

The application of Feminist Standpoint Theory in social research

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Recibido: Octubre 2019 / Revisado: Enero 2020 / Aceptado: Marzo 2020

Abstract. This article assumes *a priori* that feminist epistemology must necessarily imply the definition and application of a methodology that is capable of analysing knowledge from a situated perspective, making visible the restrictions of gender, class, ethnicity, and in summary, of the social location. Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) set out by authors such as Sandra Harding, calls on those who have not had access to power and areas of decision-making to participate in the construction of knowledge and in the social construction of reality. In this article, we claim for a need of a sociological investigation based on FST and provide some examples and evidence of the knowledge generated by women's voices building on the analysis of 10 doctoral theses. The methodology used is based on the analysis of the topics chosen by the thesis, the formulation of its objectives and the bibliography used. Likewise, we have developed a so-called "Harding test" grounded on her postulates, which has allowed us to assess the doctoral theses analysed and to reflect about the empirical contributions of the research, the feminist commitment and what the subject / object relationship should be in feminist epistemology.

Keywords: Feminist Standpoint Theory; Intersectionality; Feminist analysis.

[es] La aplicación de la Feminist Standpoint Theory en la investigación social

Resumen. Este artículo asume el *a priori* de que la epistemología feminista debe necesariamente implicar la definición y aplicación de una metodología que sea capaz de analizar el conocimiento de manera situada, dando visibilidad a las restricciones de género, clase, etnia, en resumen, de la posición social. La Teoría del punto de vista feminista (FST) propuesta por autoras como Sandra Harding, hace un llamamiento a aquellas personas que no han tenido acceso al poder y a las áreas de toma de decisiones para que participen en el conocimiento y la construcción de la realidad social. En este artículo, justificaremos la necesidad de una investigación sociológica fundamentada en la FST y proporcionaremos algunos ejemplos y evidencias del conocimiento generado por las voces de las mujeres a partir del análisis de 10 tesis doctorales. La metodología utilizada se ha fundamentado en el análisis de los temas escogidos por las tesis, la formulación de sus objetivos y la bibliografía utilizada. Asimismo, hemos construido lo que hemos denominado como "*test Harding*" a partir de los postulados de esta autora, que nos ha permitido valorar las tesis analizadas y reflexionar sobre las aportaciones empíricas de la investigación realizada, el compromiso feminista de la investigación y cuál debe ser la relación sujeto/objeto en la epistemología feminista.

Palabras clave: Feminist Standpoint Theory; Interseccionalidad; análisis feministas.

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Cómo citar: Cabrera, M. S.; López Belloso, M. y Royo Prieto, R. (2020). The application of Feminist Standpoint Theory in social research, en *Revista de Investigaciones Feministas* 11(2), 307-318.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is none other than to check that the application of feminist epistemologies and methodologies allows for the generation of situated scientific knowledge constructed from the point of view of

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different, often invisible women who go through life and social processes which acquire new meaning thanks to their participation and interpretation.

The article is structured in five sections, but it can be divided into two differentiated parts: a theoretical framework and a practical application. The first two sections present an important part of the feminist theoretical legacy: intersectionality and the Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) considered as conceptual instruments or tools, as analytical categories to allow us to get closer to the reality from another perspective and encourage questioning, conscious, critical and emancipating knowledge

The second part of the article analyses the contributions which ten doctoral theses have made to the situated knowledge and the characteristics of that doctoral research. The definition of our study object has also led us to make led us to also making an *ad intra* analysis of the doctoral research, assessing its scope as regards generation of feminist scientific knowledge and the characteristics of that doctoral research. To carry out this study we have used the analysis of content from induced categories. We have focused on the study of the subject-object relationship through the motivations and the objectives; the justification of the methodologies used and; the type of conclusions and proposals made. To that end, we will examine motivations and objectives and the rationale of their positioning in an attempt to determine if their positioning in relation to the object is reached through a critical reflection or as a result of their personal/social positioning.

2. Intersectionality: dispossessed groups and androcentric knowledge

Knowledge in Social Sciences has traditionally been organized from the modern idea “which places a particular subject (male, western/white, heterosexual, adult and bourgeois) as reference of the social and public life in the West, with regard to which everything else (“the other”) is subalternized” (Cubillos, 2015, 120). This reductionist perspective has distorted the Social Sciences in their content, their selection methods and in their analysis and interpretation of the data (Argibay, Celorio & Celorio, 1998; Nash, 1994).

In this sense, we can refer to the sexist stereotypes held by the evolutionary ethnologists –who considered males to be aggressive and competitive, and females as submissive and dependent–, projecting their own Victorian conceptions (Maquieira, 2001, 142). In addition, the assumption of the concept “work” as equivalent to “employment” in the sociological conceptual apparatus gave priority to male experience and contributed to making the reproductive work invisible (Borderías & Carrasco, 1994, 18); while at the same time as it produced a frequent and a critical acceptance of the sexual division of labour, which had one of its best defenders in Parsonian functionalism (Alberdi, 1996, 233-249) just to mention some examples.

