REVIEW ESSAY

Leavy, P., & Harris, A. (2019). *Contemporary Feminist Research from Theory to Practice*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

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This book is an excellent resource for all teachers, educators, and students engaged in research in the social sciences, as well as any individual who is interested in learning about the applications of feminist critical theory to research design. As the title of the book implies, Leavy and Harris aim to bridge the gap between the often abstract nature of feminist theory with the practical reality of research in the social sciences. In order to achieve this, the book is helpfully divided into three sections; namely, part one, “Feminist Theoretical Frameworks”; part two, “Feminist Approaches to ‘Doing Research’”; and part three, “Being a Feminist Researcher: Getting the Work Out”.

Given that *feminism* itself is a highly contested term and operates according to various levels of inclusion, the authors immediately acknowledge in their preface that their perspectives, “those of two White, Western feminists, have shaped every aspect of this text” (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. viii). This awareness that Leavy and Harris begin with continues throughout the textbook as they are transparent regarding their positions of privilege as members of the academic community.

I believe this book is unique amongst other feminist textbooks because of its up-to-date and comprehensive analysis of feminist theory. Indeed, in the theory section, the authors explore feminism from a variety of historical moments and geographical locations, as well as through various lenses, such as popular culture, education, environmental studies, philosophy, psychology, gender/queer studies, and postcolonialism. Leavy and Harris often refer to the word “Intersectional” as coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), and this is in fact the framework they explore in the text by examining feminism from all of the aforementioned perspectives (as cited in Leavy & Harris, 2019, p.43). As the authors delve into the critiques of the various waves of feminism, they present the information as objectively as possible, without judging the perceived inadequacies of the previous waves.

Additionally, in the second section of the book, Leavy and Harris not only identify problems that arise in the methodology and process of conducting research, but also offer possible solutions to rectify them according to feminist principles. For example, they discuss the issue of unequal power distribution when collecting data from participants, and how this is inherently exploitative. They also point to the dangers of researchers representing the knowledge of their participants, and becoming authority figures, an experience that is not their own. Consequently, Leavy and Harris suggest ways that research can become more collaborative in the data-gathering and knowledge disseminating stages of a project. For instance, in part three of the textbook, they refer to researcher Michelle Fine (1994) and her use of collaborative writing as a way to distribute power between researchers and participants (as cited in Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 202).

Furthermore, Leavy and Harris underscore the importance of making research accessible within the public sphere, with the intention that individuals outside of academic circles can become part of the conversation. Most notably, they argue that research that is accessible should not be expressed in a language that is elitist or overly technical. Additionally, Leavy and Harris point to the fact that research should be accessible in terms of circulation, which is why they stress the importance of online platforms that allow people to encounter this information more readily (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p.212). Although I agree that these are helpful proposals for ensuring accessibility, they also come with their own assumptions. For example, even if a conscious effort is made to write in a way that is not overly scientific, I wonder how accessible this information can be to individuals who are perhaps illiterate or are not at a basic reading level required to understand the information presented. Likewise, although the internet is an extremely useful way to make research readily available, not all regions have access to the internet, which excludes individuals living in these areas from partaking in the knowledge sharing process.

Beyond the content of the book, I believe the pedagogical aspect also sets it apart from other feminist research books. For example, there are ample definitions sprinkled throughout the book, most notably in the theory section. All major words appear with their definitions in boxes adjacent to the text, to help the researcher navigate through what is at times inevitably dense theoretical jargon. This in itself is inclusive, as it invites individuals without a theoretical or perhaps even academic background to access the text. Additionally, end-of-chapter resources follow the conclusion of any given chapter. In these resources, one can find suggested discussion questions and activities which are practical tools for classroom and seminar use. These segments reflect on material from the chapter and prompt students to apply their new knowledge, which underscores the aim of the textbook to unite theory and practice.

Another key aspect of this textbook is its focus on the role that digital media plays in feminist theory and current research. In the suggested resources section at the end of every chapter, not only are books listed to inspire further reading, but there are also an array of digital resources that include TED talks, YouTube videos, university department websites, and other electronic platforms. The presence of this wide array of material is in keeping with the authors' commitment to provide multi-disciplinary approaches to feminism. ■