy Hartsock [13, 14], Dorothy Smith [15], and Sandra Harding [6, 16, 17]. Specifically, as a social constructivist and post-positivist epistemology, FST provides justification for what we claim to know in both daily life and social science research [18]. FST holds important and meaningful roots within Hegelian and Marxist traditions that are critical of, and seek to deconstruct, the oppressive systems of power that organize our world especially regarding intersections of gender, race, and class. Marxian roots further inform FST by suggesting that knowledge, knowing, and the knower are

ideas linked to particular time-and-place social categories (and locations), which are unequally “imbued with power” ([19], p. 160). The result is that knowledge, knowing, and knower are separate and sometimes alienated from one another.

Broadly, these philosophical roots inform two specific, material precepts within FST. First, it is vital to account for the social positioning of any social agent [20]. Secondly, standpoint theories are foundationally oriented toward making an appeal toward these social identities in order to pursue its core aim: the study of structural power relations [7]. Power in this sense refers to the dynamic and continually unfolding processes wielded by institutional structures to manage the ability of a group or an individual to constrain the choices available to another group or individual [21]. FST can therefore provide an critical lens to support ongoing efforts within the field of counseling psychology to decolonize Eurocentric epistemologies within research and practice paradigms [22, 23]. Of particular interest to counseling psychology researchers is the way that FST scholars are interested in engaging an intersectional analysis on individual-level psychological experiences and the ways these are influenced by—and therefore can illuminate—the structural dimensions of social life [9]. It is thus important to first discuss how and why FST posits an epistemically advantageous relationship between interlocking experiences of marginalization and the ways that this advantage provides opportunity for people to develop standpoints. Secondly, it is necessary to discuss how standpoints are discerned within an FST lens to inform counseling psychology research on the nature of social reality. As such, the following sections addresses the epistemology and values of an FST lens to research including: a) the role of power as it shapes the situatedness of knowledge, b) the role of power as it affects critical research inquiries, c) the importance of FST’s intersectionality stance, and d) the applicability of an FST lens to counseling psychology researchers’ social justice approaches. Lastly, we will briefly discuss criticisms and ongoing development within FST research scholarship and epistemology.

2.1 FST epistemology and the role of power and situated knowledge of social agents

According to the FST conceptualization of power, one of its most influential concepts, situated knowing, attends to interlocking systems of structural power and argues that one’s social location shapes *and* limits one’s knowledge of the world [17, 24]. As Harding [25] and Grasswick [26] argue, each person can only achieve a partial view of reality from within their particular social location, as this view is ultimately shaped by the values and interests of the overarching systems of power acting upon them. As a result, FST’s aim is the study of power relations, which is undertaken through coalitional research and activism with sociopolitical identities that are characterized by a lack of cultural privilege. In her foundational approach to FST, Hartsock’s [27] concept of the politics of location critically generalizes Marxian epistemology which posits that “due to the forces of capitalism and the ideology of ‘abstract masculinity’, material life is structured into a fundamental opposition between two different groups” [28], such as capitalist and proletarian classes, or women and men. Black scholars such as Hooks [11, 12] and Patricia Hill Collins [29–31] articulated crucial nuances to FST’s central ideas that related to issues of gender oppression. In particular, they underscored how this form of power occurs at the interlocking intersections of racism and sexism, in addition to other simultaneously intersecting dimensions of oppression [32].

To further understand FST's concept of situated knowing, adopting this lens suggests that those who occupy the furthest extremes at the margins of power and privilege have experiences that they can critically reflect upon. Compared to people positioned at the social centre, people within this context are therefore thought to be more likely to develop what W. E. B. Dubois called double vision, Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "*borderlands*" *consciousness* [33], or Dorothy Smith's *bifurcated consciousness* [6, 34]. This type of vision affords such people epistemic advantage to insights on the very dynamics and structure of the overarching systems of power. As such, double vision represents a cyclical relationship between intrapersonal and wider group-level sociocultural experiences. Important knowledge and survival skills associated with the development of double vision are achieved through enduring oppression. Subsequently, double vision typically culminates in a psychological shift as individuals mobilize their knowledge and survival skills to resist these relations of power, thus informing the ability to act as social agents.

Given this lens, standpoint is an attitude of active political engagement that an epistemic agent develops from *having to learn* to move through the world from the margins [35]. Solomon [36] argues that the nature of such a standpoint relates to theories about the achievement and "epistemic fruitfulness of political awareness" (p. 233). This stance clarifies that epistemic advantage does not merely represent a simple perspective *developed at* the cultural margins or bestowed as a result of holding a particular identity group label [32, 37]. Further, standpoint knowledge can be explicit or implicit, and is present in one's "ability to participate in, challenge, or manipulate power relations between social groups" [36]. This aspect of standpoint theory bridges the epistemic gaps between situated knowing and subjectivity. For instance, Harding [25] argues that P. H. Collins' [29, 31] concept of the Outsider Within possesses such a critical psychological ability—specifically, *the ability* to engage in reflexivity. This represents a form of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence developed by people with experiences shaped by interlocking systems of oppression at or between social margins.

