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Feminist Perspectives on Building a Better Psychological Science of Gender

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Transnational Feminism in Psychology: Moving Beyond Difference to Investigate Processes of Power at the Intersection of the Global and Local

Shelly Grabe

Although problems related to patriarchy have long concerned women and feminists throughout the world, transnational feminism, in particular, arose during the 1980s out of the interplay between global and local practices influenced by neoliberalism that were denying women's rights, permitting exploitation, and reproducing subjugation (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Naples & Desai, 2002). It is now well-documented that the neoliberal shifts characterizing the 1980s and 1990s—free trade agreements, structural adjustment of social welfare policies, increased international activity by multinational corporations, and the deregulation of markets—exacerbated already existing gendered power imbalances, increasing women's risk for human rights violations (Moghadam, 2005; Naples & Desai, 2002). The political mobilization and feminist activity that emerged in response to these neoliberal shifts reflected diverse modes of resistance, operating from different strategic spaces within society that reflected movement across national borders to address the range of women's growing concerns (e.g., civil society organizations, international organizations such as the United Nations, social movements, academia;

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Author note: Much of what is written in this chapter came out of my experience working in collaboration with women's grassroots organizations in Nicaragua and Tanzania working for change. In both locations, the community collaborators' agenda drove the inquiry and their expertise ensured community relevance and cultural sensitivity. The collaborators also allowed for me to enter into transnational partnerships to offer a specific skill set meant to compliment the engagement of local women in their own processes of resistance and transformation. The "best practices" that are offered as part of this chapter came out of my experiences with these organizations. The idea to write them up was inspired by a colleague, Anjali Dutt, who, in observing a training in Tanzania with me, suggested I consider writing a field manual on "best practices" for transnational feminist research. In lieu of that manual, I offer some suggestions for "best practices" in this chapter.

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Ferree & Tripp, 2006; Kabeer, 1994; Montenegro, Capdevila, & Sarriera, 2012). The mobilization and collective identity behind transnational feminism, therefore, is not rooted in the notion that women have universal experiences; rather it is rooted in a shared criticism of and resistance to how neoliberal economic policies and governments create structural conditions that limit women's rights in their respective locations (Moghadam, 2005).

To date, processes of resistance that have fueled individuals committed to collective action aimed at social justice for women have received only limited attention from the discipline of psychology. This may be in part because much of mainstream Western feminist psychology has, with few exceptions, largely neglected the voices of marginalized women and women of Color¹ in understanding feminist dynamics of resistance and oppression (Kurtiş & Adams, 2015; see Cole & Stewart, 1996; Grabe, Dutt, & Dworkin, 2014; Hurtado, 1996; White & Rastogi, 2009 for exceptions). In fact, recently it has been suggested that the liberatory potential of feminism within psychology has fallen short because of its grounding in (neo)colonial legacies of hegemonic² feminism (Kurtiş & Adams, 2015). For example, much of mainstream feminist work in psychology has developed theories and understandings of gender oppression in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic (or WEIRD, see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) contexts and imposed those perspectives across varied settings for understanding what has been conceptualized as “universal” gendered oppression (Kurtiş & Adams, 2015). Moreover, and not unrelated to the first point, mainstream feminist psychology has largely employed methodologies that involve sampling predominately White undergraduate college students studying at US universities (Marecek, 2012). These traditional approaches to understanding gendered injustice within psychology are problematic not only because they develop understandings that might not be applicable across varied contexts, but also because they tend to treat women in “majority world”³ settings as powerless thereby serving to legitimize structures of domination (Kagıtcıbası, 2002; Kurtiş & Adams, 2015). This chapter will discuss the role transnational feminism has begun to play in the discipline of psychology and conclude with a list of suggested “best practices” for feminist psychologists interested in conducting investigations from a transnational feminist perspective.

¹ Following the suggestion of Aída Hurtado (1996), Color is capitalized because it is used in reference to specific ethnic groups (e.g., Chicanos, Asians, Blacks, etc.), whereas the reference white is often not used to refer to specific ethnic groups, but to many groups.

² The term “hegemonic” is used following the suggestion of Kurtiş and Adams (2015) to refer to dominant forms of global feminist discourse that originate in Western settings and become applied universally in diverse local contexts.

³ Given that the commonly used terms “developing” and “third world” are often used by so called “first world” nations to describe the relatively low economic well-being of another country in a manner that implies inferiority, the term majority world, borrowed from Cigdem Kagıtcıbası (2002) and Kurtiş and Adams (2015) will be used in this book because individuals from “developing” countries constitute the majority of the world's population.

