

Helma Järviluoma, Pirkko Moisala & Anni Vilkkö: *Gender and Qualitative Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 2003

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1 *Gender and Qualitative Methods* forms part of a series entitled "Introducing Qualitative Methods", which, it is stated, has an "interdisciplinary and international" (p. 2) approach. The volume under consideration here clearly ties in with this scope. The series is aimed at the student and beginning researcher, providing an accessible yet informative introduction to the consideration of gender within qualitative research. The authors illustrate how gender can be approached, seen, and researched in a variety of settings through the use of their personal research experience, case study examples, and thorough discussions of theories and positions. Each chapter is a theoretical introduction to a particular method, illustrated with practical and real examples of the research method. The case study examples are diverse in nature, showing the richness and possibilities within gender studies. Each of the three authors has her own research expertise, and this is evident in the varied chapters and research methods chosen. Their aim is to "introduce different methods for recognizing gender/ing in qualitative research" (p.7).

2 Useful exercises are given at the end of each chapter to encourage the student or researcher to explore the methods for themselves. This provides the researcher with a constructive starting point if they wish to understand more about a particular method and can be very useful for students new to the field of gender studies. For example, the first exercise from Chapter 1 is to write one's own biography from the perspective of gender, and one exercise from Chapter 5 is the gendered analysis of an advertisement jingle.

3 Chapter 1, Performing and negotiating gender, acts as an introduction to gender studies, and the book as a whole. For those new to gender studies this is a useful overview, whilst to those familiar with the field it provides a new and constructive account of gender in research. The authors establish their position of regarding gender as a social construction and that "in order to be able to question, that is, to analyse, gender, one has to seek to distance oneself from one's own gender system" (p. 19). This is one reason why they argue that research is never neutral. The authors also provide a useful gendered critique of the division between quantitative and qualitative methods, citing Ann Oakley and her changes in approaches over time as being instrumental in changing the way methods are viewed. The chapter therefore provides a useful overview of how gender is something that is "constantly being maintained, performed, and renegotiated" (p.24) and that it can be "read" and

"interpreted" (p.24) from a variety of sources, texts and contexts.

4 Chapter 2 focuses on gender and field work and as such is the first of the more specific chapters, dealing with a specific method. Here, the authors are "not using gender as an explanation for different 'objective conditions' but rather as an analytical concept to focus on the construction of gender in field research" (p.27). The field work of the chapter title is primarily discussed from an ethnographic perspective which provides an interesting context for those perhaps unfamiliar with this type of approach. The case studies presented here provide distinctive examples of cases where the intricacies of race, gender and culture collide in practical fieldwork, producing varying power relationships. Physical and literal postures in the field are constantly negotiated and renegotiated along many social, cultural and gender lines during fieldwork, and "the intertwining of the research and the researcher is particularly obvious" (p.33). Female (and male) researchers may find themselves in situations where personal social or cultural attributes are used to locate the person in a position which may be unfamiliar or unusual for them - this can focus attention not only on analysing the actual situation, but also encourages inward observation in terms of their reactions to the different situations.

5 Chapter 3 focusing on gender and life stories continues the theme of differing gendered approaches by females and males, but from the perspective of the telling of life histories and how these autobiographies or oral histories are used as research texts. The authors argue that the telling of life stories can be gendered by the narrator. But, they warn that a gendered interpretation is not simple as narrators can 'adopt' voices, styles or patterns that are contradictory and can mask their gender. Autobiographies and life histories, they argue, can be useful not only for the social and historical evidence they provide on the surface, but also for the possibility of reading them from a gendered perspective: "autobiography is not just research material among other data, but also a set of practices which produce knowledge in accordance with its own protocols, implicating the reader in this process" (p.53). Feminists have therefore used life histories as a way of furthering the field of feminist studies because autobiographies give a voice to (previously silenced) women and have an "emancipatory function" (p.60). The authors here also show how recent debate within this field has led to more "discursive" and "performative" (p. 66) approaches of the reading of life narratives.

6 A possibly new method for some students and researchers is that of membership categorization analysis that is explored in Chapter 4. A brief history of this method is provided, along with an outline of the various concepts of membership categorization analysis

(MCA). Although postmodernists, and many feminists, would argue against the use of categories and labels, MCA enables researchers to look beyond the labels by seeking to understand how "these categories are constantly being constructed and maintained through everyday interactions" (p.70). Using a variety of examples, the authors show how individuals, the media, society etc construct and use categories, and how we all react to such labels, even when we think we, as feminists or researchers, are not susceptible to the use of categories and labels!

7 Chapter 5 which analyses sound and vision from the perspective of gender may be another method that is new to many researchers as the authors state that the analysis of such forms is frequently neglected in ethnographic and media studies. They focus on how gender categories "are performed and reshaped in film soundtracks and music videos" (p.84) and argue that not only does music have meanings on its own, but that sounds can also change our interpretations, feelings, and reactions to visual situations e.g. the use of particular sounds to accompany particular scenes in films. This can be studied from a gender perspective such as analysing the types of sounds associated with different types of women when they appear in a film. Gender in sound and vision also encompasses approaches including studying neglected female composers as well as the position of women in the music world today e.g. women in rock music. Detailed case study examples and guides to reading the gender construction of film or video soundtracks provide sufficient material to show the researcher how sounds are interpreted consciously and unconsciously and how we react to aural stimuli.

8 In Chapter 6 on Research Reporting and Gender the authors consider the gendered process of writing research and discuss the issues surrounding the dichotomy of objective (masculine) and subjective (feminine) research writing. They also consider the differences between what they term American and French styles of feminist thought and writing and look at experimental hybrid models as a possible way forward to avoid the tired traditional dichotomy of neutral or subjective research writing.

9 Despite a few unfortunate typographical errors e.g. 'femininity', Okeley rather than Okely, and the lack of a concluding chapter on gender and qualitative methods, this book shows how important it is that "gender must be taken seriously in every kind and at every level of research, from practical choices to methodological questions, as well as at every stage of the research process" (p.1). This book exemplifies ways of analysing gender as a socially constructed and performed interaction from a variety of different methods, most of which are usually left out of research textbooks. Whilst it is not a general how-to book on gender and

qualitative methods (which could be possible, given its title), it is a valuable introductory exploration into several research methods from a gendered perspective.