FST scholars such as Collins and Bilge [38] and Hammers and Brown [28] argue that FST's interest in empowerment, consciousness raising, and social justice initiatives can be strengthened through the construction of intersectional epistemic community spaces. These spaces would focus on discourse and coalitional solidarity among diverse groups who have been (or who are) marginalized. The purpose of this strategy is to deconstruct traditional knowledge gaps and boundaries by inviting open standpoint dialog across diverse "subjects of liberatory knowledge and politics" ([17], p. 176). This aspect of research and advocacy starts from giving voice to the perspectives of maximally oppressed lives, after which other experiences are bridged to capture shared and unique nuances. Foundational to such coalitions is the intentional centering of Black women and other groups who have been socially marginalized (and thus typically left out of scientific discourses). Further, these social agents are foundational to social revolution as, due to their marginality, FST posits that they are less likely to be committed to maintaining dominant power systems, and to be more resistant to the oppressive assumptions inherent within a sociological or psychological discipline's traditional values and resources [32]. This practice relates to HOOKS' [12, 35] articulation of "centering the margins" as a crucial process of individual liberation as well as pivotal to wider processes of decolonialization and social justice [38, 39].

2.2 The role of power and standpoint knowledge in research

Power relations are a uniquely challenging object of inquiry because of their ability to "suppress or distort relevant evidence" ([7], p. 119) to obscure their own

nature and thereby prevent opposition. FST focuses on standpoint as a technical term referring to the development of a politically engaged perspective, identity, or consciousness that develops through struggle against such power (i.e., oppression and domination). Standpoint is pivotal to FST research because it encompasses the knowledge and survival skills that are cultivated as groups who have been marginalized engage in scientific actions that critically examine the underlying nature of social relations. The result of these scientific actions is to illuminate the ideological workings of relations of power [40, 41].

According to FST, standpoint captures knowledges that have historically been positioned to exist “outside” of Eurocentric traditional conceptions of scientific objectivity. From this, FST argues that people situated at social locations characterized by marginalization have the most nuanced and rich knowledge of sociocultural dynamics relative to knowledge produced by those situated at the social centres [25]. For the most productive FST inquiries on sociocultural power, Harding [25, 42] argued that researchers should begin by engaging “maximally” marginalized standpoints. This, she argued, was due to the speculation that the higher the level of oppression, the more objective the account of the mechanisms and structure of society ([43], p. 16). Notably, this tactic posited a kind of feminist objectivity intended to provide a counterhegemonic discourse against traditional, masculinist, and White research, scholarship, and theory discourses [44]. Harding thus initially argued that by inviting the standpoints of “the most oppressed group of women” ([45], p. 17) who are also oppressed by race and class, researchers can generate the most truthful research findings. The nature of standpoint thus offers epistemic privilege and authority to make the relations of power visible and therefore accessible to social justice revolution [46]. Beginning research from these standpoints enables FST researchers to uncover aspects of social power relations otherwise obscured within traditional research approaches and biases.

2.2.1 Development of a research inquiry: reflexivity and deconstructing traditional biases

As a starting place to deconstructing traditional research biases, Cole [47] provides foundational guidelines for psychologists to attend to diversity within groups by asking who is included within groups. From this, FST research involves conceptualizing social categories as reflecting “what individuals, institutions, and cultures do, rather than simply as characteristics of individuals” ([47], p. 175). To Cole, this shift is meant to “productively complicate the meaning” (p. 173) of social categories of identity, and how difference, privilege, and inequality shape experience [9]. Examinations of the role of inequality help psychologists attend to how groups, group members, and institutions stand in relation to one another and begin to deconstruct traditional conceptions of boundaries of difference and the individualization of social category membership. This involves engaging research that challenges the presumption of homogeneity of groups, thus inviting evaluation of the implicit bias that causes researchers to view categories of marginalized identity as being defined by difference and disadvantage. Such a cognitive shift requires diligent reflexivity on the part of the researcher to continually transparently situate and consider their own biases, experiences, and role relative to the context of the research inquiry, hegemonic traditions of research, and wider sociocultural relations of power.

Since the FST epistemology requires flexibly and sensitively centring marginalized standpoints as the position from which research inquiries should begin, this lens does

not depend upon any manualized structure for developing research questions. From this starting point, research is then oriented “upstream” toward critical inquiry on overarching structural power [47, 48]. FST researchers then determine participant recruitment and community partnerships by attempting to critically discern whose standpoints will reveal the most about sociocultural systems of power, and who will benefit most from the research [6, 49]. Engaging this critical examination at the outset of a research project involves establishing and maintaining partnerships with stakeholder communities. Researchers can then deconstruct gaps between knowledge and relations of power. This orientation reflects the importance FST bestows upon participants’ identities as a lens to examine both how overarching power relations shape social locations, and the diversity inherent within groups without assuming homogeneity [25, 29, 50, 51].