Transnational Feminism in Psychology

Scholars across disciplines have made a concerted effort to distinguish *transnational* feminism from *international* feminism or *global sisterhood* because international and global models of feminism have traditionally turned a blind eye to diverse expressions of feminism, instead favoring a Western model that universalizes women's experiences (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Naples & Desai, 2002). The Western model that has traditionally been exported in an “international” or “global feminism” approach is largely a White, middle-class feminism focused on power imbalances that are rooted primarily in gender. Many scholars, including ones in psychology, have urged thinking beyond the homogenization of the category gender to understand the intersectional effects that other social locations related to power—such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class—have on women's experience (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994; Hurtado, 1989). In other words, it has become increasingly clear that gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in multiple social categories. As important as the growing use of intersectional approaches to the study of gender and power within psychology has been (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009; Fine & Sirin, 2007; Hurtado, 1989; Hurtado & Sinha, 2008; Mahalingam, Balan, & Haritatos, 2008; Stewart & McDermott, 2004), many initial investigations have reflected a largely Western bias. In addition to the other dimensions of social location that are often of focus in a US context, transnational and decolonial feminist scholars suggest that women's experience in the majority world is also inextricably linked to the systemic inequities of global power (e.g., colonialism, globalization; Bose, 2012; Grabe, Grose, & Dutt, 2015; Lugones, 2010; Narayan, 1997; Sen & Grown, 1987). Therefore, psychological investigation into women's experience from a transnational perspective also needs to take into account the theoretical frameworks offered by Third World feminisms,⁴ which argue that gender oppression operates through unfavorable social systems such as global power that exacerbate or maintain violations of women's human rights (Crenshaw, 1989; Lugones, 2007; Sen & Grown, 1987). For example, the social locations of gender and class that determine experiences of marginalization are different for women working in low-wage sewing jobs in the United States than they are for a woman living in a country with a “free” trade agreement with the United States such that products of her (exploited) labor (e.g., textiles) can cross borders freely, although she cannot. Thus, a *transnationally intersectional* approach to the study of gendered justice worldwide is necessary when examining psychological processes related to women's experience in the majority world (Grabe & Else-Quest, 2012; Mahalingam et al., 2008).

⁴ Despite the cautioned use of the term “third world,” women writing from the perspective of the majority world or Global South often position themselves as “Third World feminists” to highlight the need for post-colonial and transnational analyses of women's lives in a manner that reclaims use of “third world” (Mohanty, 1984).

Beyond Difference: Incorporating These Perspectives into Psychology

Simply acknowledging that multiple social locations within a global world intersect to impact women's lived experience is not enough to understand how to apply that knowledge in the course of conducting research (Shields, 2008). Evidence of this fact is that, despite feminist calls to put the question of gender differences aside to more closely examine the *processes* involved in the psychological phenomenon surrounding gender (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990; 1994; Marecek, 2012), the prevailing approach to gender research in psychology has been to conduct gender comparison tests to examine differences (or similarities) between women and men (e.g., Hyde, 1997, 2014). As important as this approach has been to documenting various phenomena, investigations focused on gender differences presuppose an essentialist model of gender that, perhaps without intending to do so, suggest that women, as a group, have universally shared experiences, relative to men as a group. This approach overlooks differences between women and the contexts in which they live. The preoccupation with the differences paradigm is reflected in a PSYCH Info search conducted for the writing of this chapter which revealed 68,827 articles in peer-reviewed journals with key word "gender differences." This is in contrast to 145 articles retrieved when using key word "transnational feminism."⁵ A continued focus on gender differences will do little to help us understand the processes by which gender operates as a *system* of oppression at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional levels (Shields, 2008). The question then is how feminist psychology can be transformed by adopting a transnational framework that understands gender justice in the context of multiple levels of oppression. Because the transnational framework being proposed in this chapter involves understanding gender in the context of unfavorable global systems (as opposed to phenomenon that necessarily involve crossing borders; e.g., immigration), this perspective can and should also be applied when conducting research solely in the US.

Theoretical approaches offered from other disciplines (e.g., sociology) have gone beyond difference to illuminate the complex and dynamic social processes of gender and power (Connell 1987, 2012). For example, relational theory in particular places central importance on the patterned relations between women and men by understanding gender as multidimensional, that is, with power relations operating simultaneously at multiple levels within society (Connell, 2012). Social psychologists have also argued for decades that sociostructural factors should be examined to understand well-being instead of focusing on variables that assess individual differences alone (Apfelbaum, 1979; Pettigrew, 1991). Critical feminist psychologists have suggested that an individual-level focus downplays the sociohistoric and cultural context in which interpersonal exchanges are embedded

⁵ Of the 145 articles found in a search for 'transnational feminism,' only 12 were in psychology journals and only two of them were empirical (4 were book reviews, 6 were proposing paradigm shifts). Nearly all of them were in the journal *Feminism & Psychology*.

and overlooks an intersectional analysis of the roles of multiple, simultaneous power injustices in women's rights violations (Cole, 2009; Griscom, 1992; Stewart, 1998; Yoder & Kahn, 1992). Nevertheless, the bulk of mainstream psychology continues to conduct investigations that separate individuals from their social context, with a near neglect to social structures such as gender (Cortina, Curtin, & Stewart, 2012). Because an aim of transnational feminism is to contribute to efforts toward social justice in a global context, a transnational feminist psychology needs to move beyond a focus on difference to examine the psychosocial *processes* behind oppression and resistance that are critical to creating the transformations necessary for gender justice.

What Has Been Done to Date? An Overview of the Current State of Transnational Feminism in Psychology

One of the first scholars to bring these ideas together in psychology, albeit using different terminology than that which was developing in the transnational movement, was Geraldine Moane (1999). In her book, *Gender and colonialism: A psychological analysis of oppression and liberation*, Moane articulates what she calls a "feminist liberation psychology." Liberation psychology, more generally, emerged out of a Latin American context when social psychologist Martín-Baró (1994) urged psychologists to free the discipline from investigations that responded to the interests of the wealthy minority which thereby served the economic, political, and intellectual power structures rather than developed an understanding of the lives of the majority population. Martín-Baró argued that psychologists can and should reframe standard methods to consider that the root causes of oppression lie in the structures and ideologies that underlie inequity. *Feminist liberation psychology*, specifically, takes into account the effects of globalization, international human rights discourse, and activism surrounding women's issues when linking women's well-being to structures of power (Moane 1999). Approaches to research taken from a feminist liberation psychology perspective, therefore, would attend to the social conditions that are embedded in global structures of gender inequality by examining processes related to structural power differences at local, national, and transnational levels (Lykes & Moane, 2009). In this way, feminist liberation psychology is an ideal paradigm from which to begin transnational feminist investigations from within psychology.

