Studying DNA: Envisioning new Intersections between Feminist Methodologies and Actor-Network Theory

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Abstract

Feminist methodologies and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) have often been considered opposing theoretical and intellectual traditions. This paper imagines a conversation between these seemingly divergent fields and considers the theoretical and methodological challenges that ANT and particular branches of feminist thought raise for the other. This paper examines an empirical project that calls for an engagement with both ANT and feminist methodologies. Through the lens of this empirical project, four methodological questions are considered, which an alliance between ANT and feminist methodologies would raise for any research project: 1) Where do we start our analysis? 2) Which actors should we follow? 3) What can we see when we begin to follow the actors? 4) What about politics? The potential places where ANT and feminist methodologies can meet and mutually shape research on scientific practice and technological innovation are explored. In doing so, this paper moves towards envisioning new intersections between feminist methodologies and ANT.

Keywords
Acto,r-Netwo,r Theory, Feminist Methodologies, Fores,nci, DNA Analysis, Sexual Assault

INTRODUCTION

According to Sandra Harding (2008), a well-known feminist scholar in science studies, feminist scholarship and Science and Technology Studies (STS) have a lot to learn from one another. Despite the past few decades of feminist scholars’ efforts to integrate gender, race, and class into analyses of science and technology, these themes remain largely absent in mainstream STS. Feminist scholarship, Harding suggests, still has much to teach STS about how science and technology are shaped by gender, race, and class and the importance of politically informed methodology. Conversely, Harding argues that feminist scholarship has much to learn from the questions that STS poses about how science and technology are organized, practiced, and constructed within the Western world. Through this, Harding offers a hopeful vision of further dialogue between STS and feminist scholarship.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a theoretically informed approach in STS that has been used to study the rapidly changing worlds of science and technology. Despite its apparent success in STS, feminist scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s raised sharp criticisms of ANT for its disregard of gender (Wajcman, 2000) and power inequalities (Casper & Clarke, 1998; Star, 1991), and for its apolitical and “insufficiently radical” orientation (Wajcman, 2000, p. 452). From these critiques, it would seem that feminist traditions and ANT are incommensurable. But perhaps, as this paper will explore, this need not be the case.

This paper takes up Harding’s (2008) hopeful projection and imagines a meeting between the seemingly divergent fields of feminist methodologies and Actor-Network Theory. I will examine an empirical project that calls for an engagement with both ANT and feminist scholarship. Through the lens of this empirical project, I will consider what these diverging theoretical and methodological
traditions can learn from each other. I will consider four methodological questions that an alliance between ANT and feminist methodologies would raise for any research project: 1) Where do we start our analysis? 2) Which actors should we follow? 3) What can we see when we begin to follow the actors? 4) What about politics? Through these questions, I will explore how ANT and feminist methodologies challenge and potentially speak to one another.

**FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES AND ANT**

Actor-Network Theory and most feminist theoretical and methodological approaches stem from very different political, intellectual, and historical traditions. ANT grew predominately out of the intellectual movements of post-structuralism, constructivism, and ethnomethodology (Law, 1999). Feminist scholarship, on the other hand, grew from social and political movements that hinged on eradicating gendered, raced, and classed inequalities (MacKinnon, 2005). While some branches of feminist theory have, similar to ANT, drawn on post-structuralism and constructivism (e.g. Haraway, 1991; Butler, 2004; Mohanty, 2003), others have been built from theoretical traditions such as Marxism, existentialism, and psychoanalytic theories (de Beauvoir, 1957; Davis, 1983; Benjamin, 1988).

Feminist methodology is a diverse field made up of many distinct empirical, theoretical, and methodological approaches. To refer to feminist methodology as a unified tradition of thought and practice is a vast over-simplification of its diverse history. In a similar way, the diversity in ANT studies makes it difficult, if not impossible, to define in broad terms (Law, 1999). The diversity within these two fields presents a challenge for creating dialogue between them. This paper will therefore draw on very particular traditions within feminist methodologies and ANT, and will employ working definitions of each. These definitions are not intended to erase the diversity within these fields, but rather, allow for an exploration of what lies between them.