2.3 FST means engaging an intersectionality stance

Intersectionality is an intrinsic component of FST and provides a mechanism to situate the research data with respect to complex relations of power. As a concept and tool of critical inquiry and social justice praxis, intersectionality theory is neither new, nor is it solely the domain of North American feminist scholarship and activism [38, 52, 53]. According to Angela Davis [54], taking a *intersectionality stance* represents “today’s feminism”—specifically, it is an answer to critiques against what Davis calls “bourgeois white feminism”, and possesses underlying ideas rooted in the scholarship of Black womanism, feminism, and anti-colonialism. As a challenge against sociopolitical contexts of “neoliberal domestication of dissenting knowledges in academia”, Canadian scholar Sirma Bilge [55] argues that a more radical intersectional praxis is necessary to combat the “whitening and depoliticising of intersectionality theory” [56].

Intersectionality theory itself originated from a legal, anti-discrimination discourse that was argued to allow Black women to make both a race and gender claim as simultaneous causes of action. Specifically, the theory argues that such intersections create unique and distinct burdens that make social identities the consequences for vehicles of certain kinds of vulnerabilities [39, 52]. As a social science theory, intersectionality begins within the argument that each person’s identities and experiences are multiple and shaped by a multiplicity of interlocking social categories. Next, intersectionality theory posits that, people’s lives are best understood as being shaped by a multitude of interlocking “axes of social division that work together and influence each other” ([38], p. 11), rather than by any single axis in isolation.

From this critical theory again comes praxis. For instance, Bilge [56] argues that intersectionality represents a counter-hegemonic political awareness that offers feminist academics and activists vital critical potential for constructing non-oppressive political coalitions between a multitude of social justice-oriented movements. Similarly, as Patricia Hill Collins [39] and Kimberlé Crenshaw [53, 57] argue, these movements require intersectional, flexible solidarities to form a robust and inclusive set of coalitions around social justice across a range of political identity sites (i.e., within Black communities; among communities of other people of color; with white allies). As such, many argue that intersectionality theory is subverted if it is only used to privatize identity and the related influences of unequal power relations [3]. Rather, its application must be focused on dismantling the systems of power that maintain the marginalization of certain identities. This perspective is rooted in intersectionality as an embedded, critical praxis to feminist research, which inherently implicates individual researchers as equally construed subjects [10].

A large area of work by feminist standpoint theorists has been to attempt to embrace more complex intersections and difference (2000). FST proponents argue that interacting systems of privilege and oppression position individuals who hold marginalized identities at a precarious intersection of oppression and domination. Relations of power often further render these identities as epistemically invisible since they fail to fit the normative prototypes of their respective cultural groups [58]. In response to these dynamics, FST offers a powerful guiding epistemology to critical-ideological research on intersectionality. FST is able to embrace such complexity because it inherently posits that *all people* have experiences that exist at the nexus of multiply-intersecting sociocultural systems that differentially privilege and/or oppress particular groups [10, 59, 60].

It is important for FST researchers to interrogate the role of structural inequality as it affects multiple minority identity category membership. This is because these relations of power position groups and individuals in asymmetrical and hierarchical relation to one another, thereby creating vastly different perceptions, experiences, and health outcomes [47]. Notably, processes of multiple and interlocking systems of marginalization combine to impose many forms of sociocultural and psychological harms [61–64]. FST’s critical inquiry into the nature of power relations upon such identity intersections therefore requires flexibility and attention to nuance. In particular, Solomon [36] notes that the language of *intersections* is best applied with the intention of treating complex experiences of identity as “non-formulaic combinations of simpler identities” (p. 233). She goes on to argue that more complex intersections must continue to be empirically investigated and not simply derived through “armchair combinations of the standpoints of component groups” (p. 233).

2.3.1 Researcher/psychologists’ social identities and power in research

To access maximally epistemically privileged standpoints, an FST lens means researchers must engage in a process of critical evaluation to attempt to discern which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims [25]. This is a controversial position in feminist scholarship, given how FST positions the researcher as a kind of judge with the power to weigh a prospective participant’s relative socio-cultural oppression [49]. Through engaging an intersectionality stance, the researcher must take contextuality into account to increase the rigor of critical scrutiny that occurs in epistemic communities of researchers [65]. This involves a process of situating and contesting dominant perspectives that have been traditionally prioritized within research to then determine which people and perspectives are better than others for the goals of the inquiry [66, 67]. Starting with centering the margins, FST researchers then invite a diversity of standpoints which together can engage in critical dialogues to produce knowledge about (and useful to) society as a whole. This process involves subjective and objective justifications that support FST’s central theses of situated knowledge and epistemic privilege [68]. Specifically, Harding [69], p. 9 writes,

Each oppressed group will have its own critical insights about nature and the larger social order in order to contribute to the collection of human knowledge. Because different groups are oppressed in different ways, each has the possibility (not the certainty) of developing distinctive insights about systems of social relations in general in which their oppression is a feature.