Despite that Moane's book was published almost two decades ago, empirical examinations in psychology that take a transnational or feminist liberation approach are still in nascent stages. In a ground-breaking Special Issue of *Feminism & Psychology*, Geraldine Moane and colleague Brinton Lykes sought to identify researchers who were interfacing feminist psychology with the work of women's social movements and focusing on liberatory processes in their investigations (Lykes & Moane, 2009). Again, although not specifically using the terminology

of transnational feminism, many of the articles in the Special Issue emphasize systems of global inequality and the role of structurally embedded power differences in the limited situations in which many women experience their lives (e.g., Crosy, 1999; Madrigal & Tejada, 2009). Two investigations in the Special Issue used concepts taken from liberation psychology to examine processes linked to gender-based violence and found that although women's agency remained constrained by structural power, their narratives reflected critical awareness of how everyday struggles were shaped by structures of power (Pakistan: Chaudhry & Bertram, 2009; India: White & Rastogi, 2009). For example, White and Rastogi (2009) demonstrated the critical role of group consciousness surrounding gender discrimination in resisting injustice and working toward liberation among a group of vigilante women in rural India (i.e., the Gulabi Gang). In another investigation included in the Special Issue, Oliveira, Neves, Nogueira, and Koning (2009) demonstrated how problematizing traditional gender ideology influenced a process that was necessary to contribute to collective social change in the women's movement in Portugal.

Although empirical investigations in the area of transnational feminism remain sparse, more recent investigation among a group of Afghan women mobilized within a revolutionary organization (i.e., the Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan; RAWA) found that processes involving conscious awareness, intention, and action were all important in maintaining a sense of community that could lead to changes in women's well-being over time (Brodsky et al., 2012). Similarly, other scholars have used feminist liberatory frameworks to demonstrate that self-mobilized groups of women in Nicaragua and Tanzania are problematizing and resisting traditional gender arrangements that have been exacerbated in the context of globalization, thereby renegotiating structural and relational injustices that transform their receipt of violence (Grabe, Dutt, et al., 2014; Grabe, Grose, et al., 2014). Emphasizing the role of women's resistance to structural inequity in a global context highlights the importance of investigating *processes* involved in the psychological phenomenon surrounding gender and power, rather than focusing on differences between women and men.

Because transnational feminist approaches require local knowledge and experience in order to address the structural conditions that limit women's lives, praxis—or the process by which theory is enacted—is a key element of transitional feminist work (Montenegro et al., 2012). Liberation psychologists have also used the idea of praxis to suggest that psychologists should be critical of working with professionals and experts in positions of power and work, instead, alongside the people (Martín-Baró, 1994). The Global Feminisms Project (GFP), initiated in 2002, is an example of one of the first transnational feminist projects conducted from within psychology to bridge scholar-activism by partnering with several women's movements throughout the world. The GFP is a collaborative project that conducts, examines, and archives interviews with women involved in feminist activism, social movements, and women's studies departments in China, India, Poland, Nicaragua, and the United States. By documenting individual life stories of women involved in feminist activism in various locations throughout the world, the GFP records a

diversity of feminisms defined by women for themselves and in response to needs in their respective locations. Because an underlying goal of transnational feminist research is a reconfiguration of knowledge production that incorporates the perspectives and experiences of the oppressed or marginalized, local women in each of the five countries developed a list of the interviewees, which allowed the women, rather than the researcher, to showcase the issues that best represented women's concerns in their respective locations. The GFP is housed at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan, but the interviews are archived at the GFP website⁶ as an open-resource for future feminist research and pedagogy. Initial publications from the GFP archive have centered local knowledge and experience to better understand the conditions and processes that have made it possible for women to resist inequitable social structures that are embedded in global systems and through which their lives are greatly influenced (Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Grabe & Dutt, 2015; Lal, McGuire, Stewart, Zaborowska, & Justine, 2010; McGuire, Stewart, & Curtin, 2010; Stewart, Lal, & McGuire, 2011).

In the first publication from the GFP, McGuire et al. (2010) compared narratives among four women, one each from China, India, Poland, and the United States⁷ to examine the processes by which women came to be identified as political activists. The authors found that all four women, despite being active in different historical and cultural contexts, described a critical consciousness surrounding perceptions of their "difference" and expressed an understanding that political experiences based on these differences were personally relevant. The authors also found that critical awareness, coupled with the influence of political leaders or organizations, facilitated the development of new skills and commitments to contribute to social change aimed at justice for women.

In the most recent study from the GFP archives, Grabe and Dutt (2015) used narratives from women in Nicaragua to conduct a thematic narrative analysis examining the experience of 13 key leaders in the *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* (Autonomous Women's Movement). The authors investigated how "oppositional ideologies," or counter narratives, held by women in the *Movimiento* have played a significant role in creating a more expansive and inclusive notion of human rights that has fueled a strategic political agenda aimed at improving women's lived experience. The authors found that feminist activists within the *Movimiento* developed a sense of action through problematizing political oppression, thereby developing a narrative that countered dominant ideology by being inclusive of women's rights.

In sum, an emerging body of literature that represents a transnational feminist approach to psychology has drawn on women's experience in the majority world to better understand the psychological processes involved in transforming the mechanisms associated with oppression and taking action to bring about change. Because self-mobilized groups of women across the world employ a complex understanding

⁶ <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem/>

⁷ At this date Nicaragua had not yet been added to the archive.

of the interaction between local and global impacts on women's human rights, feminist psychologists interested in global social change need to work alongside women and build alliances that center local knowledge.