In this paper, I draw most significantly on Feminist Standpoint Theory, a theoretically informed methodology that is deeply rooted in Marxist epistemology and hinges on the epistemological assumption that oppressed and/or marginalized people see relations of power most clearly (Harding, 1991a). Harding defines Standpoint Theory as “thought that begins with the lives of the oppressed” (Harding, 1991a, p. 56). Women, people of colour, people living with disabilities and/or experiencing poverty, and other marginalized groups are assumed to have the capacity to see mechanisms of oppression in ways that dominant groups cannot. The oppressed have, what some theorists have called “epistemological privilege” on dominant, oppressive relations of power (Brooks, 2007, p. 69). As this paper will show, this branch of feminist methodology raises particular challenges for ANT.

I define ANT as a deeply theoretical methodology that has been commonly used to explore the “messiness” (Law, 2004, p. 4) of scientific practice and technological innovation. ANT, like feminist Standpoint Theory, does not provide an explanatory framework for empirical realities, as social theories often do (Law, 2007). Nor does it provide a rigid set of methodological rules for studying associations (Latour, 2005). Rather, as Law (2007) suggests, ANT is a “toolkit for telling interesting stories” (p.1). ANT provides tools for tracing “actors”, both human and non-human, and the ways they work collectively in “networks” of action (Latour, 2005, p.5). Research in the field of ANT often tells stories of the “complexities”, “translations”, and “multiplicities” found in science and technology (Law & Mol, 2002, p.7).

While ANT and Feminist Standpoint Theory represent very distinct traditions of thought and practice, both provide useful tools for studying empirical realities. As this paper will show, creating a dialogue between these fields has the potential to expand the toolkits of each.

**AN EMPIRICAL PROJECT**

Since its development in the 1980s, forensic DNA analysis has grown to be one of the most predominant scientific technologies used in the Canadian legal system (Gerlach, 2004). The growing public excitement around forensic technologies has supported a rush of resources into this growing field of forensic work. In the context of sexual assault, various professional groups have formed to
accommodate this new legal emphasis on forensic DNA evidence collection and analysis (Bumiller, 2008). Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) are a relatively new professional group responsible for collecting DNA samples from sexual assault survivors’/victims’ bodies (Du Mont & Parnis, 2001; Parnis & Du Mont, 2006). The DNA samples that are collected through a forensic exam can be used to identify sexual offenders through DNA profiling methods (Quinlan, Fogel, & Quinlan, 2010).

The process of DNA extraction is incredibly invasive and can be traumatic and at times painful for the survivor/victim (Doe, 2003). A forensic examination can last up to 3 hours and often includes vaginal, anal, rectal, and/or oral swabbing (Parnis & Du Mont, 2006). When a survivor/victim consents to the forensic exam, they have little control over which body parts are examined, how long the exam lasts, and what kind of evidence is taken (Doe, 2003). Some, although certainly not all, survivors/victims experience a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness during the process of DNA collection and the legal investigation and prosecution that sometimes follows (Du Mont, White, & McGregor, 2009; Doe, 2012).

Scholars in Feminist Standpoint Theory have argued that social relations can be most clearly and objectively seen from the perspective of those that hold the least amount of power (Harding, 1991b, 2008; Hartsock, 2004; Smith, 2005). This methodological tradition in the context of the empirical project on DNA would remind us to be attentive to a survivor’s/victim’s experiences of having little power within medical and legal institutions (Smith, 2005). It would remind us to take seriously how these social relations look “from below” (Harding, 2008, p. 1). Using this approach, we could see the survivor’s/victim’s experiences of being disempowered in relation to DNA evidence extraction and construction.