FST critical inquiries focus on sensitive research topics that must be handled with respect to honor participants' voices and experiences. In sharing their personal experiences, participants face potential costs involving the risk of experiencing guilt, shame, or embarrassment [48]. These risks can be heightened when sharing personal stories with a researcher who potentially represents dominant cultural groups or institutions. Consequently, FST scholars call for flexible methodological approaches that can be responsive to participants' needs, safety, and trust building. Researchers are therefore encouraged to offer anonymity to avoid face-to-face interactions, or conversely, "more personal and interactive communication and has the potential to diminish the typical power relationships present in conventional research" ([48], p. 291). Crucially, Toole [37] argues that such approaches to research require empathy as an invaluable tool of any inquiry. She posits that empathic perspective-taking helps researchers maintain a more consistent appreciation for the paradigms participants employ, and "generate new data, offer better interpretations of existing data, or come to understand phenomena" (p. 16) that were otherwise obscure. This is a researcher role and skillset that is strongly resonant with counseling psychology's existing practices and perspectives to human sciences and therapeutic interventions.

It is important to consider the risks of abuse of power inherent within any research inquiry, given the epistemic and social power held by researchers. FST scholars argue that one important strength of the approach is that it offers a framework to consider not just multiple, marginalized participants' perspectives, but also to transparently situate and examine researchers' own perspectives, social locations, and identities [70]. In this aim, FST researcher Kristen Intemann [65] argues that in adopting the FST lens, the locus of objectivity and empirical justification is social and psychological. FST research objectivity and justification must therefore be promoted at a higher level—that is, by structuring epistemic research communities through practices that manage the negative influences of biases of individual researchers. This process requires that the community and individual researchers pursue thorough epistemic rigor in examining the ways that researchers' (and thus counseling psychologists') social locations shape aspects of research. Examples of areas for explicit examination include the development of research questions, selection of methodologies, examinations of background assumptions, and interpretations of the data. As such, an individual researchers' status as an insider or outsider (or some combination therein) to the inquiry is less important than the ways that the research contributes to and engages with the wider social epistemic FST and social justice communities to critically produce knowledge [65]. Importantly, the degree to which such epistemic rigor on the research inquiry can occur is influenced by the social locations of the epistemic/empirical community members (i.e., individual researchers and psychologists). Specifically, Rolin [67] argues that the epistemic fruitfulness to challenge problematic default assumptions within science itself is greater when these epistemic communities include wider and diverse participation foregrounded upon the standpoints of insider-outsiders (i.e., who are members of oppressed groups).

2.4 Counseling psychology: therapy and research projects that Centre the margins

To cultivate a more situated understanding of the world that is authentic to the dynamics of power, counseling psychology researchers can use an FST lens to intentionally centre and prioritize diverse marginalized standpoints as a foundation for social justice-oriented initiatives. This process of centering the margins breaks from the traditional structure of subject-object relations [12, 35]. When centred, the FST

research lens can offer an empowering framework for these subjects to take view of the traditional and dominant systems of power and oppression. This process therefore allows counseling psychologists to redistribute power by affirming the experiences and identities of those most profoundly harmed and oppressed by sociocultural power inequalities. An FST lens helps researchers and participants deconstruct the unequal power structures that restrict the agency, access, and production of knowledge to only those groups positioned at the centre of the power structure [7]. Through this individual-level psychological lens, this means that a counseling psychologist and participant are relationally positioned as co-researchers. Together, they enter an epistemological coalition to engage a process of validation and deconstruction of the dominant discourses and ideologies that are brought forth by both stakeholders, since both are mutually shaped by such overarching relations of power [71].

Ultimately this engages the therapeutic dyad, the site of counseling psychology across both clinical and research domains, as the means and mechanism by which to explore the nexus of counseling and standpoint as a critical discourse of body proximity. Specifically, the core of counseling is typically therapeutic dyad. This functional relational space constitutes a *meeting-place* that is both verb and noun: the intersection of two body subjects is a tangible project of multiple and intersecting knowledges. It is at once reflective and shaping of the power relations that house it [72]. In this space, counselor and client are equally imbued with aspects of epistemic power as subjects and objects alike. However, it is important that we acknowledge the limitations of therapy as an act of one type of the project of justice-doing and activism. We must always recall that psychotherapy has historical and current risks of serving as a tool in the hands of institutions and individual counselor by which to reify social control that maintains oppressive power structures [73]. An FST lens necessitates that we consider the researcher (i.e., subject) and researched (i.e., object) as co-constituted in the knowledge making-process – that is, the researcher cannot be controlled for or eliminated through methodological rigor; they must instead be marked, explored, and articulated throughout the research process [9, 10]. Similarly, an FST lens problematizes and challenges this positionality when considering the therapeutic dyad. An individual counselor's status as an insider or outsider (or some combination therein) to the therapeutic intervention or assessment project is less important than the ways that the therapeutic space contributes to and engages with the wider social epistemic body positionings of both counselor and client to critically produce knowledge for the purpose of therapy [65].