Faced with this androcentric vision in scientific work, the influence of feminist theory caused a sharp shock in Social Sciences, not only because it meant considering traditionally ignored dimensions (Swingewood, 2000, 241) but also, and above all, because it questioned the male bias implicit in the theoretical and methodological structures from which they were constructed (Molina, 2000, 255). The consequences of trying to answer the question “What about the women?” revealed in the intellectual community “that what had been considered for a long time as the universe of experience was really a particular vision of male actors and experiences” (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Branteley, 1993, 355).

However, although the various feminist perspectives question the male hegemony, not all of them have dealt with the deeply different intra-gender situations and experiences of women for example according to their race and their social class (Cubillos, 2015, 121). This has led to non-hegemonic feminism voices which “question the ethnocentric feminist visions which had not considered the link between gender and race or between cultural identities and gender identities, nor the close connection between racism, imperialism and the patriarchal practices and ideologies” (Hernández & Suárez, 2008, 11).

Since the 1970s, the criticism from the Black and Chicano feminists in the United States (Combahee River, 1981; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1981; Andalzúa, 1987; Moraga & Andalzúa, 1981; Collins, 1990) questions the monolithic use of the female category and show that “even if white feminists always questioned the use of the male norm as standard, at the same time they incurred in similar generalizations, building the female norm based on the experience of white, heterosexual, middle class women from Christian backgrounds” (La Barbera, 2016, 108).

The growing awareness of the limitations of the use of gender as the only analytical category has generated a broad consensus on the need to adopt an intersectional perspective in the feminist analysis (Nash, 2010 in Gandarias, 2017, 74). According to Carbado *et. al.* (2013), “rooted in Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool” (303). This concept was coined by the black feminist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) to show that the intersection of racism and sexism in the life of black women affects their lives in ways which cannot be completely understood if dimensions of race and gender are considered separately (2012, 89), which she analyses in areas such as labour discrimination

or violence against women. Besides, for Crenshaw (2012,98), the opposing agendas excluding feminism and anti-racism generate a particularly difficult dilemma to resolve for black women⁴:

Crenshaw's proposal emphasizes that there are situations of discrimination and inequality which cannot be adequately covered or addressed from a single-focal vision and implies the start of the use of intersectionality as a conceptual tool "which will claim a greater analytical complexity when it comes to the configuration of multiple forms of discrimination" (Gandarias, 2017, 76). In this sense, Collins & Bilge (2016, 2) point out that "When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other."

Intersectionality favours approaches which consider how the systems of domination –such as patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, colonialism and ageism– "have reciprocal relationships" (Platero, 2012, 26), "interact and impact" the identity of people in ways that exceed the mere addition of systems of domination (Severs, Celis & Erzeel, 2017, 42). In short, this conceptual tool allows us to recognize and understand that "our experiences are intersectional" (Platero, 2012, 19).

Thanks to intersectionality, we can identify invisible experiences of subordination or privilege, as well as resistance and oppression, which are incarnated and contextualized in a certain spatial and temporal area. This is a perspective "which must lead us to highlight the power relationships", the construction and naturalization of the social norms and the unwanted consequences of activism or public policies (Platero, 2012, 27-29). Despite its difficulties, challenges and criticism⁵ (Sales Gelabert, 2017, 229; Ahmed, 2012), intersectionality constitutes a fundamental contribution (La Barbera, 2015, 105) to destabilize the modern subject –not only male, but also belonging to the dominant ethnic, class, culture and epistemological logic– and to rethink how we interpret social reality and knowledge processes (La Barbera, 2015, 121).

In short, intersectionality constitutes a conceptual tool that questions not only androcentrism, but also the invisibility of all those subordinate groups. It allows us to recognize diverse realities and experiences of women, whose socially and historically placed discourses nurture Feminist Standpoint Theory.

3. Contributions to sociological research from the Feminist Standpoint Theory

The need for sociological research from alternative standpoints to the hegemony of androcentric knowledge was revealed by Dorothy Smith (1979, 1987a, 1987b) who developed a sociological method from the standpoint of women. This author highlighted the contrast between the categories of sociology and the daily life of women, noting that the reality of women is absent from sociology and is invisible to the sociologist. This translates into what the author calls "bifurcated consciousness": the abstract world which she analyses as a sociologist and her reality lived as a woman (Smith, 1987, 90). In view of this situation, Smith (1979) sought to develop a method which included a "Copernican shift" in sociology (183). This milestone was produced with the publication in 1983 of *Feminist Standpoint Theory* (FST) by Nancy Hartsock (1983). On the basis of Marxist epistemology Hartsock (1981) sought to define the nature of truth through a method which legitimizes the feminist claims connecting daily life with the social institutions which condition it. For Susan Heckman (1997) this contribution by Hartsock originally sought to provide a method to legitimize feminist claims but represented a paradigmatic shift in the approximation to the knowledge which transformed not only feminist theory, but epistemology itself. Authors like Mary Hawkesworth (1999) further analysed the nature of the proposal from Hartsock and Harding, affirming that it is a very useful analytical tool as it illuminates a knowledge area.