While a feminist standpoint analysis may help to uncover an important part of the story of DNA analysis, there are complexities that a view from below cannot capture. The technologies and practices of DNA analysis are in a constant state of evolution (Quinlan, Fogel, & Quinlan, 2010). New approaches for DNA testing are increasingly being introduced to the field of forensics. For example, there is a growing interest in mitochondrial DNA analysis, which constructs DNA profiles from the mitochondria of the cell verses the nucleus, as older DNA testing techniques did (Quinlan, Fogel, & Quinlan, 2010). These new approaches to DNA testing are often incompatible with existing resources for perpetrator identification, such as the National DNA Databank, which stores only DNA profiles that have been constructed from cell nuclei. To use the words of Actor-Network Theorist, John Law (2004), this is a “messy” (p. 1) and complex ground to trace.

Actor Network Theory would remind us to be attentive to these brewing controversies and the complexity of negotiating scientific practices and technological development. More specifically, ANT in this study would call our attention to the network of humans and non-humans, texts, tools, and technologies that are working to assemble DNA evidence in the legal system. Using ANT, these aspects of DNA’s story could become visible.

This empirical project begs an alliance between ANT and feminist methodology. Both draw attention to different, yet equally important dimensions of DNA evidence construction in cases of sexual assault. But can these divergent approaches be brought together? It is to this query that we now turn.

WHERE DO WE START?

Bruno Latour (2005), a well-known Actor Network Theorist, suggests that a “slogan for ANT” (p. 12) is to follow the actors and “grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of” (p. 11). The sociologist, he claims, must begin the analysis by listening to actors’ and following them through the networks they inhabit. He criticizes mainstream sociology, what he calls “sociology of the social” (p. 25), for not listening closely enough to actors when they describe

1 Here, I purposely adopt the imperfect term survivor/victim. The forward slash serves a distinct symbolic purpose: it acknowledges that identities in relation to violent experiences can be complex, multiple, and changing. The term survivor/victim proposes the possibility that victim and survivor identities can be simultaneously claimed, while the forward slash conveys the possibility of identities in between or beyond survivor and victim.
their networks. While Latour raises an important point about increasing our listening skills as sociologists, he says very little about which actors we should be listening to. This begs some important methodological questions: Which actors should be telling the story of the network? And what informs this choice? Do we simply listen to those actors who have the loudest voice? Or those that are the most visible? And if so, what are the consequences of doing so?

Feminist scholar, Leigh Star (1991), criticizes ANT for focusing its analysis on the most powerful actors in the network, or as she calls them, the “executives” (p. 29) or the “victors” (p. 33). Judy Wajcman (2000) makes a similar observation when she says, the “agents in ANT are most commonly male heroes, big projects and important organizations” (p. 453). In Latour’s (2010) most recent work on the Conseil de Etat in France, he describes his adventures in the worlds of law and science, two fields that he describes as being made up of male judges and “elite men in white coats” (p. 221). In Latour’s narrative of law and science, there are only powerful men and their tools and texts. Women, racialized people, people living with disabilities and experiencing poverty are nowhere to be found.

The study of forensic DNA analysis could begin in the same place that Latour (2010) began his most recent study: we could allow the loudest and most powerful actors to describe the network. We could speak to forensic scientists, lawyers, and police officers, gathering their tales of constructing DNA evidence. However, in taking this approach, is there a piece of the network that would be ignored?

Star (1991) and Wajcman (2000) both argue that ANT’s focus on powerful actors often leads to the erasure of actors that sit on the margins of networks. Star (1991) asserts that if ANT were to pay attention to the marginal actor, an entirely different actor-network could be drawn.2

Deciding on a methodological entry point for empirical analyses is for many feminist scholars, an important political decision. Embedded in Feminist Standpoint Theory’s move to take up the ‘view from below’ is a political and methodological critique of social science traditions that do not take seriously the perspectives of marginalized and/or oppressed groups (Harding, 1991b, 2008; Hartscock, 2004; Smith, 2005). These theorists’ contention that the ‘view from below’ provides a more accurate vantage point on social reality is an inherently political one. Standpoint Theory could be employed in the study on DNA analysis. To do this, we might begin with the assumption that the survivor/victim of violence is a marginalized actor who has a privileged vantage point on the institutional practices of DNA evidence collection. However, if the aim is to study the material messiness of forensic science and technology, does the survivor/victim provide the best vantage point?