Through an FST lens, the sociopolitical and physical proximities between the counselor and the client are inescapable and legible to both subjects, no matter the ethical stance of the counselor. Indeed, our physical bodies are tools of representation: as counselor and client sit together at this nexus, systemic and social forces of power produce and invoke power relations from and toward their gendered and racialized bodies. This emotional (yet physical) relational meeting constitutes a site of political situatedness separate but deeply linked to the relative and proximal epistemic positioning and access that are imbued upon their differing (yet physical) social bodies. A critical feminist optics such as an FST lens therefore allows us to view the exchange and flow of power in the therapeutic meeting-space relative to the configurations of body positions in these interactions. Subsequently, both bodies (counselor and client) take on subject-object qualities of critical knowledge: toward the self-body, the other-body, and the relational space they are positioned at, both inside and outside the physical counseling space. The counseling relationship may therefore be one factor in explaining the power relations between the engaging bodies at such a

meeting-place. Exploring our physical bodies at this nexus may then serve as a critical reason to center the margins, *and conversely*, to locate the margins within the center of the counseling dyad.

As a result, through the phenomenology of an FST lens, both counselor and client are reformulated to consider both the body that we *have* and the body that we *are* [74]. This novel process of centering the margins breaks from the traditional structure of subject-object relations [12, 35]. When centred, the FST research lens can offer an empowering framework for these subjects to take view of the traditional and dominant systems of power and oppression. This process therefore allows counseling psychologists to redistribute power by affirming the experiences and identities of those most profoundly harmed and oppressed by sociocultural power inequalities.

2.4.1 Data analysis, counseling skills, and knowledge translation

As a critical and ideological research paradigm, FST can guide counseling psychology researchers' reflexive lens as they engage in data analysis. This lens shapes the research mind in order to question the position, socio-political context, and aim of the research in each step, rather than suggesting specific manualized steps to data analysis. This lens extends beyond the traditional scope of a research project's immediate outcomes, since feminist research inquiry offers a platform to motivate mutual consciousness raising between participants and researchers, social change, and empowerment of vulnerable stakeholders [75]. For instance, research findings must offer information that is useful to participants, and is validating of their experiences through engaging a holistic view of reality that integrates the personal and political [76]. Further, FST research practices can focus on participants' agency and options (e.g., promoting a shared understanding of power relations), and stressing the importance of personal empowerment and respect for personal dignity [77]. As a result, adopting an FST epistemology involves critically revising scientific practices, for example, by offering flexibility and transparently situating researchers and participants' standpoints and social locations. This lens can support counseling psychology researchers to deconstruct the ways that relations of power shape participant safety, data collection and analysis, and the values implicit across the overall research process [7, 65]. In extension, an FST lens can inform counseling psychology researchers to be critical of the policy implications of their findings and ensure that they are accessible to relevant stakeholders [75].

Given the prevalent use of interview-based research within the field of counseling psychology, an FST lens to research can also inform the unique ethical implications and dual roles that can arise when research blends with therapeutic relationships [78]. Importantly, neither the FST nor counseling psychology research interviews are meant to provide therapeutic intervention. However, FST scholars hold a central interest in consciousness raising, which they argue can occur when "articulating perceptions of one's experiences that are usually censured by the culture" ([17], p. 194). Further, consistent across counseling psychology and FST scholarship, the relationship between researcher/psychologist and participant/client is conceptualized as living, collaborative, and foundational to the goals of either approach. As such, like the therapeutic relationship, the research partnership is an important site to begin situated, meaningful social justice actions that can, in some cases, promote reflexivity that can have therapeutic effects [3, 79].

Primarily, researchers should be aware that structural relations of power can become internalized to occupy both research and therapeutic relationships [7].

To manage the risk for abuse of power, Campbell and Wasco [75] suggest that FST researchers should use their role and power to facilitate the development of non-hierarchical relationships, deconstructing inequalities therein, such as the assumption of researcher expertise. To balance some aspects of relational power, researchers can consider disclosing personal information or experiences relevant to standpoints on structural power dynamics [80]. Active practices of transparency can also include researchers informing participants about their intentions and collaborating on how participants' involvement and the dissemination of research findings will benefit them and the communities they represent [22]. FST research practices also require methodological flexibility, and ongoing reflexivity to clearly situate and articulate the researcher's presence, pre-suppositions, and intentions throughout the research inquiry. Specifically, the researcher's presence should not, nor "cannot be controlled for or eliminated through data scrubbing, member checking, bracketing, or auditing; rather the researcher's positionality should be marked, explored, and articulated throughout the research process" [9]. This means that an FST lens can strengthen counseling psychology researchers' practices of active and transparent commitment to protecting and upholding participants' voices, stories, and preferences after they share their experiences within research [22].

