

Rasch Measurement as a Feminist Quantitative Approach



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Between two worlds



The Context

- Researching the effect of for-profit school environments on teachers
- Quantitative – Policy audience
- Feminist perspective – Gendered nature of schools, bureaucracy, care work

What is feminist research?



Feminist Research Expectations 1

- Not simply research about women
- Acknowledging the influence of gender
- Increasing the visibility of marginalized groups
- “Tune their designs to their political context, even while they are challenging dominant values in those contexts” (Marshall, 2006, p. 65-66)

Marshall, C., & Young, M. D. (2006). Gender and Methodology. In C. Skelton, B. Francis, & L. Smulyan (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Education*. London: SAGE Publications.

Feminist Research Expectations 2

- The analysis must be appropriate to “talk back”
(DeVault, 1999, p. 27)
- No voices privileged over others
 - Men speaking about/for Women
 - Administrators speaking about/for Teachers
- Politics and Stance are integral
 - No “depoliticization”, “de-stancing” or bracketing

DeVault, M. J. (1999). *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

A feminist view influences method

- Not just philosophical – methodological too
- “Many feminist came to realise that the project of women’s inclusion as men’s equals could not succeed. This was because it was not simply the range and the scope of objects that required transformation: **more profoundly, and threateningly, the very questions posed and the methods used to answer them, basic assumptions about methodology, criteria of validity and merit all needed to be seriously questioned**” (Gross, 1986, p. 192)

Gross, E. (1986). Conclusion: What is feminist theory? In C. Pateman & E. Gross (Eds.), *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory* (pp. 190-204). Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Are feminism and quantitative research compatible?



Theoretical Patriarchy in Quants

- Assuming a universal truth or method
 - without acknowledging history of power dynamics
- Fixed belief in objectivity, neutrality of observers
 - without questioning the instrument or judges
- Seeing only universal subjects of knowledge
 - Ignoring the bodied nature of people
 - “Perspectiveless knowledge” (Code, 2014)

Code, L. (2014). Feminist Epistemology and the Politics of Knowledge: Questions of Marginality. In M. Evans, C. Hemmings, M. Henry, H. Johnstone, S. Madhok, A. Plomien, & S. Wearing (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory* (pp. 9-25): SAGE Publications.

Can't "talk back" without Quants

- "However, **what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts in the neo-liberalised research economy are critical questions**. Some social identities intra-act with expectations of excellence and have become understood as the rightful occupants of research spaces. Those people who might offer **different accounts of the world** are in danger of being **illegible and inaudible** to the quality apparatus of the global academy. . . . there continue to be some disturbing reproductions of how gendered privilege intra-acts with the global research economy to ensure that women remain firmly shut out" (Morley, 2016 p. 34).

Morley, L. (2016). Troubling intra-actions: gender, neo-liberalism and research in the global academy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(1). doi: 10.1080/02680939.2015.1062919

Construction– not just deconstruction

- “Feminist theory is involved in both an *anti-sexist* project . . . and in a positive project of constructing and developing alternative models, methods, procedures, discourses, etc.” (Gross, 1986, p. 195)

Gross, E. (1986). Conclusion: What is feminist theory? In C. Pateman & E. Gross (Eds.), *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory* (pp. 190-204). Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Sounds like Rasch can help

- “Taking women’s cognitive experiences seriously enables feminists, in these diverse ways, to eschew the individualism and universalism of mainstream theory and to examine specifically located knowing, **where theory and practice are reciprocally constitutive and knowers are diversely positioned and active within them**” (Code, 2014, p. 13)

Code, L. (2014). Feminist Epistemology and the Politics of Knowledge: Questions of Marginality. In M. Evans, C. Hemmings, M. Henry, H. Johnstone, S. Madhok, A. Plomien, & S. Wearing (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory* (pp. 9-25): SAGE Publications.

Rasch and Feminism



Agreements

- An underlying assumption that people are different
- Separation of “item difficulty” and “person ability”
 - rather than assuming all people to be the same
- Individual reporting of unexpected results
- An embedded scepticism of the instrument
- Measurement as “person free” and “item free”
 - although the terms do not sound feminist
- Fewer issues with ceiling and floor effects catches a large range of possibilities
- Not reliant on existing scales - constructing

Disagreements

- Probabalistic
- May not always uncover differences in language, desire, or power within research
 - but mixed-methods may rectify that issue

Conclusion



Developing an alternative

- Research design that is appropriate for an audience that expects quantified data
- But also sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of the topic
- “Feminism attempts to develop alternatives to the rigid, hierarchical and exclusive concept of reason. It seeks a **rationality not divided from experience**, from oppression, from particularity or specificity; a reason, on the contrary, that includes them is a **rationality not beyond or above experience but based upon it**” (Gross, 1986, p. 203)

Gross, E. (1986). Conclusion: What is feminist theory? In C. Pateman & E. Gross (Eds.), *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory* (pp. 190-204). Boston: Northeastern University Press.



Discussions and Questions

Thank you for attending

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