

GENDER MATTERS

Formulating Research Questions Teaching Guide

Video Summary

This video discusses how Gender Based Analysis can help psychologists analyse how gender norms and assumptions influence the research questions posed in a field and help them formulate **more gender sensitive research questions**.

Discussion Questions

- How has *who* a psychologist is (or who psychologists are!), in terms of their gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, ability, etc., influenced the research questions that they ask? Why?
 - A good resource here is work by feminist scholars on *standpoint epistemology*: see for example, the work of Sandra Harding and Patricia Hill Collins (in reference list below)
 - Specific examples from psychology include:
 - the relative omission of questions about women's experience (except as pathological) until the 1970s – see Crawford & Marecek (1989)
 - the omission of questions about the psychology of Black women – see Mays (1988)
 - the relative omission of questions about class until fairly recently – see Reid (1993)
 - the tendency of white psychologists to problematize/pathologize people of color – see Guthrie (1998) for a review, including responses by psychologists of color.
- Can you think of an example of a research question that is framed in a way that draws on and reinforces gender stereotypes? How about stereotypes about race? How might you reformulate these questions to avoid uncritically reinforcing gender or racial stereotypes?
 - There are many examples from the vast literature on sex/gender differences and race differences that could be drawn on here. For critical reviews, see Hare-Mustin & Marecek (1994) and Cole & Stewart (2001).

Activities

- Show students excerpts from the PFV [video of psychologist Aaronette White](#) in which she talks about her research on Black feminisms using interview and narrative methods, and then the [video excerpt](#) in which she talks about her work on feminist African American men and fatherhood. Lead a class discussion in which you explore how White used interviews to help answer questions about areas in which there was not a lot of previous research:
 - How might this approach avoid reinforcing preconceived stereotypes? How might a researcher's previous assumptions about gender and race nonetheless enter the interview process? How might one guard against this?
 - Can you think of a research question about a particular group or topic that would be best explored using a more open-ended method, like interviewing? How would

- you frame your questions? How might your own standpoint influence the questions you think to ask?
- As a class or small group, select a topic on which you would like to conduct a research study. Drawing on the considerations raised in the video, formulate a gender sensitive research question for your topic. Among the issues to consider during this process:
 - How might you phrase your interest in the topic as a testable research question?
 - Are there uncritical assumptions about sex or gender influencing the choice of research question and/or how it is phrased?
 - How might sex and gender norms limit or constrain the research questions posed in the field you are interested in researching? What is the state of knowledge about sex/gender in that field?
 - Have gender norms and assumptions led to a research question that excludes or ignores potentially relevant groups of research participants? How might you redress this?

Assignments

- Gender stereotypes can influence how researchers frame questions so that the research simply ends up measuring and reinforcing the stereotypes rather than helping us understand them or informing us about how to challenge them. In this video we discuss an article by Glick et al. (2005) in which the researchers assessed how participants' perceptions of women in low status and high status jobs were influenced by their attire (i.e., whether it was conservative or "sexy"). Have students read the article and write a critical reflection paper in which they consider the following questions:
 - Why did Glick et al. choose to focus only on perceptions of women in this study? How might you design a more gender-inclusive study? What would this accomplish?
 - What stereotypes about gender are discussed in the article? What stereotypes do the results of the article support/reinforce?
 - Based on their findings, the researchers suggest that women who aspire to high status occupations should not dress in sexy attire if they want to attain the respect of their coworkers. What alternative implications or interpretations might be drawn from this study to help disrupt harmful stereotypes and our attributions about people who dress in certain ways? How might you frame a research question to help us understand *why* people attribute negative qualities to people who dress in certain ways?
- Have students read the article "Bust size and hitchhiking: A field study" (Gueguen, 2007). Ask them to pair up outside of class and make a short video in which they discuss their reactions to the article and answer the following questions:
 - What was the research question? What gender stereotypes does the research question draw on and ultimately reinforce? What are the real-world and/or theoretical implications of the findings? How might you reframe the research question to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and the sexual objectification of women?
 - Have them post their videos to a shared space such as google drive or Dropbox, so they can compare their analyses of the article.

Additional Readings

- Cole, E. & Stewart, A. (2001). Invidious comparisons: Imagining a psychology of race and gender beyond differences. *Political Psychology*, 22, 293-308.
- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Crawford, M. & Marecek, J. (1989). Psychology reconstructs the female, 1968-1988. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13, 147-165.
- Glick, P. & Larsen, S., Johnson, C., Branstiter, H. (2005). Evaluations of sexy women in low- and high- status jobs. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29, 389-395.
- Guthrie, R. V. (1998). *Even the rat was white: A historical view of psychology, second edition*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Guégen, N. (2007). Bust size and hitchhiking: A field study. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 105, 1294-1298.
- Harding, S. (Ed.)(2004). *The feminist standpoint theory reader*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Hare-Mustin, R. T. & Marecek, J. (1994). Asking the right questions: Feminist psychology and sex differences. *Feminism & Psychology*, 4, 531-537.
- Mays, V. (1988). Even the rat was white and male: Teaching the psychology of Black women. In P. Bronstein & K. Quina (Eds.) *Teaching a psychology of people: Resources for gender and sociocultural awareness* (pp. 142-146). Washington DC: APA Books.
- Reid, P.T. (1993). Poor women in psychological research: Shut up and shut out. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 17, 133-150.
- Wallston, B. S. (1981). What are the questions in the psychology of women? A feminist approach to research. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 5, 597-617.
- White, A. M. (2006). African American feminist fathers' narratives of parenting. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 32(1), 43-71.