The Way Forward: Best Practices for Transnational Feminist Psychological Research

Continued research in psychology can shed light on the diverse experiences of women engaging in resistance and help to understand the role of psychological processes in more effectively challenging the broader structures of power that sustain gender inequalities. Transnational feminist scholar Leela Fernandes suggests that despite the interest in transnational feminism moving away from stereotypical views of non-Western women, a narrow focus has developed in much interdisciplinary scholarship that has created a binary of marginalized women from the Global South and elite scholars (Fernandes, 2013). To recognize and try to safeguard against the risk of psychologists further legitimizing structures of domination when conducting transnational investigations, it is imperative that researchers take a scholar-activist approach by employing methodology in the aim of social justice. This is particularly important given that transnational feminism emerged as an act of resistance to neoliberalism and universalizing feminisms. In *Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminisms, and Social Change*, Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey (2009) define activist scholarship as "the production of knowledge and pedagogical practices through active engagements with, and in the service of, progressive social movements" (p. 3).

My own program of transnational feminist research emerged, albeit accidentally, out of a scholar-activist partnership. I was originally trained as a mainstream clinical psychologist, but after having finished my degree and being disillusioned with academia I began participating in local community mobilization around women's human rights. This effort eventually led me to join a social delegation to Nicaragua that was focused on women's empowerment. Although I was strongly committed to women's issues, the trip seemed a bit far afield from my focus as a psychologist and I suspected, given my limited knowledge of Latin American politics and culture, and my inability to speak Spanish, that it was perhaps even inappropriate that I be part of the delegation. Nevertheless, a solidarity activist and leader of the trip convinced me these were the very reasons I should attend. During my first trip to Nicaragua in 2005, we visited several key women's rural grassroots organizations that were working to transform gender inequity. One of the organizations, Xochitl Acalt, facilitated rural women's access to land as a means to alter structural gender inequities in a manner that would transform women's subordination. Both the leaders and members of the organization took countless risks to boldly and brazenly challenge gender norms, with what appeared incredible effectiveness. Despite that our initial conversations with each other during my first visit

to Nicaragua included "solidarity" language, I had yet to contribute anything substantive. However, as I listened to the processes by which women were resisting and implementing change, I found the social psychologist in me asking whether research that documented their efforts might play a role in their commitment to social justice. A determinedly emphatic response indicated that, yes, being able to empirically demonstrate the efficacy of the processes they were engaging could afford their efforts more credibility with people in positions of power.

Over time, I became increasingly committed to deepening my understanding of the region and people, as well as my role in it. I traveled with Witness for Peace to learn more about US interventions in Latin American foreign policy, spent a summer in Central America taking language classes, and visited other parts of revolutionary Latin America to increase my breadth of knowledge. Although a common and justified concern with transnational work is that Western feminists are deploying a universal feminism, I entered into these relationships with no formal training in feminist studies and rather, became learned in a women of Color, decolonial, and rural feminism that largely influences most of the work I do today. In this way, I violated the traditions of mainstream science by *not* arriving with ready-made theories or a research agenda driven from the literature. I went into these relationships, though unaware at the time of something called "scholar-activism," to use my tools and training in active engagement with and in the service of a progressive social movement (Sudbury & Okazawa-Rey, 2009). I have since collected and disseminated data based on large-scale mixed methods investigations conducted in partnership in Nicaragua and Tanzania that document the processes of power that impact women's human rights (Grabe, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2014; 2015; Grabe & Arenas, 2009; Grabe & Dutt, 2015; Grabe, Dutt, et al., 2014; Grabe, Grose, et al., 2014; Grose & Grabe, 2014). What follows is a list of "best practices" that I have learned working with grassroots collaborators who have astutely noted that they, not me, are of course the experts of knowledge in these areas of investigation.

Best Practice I: Work for and with Local Women in Partnership by Establishing a Collaborative Relationship with the Grassroots

Given that transnational feminism emerged in response to a neoliberal economic environment characterized by the growing power of international institutions that have contributed to furthering women's marginalization, feminist researchers should not work with large international organizations (e.g., the World Bank) that see neoliberalism as the remedy for the world's problems (Cooke, 2004). In addition to large financial institutions, researchers should be skeptical, and I would argue avoid, working with any international development organizations (e.g., USAID) or nongovernmental organizations (e.g., the United Nations) that

are driven by an international agenda, rather than the interests and needs of local women. According to Geraldine Moane (1999), “liberating modes of psychology are aimed at contributing to changing, developing, and maintaining a society that allows people to become full citizens who can exert their rights.” (p. 527). Because women from diverse local contexts all over the world have demonstrated that they are not mere victims, but rather have worked actively to resist oppression and promote women’s rights (Brodsky et al., 2012), research partnerships should be established with *local* grassroots organizations or social change agents. In contrast to the large swell of international organizations that draw on generic notions of women’s “empowerment,” or deploy one-size-fits-all programs aimed at women’s “participation,” self-mobilized groups of women employ a complex understanding of the interaction between local and global initiatives aimed at promoting gender justice for women (Grabe, Dutt, et al., 2014).

