

Narrative Research Method and the Construction of Teachers' Moral Learning Research

From the Feminist Perspective*

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Abstract—The narrative research method based on feminist perspective is one of the most important research methods in the field of humanities and social science, which meets the needs of the current teacher's moral learning research. Its full application in the research of teachers' moral learning has its significance, whether for female teachers themselves, or for female teachers' moral learning theory and even progress in practice. Standing on the basis of feminism, a theoretical system with internal logic, feminist narrative research method has its basic theoretical proposition about the value orientation, the object and the practice criterion of the research. In the practice of teachers' moral learning, research should focus one analyzing the practice from teachers' moral learning theory and theoretical construction based on teachers' moral learning practice. And because of the inherent characteristics of this method, it is necessary to face up to the defects of the research materials, the bias of the research angle, and the limitation of the research results and so on.

Keywords—*narrative; narrative research methods; teachers' moral learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, human beings used to divide men and women into two genders by physiology. Because the long process of human civilization development is mostly based on the historical reality of men being superior to women, the equality of women is often not fully recognized. As the literature review with regard to women and work by Xu Zongguo indicates, women are disadvantaged in power and resource allocation though they are not minority population. [1] With the progress of society and the increasing status of women, the school education lays more and more emphasis on guaranteeing female students' learning and living rights from the aspects of curriculum construction and daily management. Many scholars also emphasize the need to achieve "gender harmony" in the field of education from different aspects and levels. However, in the current theory and practice of teachers' moral education, the characteristics of female teachers' moral learning are often not fully valued, which leads to the dilemma of the theory and practice of teachers' moral education, because fundamentally, the aim of

"teaching" is "learning". Without a thorough study of the problem of "learning", it is impossible for people to have a profound understanding of "teaching". Because of the lack of in-depth inquiry into the preconditions of female teachers' moral learning, the theory of teachers' moral education is not only incomplete but also is lacking in foundation and a clear purpose. Moreover, it is not helpful but even harmful to the practice of teachers' moral education. Specifically, in the current theory of teachers' moral education, due to the influence of Kohlberg, Piaget, Eriksson and other people's ideas, the relevant theoretical research results are often full of various forms and levels of gender bias. [2] In connection with the theoretical gender bias, the gender bias in the practice of teachers' moral education is omnipresent, such as intentionally or unintentionally ignoring the differences between male and female teachers in moral learning, and formulating uniform goals and methods of teachers' moral education. In fact, under this seemingly just way of management, gender bias, which is imposed by society or individuals and is based on the moral learning characteristics of male teachers, is often hidden in a deeper level. Therefore, in order to eliminate gender bias rooted in the theory and practice of teachers' moral education, the fundamental progress of relevant academic research is indispensable. It is in this sense that we try to expound the possible significance and realistic approach of narrative research methods for the rational development of teachers' moral learning research from the perspective of feminism.

II. FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH METHOD AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

There are gender differences in morality, so the feminist perspective is indispensable for the development of teachers' moral learning research. But in fact, due to the current situation of academic development, especially the increasingly important positivist research methods in the academic research field, feminist research methods are often subjected to a comprehensive suppression, in an extremely weak state. Specifically, according to feminist epistemology, the principles of "rationality", "objectivity" and "universal law" advocated by positivism are just "emperor's new clothes". For example, the so-called gender as a "natural fact" is not entirely a natural consequence, but also a product of social construction. But the existing scientific research

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often turns a blind eye to all this, which makes the research results imprisoned by gender bias. Sandra Harding once pointed out that in modern society, women have neither been empowered to speak authoritatively to state their own or other people's social situations, nor been empowered to explain how to change them. [3] It is in this sense that feminist research methods tend to actively focus on women's daily life, so that women's voice, experience and so on can be highlighted and even included in the scope of social awareness. Meanwhile, since human beings began to be able to speak, narrative has existed at all levels of society and history along with human life. As Liu Xiaofeng said, narration has fundamentally changed the sense of human existence in the world. Because when people face all kinds of difficulties in life, narration can make people regain their sense of life, return to the space of their life phenomena, and even regain the self that has been erased by the uncertainties in life. [4] Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings also said that narrative can give our life significance and sense of belonging, make us have moral sense of empathy, and help us understand life and promote interpersonal understanding. [5] It is in this sense that narrative research essentially pays attention to every independent life, even the self erased by life, and more to their sense of life, and so on. It is for this reason that narrative research methods are widely used in the fields of Humanities and social sciences, including history, anthropology, literature, philosophy, pedagogy and so on. The so-called narrative research method is to promote the researcher to narrate the meaning of his or her life in the way of storytelling, which is essentially a retrospective research method for the past experience and consciousness shaping process. [6] In a word, feminist research methods and narrative research methods pay close attention to every occasional individual's life situation and even their own life experience at the essential level. They are highly compatible. It is precisely because of the deep agreement of the two essential levels that feminist narrative research methods can develop and expand and profoundly influence the development process of international education academia. Jane Chengxi once pointed out that in the field of education research; the narrative research method with greater influence belongs to feminism and postmodernism. [7] Based on the analysis of feminist narrative research methods, we will explore the possible approaches of female teachers' moral learning research in detail, with a purpose to eliminate gender bias in current related research and promote the overall progress of teachers' moral learning research fundamentally.

