



December 1997

Review of *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*. Heidi Gottfried (Ed.). Reviewed by Rebecca S. Carter, Louisiana State University.

Rebecca S. Carter
Louisiana State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Politics and Social Change Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Carter, Rebecca S. (1997) "Review of *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*. Heidi Gottfried (Ed.). Reviewed by Rebecca S. Carter, Louisiana State University.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 4 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol24/iss4/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Book Reviews

Heidi Gottfried (Ed.), *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996
\$ 39.95 hardcover, \$ 14.95 papercover.

In comparison to the active second wave of feminism during the 1970s, the backlash of the 1980s slowed feminist advancements. In the 1990s, feminism rebounded and made important progress. Currently, feminist thought is acknowledged and explored in many academic fields and women's studies departments have become commonplace in universities and colleges across the country. The various perspectives represented in feminism continue to require the clarification that there are many feminisms. Although diversity allows many voices to be represented, it also confounds issues requiring consensus. In some ways, feminism's diversity in emphasis and strategy has slowed attainment of its basic goal of action and social change. Exactly how to best accomplish transforming the structure of society to more ably meet and acknowledge the needs of women has been an ongoing debate among feminists.

Gottfried's book is directed at addressing the problems that feminist researchers face in the effort to do research about, for, and with women. She explains that feminism is viewed as an epistemology, a theory, and a methodology. The overall theme of the book is how to best link feminist theory with actual practice that will then lead to social change. The chapters of the edited volume are divided into three main sections; (1) *Doing Feminist Research: Dilemmas and Contradictions*, which presents specific issues in feminist debates concerning theory, research, and practice, (2) *The Outsider Within*, which focuses on issues concerning various women's communities presented through case studies, and (3) *Participatory and Liberatory Advocacy*, which discusses strategies of activist research. Within these three sections contributing authors discuss their own research, perspective on feminist theory, and opinion on the ability of social science research practices to promote social change.

Gottfried begins by supplying the reader with a description of important and recent work on the subject of feminist research. She argues that this book differs from others on the subject because it is concrete in content and presents diverse research methodologies including ethnographic study, in-depth interviewing, participatory and advocacy research practices, and coalition building. Presenting the use of various methodologies helps illuminate both the problems and possibilities that feminist research offers for creating social change. Although the entire book is targeted to discussing the difficulties of feminist research, Part One specifically addresses the ongoing debate between positivism and feminism. Included in this debate is discussion of the ways in which quantitative and qualitative methods are applicable for advancing the concerns of women. The feminist agenda is clearly one of political action and chapters in this section evaluate past progress and future consequences of feminist scholarship.

Next, the chapters in Part Two present the actual research projects of feminists engaged in work that attempts to overcome the subject-object barrier. Projects involving participant observation and in-depth interviews with undocumented immigrant Latina and Caribbean women employed as domestics demonstrates feminist researchers attempts to capture the experiences of these women directly. Another chapter uses case studies to present the issues surrounding research from a lesbian feminist perspective. The second section concludes with a chapter directly engaging the feminist perspective that the personal is political. From the standpoint of survivors of childhood sexual assault, the authors of this chapter use personal narrative linked with feminist theory to challenge oppressors, illustrating how theory and research can be effectively tied to action.

Part Three continues with a presentation of methodologies used by feminist researchers to advance social change and discusses the constraints that require some researchers to adopt conventional methods. One chapter offers a historical look at the ways in which two generations of feminists were trained, the first originating from the Hull-House and University of Chicago, and the second arising in the 1960s and 1970s during the second wave of feminism. This serves to frame the contrast and comparison between participatory research, which engages community's

involvement, and advocacy research that relies on data sets to help formulate policy. Another author argues that feminist coalition building is necessary and useful for feminist politics but requires recognizing differences and commonalities among those who favor social change.

Gottfried does a good job of presenting the core issues that not only represent feminist thought but also complicate its advancement. The critiques offered by various authors concerning the constraints imposed on feminist research, especially in the academic setting, are insightful and illustrate the current situation of feminist research. The title of the book appropriately reflects the fact that each of the pieces in the collection contribute in their own way to bridging feminist theory and social action. By having various authors contribute to the book, Gottfried is able to present a volume that addresses the multiple perspectives and approaches of feminist thought and practice. This endeavor effectively broadens the appeal of the book and is clearly a contribution to feminist scholarship. Gottfried's book allows the reader the opportunity to see the diversity in feminist thought and the offering of choice in applicable research methods.

Rebecca S. Carter

Louisiana State University

John Keane, *Reflections on Violence*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
\$17.95 papercover.

Much of the recent attention to violence has come from the feminist literature, with the main focus being the abuse experienced by women and children. The United Nations' conference on women in Nairobi and China helped bring this problem to the international forefront.

Keane disputes the claim that organizing societies into nation states was a civilizing process of establishing a "democratic zone of peace". It was believed that nation states would end the barbaric violence of primitive societies. Given the past century's quantity and brutality of violence, the author laments the paucity of reflection in political theory on its causes, effects, and implications.