In order to understand the nature of the contribution of FST, the explanation by Sandra Harding (1987) on method, methodology and epistemology is indispensable, as they are usually confused, not only in feminist discourses, by the simultaneous use of the term "method" for all 3 of these aspects of research (9). Harding (1987, 10) explains that while research method is the best tool to collect information, methodology involves theoretical application to the research process, and finally epistemology is a knowledge theory which reflects on who can be a subject of knowledge. But as Norma Blazquez (2017) recalls, it also determines what kind of knowledge, and "through what evidence beliefs are legitimized as thought" (14). Although it is not considered a uniform theoretical overview (Harding, 2008, 7; Flax, 1990, 188), there is consensus in distinguishing three feminist epistemologies, following the classification by Sandra Harding (1986): empiricism, post-modern theory and the standpoint theory (Harding, 1987, 20; Del Moral Espin, 2012, 59; Hekman, 1997, 353).

Feminist Standpoint Theory is based on the assumption that the world is traditionally represented from the perspective of a determined social location which prevents the knowledge from being generated free of constraints and prejudice. As opposed to this condition of knowledge, the FST theorists advocate the need for a critical awareness of this relationship between the generation of knowledge and power and to empirically and

⁴ In this sense, a more intersectional perspective in the treatment of inequalities could promote the development of more inclusive and better-quality policies (Lombardo & Verloo, 2010, 12)

⁵ Some of these criticisms point to the fetishisation of intersectionality (Ahmed, 2012), the lack of definition of the discourse or the "risk of political deactivation" posed by the challenge of conceiving "forms of political articulation of diversity" (Sales Gelabert, 2017, 254).

theoretically start with “the life of women” for the performance of feminist research (Del Moral Espín, 2012, 64). Initially FST was strongly influenced by the Marxist trajectory of Hartsock (Hawkesworth, 1999, 135; Cockburn, 2015) and by the feminist theory of object dependencies from authors such as (Chodorow Blazquez, 2017, 22; Guil Bozal, 2016, 275). This epistemology, as summarised by Kristen Intemann (2010, 783), FST, has two main bases of argument: situated knowledge and epistemological privilege. The standpoint theorists do not question the veracity of scientific findings, but they claim that these are biased due to androcentricism (Arrieta de Guzmán, 2018, 56). For this reason, they state that “[the] experiences of women, informed by feminist theory, provide a potential basis for more complete and less distorted knowledge than that which comes from male experiences” (Harding, 1989, 184), and therefore allowing what Harding calls “strong objectivity”. In order to ensure this “strong objectivity”, it is necessary that the person who generates the knowledge (the subject) is in the same causal plane as the objects (Harding, 1993, 69). As Yin Paradies (2018) points out, FST confronts the “situated truth” against the “objectivity” of science, trying to decentre the “truth” (120). However, as stated by Allison Willie (2003, 31), the location of knowledge is not acquired *per se*, due to social belonging, but it is necessary to acquire it through critical reflection. This critical consciousness which the standpoint must characterise is acquired in Dorothy Smith’s opinion (1997) by the communities, not from individuality, basing her arguments on the experience of working women movements in the 1970s.

The epistemic privilege was developed especially by Donna Haraway (1995) who advocates that the objectivity of the oppressed is privileged over those dominant interpretations of society. She argues that, opposed to the inability of the privileged groups to understand the nature of the relationships, oppressed groups offer an emancipatory standpoint.

The formulation of the FST has been profusely criticized and reviewed, enriched over time from the other two feminist epistemologies and from the reformulations made by their precursors, especially by Sandra Harding in light of them. The main review of FST was made by Susan Heckman (1997) synthesizing the criticism in three fundamental aspects: the Marxist inspiration of FST; the promotion of gender difference; and its opposition to postmodernism and structuralism. The theorisation of the difference made by Patricia Hills Collins (1990) is particularly relevant to complement FST with intersectionality and theoretical formulation developed by authors like Crenshaw (1989) or Choo & Feree (2010).