Apart from the forensic exam, survivors/victims are completely excluded from the production of forensic DNA evidence. What goes on in the lab, and any other site beyond the exam room, such as the police processing and evidence holding centre, the DNA Databank, and lawyers’ offices, remains completely invisible to most survivors/victims. The only human actors in these sites are those who hold varying degrees of institutional credibility and power to participate in institutional practice. This raises the question: Is it possible to maintain a focus on the materiality of DNA evidence construction, without resorting to a tale told by the powerful?

Star (1991) suggests this is indeed possible. Loosely drawing on Standpoint Theory, Star proposes that the marginalized actor’s perspective can be “a point of departure” (p. 38) for the study of an actor-network. She argues, the “voices of those suffering from the abuses of technological power are among the most powerful analytically” (p. 30). As an example, Star uses her own experience of contending with onion allergies at McDonalds and describes the difficulties she has had ordering a hamburger without onions. She describes herself as an actor that is on the margins of the McDonalds network. From her experience, she argues that it is possible to see how the McDonalds network is built in a way that does not easily accommodate onion allergies. Taking the marginalized actor as an entry point into the McDonalds network, she argues, would produce a radically different network than one that could be drawn from the experiences of powerful actors, such as the owners and originators

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2 Star is not alone in arguing this. Other feminist STS scholars have similarly argued that if ANT were to grant epistemic privilege to marginalized actors, the shape of actor-networks would inevitably change (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Star, 1991; Clarke & Montini, 1993; Casper & Clarke, 1998).
of McDonalds. It would be possible to see a network ‘from below’ and examine how it is built to include and exclude particular actors.

Star (1991) distances her approach from Feminist Standpoint Theory when she argues that it is not necessary to be limited to a ‘view from below’. Instead, this view can be used as merely an entry point into the complexity and multiplicity of an actor network. Being a marginal actor, for Star, involves holding multiple locations: the “marginal person [is] the one who both belongs and does not belong” (p. 50). Beginning with the marginal actor, who is simultaneously inside and outside of the network, we come to understand “multiple membership in many worlds” (p. 30). Through this entry point, it becomes possible to see how networks are “stabilized and standardized” (p. 44) for some actors but not for others. It becomes possible to see how the network itself can be multiple.

In proposing this approach, Star illustrates how feminist methodological traditions might inform a new starting place for ANT studies. With this new entry point, Star argues that it will be possible to draw new actor networks, ones that are attentive to the complexity that power inequality introduces to any network of associations.

Using Star’s (1991) understanding of marginality, it might be said that a survivor/victim of sexual violence sits simultaneously inside and outside of the legal system’s institutional network. The survivor/victim is ‘inside’ in the sense that their body serves as the “crime scene” from which DNA evidence is gathered (Mulla, 2008, p. 301). However, the survivor/victim is simultaneously ‘outside’, as they are excluded from many of the practices within the legal system. The survivor/victim’s ‘multiple membership’ in and outside of the legal system could illuminate a new level of complexity in the legal network. We could see how the network is organized in ways that disempower many survivors/victims and privilege scientific practice and the actors engaged in it. Or, to use Star’s language, it would be possible to see how the legal system is ‘stabilized’ for some actors and not for others.

