

Report on Gender – Sensitive Research Methodology

Approaches to social science research by Widad Ali Adelraham

Philosophical dimensions in social research helps with the conceptualisation and organisation of research.

There are assumptions related to social science:

Ontological: reality is objective, external to an individual or a product of one's cognition and mind.

Epistemological: the theory of knowledge which establish the **knower** and the **power** dimension. The focus is on the subjective and objective ways of producing knowledge. That is the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Therefore, what is known, how knowledge is known, who produce knowledge, what is legitimate knowledge?

Human nature can be passive as well as actors in social research. The passive role is where the humans' experiences are controlled by the environment and the context that they find themselves in. However, as actors means their experiences are shaped by their actions i.e. lived experiences.

Methodology is the practical way of conducting research by linking with particular ontological, particular epistemological and the special view of human nature and their role in shaping reality.

Paradigm is about the three assumptions: ontological, epistemological and methodological.

Positivist Paradigm:

Ontological assumption is that reality is out there, driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms. Knowledge is time free and context free – i.e. generalisations.

Epistemological assumption exclude subjectivity that is the enquirer is at distance from the subject or in non interactive posture.

Methodology assumption: The conduct of research is under careful controlled situations where the subject is experimented and manipulated.

Criticisms are knowledge is neither universal nor valid, representations are always partial interpretations and statistics do not represent reality but construct reality.

Critical theory paradigm:

Ontological assumption is critical of the reality that is out there.

Epistemological assumption is subjectivist in the sense that value mediates the inquiry.

Methodology assumption: the conduct of research should eliminate false consciousness but rather gives room to come out with transformative knowledge. That is knowledge gain should contribute to change.

Constructivist paradigm:

Ontology assumption is about the construction of knowledge by those who are involved in the knowledge process. Reality is multi-faceted because it dependent on the form and content on the persons who hold them.

Epistemology assumption is the interaction between who want to know (i.e. inquirer) and the subject (i.e. inquired).

Methodology assumption: the conduct of research is subjective where findings are literally created from the interaction between the inquirer and the inquired.

Relativist: No objective reality exists, multiple realities, the meaning differ from every interpreter and there is interdependence between any perception of reality, the researcher, the researched and the tools used in the research.

Methodology & methods: There is confusion between the two. However, methodology refers to “the overarching approach to research”, that is theoretical & philosophical ideas, focus of the research, methods to be employed, form of analysis and the position of the researcher” but the actual techniques that one employs to conduct research are the methods.

Therefore the choice of methods should be in line with theories, ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Research approaches of quantitative and qualitative should be linked to the selected paradigm.

The reason why there is more focus on qualitative research approach for feminist/gender research are they give the researched a voice, dignity and empowers people. However, there is the concern of the biasness from the researcher. The use of theory bridges the gap between the data and knowledge.

Methods of qualitative approaches which are suitable for any gender-sensitive study are ethnography, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study

Research positionality of a gender-sensitive researcher should think about the ways in which to minimize the power differential, e.g. use local language, recruit interpreter, blending into the culture etc. Also have an ethical relationship with the subject.

Gender-sensitive research methodology by Petra Dannecker

The 1970s discussions on feminist methodology ask about the sex/gender influence which the choices of theoretical framework lead to the choice of which methodology and methods to be used.

The arguments for the feminist research were drawbacks that were identified with the positivist paradigm.

The 1990s feminist methodology debates were mainly initiated by black and migrant women where the focus were on the processes of knowing and knowers, the variety of different approaches and controversial debates, also with regard to categories like race in the process of knowledge production.

There are **two dimensions of special importance** in the feminist methodology:

- a) Power and power-relations and how they influences and structure knowledge, research and the development of theories
- b) Reflexivity: discussion of the researcher’ subjectivity and subject position, the problematic nature of it and how does the subject position affect knowledge production?

In conclusion, the feminist methodology pursues an emancipatory research practice that is socially responsible and politically and ethically imperative. Researching gender is ‘doing gender’