From the perspective of feminism, the full application of narrative research methods in the study of teachers' moral learning is of great significance to the advancement of female teachers themselves, as well as the theory and practice of female teachers' moral learning. Firstly, we should pay attention to the expression of female teachers' moral learning. Human society is made up of men and women, and the moral edifice of human beings is also made up of "male morality" and "female morality". There are inevitably differences in many aspects of moral learning between the two. For example, they are completely different in the stage of moral learning. Gilligan once pointed out that

there are fundamental differences in moral learning between women and men, and the former will experience three stages as a whole: tendency of self-preservation, goodness of self-sacrifice and morality of non-violence, [8] because basically, although they are living in the same world, they are quite different from men in terms of women's life situation, life experience, and even their perspective of life. [9] However, no matter what differences exist between men and women in moral learning, they are unique people with self-sufficiency and survival value, and their right to life should be respected equally in the most universal and effective way. Therefore, based on feminist perspective, using narrative research methods can undoubtedly reveal, criticize and subvert the "male-centered" discourse in the past research on teachers' moral learning to a certain extent, and pay attention to the expression of women teachers' overall situation of moral learning, thus substantially demonstrating women's dominant position in moral life. Secondly, it produces abundant research materials on female teachers. As mentioned above, the narrative research method is essentially a retrospective research method oriented to the past experience and the process of consciousness shaping. Therefore, compared with the literature research method focusing on logical analysis and quantitative research methods, the narrative research method can often generate rich questions about teachers' moral learning in the process of retrospective research. The accumulation of these research materials is of great value in promoting the progress of teachers' moral learning research. For example, the collection and analysis of the data can not only challenge the research hypothesis that researchers take for granted, but also provide more research topics for researchers at a deeper and broader level, so as to expand the research field of teachers' moral learning. Because, fundamentally speaking, the narrative of life and history is unpredictable, which will inspire the multidimensional possible experience space of human beings on related life issues. Of course, unpredictability is not inexplicable. The reason why explanation can exist is that there is a definite purpose in human narrative, that is, the pursuit of a good life. [10] Therefore, the emergence of a large number of research data can undoubtedly promote the sustained and in-depth development of relevant research to a certain extent. Thirdly, it will lead the practice of female teachers' moral learning. The method of narrative research is not to reveal the truth actively as the way of illustration, but to be more realistic or close to life. [11] Specifically, in the practice of teachers' moral learning, there may be some reasonable problems, such as the possible influence of emotional factors on the process of teachers' moral learning. Therefore, the narrative research method will play an important and even indispensable role in the development of teachers' moral learning process in real situations. At the same time, compared with abstract and simplified literature research methods and quantitative research methods, the results of narrative research methods are undoubtedly more readable, which is more acceptable to ordinary teachers who are on the front line of education, so that they can better understand the moral learning process and support strategies of other teachers' individuals and groups, and to a certain extent,

realize educational academy. Research serves the purpose of educational practice progress.

III. AN ANALYSIS OF THE THEORETICAL PROPOSITION OF FEMINIST NARRATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

As mentioned above, the feminist narrative research method, as an influential narrative research method in the current international context, has its significance in promoting the development of teachers' moral learning research and so on. However, based on feminism, a theoretical system with inherent logic, feminist narrative research methods also have their basic theoretical propositions on the value orientation of research, the object of analysis and even the practical criteria. Therefore, we will try to combine the characteristics of teachers' moral learning research, and discuss the related issues in depth.

Firstly, confirm the main body of female teachers' moral learning process. As a research method, narrative research method is rooted in the progress of Humanities and social sciences since modern times. Therefore, we can not say that it is totally unaffected by the "male-centered" perspective in traditional society. But we must make it clear whether it is essentially or in detail with a certain degree of "gender bias". In fact, in the current field of education research, Carol Witherell, Nel Noddings, Kohli Wendy and others have used narrative research methods to study related issues in the field of education from the feminist perspective. From this point of view, the narrative research method may become the cornerstone of the research from the perspective of "male-centered" and also a powerful weapon for feminist scholars to reveal gender discrimination. As for the study of teachers' moral learning from the feminist perspective, the narrative research method will undoubtedly bring into play the value of the latter. That is to say, by resorting to narrative research methods, we will reveal that the process of female teachers' moral learning is really integrated into their lives through certain narrative structure and content, thus confirming their subjectivity and value-level self-sufficiency in their moral learning practice. For example, through the words of female teachers themselves, it reveals the process that female teachers may be oppressed and eventually be "assimilated" in the face of "standardization" and even "masculinization" teacher ethics evaluation system. By comparing the narrative perspectives and contents of male and female teachers, we can reveal their different situations in the process of moral learning and analyze the possible social and historical causes. In a word, if feminist narrative research methods can be fully and reasonably applied, it will undoubtedly help to confirm the dominant role of female teachers in the process of moral learning.