Despite the differences between these epistemologies, due to the comments on their formulation, FST has approached postmodernism by moving towards pluralism, recognizing the multiplicity of situated knowledges (Blazquez, 2017, 28). Certain convergence has also been identified with empiricism, recognizing that experience has a prominent role, as the social location with epistemic significance can vary over time (Intemann, 2010, 785). Also perceived as a connection with empiricism is the assertion of the critical consciousness of the nature of social location, which is through the diverse communities and not individuality (781).

In addition, for Heckman (1997, 359) the FST presents a methodological problem, due to the fact that the multiplication of standpoints makes it impossible to perform a coherent analysis of them and does not resolve how to discriminate among them. However, Heckman (1997, 351) also recognizes the contribution of FST and states, for example, that Hartsock correctly defines the problem of androcentric knowledge but errs in identifying the solution. In her opinion, both Hartsock and Harding misinterpret the post-modernist definition of knowledge, at least in the Foucaultian formulation and points out that Harding’s rethinking has two important limitations (355). The first refers to epistemic privilege, as Harding does not argue why the women’s standpoint, especially those belonging to the most disadvantaged groups, is a privilege, nor does she recognize that such “reality of the life of women” is a socially constructed discursive formation. Secondly, when Harding defends objectivity and presupposes a shared discourse which establishes standards for its validation. By doing so, she reproduces a defense of a male-like meta-narrative, which Heckman considers a reproduction of the male arguments to rebut the feminist claims that as she points out, “fails both practically and theoretically” (1997, 355).

Kirsten Intemann (2010, 783) agrees with Heckman in considering that the social location of knowledge influences our experiences, strengthening gender stereotypes and universalizing women’s standpoints. She also questions the epistemic privilege of the oppressed groups for a less distorted version of the world with two main arguments. On the one hand, she states that the oppressed groups may have a less true vision because they internalise their own oppression and can lack access to educational resources to access knowledge (784). On the other hand, Intemann finds it hard to understand how the oppressed groups can have a privileged vision in all epistemological contexts (784). Despite these criticisms, Intemann echoes the efforts of FST advocates to clarify and deepen their thesis as a result of the comments received. Bob Ellis and Bob Ellis and Rodney Fopp (n.d.) also synthesize the criticisms of FST, especially Harding’s work, in four major issues they identify as representative of all the detractions to Harding’s position: the lack of clarity of the concept of “marginalized” and the lack of focus on means to identify them; the essentialist and relativist position of Harding; her inability to avoid the traps of empiricism and positivism; and her weak arguments on objectivity and neutrality.

Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval Davis (2002) take a step further in the development of FST and state that sufficient attention has not been given to some mental processes associated with knowledge, such as imagination, which play a crucial role in the creativity process and in the interrelation between knowledge and the political and social sphere.

Due to the above, we can conclude that the fundamental characteristics of the best feminist studies identified by Harding (1987) are in the research made from the FST. Research from the FST provides new empirical resources, based on women's experiences. Finally, the research performed from FST provides a new research objective, that of placing the person who is performing the research in the same plane as the subject of study.

4. Examples of the knowledge generated from women's voices

This section is based on ten doctoral theses which have been epistemologically and methodologically based on women's testimonies and which have built knowledge from the experiences many times forgotten or invisible to normative knowledge.

The selection criteria for the thesis sample was the following: their authorship or their supervision corresponded to at least one of the authors of this article. This selection criterion is justified due to the importance acquired by the subject who researches the researched reality. The participation of any of the authors either in the supervision or in the doctoral thesis themselves provides in depth information not only about the research content but about their motivations and positionings as well⁶.

This is an *ad intra* analysis of the doctoral research promoted, evaluating its scope as regards the generation of feminist scientific knowledge. The purpose of this article is none other than to check that the application of feminist epistemologies and methodologies allows for the generation of knowledge from the lives of different women in view of different life and social processes.

The methodology used to carry out the analysis of the evidence was the qualitative technique of content analysis. This is not a documentary analysis *per se*, as it does not simplify the information to improve its access and dissemination –which is the purpose attributed to documentary analysis (Gil, 1994, 78)– but rather a documentary analysis of content, and therefore we have preferred to apply the technique of content analysis to a non-primary source. According to José Ignacio Ruiz Olabuénaga (2012, 195), when conducting content analysis, five information blocks must be taken into account: content, author, receptor, codes and channels

The methodology for the presentation of the evidence is therefore based on the study of the contributions which the ten doctoral theses make to the situated knowledge from the testimony of non-hegemonic research subjects-objects. For this purpose, the titles, objectives, methodologies and the conclusions of the ten doctoral theses have been analysed, inferring key categories and concepts which are descriptive of the singular contribution of this research work.

In Table 1 below, we detail the list of the theses analysed in this article. We include the title, their authorship, the supervision and the University and the date of its defence.

Table nº 1. Doctoral thesis analysed: title, authorship, supervision and date of research.