To begin a collaborative research partnership, it is ideal that you have some sort of established solidarity relationship with the organization or the women you are in contact with and have spent some time in the community. This is not the same thing as requiring that you are a member of that community or that you have personal relationships or friendships within that community, but rather that you have come together as partners in solidarity in some manner. According to Oxford dictionary, solidarity is “unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest.” All too often within community-based psychological research, “partnerships” have been characterized by instrumentalist involvements whereby communities, and the individuals within them, are positioned as extractable data sources, rather than true partners in collective social change efforts (Nelson, Prilleltensky, & MacGillivray, 2001). A partnership based on solidarity needs to be rooted in a shared interest or goal, which will not be a primarily academic one, but one that has relevance to the community in which you are working. A critical communicative methodology, whereby an egalitarian dialogue between the researcher and grassroots organizations and/or community leaders is one approach to conducting research, contributes to transforming social contexts and improving the lives of the groups studied (Gómez, Racionero, & Sordé, 2010).

Best Practice II: Do Not Arrive in a Community with Ready-Made Ideas or Theories (Lugones & Spelman, 1983)

One of the aims of transnational feminist scholarship is to break through the strangleholds imposed by mainstream academia and universalizing feminisms to elevate the voices of marginalized women in the production of liberatory knowledge. This is not possible if you, as the scholar, come with “ready-made” theories, especially if those theories represent those of a fairly small handful of privileged women. Decolonial feminist scholar Maria Lugones pointedly notes that, “if other women’s voices do not sing in harmony with the theory, they aren’t counted as

women’s voices—rather they are the voices of the woman as Hispana, Black, Jew, etc.” (1983, p. 575). Lugones suggests this happens when those who are producing theory (i.e., the “experts”) presume to know more about the phenomenon under study than those who are being theorized about. Do not fall prey to the falsehoods of “expert” or “knower.” Be a listener. If you are going to create knowledge together, you need to make space for the women you are working with to articulate, interpret, theorize, and reflect about what is under investigation (Lugones & Spelman, 1983). And, more specifically, because scholar-activist partnerships should be aimed at being genuinely transformative, the needs and interests of the marginalized group should be what guides the research question, rather than your academic agenda. In other words, the research project should not be based on the need to complete a dissertation, advance a program of research, fulfill a grant obligation, or get tenure. Transnational feminist collaborations that are rooted in shared criticisms and commitment to social change should be rooted in ideas, concerns, and understandings that are driven by a local community and not imported from outside.

Best Practice III: Explicitly Address the Role of Power in the Research Partnership

In much community-based work, many researchers rarely explicitly recognize that there is a power imbalance between professionals and the oppressed groups with whom they work (Nelson et al., 2001). As a mode of scholarship, transnational feminist research should entail movement and intellectual exchange between academic and activist spaces, privileging the knowledge that emerges from the grassroots in that it creates new possibilities for the production of emancipatory knowledge. As such, establish a commitment to a research process that is attentive to the boundaries between you and your research partner and the power those boundaries have to marginalize (Ackerly & True, 2008). Attempt to break down some of those boundaries by interrogating forms of inclusion and exclusion in the research process. Do this by working in collaboration with community partners and engaging in “political listening,” thereby challenging subject/researcher power imbalances that determine the “knower” and “expert” (Shayne, 2014). Do not confuse your attempts to interrogate boundaries with relinquishing the responsibility for the unique skill set you bring. You have methodological training that you will be charged with administering skillfully and this contribution cannot be abandoned. That training, however, does not position you alone to better understand the research question, why it matters, or the nuances of how the study should be administered in a particular cultural context. Because liberation is not given, but constructed by those needing it and facilitating it, the goal of the research is not obtainable without the participation of your research partners (Moane, 2009). A discussion about how each person in the partnership will use their role and what they will contribute should occur at the outset and be revisited throughout the

Table 1 A (non-exhaustive) list of sample questions that you might use to determine respective roles in your collaborative partnership

	Who will.
1.	... seek funding for the project?
2.	... identify the "sample"?
3.	... contact community leaders to inform them of the study?
4.	... select and hire members of the research team?
5.	... participate in training the research team?
6.	... arrange meetings in the communities before beginning data collection?
7.	... the contact person be if respondents want to contact the researcher?
8.	... be in control of data management, entry, and analysis?
9.	... be responsible for data dissemination within the partnering organization and communities?
10.	... use the findings for potential policy and program implications?
11.	... generate and publish reports, manuscripts, etc.?

process (see Table 1 for a list of sample questions that could assist in generating this discussion). This discussion can attempt to reduce some of the tension that is inherent in the power disparities, but that cannot be completely undone by feminist "best practices."

Before beginning a transnational project, you should also engage in reflexivity—or the process of examining yourself as a researcher as well as examining the research relationship. This starts with asking questions about the role of psychology or academia—at large—in perpetuating existing power imbalances (Marecek, 2012). For example, in what ways does the international work of psychologists inadvertently support and reinforce hierarchies that help contribute to the global order? You should also be self-reflexive by situating yourself in the context of global power dynamics (Ackerly & True, 2008). For example, how does how you are socially situated as a researcher impact the research relationship and process? What is your social location in relation to globalization and how will that impact how you believe the research project should be conducted? How will your social location impact your ability to engage authentically, conceptualize the issue under investigation, interpret the findings, etc.?

Given the power disparities that will exist between you and your research partner (s), you should also ask yourself why you want to do this work. What is your motivation? What are your self-interests? Are you prepared to abandon parts of your privilege to engage in "political listening?" In other words, although you cannot completely abandon all aspects of your privilege (e.g., the social capital that comes from being a member of institutions that benefit from globalization), can you relinquish some elements of your position to be a learner in these contexts? Are you prepared to let go of universal claims or understandings about women's experiences that you may bring into the project? You should also consider in advance, when you speak, write, and publish the work from this project, who will you be accountable to (Lugones & Spelman, 1983)? Do you have concerns that being accountable to your

advisor, department, and/or profession are at odds with the concerns you have in being accountable to those with whom you have partnered? You may not arrive at easy answers to these questions, but you should ask them and allow them to help you dialogue with your community partners.