Secondly, it reveals the concrete process of female teachers' moral learning. Teachers' moral learning develops in a specific and complicated educational practice situation. It is faced with various forms and levels of influencing factors, including natural factors, subjective factors, and environmental factors and so on. Thus, the process of teachers' moral learning presents complex characteristics and has various development possibilities. Therefore, based on the perspective of female teachers as their main body of life,

we must actively use narrative research methods to explore how female teachers as self-contained value subjects specifically promote their moral learning process. For example, female teachers carry out their own moral learning process, which has certain value in the first place. The focus of value embodies the desire of moral learning process, and fundamentally affects the development direction of teachers' moral learning process. Therefore, in the narrative study, the concealment or substitution of the focus of value in the process of female teachers' moral learning obviously fails to meet the fundamental purpose of feminism. Thus, the proper meaning of feminist narrative research method is to actively reveal the value focus of female teachers in the process of moral learning. For example, Gilligan and Noddings have emphasized that women have different "caring" ethics from men, and then explore the characteristics of time and space and the realization mechanism that lead teachers' moral learning. At the same time, female teachers, as the main body of their own moral learning process, undoubtedly need to actively explore the realization of their own value demands. But for female teachers, due to social, historical and cultural reasons, their moral learning process is often hindered by various forms, such as structural oppression of male-centered orientation. Therefore, in the face of such a dilemma, what is the impact of its initiative, and how to realize its possible impact, undoubtedly deserve our active attention. In a word, the process of female teachers' moral learning is extremely complicated and important, which requires us to make a detailed and in-depth discussion.

Thirdly, it establishes the empirical cornerstone of the study of female teachers' moral learning. From the perspective of feminists, the objective rationality pursued by positivism is often based on certain gender privileges, and the knowledge produced will inevitably become a "booster" to aggravate gender hegemony. It is for this reason that feminist epistemology emphasizes taking concrete life experience as the basis and refuses to devour life practice with abstract and difficult theories and data. That is to say, in the eyes of feminists, the rationalized "universal law" such as the "mastery" of researchers is often the consequence of the operation of specific social power, while the goal of feminist research methods is to let the research subjects make their own voices, break the elite hegemony of the past dominant opposition between the subject (researcher) and the object (narrator), and let the female narrators eventually gain strength and voice. [14] In fact, the current promoters of narrative research methods in the field of education often emphasize the significance of collecting concrete and real life experience for narrative research, such as the "four principles" theory (breadth, consistency, insight and simplicity), the "three principles" theory (authenticity, appropriateness, possibility), and so on. [15] For the study of teachers' moral learning, based on the feminist narrative research method, it should actively promote the initiative of the research object to participate in the study, so that the researchers and the research object can form a positive inter-subjective interaction, so that researchers can more easily learn about the life situation of female teachers. In other words, researchers should reproduce their concrete moral learning experience through the narrative of female teachers,

pay attention to the practical problems that female teachers may encounter in their lives, and then understand their motivation and other issues in the context of moral learning, so as to avoid the possible gender blind spots in research design and research conclusions.