Title	Authorship	Supervision	Year
Domestic Violence: Maltreatment of women. Analysis of factors which determine the break-up in an abusive relationship.	Mónica Ibáñez González	María Silvestre Cabrera	2003
Family Work in the Basque Autonomous Region (BAR): A qualitative perspective in the case of dual-income couples.	Raquel Royo Prieto	María Silvestre Cabrera	2008
Life stories about the transmission of values and gender roles in single-mother families from Columbia, Morocco and Romania resident in the Basque Autonomous Community.	Ester Escudero Espinal	María Silvestre Cabrera	2015
Effect of socio-structural determinants in mental health dimensions evaluated in Chilean women suffering from depression from a gender perspective in health.	María Sol Pastorino	María Silvestre Cabrera	2015
Truth, justice and redress processes for the victims of enforced disappearance in Western Sahara.	María López Belloso	Felipe Gómez Isa y Carlos Martín Beristain.	2017
Moroccan women immigrants in the Autonomous Basque Region: employment according to their academic and/or professional qualifications?	Khadija Yahya	Xabier Aierdi Urraza y María Silvestre Cabrera	2017

⁶ The established selection criteria is intended to serve as a self-evaluation of our contribution to social research. Although not all the theses examined were conceived from the application of the FST, they are all feminist theses. For this reason, we have tried to test the knowledge generated by subjects who are placed on the same plane as the object through the analysis of the research quality criteria defined by Harding.

Title	Authorship	Supervision	Year
The second and the third digital divide in the young population of the Basque Autonomous Region.	Estibaliz Linares Bahillo	Raquel Royo Prieto y María Silvestre Cabrera	2018
Coping and resilience against the impact of long-term unemployment in Bizkaia.	Ainhoa Díez Sanz	Iratxe Aristegui y María Silvestre	2019
La vulnérabilité comme source de capacitation collective et créatrice d'un modèle d'accès aux soins en RDC. Cas: solidarité des femmes enceintes envers les femmes en urgence de césarienne et les femmes victimes de violences sexuelles.	Justine Mbelu	Dominique Jacquemin y María Silvestre Cabrera	2019
Sexuality and power discourses. Continuity and break-up of the heteropatriachal sexual order.	Maialen Suárez Errekalde	Raquel Royo Prieto y María Silvestre Cabrera	2019

The first issue found is that all authors are women and that, except one of the theses and two co-supervisions, the supervision of these works also corresponds to women. The criticism of androcentrism in knowledge and the call for new epistemologies and methodologies capable of overcoming it, appear to be matters which only prioritise those who are outside the prevailing normative patterns. Therefore, this knowledge has not yet gained majority recognition, and is much less hegemonic, but which is progressing step-by-step, as shown by this issue. The authors are mainly white Europeans, but we have also added research performed by authors coming from different geographical contexts (Mari Sol Pastorino, from Latin America and Khadiya Yahia and Justin Mbelu from Africa) and different etnical groups and races mostly from Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Arab World). Besides the positioning of the subject-object in relation to social belonging, other authors have also placed themselves on the same level as that of their research objects through the critical reflection raised by Willye.

4.1. The subject-object relationship

To analyse the object, we have focused on the induction of categories based on the analysis of the titles of the theses. The selection criterion has been based on the detection of concepts which allow us to infer that this is feminist research or thesis focused on exclusion problems or areas where women and/or oppressed groups are the protagonists from their situated knowledge.

Table nº 2. Induced categories

<i>Induced categories of objects based on the titles</i>
Domestic violence
Maltreatment of women
Family work
Gender roles
Single-mother families
Chilean women with depression
Gender perspective in health
Moroccan immigrant women
Digital divide
Unemployment
Coping
Vulnerability
Solidarity of pregnant women
Women victims of sexual violence
Sexuality and power
Hetero-patriarchal sexual order

Among the categories listed, we do not find any that makes direct reference to feminism, although two of the categories (gender roles and hetero-patriarchal sexual order) refer to traditional feminist terminology. "Women" as a category appears, on five occasions, to be associated with issues such as abuse, depression, immigration and pregnancy. With a diversity of origin also being present this then answers to the third orientation of the research which focuses on women, as pointed out by Harding (1987) and considers the diverse forms of male domination⁷. The categories cover exclusion and risk situations (maltreatment, migration,

⁷ Harding (1987) points out that, in order to redress the androcentric nature of scientific research, feminist researchers have made different attempts by incorporating a female scientist to recognise and give value to the scientific knowledge produced by female scientists.

digital divide, unemployment, coping, vulnerability, pregnancy, hetero-patriarchal order). In short, the choice of women as subjects-objects of the research is clear and their association with possible areas of oppression and inequality, although the titles do not yet show whether they use feminist epistemologies in the analysis.