While Star (1991) provides some useful insight into how feminist methodology might inform a new starting place for an ANT study, she leaves many remaining questions. How do we identify or find marginal actors? Once we have found them, how do we decide which marginal actor to begin our analysis with? What are the empirical and political consequences of choosing one marginal actor over another? In the context of the DNA study, two important questions would be: what other actors in the network, besides the survivor/victim, might provide a useful perspective and what would be the consequences of choosing those actors over the survivor/victim? All these questions collectively invite another: which actors should we follow when tracing actor-networks?

**WHICH ACTORS SHOULD WE FOLLOW?**

For Latour (2005), sociologists must follow the actors who *act*. Active actors, according to Latour, leave visible “traces” (p. 29) of their action, which an interested sociologist can follow. Star’s (1991) description of the marginalized actor reveals, however, that not all actors have equal capacities, resources, and the power necessary to leave visible traces – or at least traces that are visible to the sociologist. In the context of forensic DNA analysis, some visible traces that a sociologist might follow are institutional protocols, reports, case files, forensic samples and forensic technologies. All of these traces are assembled and/or authored by actors who have varying degrees of authority, credibility, and power in the medical and legal practice. Survivors/victims have little power to influence the content and shape of these traces. In this context, Latour’s dictum of only following actors who leave visible traces risks erasing survivors/victims from medical and legal actor-networks, which survivors/victims are implicated in when they report a sexual assault to physicians, nurses, and/or police. In other words, Latour’s rule of thumb in this context carries risks of producing a one-dimensional network of actors who all have the power to create observable traces.

If we take Star’s (1991) suggestion to follow marginal actors seriously, then we must consider not only the actors who have the power to create visible traces, but also those who do not. But how do we identify all of these actors? If an actors’ capacity to create a trace is no longer the distinguishing feature of an actor, then how do we see all the actors who are relevant to an actor network? Most importantly, to use Star’s (1991) terms, how do we identify marginal actors?
Some feminist scholars may propose that marginal actors are self-evident and can be easily identified through their lack of access, resources, and power. However, by labelling actors as marginal before the analysis begins, what is lost? I suggest that there may be a distinct analytical disadvantage of identifying marginal actors a priori and using them as an analytical entry point, as some Standpoint Theorists suggest. By assuming marginality we forgo an empirical opportunity to describe how marginality is made. We lose the chance to describe how a marginal actor comes to be marginal through practice in actor-networks. In the context of forensic DNA analysis, how survivors/victims come to be marginal actors who are placed both inside and outside of medical and legal practice is theoretically interesting and empirically significant. This kind of analysis would reveal the institutional practices through which survivors/victims come to be disempowered. If our aim is to investigate the ‘messiness’ of science and technology, these aspects of practice in which actors are made cannot be overlooked. Designating survivors/victims as inherently marginal before the investigation begins risks ignoring these intricacies of practice.

Perhaps this is where ANT can provide some guidance. In his well-known article on scallops, Actor-Network theorist Michael Callon (1986) argues that “science and technology are dramatic ‘stories’ in which the identity of actors is one of the issues at hand” (p. 198). This contention can be usefully put in alternate terms: the identity of the marginal actor is something that is not self-evident, but instead something that needs to be described. While some feminist scholars may view this as a threat to the recognition of systemic power, it need not be the case. If a marginal identity becomes an object of investigation, we can see how marginality is made through practice. I propose that illustrating how actors come to be marginal through practice is a more optimistic stance. If marginality is a product of practice, it could be otherwise.

Perhaps our analytical starting point need not be a particular set of actors, but instead, scientific practice. Our questions become who is doing what, when, where, how, and with what consequences to whom? If we trace scientific practice, while remaining attentive to questions of access and power, marginal and non-marginal actors will become visible alongside the practices through which their identities are made. With this as a point of departure, a subsequent question is raised: what can we see once we have begun to follow the actors?

**WHAT CAN WE SEE?**

Latour (1987, 2005), along with other Actor-Network Theorists, have argued that concepts like gender, power, and inequality have become reified within Sociology. Sociologists, he asserts routinely misuse these concepts to explain away the realities that they observe. Instead of relying on preconceived concepts, Latour (2005) argues that sociologists should simply describe what they see.