2.5 Criticisms and ongoing development of FST

FST represents an array of related feminist perspectives which continue to provoke important theoretical debates and dynamic developments of the theory as a lens for research [24, 37, 68]. For instance, critics such as Bar On [81] have raised issue with FST's second wave Feminist extension of Marxian ideas as they relate to an intersectionality stance. Specifically, early FST theorists argued that women were not simply a homogenous social *class* characterized by social marginality but were also a *revolutionary* class who would be the best agents of their own liberation under patriarchy. These early ideas overlooked intersectionality, and have since been reoriented within FST [20]. Similarly, authors such as Jiang [82] contend that Harding's focus on locating and starting from maximally objective standpoints conflicts FST's own underlying social constructivism by implying essentialism based on the rhetorical positioning of "women" as a group that exists separately from intersectionality. Bowleg [83, 84] argues that such assumptions create false dichotomies and intergroup conflict. In response, Hekman [44] argues that FST might be more authentically conceptualized as a counterhegemonic discourse that must remain responsive to new paradigms of politics. That is, it should recognize politics as "local and situated activity undertaken by discursively constituted subjects", and define political resistance as counterhegemonic discourses that are "effected by employing other discursive formations to oppose [the dominant] script, not by appealing to universal subjectivity or absolute principles" [44].

Naturally, it is important for standpoint theorists to emphasize the specific historical feminist roots of the theory, invoke its core stance of intersectionality, and invite inclusive diversity to standpoint epistemologies. As such, to expand its historical gender lens regarding the achievement of standpoint and epistemic privilege, contemporary standpoint theorists typically engage an intersectional stance to capture the interlocking experiences of other social categories characterized by a lack social and economic privilege. In fact, Harding [6] described the absence of an intersectional stance in feminist research a "kind of no-longer-tolerable error that is not itself a part of standpoint theory" (p. 19). Further, anchoring FST within intersectionality

and marginality related to multiple-marginalization represents what Cole [47] calls the oldest approach within intersectionality studies, and cannot be isolated from theory or research. The author further argues that exploring intersections of multiple subordinated statuses achieves some aims of social justice by attending to categories that have largely been (and often continue to be) epistemically erased or otherwise stigmatized (see [85]). As such, it is important to ensure that intersectionality is upheld by moving away from the idea that marginalized groups or social locations represent the sole *constitutive sites that convey* epistemic privilege [34]. Further, researchers seeking to include a wide range of experiences that have been marginalized should be mindful not to treat these standpoints as secondary to the experiences of women as a social category. Doing so risks implying class essentialism by taking a static, additive perspective of intersectionality [9, 20].

In response to criticisms of maximal oppression stances, proponents of FST argue that researchers should focus on “the diverse array of knowledge found within a multiplicity of standpoints” ([45], p. 17) rather than assume the ability or necessity to generate universal knowledge claims. In doing so, FST recognizes that epistemic privilege is available to individuals whose experiences of pain and suffering may occur at other positions on the social power spectrum that are not currently captured as maximal extremes [30]. Broadly, these debates illustrate how a fundamental tension between feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism is reconciled by modern FST, making room for the breadth of human experiences that represent anti-categorical intersectionality [86, 87]. Through an FST lens, counseling psychology theory and research can be strengthened by embracing difference and complexity found in revolutionary coalitions of multiple subjectivity [17].

3. Part II: FST as a lens for engaging social justice counseling psychology practice and advocacy

Embracing complexity helps FST researchers develop knowledge on society that can then be mobilized toward social change. Broadly, FST’s political engagement integrates several epistemological practices and values. Firstly, they represent crucial acts of empowerment and self-determination for maximally marginalized people [12]. Secondly, the intentional centring of the margins and the de-centering of sites and agents of structural power helps FST researchers to manage the risk of epistemic relativism, essentialism, and erasure. Thirdly, these practices enable what FST theorists refer to as a *democratic strategy for world sciences* [5, 6, 39]. Specifically, in seeking to develop a more transferrable, situated human experience of the world, FST’s intersectional stance offers a trajectory toward specific social justice actions that matter to relevant stakeholders.

It is important to explore what FST research practices might mean for clinical practice in counseling psychology. Counseling psychologists are typically interested in humanism and the holistic bio-psycho-social-spiritual [1] wellbeing of clients and research participants [88, 89]. These ideas have been propelled by arguments that the field would benefit from supplementing their training with “interdisciplinary study in history, sociology, or other social sciences and/or to pursue collaborative relationships with scholars in other disciplines” ([47], p. 175). Counseling psychology also distinguishes itself with a proud history of social justice advocacy and an ongoing commitment to on-the-ground community and political engagement [23, 90, 91]. There are many creative and diverse ways to approach praxis related to FST in ways

that may be meaningful and relevant to counseling psychology's goals of social justice action. As such, given the way an FST lens can shape the counseling psychology research mind, the following sections will discuss how it can in turn affect clinical practice. This discussion includes issues related the ways in which FST lens can shape counseling psychology clinical practice along with engagement with wider policy and community partnerships.

3.1 FST As a lens for counseling psychology clinical practice

The field of counseling psychology relies upon the scientist-practitioner model that requires a careful balance between clinical expertise and skill development in relation to rigorous empirical investigations of issues that influence client presenting concerns and treatments [92]. Such a balance requires mindfulness toward critical inquiry as praxis, such as the ability to fluidly translate epistemological and theoretical data to real-world applications in ways that are meaningful to client wellbeing. This obliges counseling psychologists to not only consider, but to centre the physical proximity of counselor and client as a site of epistemic analysis and reification, in directly response to the gendered and racialized bodies of those present.