IV. THE APPLICATION OF FEMINIST NARRATIVE RESEARCH METHOD AND ITS PROBLEMS

In the specific research practice, if we want to apply the feminist narrative research method and give full play to its value, so as to promote the progress and effective interaction of teachers' moral learning theory and practice as a whole, we undoubtedly need to make various efforts. Specifically, in the relationship between the theory and practice of teachers' moral learning based on feminist perspective, on the one hand, progress cannot be separated from the support of the other. That is to say, resorting to narrative research methods, teachers' moral learning theory can be used to elucidate and apply educational practice, so as to achieve its own correction and development. At the same time, with the help of narrative research methods, the educational experience and wisdom in teachers' moral learning practice can be effectively explored, sorted out and promoted, thus providing the intellectual basis for the construction and development of local educational thoughts. Therefore, we can discuss the application of feminist narrative research methods in teachers' moral learning from the following two aspects. Firstly, based on the practical analysis of teachers' moral learning theory, it is hopeful that the theory of moral learning, including female teachers, can lead the progress of teachers' educational practice, which undoubtedly has some difficulties. However, with the help of narrative research methods, specific teachers' moral learning theory can be connected with female teachers' moral learning practice at a certain level and in a specific time and space, and produce beneficial interaction. While bringing the theoretical results closer to the first-line teachers' personal experience, it can also make them more readable because of the cooperation of narrative. Therefore, the practical application of feminist teacher's moral learning theory will undoubtedly enable specific theoretical viewpoints to be shared in a broader field of educational practice, thus enlightening the overall progress of teacher's educational practice. Secondly, the theoretical construction is based on teachers' moral learning practice. Any educational theory is the result of artificial construction, and the specific teacher's moral learning theory is no exception. Therefore, due to the imperfection of human nature, all theoretical achievements, including teachers' moral learning theory, inevitably have problems in one way or another. Therefore, in order to better serve the overall progress of education, the continuous progress of education theory itself should be indispensable. Specifically speaking, people's understanding is not passive water, always facing the profound impact of practice. Therefore, only based on the existing research results, with a critical and reflective attitude, can we take educational practice into account as a problem, so as to form ideas, constantly integrate and adjust existing theories, and then it is possible to make it develop towards a higher stage. It is in this sense that by resorting to narrative research methods, researchers can undoubtedly continue to

penetrate into the field of educational practice, clarify the specific situation of teachers' lives, and discover enlightening ideas from them, thus laying a solid ideological foundation for the continuous construction of the moral learning theory of local female teachers.

From the analysis above, the application of feminist narrative research methods can undoubtedly promote the in-depth study of teachers' moral learning to a certain extent, but its potential dangers are undoubtedly worthy of our in-depth discussion. As Lynda Stone said, the exploration of narrative research methods in educational research will become more and more normal, even as educational research has entered an era of "narrative research", but prudence in applying this method is still essential. [16] Firstly, the shortcomings of research data: narrative research methods focus on the retrospect of past experience and the process of consciousness shaping, but in fact, it is difficult to apply narrative research methods to perfection, so that research materials can fully reflect the truth of the facts, such as the limitations of human memory, analysis focus, research time and other factors, especially in the face of some sensitive and important issues, the narrative subject will have selective blindness. It is precisely for this reason that, as far as narrative research methods are concerned with the collection of narrative data, inevitably there will be some problems in the aspects of referring objects and presupposition concepts. Even in the process of collecting narrative materials, the narrator "tailored" and "scrambled" completely contrary to the original intention of life. As a result, no matter how significant the narrative research method itself is to the development of teachers' moral learning research, we still need to be cautious because of the possible problems in the collected data itself. Secondly, the research perspective is biased. Narrative research methods are liable to encounter many problems at the level of data collection, but also at the level of understanding and analyzing the narrative intention of the parties. That is to say, even though the data collected by narrative research methods are complete and comprehensive, the research perspective of the researcher, as a living individual living in a specific historical and cultural context, will inevitably be subject to various forms of pre-ideology and ideological and theoretical framework, so it is naturally difficult to truly grasp and understand other people's thoughts when analyzing materials. Specifically, because of the influence of feminist narrative theory, researchers tend to assume that the relevant research materials tend to be male-centered in nature and even be completely bound by it. Therefore, they may adopt a comprehensive deconstruction and rejection attitude towards the relevant research materials, and they cannot hold an objective research perspective. As a result, due to the constraints of research perspective, narrative research methods are naturally difficult to really play its due value, thus promoting the in-depth development of teachers' moral learning research. Thirdly, the limitations of the research conclusions: as mentioned above, the application of narrative research methods is to make women's voice and experience included in the study of teachers' moral learning. However, in fact, people are always in a specific social and cultural environment, not a "closed existence wrapped in their own

skin." He should and can produce various forms and levels of communication and activities with the outside living environment. Therefore, women's voice and experience are not isolated, but are bound to be restricted to a certain extent by specific historical time and space, showing complex cultural and historical characteristics. It is in this sense that the research results of teachers' moral learning obtained by applying feminist narrative research methods cannot be used to reasonably compare and regulate the similarities, differences and relationships between male and female teachers' moral learning characteristics. When facing the problem of female teachers' moral learning, we can hardly say that it can truly represent or even clarify the relevant voices and experiences of women. It is in this sense that, due to the problems of feminist narrative research method itself, its research conclusions are fundamentally worth our vigilance.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on above all, it is necessary that the narrative research method based on feminist perspective is one of the most important research methods in the field of humanities and social science, which meets the need of the current teacher's moral learning research. Its full application in the research of teacher's moral learning has its significance, whether for female teacher themselves, or for female teacher's moral learning theory and even progress in practice. But because of the inherent characteristics of this method, it is needed to face up to the defects of the research material, the bias of the research angle, the limitation of the research conclusion and so on.

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