

Critical Evaluation of Feminists Arguments against the Present System of Science



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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to build a bridge among feminist and science in current system. This particular article concentrates on criticising the aspects of science that reproduce the masculine ideology. It aims to draw the attention on feminist philosophies of science that provide potent perspectives on the subject.

Introduction

Oakley [1] states that both “science” and “gender” are concepts that many current stances within feminism argue have no appropriate or useful place in feminist discourse. Modern science was born of the ancient tradition of rational enquiry that relied upon reason, experience, theory and argument in an attempt to acquire knowledge of the world, cosmos and God. Hume and Kant lead an influential change of traditional ideas in the 18th century splitting philosophy and science. They proposed that whatever lies beyond experience is not science. Manicas Grimshaw has identified issues finding one’s own place within philosophy as the heart of the problem for women sensitive to matters of modern day feminism, gender and the situation of women concerning biological condition in term of research. According to the history of philosophy has been filled with ‘Great Men of Ideas’ more than any other academic discipline, hence a lack of female presence.

Le Doeuff mentions that even for those women with renown in this discipline, they are still somewhat restricted, playing the role of disciple to a “master” as depicted in the book DECARTE. Historically, scientific thought has been regarded as male dominated Rouch [2]. Harding which has resulted in these apparent restrictions on women in the field of philosophy. This concept is appropriately summed up by Le Doeuff: “Being a woman and a philosopher will always pose problems and something that will have to be agreed upon”, This observation

does not necessarily mean that women have been excluded but rather that there has been an relentless opposition to their presence in the field of not only philosophy but science as a whole. Bandeira [3].

Additionally, criticism levelled against the process of scientific knowledge has not only come from feminists but also other groups such as environmentalists, antimilitarists, anti-colonialists and members of the counter culture and capitalism who have all fiercely condemned because of the exclusion of women from modern science and the use and abuse of the field. Bandeira [3], Harding [4]. Mary Wollstonecraft attempted to validate arguments, within female physiology and psychology on the exclusion of women from the field of science. Wollstonecraft encouraged women to become “more masculine and respectable” in a bid to create equality between the sexes. Schiebinger.

Aside from the many issues with the scientific method itself, some feminists maintain a special focus on the notion of objectivity which Mac Kinnon dismisses as “ostensibly [the] non-involved stance”. Objectivity in this context, is the male standpoint implying the scientific method is the result of our traditional (sexist, hence male biased) political inclinations. Klein. In analytical philosophy subjects were traditionally required to be “detached, objective onlookers on the world” Assiter [5]. According to Karl Popper, Lakatos and Musgrave this legitimized the cognitive authority of science as such objectivism

became embedded in the definition of science. Objectivity here involves opposition by the knower to disengage themselves from their embodiment and their beliefs they have Gellner.

Harding [4] directly questions the idea of “objectivity”, commenting on four problems with defining objectivity namely that scientific principles must be; neutral, value free, detached and has no viewpoint before applying an objective question. Feminists are often accused of being incapable of this procedure. Another definition of objectivity is frequently attributed to knowledge claims in a suggestive manner that objectivity should be considered verification for the claim in question. It is however unclear how this objectivity could serve as evidence. The final definition involves the methods of procedures implemented; the more objective it is as long as it is associated with fairness or the likelihood of correcting error. With particular communities which consciously form themselves, objectivity is also associated in the pursuit of the knowledge they seek. According to Harding [4] this points to the fact that objectivity is often used by people to serve their own varying purposes.

Hart stock argued against this ‘objectivist’ assumptions involving that how values claims the knowledge of something is the case with regards to a person’s embodiment Assiter [5]. With the clear example by Dr Edward Clarke whose books ‘Fair chance for the girls’ and ‘Sex in education’ supports the previously mentioned arguments against the use and abuse of some research. These examples claimed that women who attended college were at health risks which ruin their capacity to give birth. And this was only because they were alarmed by the female trying to get admission to colleges. Though these books were subjective and incomplete regarding the issues of females who had suffered a physical or mental health problem after attending university for a year or two, it was widely cited as scientific. However Jacobi explained no significant negative effect on health issues related to college attending young women.

Some reasons such as how men are using science to oppress women Klein and how women have been inhibited from getting into the science profession Tuana [6] explained the criticisms levelled against science. Though women are gaining access to the scientific field profession there is still discrimination of female scientists and stereotypy within. Mc Clintock mentioned how science falls short in understanding and valuing the forms of insight females bring to the field simply because of its male status. Probably it is because from the beginning the differentiated learning process and code of behaviours of socialization occurs for both male and female. According to Bandeira [3], the process of socialization will direct females to shift from science because of feminine difficulties of making choices between a professional career, having a family and maternity issues.

Longino [7], maintains her stance on the world as existing and can be known using traditional method of enquiry in the sciences however, the methodological critique or greater consideration to scientific rigour holds answers in analysing

difficult research; because to her, the scientific method of enquiry is not an absolute concept but is dependent on the community that agreed and carved it. By the same token, some feminist scientists have argued about the need for existence of all sexual subjects specifically women/women and men/men and also consider their ethnicity, social positioning and race Jagger [8]. Consequently, the emergence of females into the research field of science has resulted in the birth of feminism Keller, Tuana [6] also argued that it is not a demand for another science or feminist science but there is a need to take a closer look at the language of science.

Despite the numerous allegations being made by feminist to avoid the male science, it fails to provide credible alternative to the “female” method of doing science. Some of these assertions made by feminist deny the woman as capable for abstract thinking even though there are clear indications of a growing number of distinguished females in the mathematics, astronomers, physicists and computer scientist fields. Feminists can play a vital role in science by encouraging more women to join and participate in the scientific community. Equally, claims about science being gendered are reinforcing but does nothing to proving what is already known. A probable outcome of the feminist critique of science is that profitable time will be wasted on ideologies without gain [9-12].

Conclusion

Notwithstanding these limitations of the feminists, it’s worth remains in a number of situations in the field of Science because as cited in Oakley [1] , “Feminist debates about methodology have privileged qualitative methods, which have consequently acquired a hegemonic correctness for feminist social science researchers” Reinharz 1992, Stanley Wise 1993. In addition gender and science can be mended on various fields including its engagement in female health issues Oakley [1]. Moreover, their criticisms have helped to investigate the idea of discovery which has made it achievable to perceive how social values, including gender ideology in various forms, could be introduced into science Longino [9]. It can therefore be concluded that convergence between feminists and the present system of science can form a beneficial relationship for both.

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