For counseling psychologists, an FST lens offers a framework to go beyond simply identifying vulnerable groups and individuals within them. Specifically, it orients this analysis to hold the physical meeting-place of the counseling interaction as a site of power. This space is not just physical but also social, emotional, relational space. At this nexus, gendered and racialized bodies are iteratively positioned to be able to critically identify higher sociocultural relations of power that create and uphold these systemic vulnerabilities (i.e., to centre the margins). In doing so, counseling psychologists and clients can first identify culturally relevant needs, systemic barriers, risk factors based on their body proximity inside and outside of the counseling site. The increased nuances of such a knowledge base can allow counseling psychologists to more appropriately inform and collaboratively develop interventions that will most empower clients as they are supported in defining their needs and systemic barriers on their own terms [93]. This approach helps to deconstruct hegemonic tendencies within social sciences related to objectifying, deficit-based analyses of vulnerable groups tied to the relational experience of these bodies brought into the proximity of the physical counseling site [22, 94]. Instead, an FST lens can encourage counseling psychologists to pursue practice that focuses on holistic, mutual, situated conceptualizations of client and counselor. Through an FST lens, strengths and resilience are centred, and viewed, instead of simply vulnerabilities, as forms of nuanced, adaptive creativity that influences psychological processes of identity development, knowledge production, and politically-engaged practices of resistance against structural power [70, 73].

Beyond counseling psychologists' understanding of the individual and systemic cultural factors that impact clients, there are elements within the therapeutic relationship that are unique. Moodley [95] describes this as a 'third space' in therapy, which is created when a psychologist and client interact, each bringing with them a unique set of intersecting cultural identities and social locations. While there is a common understanding in FST that psychologists hold a certain level of power, there are unique nuances that are highlighted in the therapeutic relationship. For example, given their life circumstances, a psychologist may have faced more adversities than a particular client, and this can lead them to develop alternative psychological conceptualizations. In this way, an FST lens allows for unique experiences and

understandings to come to the forefront for both the client and psychologist, and the third space provides opportunities to unpack such realities [96].

Beyond the therapy room, counseling psychologists are called to engage with community, policy, and service advocacy partnerships [22]. As discussed above, FST challenges researchers to understand the world through the lived experiences of individuals who have been socio-politically marginalized, and more importantly, to apply that knowledge toward social change and activism [45]. Given this stance, it is helpful to understand how FST researchers address issues of critical feminist epistemology by first informing research inquiries and subsequently drawing practical implications toward social change through advocacy and clinical practice interventions. These areas of discussion illustrate how an FST lens can inform counseling psychologists in their own commitments to social justice. Subsequently, engaging FST research values to counseling psychology practice implicates two important areas of discussion. First, an important focus is placed on practical and theoretical issues of ethics, power, and social justice values as they affect the development and management of the psychologist/client relationship. Second, there is a focus on FST research validity and knowledge transfer, as they can impact clinical practice and advocacy.

3.1.1 Living relationships: researcher-participant, psychologist-client

Within its critique of post-positivist empirical research traditions, feminist empiricism considers the traditional connections between the researcher (i.e., the subject) and research participants (i.e., the object) as living and co-constituted within the process of knowledge production [97]. Several important implications stem from FST's stance that the researcher and participant are co-constituted within processes of knowledge production. For instance, when the FST researcher and the participant enter into an epistemological coalition, this living relationship begins processes of illuminating and challenging internalized dominant discourses from both people, and offers a means to validate each other's voices [71]. This perspective parallels counseling psychology's humanistic stance of equity and collaboration, regarding the therapeutic relationship as an foundational site of therapeutic intervention [3, 78].

An FST lens can also empower psychologists in recognizing subjectivity as unfixed, as well as recognizing the importance of critical self-reflection and relationality. Overall, many counseling clinical skills are well-suited to FST's research orientation toward relational equity, epistemic coalitions, and social justice. Examples include reflexivity, the use of immediacy, transparency, appropriate self-disclosure, and empathic, active listening and clarifying questions to check assumptions are crucial for equitable, and culturally conscious relationship management. In addition, counseling psychologists' existing attendance to a bio-psycho-social-spiritual systems model [1] can be more richly informed by adopting an FST lens [3, 78]. In this way, when viewed from a feminist optics, the therapeutic relationship has the potential to offer much more than helping a client reduce distress or make changes; it can lead to new insights about the gendered and racialized self-body. In turn, integrating such self-understandings can lead to broader shifts in how one engages in the world at large, possibly contributing to social change as the individual iteratively engages and disengages in proximity to other bodies in the world.

