University of Huddersfield Repository

Burr, Vivien

The contribution of feminist research to the rise of qualitative methods: Soft data instead of hard facts.

Original Citation


This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/13699/

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/
The contribution of feminist research to the rise of qualitative methods: Soft data instead of hard facts

Vivien Burr
University of Huddersfield, UK
Soft data instead of hard facts

Psychology: a science

- Control of variable
- Measuring effects
- Eliminating social and environmental factors
Soft data instead of hard facts

But people talk back!

- Eliminate bias
- Be invisible
- Standardised procedures
- Quantitative methods dominant
- Qualitative methods should imitate them
Soft data instead of hard facts

1960s and 1970s
The crisis in social psychology
e.g. Rom Harré and Henri Tajfel

- The state of psychological knowledge
- Doubts about laboratory experiments
- Concerns about ethics
- Relationship between experimenter and subject
Soft data instead of hard facts

2008
British Psychological Society- BPS

Core curriculum does not include ‘critical’ psychology
Soft data instead of hard facts

Feminism and psychology

Sue Wilkinson
Celia Kitzinger
Erica Burman
Jane Ussher
Soft data instead of hard facts

Androcentrism in psychology

- The mainstream is ‘malestream’
  - Lawrence Kohlberg: moral development
- Men- normal or standard
- Women-deviant or pathological
- Applies to class, ethnicity etc
- Who sets the research agenda?
  - Ussher (1989): research on menstruation
Soft data instead of hard facts

Value-freedom and objectivity

Freedom from:

- prior assumptions
- vested interests
- subjective interpretations
Soft data instead of hard facts

- Funding: Industry, government and ‘unpopular’ research findings
- Societal assumptions and values
  Sex differences research and patriarchy
- Psychology- apolitical? E.g. Intelligence and ‘racial’ differences
Soft data instead of hard facts

Self-evident facts and problems
e.g. the ‘breakdown of the family’
  women’s ‘fight from the family’

Who decides what counts as a ‘problem’?

Interpreting research findings
e.g. ‘field independence’
Soft data instead of hard facts

The researcher and the subject

- An undemocratic relationship
- Power inequalities
- Who gets to interpret the subject’s behaviour?
- The self-contained individual- a masculine preoccupation?
Soft data instead of hard facts

Re-writing the aims of research

- Democratic research ‘for’ not ‘on’ people
- ‘Participant’ not ‘subject’
- The voice and account of the participant-qualitative methods
Soft data instead of hard facts

Quantitative | Qualitative
--- | ---
Hard | Soft
Masculine | Feminine
Soft data instead of hard facts

Depth interviews, scientific ‘rigour’ and validity

- Ann Oakley (1981) - experiences of motherhood
- Co-researchers
- All psychological research is some form of social interaction
- Break the ‘rules’
- Reflexivity
Soft data instead of hard facts

Conclusion

- A different conception of science
- Relativity of different perspectives
- Research findings are a co-production
- Explicit discussion of research values
- Liberatory and facilitative
- Democratic

A challenge to gender divisions?