The relationship between subject and object is fundamental in the FST, as Maialen Suárez (2019) rightly states in her thesis: “in *the feminist standpoint theory* the spatiality issue becomes particularly important, as it warns us that the social position which we occupy, both in a geopolitical, symbolic, social and discursive manner, is inseparable from the analysis of power, and vital therefore for the understanding which we acquire of the environment” (74). For the study of the relationship established between the subject and the object we have considered that the expression of the motivations for the choice of the topic addressed in the theses is one of the keys to understand the type of relationship established between them and as an evidence of critical consciousness .

Almost all the authors of the theses directly state the personal motivation which led them to choose the study topic and object. All of them have clear personal and relational links, this is knowledge situated in biographies and identities.

María López Belloso (2019, 23) states that her thesis derived from her personal and academic commitment with the victims of enforced disappearance. It is the result of a long commitment with the Sahrawi people and the personal interest to contribute to the improvement of the situation of the Sahrawi population, particularly of the victims of enforced disappearance, through a socio-legal analysis which translated into new tools for their access to truth, justice and reparation:

The study object of the thesis of Mónica Ibáñez (2004) is defined as follows: “domestic abuse in the Basque Autonomous Region, the breakup process from an abusive relationship and the factors influencing it, and the subsequent situation and difficulties following the breakup” (23). There are two reasons which the author mentions for the choice of her doctoral research topic: on the one hand “the lack of scientific rigour” existing in relation to domestic violence as a social problem (23); and secondly, an “exclusively personal” reason which the author wanted to provide an explanation for and therefore a solution to the situation of women abused by their partners. According to Ibáñez (2004), the goal is to “try to discover the existence of certain factors which may influence the decision of abused women to breakup with a relationship, and the difficulties and problems which all of these women must face after the final breakup of the abusive relationship” (23).

Ester Escudero (2015) states that the women in her study have been exposed to multiple situations of discrimination and violence and that her interest was to “bring to light and give greater visibility to the testimony of these courageous, strong and independent women. I learned from them and I have made the commitment to reflect it in this study” (10). This quote includes not only the reason for her choice, but the effect of the interaction during the process, which involves learning, growth and commitment to test all the knowledge which has been apprehended.

In the cases of Justine Mbelu and Khadija Yahya, the links between the subject and the object are clear. These are two African authors, one from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the other from Morocco. Both focus on realities which are very close to them, realities of oppression, invisibility, injustice and exclusion, but which have hardly been studied. Justine Mbelu analyses a network of poor Congolese pregnant women who created a health care network of support for cases of caesarean sections and reconstructions following sexual assault based on small economic contributions. Her work focuses on the solidarity network of women who face their vulnerability together as a sisterhood, which inspires Mbelu to propose a health care model in the DRC.

In Khadija Yahya’s thesis (2017), there is a clear relationship between the subject and the object of the research, as the chosen topic is the labour situation of the qualified female Moroccan immigrants in the Basque Country, and the author responds perfectly to the profile of the interviewed women: a qualified migrant Moroccan woman. (2017, 607-608). Yahya (2017) also refers to another significant reason which conditioned the choice of the topic of her thesis and that draws on the premises of the FST; the evidence that this is a vulnerable group experiencing precarious and discriminating situations.

In addition to the subject-object links associated with the recognition of situated knowledge which we have already mentioned, many of the theses repeatedly mention that one of the reasons for choosing the topic was the absence of prior research which addresses the chosen topic. We have seen that Mónica Ibáñez speaks of “a lack of scientific rigour”, and other authors refer directly to the lack of previous work done in these areas.

4.2. Analysis of the objectives

Not only does the choice of the research object allow for research questions to be asked which transcend normality as it has been transmitted and learned, it also questions the reality of new research subjects and at the same time that of the objects of the research.

The objectives of these ten theses question the reality in a very inductive manner. On this occasion, the categories induced have been the infinitive verbs used to formulate the general and specific objectives.

Table nº 3. Categories induced from formulation of objectives.

<i>Categories induced from the formulation of objectives</i>		
To know	To identify	To comprehend
To analyse	To understand	To determine
To detect	To describe	To consider
To go deeper	To study	To compare
To explore	To recognize	To propose

The verb to explain does not appear and none of the formulations establish causality or explanatory relationships. The prevailing interest is to learn, study, go deeper, describe and propose. The objectives are ambitious but attainable, without intending to provide concrete responses but rather to provide elements which help to deepen the knowledge. The formulation of the objectives does reflect feminism as an analytical perspective.

4.3. Analysis of the methodologies: the significance of the qualitative methodologies

In the cases analysed, the predominant methodology is the qualitative methodology, whether through the use of the techniques of the in-depth interview (most of them semi-structured), life stories and discussion groups. One of the theses supplements the qualitative analysis with an action research methodology in a pilot coeducation programme.

