

What does feminist methodology contribute to fisheries research?

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This presentation

- How our ideas about feminist methodology developed before 1990s
- Debates within feminism about methodology.
- What different methods might be useful in our research
- Which principles and practice should we take into our research into women and fisheries?

Why is feminist methodology important in fisheries research?

- Fisheries research is about fish – but also about the women and men who harvest, process and consume fish and the communities they live in.
- It is this social dimension of fisheries research that feminist methodology can contribute to.
- If we are to study women (and men) with a feminist perspective, then we have to think carefully about HOW we do this.
- Feminist methodology must be **primarily** faithful to feminist principles of equality and respect between women ie it must be **ethical**.
- Feminist methodology must also produce research that is respected by academic and other audiences.

First thoughts about feminist methodology

- Pre-history of feminist scholarship
- What we read in the 1970s - Millet, Firestone, Mitchell, Rowbotham, Oakley – all providing different perspectives on inequality and subordination of women in society.
- Rise of 1970s feminist scholarship – dismantling the generic ‘he’; filling the gaps; focusing on women
- Add women and stir – **first feminist methodology**

Rise of qualitative approaches

- Quantitative versus qualitative
- Search for a Methodology that fits women's **experience** better – not the structured interview and positivist approach
- Asks different questions
- Ethnography and qualitative methods
- Rise of the unstructured interview
- Change in the role of the participant (no longer a 'subject', becoming an equal partner in knowledge creation)
- Participatory methodology – research for, with and by women

Can feminist research be legitimate?

- Can feminist research be legitimate in **feminist terms**?
- Do we need **new methods** in order to do feminist research?
- ‘interviewing women – a contradiction in terms’ (Oakley)
- Stanley and Wise – ‘the knowing because experiencing subject’ and the sample of one
- DAWN (Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era) and the supreme validity of poor women’s experience.
- The salience of ethical concerns in feminist research.

Two theoretical approaches

- Dorothy Smith *The Everyday World as Problematic*
- Hartsock and Harding – Standpoint theory

Some practical approaches

- Reinharz – diversity and continuity of feminist approaches; feminist research is guided by feminist theory; **feminist research is a perspective** not a method
- Maynard and Purvis – mixed methods, triangulation, **transformatory** nature of feminist research

Some of the variety of methods...

- Interview research, especially in depth, open ended interviews
- Ethnography
- Cross cultural, comparative research
- Case studies
- Action, community based, participatory research
- Literature based research, content research
- Life story, narrative research, autobiography and oral history
- Visual, audio, dramatic and multi-media research eg photo research
- Historical research
- Diaries and journals

The problem of analysis

- The procedure for analysing quantitative, scientific, experimental or statistical data is relatively clear cut. The procedure for analysing qualitative data is not.
- Qualitative analysis will **never** achieve the kind of certainties that hard science aspires to. **Get used to it!**
- How we analyse and present qualitative data aims to provide readers with understanding, empathy and meaning – not certainty
- However, there are procedures and requirements to stay as true to the data as possible and to apply analytical tools as rigorously as possible

Some examples of analysis

- Strauss and Corbin – Grounded Theory - theoretic closure approaches
- Mauthner and Doucet – voice centred relational method – multi readings and group analysis
- NVivo and other computer based tools for handling large qualitative data sets (Lyn Richards)
- Czarniawska - ‘explication’ (reconstruction), ‘explanation’ (deconstruction) and ‘exploration’ (construction) 3 levels of interpretation. Eg WERL
- Biographical methods – Wengraf SQIN (Single question aimed at inducing narrative)
- Reflexive interpretation expressed in literary form eg poetic research

What kind of compromises should you make?

- ‘Second hand ethnography’ eg Women’s Economic Lives
- Issues of hierarchy in research teams
- Distance of PI from actual field material
- Issues of things that come up in the interstices of research projects e.g. domestic violence
- Working cross culturally

Invasion of the post-modernists

- Adds complexity, challenges assumptions, questions 'truth' and 'reality', complicates the picture
- Norris – rejects the 'reduction of all reality to simulcra...the abandonment of all modern enlightenment projects of liberty and humanism'
- Link between a particular form of thinking with a particular political era – i.e. neo-liberalism and decimation of liberal values

- Lovibond: ‘It would be only natural for anyone placed at the sharp end of one or more of the existing power structures (gender, race, capitalist class...) to feel a pang of disappointment at this news (that the emancipatory project has run out of steam). But wouldn’t it also be in order to feel *suspicion*? How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to ‘emancipatory metanarratives’ when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?’ p.161.

- Nussbaum: associates feminism at its heart with ‘the practical struggle to achieve justice and equality for women’ – still strong in India
- In West there is ‘the virtually complete turning from the material side of life toward a type of verbal and symbolic politics that makes only the flimsiest of connections with the real situation of real women.’ She goes on to explain that ‘feminist thinkers of the new symbolic type would appear to believe that the way to do feminist politics [or feminist research] is to use words in a subversive way, in academic publications of lofty obscurity and disdainful abstractness’.
- Denial of the hope for a world of real justice.
- Resulting withdrawal of feminist scholarship into theory and the academy

conclusion

- No actual 'feminist methods', just feminist use of good methods
- Feminist methodology draws on variety of sources,
- Takes risks but can only ever be partial
- Remains true to feminist principles
- **Contributes a valuable perspective to fisheries research.**

- Thank you for your time and attention!

Workshop the methodology

- Take any one of the presentations that have relied on quantitative methods in the last 2 days eg Mafimisebi on fish based livelihoods in Nigeria or Majid women's incomes in brackish water fishery in Indonesia.
- Given the topic **what feminist qualitative questions would you ask? What theory of women's subordination would you rely on? Why is it important for you to know this. What is the social, historical and cultural context of the research**
- How would you integrate some qualitative methods into the project and what kind of information or insights would you expect from doing so