ANT’s criticism of concepts like gender, power, and inequality, have been suggested by some feminist scholars, like Star (1991) and Wajcman (2000), to be one of the greatest clashes between feminist scholarship and ANT. While many feminist traditions take up gendered, classed, and raced social structures and power inequalities within them, Latour’s ANT labels them as preconceived concepts and attempts to replace them with description. These opposing positions appear to leave little room for dialogue.

In the study of DNA analysis, gender, power, and inequality cannot be ignored. Women are the most common survivors/victims of sexual assault (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008), a gendered reality that undoubtedly shapes medical and legal practice around sexual violence. Compounding this reality, women of colour, women living with disabilities, and women living in poverty are more likely to be survivors/victims of sexual violence and more likely to face discrimination and disbelief by the nurses, lawyers, and police that they go to for help (Doe, 2012). Alongside these realities, feminist scholars have repeatedly revealed the many ways in which survivors/victims of violence are systematically and structurally disempowered in the legal system (Smart, 1989; Doe, 2003; Bumiller, 2008; Sheehy, 2012). To ignore these experiences and the systemic dimensions of power that they represent would be to miss a crucial part of the story of DNA analysis in sexual assault cases. Is there a way to see gender, power, and inequality with ANT?
Although Latour’s (2005) emphasis on description initially appears to preclude the analysis of gender, race, power, and inequality, this need not be the case. Instead, perhaps we could consider Latour’s cautionary note as a reminder of the dangers of jumping to explanatory concepts without spending enough time describing their origins. And perhaps this could be made useful for a feminist reading of DNA analysis.

Taking Latour’s (2005) criticism of preconceived concepts seriously in the study of forensic DNA analysis may inspire a detailed description of how gender and raced inequalities are systematically made and/or organized in the medical and legal actor-network. Instead of labelling legal practices as automatically producing inequalities, the emphasis might instead be put on describing the practices that produce inequality. In describing the work of powerful actors in the network and the tools, technologies, and texts they use to do their work, it would become possible to see how gendered and raced survivors/victims become silenced (or even better, are made silent) and stripped of the power to define their own experiences of sexual violence. By taking description seriously, gender, race, power, and inequality are not necessarily erased, but are instead seen as forces that are produced through the actors’ work. Describing medical and legal actors’ practices that produce inequality between themselves and survivors/victims would be a crucial part of the story of DNA analysis in cases of sexual assault.

ANT’s emphasis on description over analytical concepts does not necessarily need to halt a feminist analysis. Instead, it can remind us to question what it is that we can see: instead of preconceived concepts, we can attempt to see relations between actors that are organized in particular ways. This may be another mutual ground for ANT and feminist methodologies. However, some new challenges arise when introducing the question of politics.

WHAT ABOUT POLITICS?

Latour (2005) argues that the problem with Critical Sociology, an umbrella term he uses to describe all sociology that is informed by a critical politic, is that it mistakenly places politics before empirical description. He suggests that description becomes impossible if it is preceded with a political agenda. In arguing this, Latour seemingly sweeps critical scholarship of all stripes, including the many branches of feminist theory that have taken seriously gendered, raced, and classed inequalities, into the same corner of irrelevance. Feminist Standpoint Theory, with its deep roots in Marxist epistemology, is seemingly no exception to Latour’s generalizations. While Latour (2005) criticizes Critical Sociologies for being too political, feminist scholars have criticized ANT for being apolitical (Wajcman, 2000). From this, it might seem that the differing historical roots and political orientations of ANT and feminist methodologies put them at odds. However, this is not necessarily the case.