Without a doubt, qualitative research techniques are ways for obtaining more inductive information, although this also depends on the procedure used to design the scripts for gathering information. A prior design based on the establishment of the analysis categories, can convert an intended inductive analysis into a more deductive study. Despite this risk, it is undeniable that participation in the interviews and discussion groups generates a bond and interaction between interviewer and the interviewed, which at the same time as gathering the information, affects both the perception of the one who analyses and the situation of the one giving their testimony.

Raquel Royo (2011), through in-depth interview, gets close to the daily reality of 52 people in middle social level homes, with disparate distributions of the reproductive and productive work, exploring the behavioural patterns, the discourse, the perceptions, the attitudes and the experiences related to the domestic work, care, motherhood and paternity. The study places us before subjectivities constructed from gender inequality and inertia, but also before new emerging models.

The thesis of María López (2019) uses qualitative socio-legal techniques, with in-depth analysis of the testimonies of 103 victims of enforced disappearance in its different forms (either as victims who appeared after a period of disappearance, or persons who were reported as deceased, or victims found in the Meheris Mass grave). The methodological process involved local actors and the civil society which accompanied the performance of the interviews, in the selection of the cases and in their complementary documentation. In the design of the interviews and in the analysis process, specific categories were established to deal with the impact of enforced disappearance on women.

Mónica Ibáñez (2004) also uses “a qualitative methodology consisting of an in-depth interview answered by a total of 25 women resident in the Basque Autonomous Region who have been abused and have ended their abusive relationship at least one year ago” (25).

The defence of the methodological option does not respond to merely adjusting to the objectives. Many of the authors include epistemological justifications in the choice of the qualitative methodology and the research techniques, as shown by the following statements:

“The biographical approach emerges as a radical break with the traditional way of conceiving, analysing and understanding the reality” (Yahya, 2017, 329)

“I considered that getting close to subjective experiences would allow me to contribute and give essence to the great explanatory theories of migration reality” (Escudero, 2015, 8)

“Few [research] exclusively adopt a methodology which brings us close to the outside world and to understand the social phenomena from the “inside”, like qualitative methodology does” (Díez, 2019, 164)

Only one of the ten theses analysed mentions the FST and situated knowledge in its methodological section. This is the thesis of Maialen Suárez (2019), according to this author:

“We therefore approach this from the feminist standpoint theory, noting the importance of socially, politically and historically situated know-how and knowledge, which in our case is generated, as we will see below, using the narratives and discourses of the people who have participated in the study; also by taking an interest not only in

the knowledge which the elites may provide, but rather in that knowledge which is generated through the experiences of oppressed groups, as in the case of women and the LGTBIQ+ community.” (145).

One of the theses which has opted for the quantitative methodology deserves a special mention. Sol Pastorino's thesis (2015) appears to be a unique case given that, although it is true that the qualitative methodology favours the feminist epistemology of the situated and constructed knowledge, often silenced or forgotten, we cannot ignore that the quantitative methodology can also provide knowledge which questions androcentrism and that it rescues, for visibility and recognition, experiences, situations and processes which affect women differently due to the impact of the gender normative constructs. To analyse, like Sol Pastorino does, the impact of the social constraints on women's depression, beyond biological or medical constraints using statistical exploitation of a database of medical records is without a doubt to provide a different approach to the study of depression as mental illness. Not only is the research relevant, but it also assesses other research based on the statistical exploitation of data bases to verify the impact of gender constraints on the physical and mental health of women and men.

Also Estíbaliz Linares' thesis (2019) complements the qualitative techniques with the quantitative technique of the survey. In this case, the author justifies this choice to carry out a descriptive analysis of the digital chauvinist realities and delve deeper in the relationships between the 2BDG and the 3BDG. For this purpose, she uses a closed questionnaire with a sample of 778 adolescents and performs an exploitation of the database based on the establishment of interesting statistical correlations which, according to the author, reflect the relationships based on cyberviolence like cybercontrol or sexual or sexist cyberbullying.

4.4. Main conclusions reached

The conclusions of this research work are not beyond the formulation of the prior objectives and their intention to go deeper, to know, to understand using the life testimonies of women (adolescents, migrants, Sahrawis, pregnant Congolese women, single-mothers, etc.) the different social processes which affect in a different, unique and specific way women from various walks of life. The processes (migrations, harassment, social integration, labour insertion, mental health, vulnerability, exclusion, etc.) have been analysed previously in Sociology, Social Work, Psychology, Law, Economics, etc. but what these theses provide is a greater understanding due to the fact that the study object has focused on those going through these processes: diverse women, which has led to the generation of new, novel, valuable, meaningful questioning and, at the same time, complementary knowledge from previous studies.