Best Practice IV: Do Your Homework

Do a good amount of homework *before* you plan a project or settle on an area of inquiry that you make promises to investigate. This involves both academic homework to understand how the issues under investigation are being addressed in the literature as well as the work you need to do on the ground before you can begin working in a community. First, aside from the organization you are collaborating with, you need to consider the broader "community." For example, check to see whether the country you are working in requires you to have national clearance in order to conduct research in their communities as an outsider. In addition, work with your research partner to have a broader understanding of the local customs you will need to follow to conduct community-based research. For example, if you will be visiting communities to collect data, learn whether or not you should be identifying community leaders and introducing yourself before you start identifying the women who live in those communities. Do you need to present a clearance letter or documentation to those leaders so that the purpose of your visit conveys professionalism and respect? Also, inquire whether the community you are working in is part of a "gift-giving" culture in which case you need to coordinate small gifts with which to greet your participants (e.g., tea, sugar, rice).

If you have not received specific training on international field-based research, read everything you can about study design in the field and which designs are most appropriate for various research questions. A great place to start if you are doing research in remote rural areas is the World Health Organization manual, *Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists* (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). There are separate sections in this guide on quantitative and qualitative approaches, sampling strategies, and methods that address collaboration between researchers and activists. Determine the scale of the investigation before you arrive in the country so that you have a realistic sense of how much time it will take you to collect the amount of data you are planning on and then schedule ahead to request a leave from your department. Start early working on the required human subjects review for your university because you may run into snags if US-based requirements conflict with the reality of community-based organizations in other countries. For example, many review boards have strict criteria for the language and contact information required in consent forms. How will you manage this in a population where the requirements do not fit with the culture or population you are working with? Consider that the contact information for your campus institutional review board may mean nothing to a woman living in a remote area who does not have access to making an

international phone call in a language she cannot speak. Moreover, even with a translated consent form, consider that it may be offensive (and potentially endangering if she wants to keep her participation confidential) to insist she accept a paper copy that she cannot read simply because your review board requires that you do so. Think through these areas of potential conflict and have a plan before your project begins for how you will handle them.

Finally, read everything you can get your hands on about the community you are working within to try to gain an understanding of the broader issues and how they are impacted by global processes. Before you begin, arrange meetings with your partner organization to understand what the specific pressing issues are or areas of focus that the grassroots is mobilized around. Spend some time in the community and talk to people through small focus groups or pilot interviews. Make sure you are familiar with the political and cultural context and barriers to change that are confronting that community.

Best Practice V: Make A Priori Agreements About the Research Question and Products of the Work

As a transnational feminist researcher working from the perspective of liberation, you alone should not determine an agenda for working with marginalized women, but rather make sure you are all in agreement about the research question. Because the women you are working with will have a solid investment in what data is being gathered and why, as well as how it will be useful to them, the issues they are confronting and the processes that they are observing should guide the focus of the research question. Because you will have done your homework and be somewhat familiar with what the presenting issues are, you should be positioned to help frame these issues into a research question that you are competently positioned to investigate. This does not mean that you should refrain from adding additional areas of inquiry or building on the main question, but that the community should be guiding the focus and *everyone* should be in agreement about what data is being collected and why.

To help shore up the agreement and make sure everyone is on the same page with the aims and intent of the project, make a priori agreements with your collaborators about what the products of the research will be, how they will be used, and who they will most benefit. For example, what form of the data will be of most use to the organization? Reports, pie charts, graphs? How will you help them disseminate it and make use of it? Also be up front at the outset about what you hope to publish and why. Before beginning to disseminate these products, plan a “report back” meeting where you go over the preliminary findings, interpret the results together, and discuss plans for dissemination *before* you begin writing. When you begin new manuscripts, consider revisiting these conversations with your partner organization about what will be written before you get too underway. Offer to have all of the

work you produce read by your collaborators *prior* to submitting it for publication. Given the intellectual collaboration involved in the project, consider seriously including your partners as authors on manuscripts even if they are not co-writing. Finally, translate your published work into the language of origin so that your partners and respondents can read it.

Best Practice VI: Design Your Study in Partnership

Because the role you will be serving is that of a social scientist, you need to decide which methodology is best suited to answer the research questions you have identified with your collaborators. You should have your study designed and your survey or interviews prepared before you arrive in the field for the data collection. Regardless of whether you settle on a quantitative or qualitative design (or preferably, mixed methods), be absolutely certain you understand the phenomenon and processes that your partners are describing and that you have observed. Take great care to only assess culturally relevant constructs. If you are conducting a survey, you will need to be especially cautious because the numerous scales that researchers have compiled in psychology often originated in Western high-income countries and have little relevance elsewhere, despite that researchers have uncritically exported them to the majority world (e.g., self-esteem; Marecek, 2012). Working in collaboration will be an important element of making sure you do not make the same mistakes. You will need to operationalize all of the constructs under investigation and be able to communicate their meaning clearly. Make sure (do not assume) that everyone on your team understands the operationalization of the constructs under investigation *exactly*. This is critical, especially if translation is involved, or you will have a team helping you collect data. If you are designing a survey, detail is absolutely critical in the instruction sets, the numbering and presentation of items, and the response categories. The *WHO Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists* (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005) and *The Survey Handbook* (Fink, 2003) are excellent sources to walk you through the minutia of detail that you need to follow to be confident in your survey. If the suggestions in those texts appear to be *too* detail-focused for you, trust them anyway and follow them to a “t”.