3.1.2 Knowledge transfer, catalytic validity, and community partnerships

FST research practices can benefit existing counseling psychology practices (e.g., managing one's sociocultural positionality as it exists the particular nexus of physical

body proximity in the counseling dyad) by focusing reflexivity to include analysis of relevant power relations that might be reified within the research relationship. In extension, this lens can inform counseling psychology's existing social justice values, which argue that collaborative and interdisciplinary treatment planning should foreground client voices, and that clinical judgment should be articulated and positioned throughout the process of mental health service delivery [3]. Both the FST researcher's and social justice-oriented counseling psychologist's goal is to give voice to insiders to speak to their social realities and carry forward a range of restorative justice actions on their behalf [77]. Specifically, FST involves taking the concept of the standpoint seriously throughout, such as by inviting participants to hold a greater stake and agency in research development, data analysis, and dissemination [98], and clients to be empowered as experts of their own experiences who have full decision-making capacity. Further, counseling psychologists can benefit from by FST's concept of taking standpoints seriously through the power of research to inform clinical practice—that is, by using knowledge produced by the collaborative critical inquiry to guide them in sharing power with clients to hold greater agency over their own assessment, intervention, and mental health plans.

An FST lens embraces methodological pluralism and flexibility in both qualitative and quantitative research to bridge group- and individual-level experiences, and to illuminate the nature of overarching cultural forces. Similarly, counseling psychology focuses on utilizing a range of methods for investigating “both emic and etic perspectives on human behaviour, and [promoting] the use of research methods drawn from diverse epistemological perspectives” ([90], p. 130). As such, a critical FST epistemological framework can be integrated into feminist empiricist methods and counseling psychology practice alike to interrogate the role that power relations play in science, therapy, and assessment. These strategies can support counseling psychology's individual and organizational policy stances toward ethical cultural responsivity, non-maleficence, and social justice regarding incorporating research into practice and methodological plurality. Similarly, FST also informs counseling psychology's orientation toward integrative therapeutic modalities predicated upon culturally-competent and socially-just assessment and treatment [22, 91].

Through an FST lens, counseling psychologists can making use of body proximity to engage in a deeper critical evaluation of clinical practice and the appropriate applications of research that considers clients' identities and physical bodies as meaningful markers for examining the interlocking power relations that shape social locations, group diversity, and individual experience and knowledge. This orientation can then guide professional policy, activities, and partnerships toward intervention and advocacy that are carried out in solidarity with marginalized communities. An FST research lens can help counseling psychologists center intentionally in the margins, facilitating vulnerable clients' participation in science and their therapeutic treatment by using practices oriented toward anti-oppressive restitution [22]. An FST lens to research can also deconstruct power hierarchies by sharing control and decision-making with clients about knowledge transfer and consciousness raising—two integral aspects of FST research methodology. Through this lens, research and counseling psychology practice is no longer conceptualized as interest-free or apolitical, but instead should be understood as having direct and indirect impacts on the lived realities of stakeholder communities.

Finally, an FST lens oriented toward building coalitional community partnerships can inform collaborative trust-building between counseling psychologists and clients by attending to the internalization of structural power dynamics for both

psychologist and client [93]. These partnerships might be engaged by both individual psychologists across their practice areas, as well as informing policy within training programs as these roles bring them iteratively into proximity with the gendered and racialized bodies of others. Subsequently, this lens can inform clinical practice and professional identity development by encouraging transparent discussions oriented toward growing a mutual self-awareness and consciousness-raising of one's reactions or beliefs between psychologists and clients alike. An FST lens can also help counseling psychology training program policies and curricula to challenge the cultural dominance of deficit-based models related to hegemonic conceptualizations of marginalized groups as inherently vulnerable and defined solely by risks. Instead, an FST lens can inform the development of program and organizational policies that actively centre empowerment, resilience, and strength-based models of well-being and healing. In turn, the production of previously marginalized social knowledges can benefit training and clinical practice by providing meaningful ways to mobilize the therapeutic relationship as an important site of resistance against structural of oppression [22, 99].

4. Conclusion

Counseling psychologists' ethical commitment to ongoing reflexivity and cultural responsiveness is well supported by critical epistemologies like FST [94, 100–102]. FST offers a powerful lens of political engagement that can inform current efforts in counseling psychology to more deeply embed a social justice stance across research and practice domains [2]. FST research values can mobilize counseling psychology due to the overlap of counseling skills and feminist research methodology. This also has implications for the ways that counseling psychologists build coalitions among social justice researchers, as well as with various stakeholder groups. These values thus recognize the importance of collaboratively managing the relations of power that shape both therapeutic and research partnerships. More broadly, adopting an FST lens supports counseling psychologists' focus on subjectivity, body proximity, and the importance of developing understanding of contextualized psychology to direct social change, rather than seeking to demonstrate a static, objective truth [103].

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Author details


Megan Suehn^{1*}, Anusha Kassan², Shelly Russell-Mayhew¹, Tonya Callaghan¹
and Julie Cohen¹

1 University of Calgary, Vancouver, Canada

2 University of British Columbia, Calgary, Canada

*Address all correspondence to: drmegansuehn@wayfindingpsychology.com

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