Several theses take the plunge and make concrete proposals to improve the situation or life of the women with whom the authors have interacted. Without a doubt, these proposals are a source of inspiration for future research, which we think will grow and delve deeper to recognise the importance of knowledge which discovers new interests and legitimizes new research objects highly linked with the subjects who think them. We collect some examples of the type of proposals which these doctoral theses conclude with.

Yahya (2017) recovers the proposals made by the interviewed migrant women in the interviews, which are concrete actions which could improve their labour integration and their social integration, with appeals to institutions, companies and themselves.

Estíbaliz Linares' thesis (2019) does not stop with the results obtained in the research and ends with a series of intervention and prevention proposals based on “a coeducational pedagogy which encourages critical, emotional and egalitarian digital literacy within the educational centres” (448).

Royo (2011) states that her results point to the urgent need to find more humane ways to deal with paid production and life production, given that otherwise many women will continue to pay the cost of social reproduction with their unilateral waivers (access to work or to professional development and their own free time), their self-deception, their feeling of guilt or resentment; many men will consequently continue to lose, even without being aware of this, their paternity; and many households will continue to be a school of inequality for the next generations.

Mónica Ibáñez (2004), after stating that the women victims of male violence suffer serious psychological consequences, believes that it is “necessary for the victims to receive the necessary aid and assistance to be able to deal with all the consequences of domestic abuse and thereby recover their lost autonomy and integrity” (355). This thesis is one of the first research works on gender violence to underline the importance of considering emotional dependence to help understand the behaviour of abused women. According to Ibáñez (2004), “influential decisive factors in the decision of the abused women to put an end to their relationship are among others: the age of the children, support of the family and/or friendships, economic independence, and emotional independence” (357).

Finally, Ester Escudero (2015) tries to make the distinction between single-parent families and single-mother families. However, she warns us about the risk of performing a categorisation which leads to establishing stereotypes or prejudices about “single motherhood” (149).

5. Conclusions

To end this article and by way of conclusion, we have asked ourselves whether the theses analysed would pass an imaginary “Harding test”. We have collected the three characteristics Harding attributes to FST research, and we have checked if the ten theses meet these basic criteria:

1. They provide new empirical resources, based on the experiences of women.
The FST states that the “standpoint” has a lot to do with the construction of identities which may clash with the hegemonic interpretations, and therefore science is an important prerequisite as it provides such new empirical resources. The knowledge generated with this doctoral research does provide new empirical resources using experiential discourses, but alone they do not become tools for the collective consciousness. Maybe their joint consideration, regardless of the greater or lesser prior consciousness of the authors, favours their condition of “standpoint” as conceived by Harding. In addition to the subject-object links associated with the recognition of situated knowledge which we have already addressed, one of the reasons for choosing the different topics was the absence of prior research which addresses the chosen topic.
2. They provide new purposes to science, as they stand in favour of women, against traditional androcentric privilege.
To introduce this point we recall a citation from Maialen Suárez’s thesis (2019), according to which “various feminist academics from different disciplines like bell hooks (1984), Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1989), Sandra Harding (1986, [1991] 1993, 2004), Nancy Hartsock ([1983] 2004), Alison Jaggar (1983), Dorothy Smith (1974) or Donna Haraway (1988), have advocated taking the life experiences of women (marginalization and slavery of black women, violence against women, reproductive work,...) as the starting point of any scientific questioning, also with the opinion that this type of research based on the position of the marginalized classes offers less partial and distorted, less patriarchal and androcentric knowledge of the social reality. Or stated otherwise, they proclaim through their research how to ensure strong objectivity” (144). In view of the topics collected in the citation, we can state that the analysed theses, all of them, reproduce how to make strong objectivity central to research carried out. We have spoken about abused women, reproductive work, about Moroccan migrant women, about pregnant poor women in the Congo, about sexual practices, about disappeared Sahrawi women, about cyber-controlled adolescents, women with depression, vulnerable people and migrant single-mothers. All of the theses take a clear position in favour of women. The eagerness to study their lives using their testimonies concludes with arguments that critically question situations of inequality, discrimination, oppression or invisibility and make proposals for change.
3. They provide a new research objective, placing the person who performs the research in the same plane as the object of the study.
At this point we cannot state that all the theses analysed apply FST in a “pure” sense, but we can state that all of them have generated knowledge based on the experiences and situations of women, denouncing their greater vulnerability and risk whilst, at the same time, placing them at the centre of scientific interest and attributing social value to all the voices of the participating women. The authors of the selected theses not only have placed their research focus on women who had previously received little attention but have performed their research positioned close to those women, either by social belonging or through critical reflection. All analysed researchers have clearly explained how gender, race or class have influenced their research projects and have overtly expressed their motivation and interests. This positioning of the authors to their research objects distances them from an “objectivist” positioning and gets them close to “reflexivity”, generating different knowledges from those traditionally covered in their fields.

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