Law (2004), another well-known Actor Network Theorist, offers a slightly more generous approach to politically informed analysis than Latour. Law begins his discussion of politics by making a claim that seemingly attacks many feminist projects. He states that he wishes to “divest [methods] of a commitment to a particular version of politics: the idea that unless you attend to certain more of less determinate phenomena (class, gender or ethnicity…), then your work has no political relevance” (2004, p. 9). Despite arguing this, Law does not erase the potential of a guiding political view, as Latour does. Instead he suggests that our research must “imagine and participate in politics and other forms of the good in novel and creative ways” (p. 9). Law suggests that “political goods” (p. 9) cannot be decided from the outset of a research study, but are instead arrived at through the particular contexts in which they are situated. What may be a political good in one context may not be in another.

While Law’s (2004) acknowledgement of ‘political goods’ and their importance in research moves a tentative step closer to an analysis informed by some feminist traditions, it still leaves many unanswered questions. In divorcing himself from the “particular version of politics” (p. 9) that takes inequalities of power seriously, Law leaves us with little direction on whose political goods we should be tethering our analysis too.
In the study on DNA analysis, a research finding that scientific facts in the forensic DNA lab are messy and sometimes multiple might be a ‘political good’ for defence lawyers who are seeking to delegitimize the DNA evidence against their clients. Whereas for survivors/victims of violence, this same finding may be far from what could be considered to be a ‘political good’. A feminist politics would remind us of the importance of questioning whose political goods should motivate our research. Instead of political goods being abstract and determined contextually, as Law suggests, they could more usefully be defined as goods that serve the interests of those who are made marginal in particular actor-networks. Orienting an analysis to this end would ensure that our investigation is geared towards making a valuable contribution to groups that have been disempowered in scientific practice. The study of DNA could be done with the aim of forwarding the interests of those who become marginalized, traumatized, and made invisible within the legal system. In doing so, we would not be sacrificing description, as Latour might suggest, but would instead be orienting our analysis to what would be useful for those who are disempowered.

A feminist politics does not necessarily impede description of an actor-network. Rather, it can drive description in useful ways. In doing so, feminist methodologies can inspire a more honest and responsible handling of politics in ANT.

**INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ANT AND FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES**

Despite how they are often cast, feminist methodologies and ANT need not be enemies. They can instead challenge one another and inform each other’s methodological practices. As this paper has shown, there are potential places where ANT and feminist methodologies can meet and mutually shape different aspects of research on scientific practice and technological innovation. In being attentive to the possible dialogue between these seemingly divergent approaches, new ways of studying and understanding science and technology come to the fore.

Feminist methodological traditions like feminist Standpoint Theory remind us of the political importance of the experiences of those who are on the margins of scientific and institutional practice. They open the possibility of understanding how marginality is made in a network of action and encourages us to examine networks from different vantage points. Analyses informed by feminist methodological traditions remind us of whose political goods our research should be oriented to. In the study on DNA analysis in cases of sexual assault, feminist methodologies remind us to listen to survivors/victims of sexual violence to understand how networks of practices are organized to (re)produce their experiences of disempowerment.

ANT heightens our attention to the work that human and non-human actors do to maintain networks of action. It draws our attention to the material ‘messiness’ of scientific practice and technological artifacts. It can open the possibility of examining the actors that collectively reproduce inequalities. In the study on DNA analysis, ANT reminds us to pay attention to the messy, complex work that people and technologies do to maintain the legal network of action.

Both ANT and feminist methodologies have something to offer to this project. Without feminist methodologies, we may lose the voice of the survivor/victim and without ANT, we may lose the multitude of actors and messy practices within the network of the legal system. By drawing these approaches together, it becomes possible to see forensic DNA in sexual assault cases in more complex ways.

As Harding’s (2008) assertion allowed us to hope, ANT and feminist traditions can indeed learn from one another. With further dialogue between these approaches, it may be possible to move from a place where feminist methodologies and ANT are treated as opposing forms of analysis, to a place where intersections become visible and they can be interwoven. Through this, a feminist-informed ANT may become possible.
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