If you are administering a survey in a different language from which the scales or questions you are using were written, translation is a large part of the process of questionnaire design. You should work with a translator who has experience, is familiar with the culture you are working in, and will translate the meaning behind the questions rather than provide a literal translation of the text. Engage in back-translation with your translator so that you know the meaning of the items was conveyed as you intended them. Once your team is assembled in the field (Best Practice VII), you will go through the entire survey question-x-question with the research assistants back-translating to ensure that the meaning of the questions is clear, culturally appropriate, and standardized among interviewers. This will be another opportunity to fine tune or reword items so that they are properly assessing

the phenomenon under investigation. You will have a third opportunity to do a translation check during the pilot phase of the study to make sure that the wording is meaningful to local respondents before you begin your actual data collection.

Before you enter the field for data collection, determine how many respondents will be necessary for the study design you have chosen. There is a helpful chapter in the *Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists* on sampling strategies. With the help of your collaborators, establish how you will identify respondents (random selection, convenience sampling, etc.) and how will you contact them. Does your collaborating organization have their contact information? If you are working in remote rural areas, respondents may not have phones, will certainly not have email, and also may often not have an address. In these cases, you will need to learn in which communities the respondents live, have at least a hand-drawn map of the community, and identify community leaders who will be able to assist you in locating the women who have been identified to participate. If you do not plan to visit women in their homes, think carefully through alternate meeting locations, how women will arrive there, who will compensate for travel costs, and how you will plan for no-shows in the total sample size you need.

Once you think you have everything ready, plan pilot work. Do not skip this step. It is imperative for a number of reasons that you will be thankful for later. First, it allows you to test your survey and/or interview in a more real-world setting with women who closely match your target sample. Even though the questions you have designed will have been examined in excruciating detail at this point by you, your research partners, and/or a research team and interpreter, the pilot will inevitably uncover nuances in language or confusion in instruction that needs to be tweaked before you begin. The pilot will also allow you and/or your team practice that will inevitably lead to a fine-tuning of your data collection. Identifying a small sample of pilot women will also give you a trial run for how you will locate women in your sample, give you or your driver an opportunity to get a lay of the land, and give everyone involved a sense of how things are going to run and how long interviews are going to take. Finally, attempting to locate women for the pilot may also tip you off to the potential no-show rate for the overall study so that you can plan it into your final selection strategy. For example, you may learn that 15% of the women you expected to be at home in the community you first targeted have migrated, traveled to the city for employment, are sick, or are otherwise unavailable.

Best Practice VII: Build and Hire a Local Team

Even the most well-intended liberation psychologist is, of course, not expert on the range of limit-situations women the world over confront in their daily lives. If you are not a member of the community you are working in, consider identifying and hiring an “interpreter” or local consultant who can help you bridge your academic role and understandings with the lens of the people with whom you are working. If you do not speak the local language, take classes. If you want to begin before you

are fluent, hire an interpreter who has experience, understands your project, is an “ally,” and is someone that the partnering organization is comfortable with. Do not assume you can do this alone and that your knowledge and information alone can design an informative study or project. Relying on local help requires you to revisit the reflexive nature of what you are doing because you are, of course, dependent on them for this knowledge and the completion of the project, whereas they are not dependent on you for knowledge, but may be for income.

Below I am going to describe procedures to follow for team building in the most extensive and remote conditions you might find yourself in (many of these suggestions are taken from the *Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*, Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). If you plan on conducting a smaller study, doing all of the interviews yourself, or are in an urban area—you can scale back on any of these recommendations. Building a solid research team involves finding the right people, preparing them well, and sustaining them throughout the research process.

Assemble a Research Team

The number and kind of fieldworkers needed on your research team will vary based on your study design, how much time you have for data collection, and the geographical region in which your respondents live. You should look for field workers everywhere; do not assume that people with little experience will not perform well if properly prepared. Hire people who have an interest in your study subject or population. You will need a team with interviewers, a supervisor, a field editor to check questionnaires for errors as they are completed, and a driver. The list of criteria for selecting interviews will vary depending on your topic of study and the culture you are working in, but in addition to experience and communication skills, consider demographic factors that may influence rapport in certain communities such as ethnicity, tribe, caste, age, language, etc.

Some countries have organizations that train and employ survey researchers that are often hired by demographers or large international organizations doing census research. With the help and agreement of your collaborating organization, you could make inquiries with these organizations to see if you could contract a team. A team contracted in this way will have already been trained in how to administer questionnaires, maintain standardization, record data, etc. and will have experience in field administration. You will still need to prioritize the factors listed above to select and hire individuals and will still need to prepare them well for your particular project.

Preparing Your Team Well

Building a research team should be the goal of your training, not just imparting the skills for administering a survey. Allocate at least 1 full week to training the team, establishing a collaborative relationship, and putting the final touches on the study design and questionnaire. As you explain the research project, be sure to introduce it and its goals as “our” project and actively solicit feedback and suggestions from team members and use their insights throughout the training week. Include team-building exercises into your training and budget time for rapport building and establishing everyone’s roles. This is imperative. If you have a team that is not comfortable providing feedback or some individuals do not feel like invaluable members of the team, you will not have a good survey. Without a good instrument to collect information, you cannot make a meaningful contribution to the issue under investigation.

