



Feminist methods of interviewing women

Hayat Naciri and Dorottya Redai

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What is feminist research?

- Commitment to collecting and representing perspectives of informants
- Focus on women's experiences and perspectives
- Aim: new knowledge construction and promoting social change
- Interdisciplinarity and boundary-crossing between activist and academic sites
- Reflexivity – content, methods, ethics, positionality, power relations btw researcher and researched
- Methodological diversity



Feminist qualitative interview research

- Knowledge can be produced via structured telling about experience
- Experience as discursively structured and historically, socially, culturally situated
- Strongly linked to social justice concerns
- Open-ended, semi-structured interviewing
- Locating authority and truth outside received wisdom of Euro- and androcentric disciplines
- Challenging the pretense of neutrality



Major points to consider

- Objectivity vs. Reflexivity
- Power relations
- Listening
- Interpreting
- Research ethics
- Accountability



Objectivity vs. reflexivity

- Questioning positivist approaches to gaining knowledge
- Who defines what is objective?
- Critique of male-biased and Euro-centric/white research questions, methods and conduct with respondents
- Representation always influenced by researcher's own agenda, discourses, pre-conceptions and positionality
- Reflexive analysis of interview data
- Self-reflection on positionality and power relations
- Reflection of aims and methods of research
- Awareness of specific social context of the respondents
- Reflexivity: most endorsed feminist idea by social sciences (esp. anthropology)



Power relations

- Power of the researcher and the researched
- What to reveal about researcher's subjectivity and the research aims and design?
- Interviewing men
- Researcher's assumptions of commonality with women respondents
- Institutional ethnography – institutional ideologies affecting women's experiences and how they interpret them
- Collaborative encounters – involving respondents in data interpretation



Listening

- Active listening - active processing of what is said, allowing information to affect researcher and interview questions
- Acknowledging researcher's ignorance and privilege
- Attending to communication difficulties, discomfort, body language
- Attending to gaps, absences, silences – some stories are too painful to be told



Interpreting

- Selecting which parts of the interview to analyse and represent and how – reflection on these choices
- Discourse analysis, narrative analysis
- Involving respondents in interpreting and presentation of data
- Awareness of the specific context of the interview encounter and the respondents



Research ethics

- Codes of ethics: informed consent, sensitivity to participants' concerns and feelings, protecting identity of respondents, costs and benefits of participation
- Confidentiality – doesn't always serve respondents' interests – flexibility, negotiation of identification procedures, respect for participants
- Institutionalized, standardized ethics review – may work against research design or feminist ethics
- Appropriation – one-way or reciprocal research exchange?
- Discursive colonization (e.g. researching third-world women)
- Treating women as agents in their own lives



Accountability

- Making produced knowledge available and applicable to the women concerned
- Disseminating results in accessible forms beyond the academy
- Corporatization of academia – requirement to be accountable to production-oriented administrative regime – works against being accountable to researched communities