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Naples, Nancy. (2003) *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*. New York: Routledge. 272 pp. ISBN: 0 4159 4449 X

Nancy Naples' (University of Connecticut, Storrs) work not only explores, but also reshapes and extends the relationship between feminist theorizing and activism. Her most recent book, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (Routledge, 2003), illustrates the use of a range of feminist methodological approaches informed by a materialist feminist standpoint epistemology. Naples uses case studies from her own research over the last twenty years to illustrate the use-value of such a perspective, making an otherwise dense and theoretically nuanced set of ideas easier to access. The first section of the book provides an overview of both feminist critiques of social science research and efforts to render visible workings of power within the research process.

In Part II of the book, she develops her epistemology, entering into a contentious conversation over the meaning and efficacy of standpoint epistemology. While standpoint theory has been developed and advocated – in various formulations – as a way of privileging perspectives that are otherwise marginal, it has been critiqued with as much fervor. Selectively drawing on the work of feminist standpoint theorists Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, and Dorothy Smith throughout, Naples engages these criticisms in her development of what she calls a materialist feminist multidimensional approach to standpoint epistemology.

She takes up the postmodern perspective that dimensions of self upon which our standpoints might be seen to be founded are themselves unstable and, rather than rejecting standpoint, engages the critique as “dilemmas of the embodied standpoint”. For Naples, the fluidity of subject positions does

not preclude the possibility (and desirability) of theorizing the extent to which different knowledges – sometimes, though not necessarily oppositional – are located in different types of communities, broadly construed. This sort of standpoint approach does not reify categories, but rather has the power to undermine and transform them by highlighting their contingency and multi-dimensionality, here, within the context of ethnographic research. The book may not sell readers on standpoint epistemology, but it will certainly compel them to hone their critiques- or perhaps to adopt Naples' approach and call it something else.

Part III is a powerful iteration of the intimate relationship between the textual and the material, wherein Naples develops earlier insights to make a strong case for bringing a Foucauldian understanding of discourse to readings of the framing of public problems and to policy analysis. Such an approach helps us to theorize the mutually constitutive nature of race, class, gender, and sexuality and to understand ways in which they are at play even when they are not, ostensibly, what is at issue. She looks at both welfare policy and public debate over community control of schools to explain how this approach can help us avoid appropriation or cooptation of social movement rhetoric and illucidate relations of power.

Naples traces the movement for community control of public schools by black and Puerto Rican activists and white allies in the 1960s, through processes of depoliticization and appropriation, to its current status in claims of the religious right, among others. She analyzes newspaper articles and archival data as well as oral narratives to explore ways in which the contested framing of "community control" challenged, participated in, and reproduced "relations of ruling". The claiming of community control as a response to institutional racism, for example, had different implications from grounding the claim in a separatist arguments and from arguments about efficiency or liberal reform. Certain types of arguments, though with similar

goals in mind, lent themselves differentially to other contexts with very different, even explicitly conflicting, political agendas. Through this and other examples Naples illustrates the nature and importance of discourse in shaping the meanings and deployment of a given rhetoric. This straightforward “intro to the importance of discourse analysis” cautions the reader to think critically about the grounds on which rights claims and other political arguments are made.

Drawing on the arguments and strategies extrapolated in the first two sections, Part IV explores the possibilities and challenges of activist and participatory research through more explicit discussions of narrativity in different formulations and contexts. She begins by discussing value of an “everyday life” approach to policy analysis, that is, an approach that foregrounds the implications of policy for women’s everyday lives. She discusses her conversations with women AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) recipients earning four-year degrees through a training program in Iowa in order to highlight disjunctures between women’s lives as they narrate them and cultural constructions of the welfare recipient. Analysis from this embodied standpoint indicates the simultaneous and interwoven material and discursive constraints on women’s lives imposed by welfare policies.

She concludes this section with a discussion of the need for a reconceptualization of survivor discourse and a practical analysis of various methodological approaches to this political project. Through her attention to the differing needs, goals, and strategies of survivors, Naples emphasizes the limitations of the (already well established) utility of standpoint epistemology here.

Feminism and Method is a valuable contribution to ongoing discussions regarding how to research better; this is an excellent text for use in graduate

methods classes and for anyone looking for an introduction to feminist epistemology or interested in feminist or activist methodologies. It might also be used in its entirety or in part in undergraduate courses in feminist theories, social welfare, or social science methods. Naples' approach to concerns about power, subjectivity, reflective practice, and social change is critical, practical, and accessible. While it provides a thorough overview of feminist epistemological concerns, the greatest strength of the book is its practice-oriented approach. The range of issues that Naples draws upon from her own research suggests the broad applicability and adaptability of the strategies she develops. Finally, aside from some distracting typos, the text is very readable. Students should find the presentation accessible and engaging.