A rough agenda for a 1-week training follows; it is crowded and you might prefer more time if you can arrange it. *Day 1:* Begin the training by providing an overview of the study objectives, samples that you are targeting, and the respective roles that you and your research partner have on the project. Start early folding the new team members into the project by discussing the unique responsibilities of the supervisor, field editor, and the interviewers as well as how everyone’s role is imperative to the overall success of the project. Review the methodology you have chosen for the study and provide copies of the survey or interview you are using. Familiarize the team with the consent form as a means to generate conversation regarding how the interviewers will greet the respondents, introduce themselves and the study, and begin building rapport. *Day 2:* Discuss, in detail, the procedures for administering surveys or conducting interviews referencing specific parts of your questionnaire as examples of how to explain instructions, read items, and record answers. Spend the bulk of this day reading through your questionnaire item-x-item so that each item has been read aloud, discussed, the meaning of the wording is agreed upon, translation is double-checked, and every interviewer understands the question and how to record the corresponding answer. This will take much longer than you anticipate. During this exercise, you start to establish the importance and contribution each person on the team will make to building a questionnaire that you can take into the field. *Day 3:* Spend all of the third-day practicing administration with interviewers role-playing as respondents. Even though you have already gone through all of the questions with careful detail, you will find wording choices or response categories that you need to fix. Discuss insight gathered from team members and implement corresponding changes to your questionnaire. *Day 4:* Conduct pilot interviews on this day (you will need to coordinate them in advance). This real-time practice gives everyone a chance to pilot how the consent and introduction will go, administer instructions sets and questions, and record data. It also gives the interviewers a trial run for practicing how they can create a relaxed environment for the respondent, collect information in an unbiased way, make the experience as empowering for the woman as possible, and go through a checklist of

what to do after the interview. Have a debriefing as a team after the pilot administration to discuss any questions and feedback from the team members or pilot respondents. *Day 5:* Conduct a round-robin of the questionnaire with the supervisor serving as the mock respondent and all of the interviewers taking turns reading questions. This gives both you and the supervisor an opportunity to observe each interviewer and how she builds rapport, asks questions, and records data. It also gives you an opportunity to give feedback on styles and how well the interviewer is able to administer the survey in a way that sounds like a conversation, yet guides the respondent through the interview process efficiently without pushing her unnaturally or appearing rude. Moreover, this exercise provides opportunity for group discussion about standardization and how to handle possible questions, interruptions, or concerns from respondent.

Sustain Your Team Throughout the Process

First, pay your team members well. Do not simply pay the “going rate” in a country without investigating whether it is a living wage. Learn what a healthy middle-class salary is and then pay it. Also allow for incentive payment for work that has been done exceptionally well. Consider giving bonuses part-way through and after the completion of the project.

You will be working together daily and sometimes living together in the field. Take your meals together. Celebrate research milestones with special dinners or evenings out. If a team member has a birthday while working on the project, celebrate it. Make sure your team members know when they perform well; do everything you can to show them how valuable they are. When mistakes are made, solve problems in a way that teaches new skills and builds team confidence. Discuss what you are learning as a team as data is rolling in. When you disseminate findings from this product, give proper credit to the team that helped you build the project.

Best Practice VIII: Use Your Funding Judiciously

Even if you are fortunate enough to receive large funding sums to cover the entire cost of the project, spend it judiciously. Many funding agencies will cover per diems and salary for you that are based on Western budgets and spending styles. My advice is that you travel, eat, and lodge with your research team. If you do otherwise and arrange private transportation and hotel lodging, your weekly per-diem may amount to an average local annual income. The privilege and mis-use of money involved in that kind of spending is not invisible to your research partners and team. Investigate local costs and discuss these costs with your research collaborator as you begin planning. Make sure to budget per diems for your hired team members who may have to travel from home to the research site. These costs may not have

been included in your grant, but it is often customary that you cover them so you may need to do some re-allocating in your budget.

Be conservative when you are budgeting, in general, rather than allocating your full per diem to what you had hoped it would be used for before you started the project. Things will inevitably occur that you did not plan on and you will need the flexibility in spending in order to finish the project (e.g., the vehicle you hired breaks down, one of your hired team members needs day care or can no longer participate in the study, fuel prices went up or you are covering more ground than you anticipated). If you have extra money, find a way to leave it in the country through salaries, wages, tips, etc.

Best Practice IX: Be Flexible

You can follow all of these “best practices” carefully and still things will inevitably fall through. As one of my graduate students said after a data collection in Tanzania, one of the main things she learned was that “Having a backup plan to your backup plan, and a backup plan in case that backup plan doesn’t work, and then another backup plan in case the first three backup plans to your original plan don’t work *isn’t* over planning. And really none of them will work, so be flexible.” It is important to keep in mind that plans will not be executed in the same fashion as they may be in your home country. There will be miscommunication, the people you are working with may keep time differently than you are accustomed, extreme weather may prohibit travel to the communities you planned to be in, you may get sick, the internet may crash before you save your questionnaire, the laptop you brought to the field may get damaged, the power may go out, copy machines may not work, etc. Do as well as you can to predict mishaps and plan ahead for them. Backup material on multiple laptops, flash drives, and web servers. In the end, do the absolute best you can to maintain the study design, yet be fully prepared to determine how much modification the design can handle and still be a viable pursuit.

Taken together, this list of “best practices” is intended to detail how transnational feminist researchers can engage research “beyond difference” by examining *processes* involved in the psychological phenomenon surrounding gender that are relevant in the context of systemic inequities linked to global power. The list of “best practices” is also intended to assist researchers in interrogating power in the research process itself and planning projects that stand with the people, employ agency, and involve locals as research partners. Among the promises of this approach is a shared struggle to develop a praxis that rejects dominant patterns of fixed relationships (knower, expert, etc.) and an extractive production of knowledge (Lykes & Moane, 2009). Incorporating principles from transnational feminism can aid psychology in being part of the political answer to social problems and assist in transforming societies.

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