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

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


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# 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
- 
- The background of the slide features several faint, concentric circles of varying sizes, resembling ripples on water, positioned in the lower right quadrant.

# 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'?

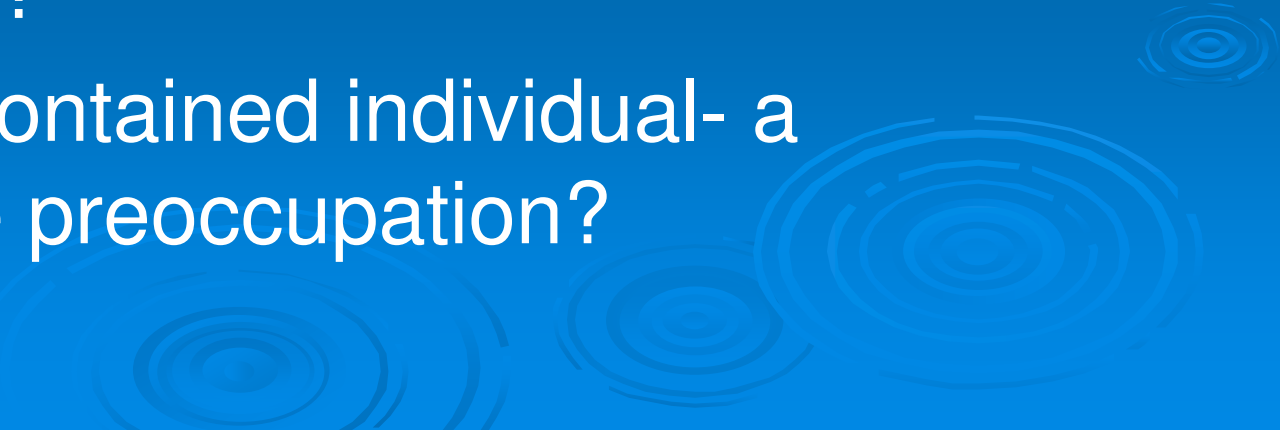
Interpreting research findings

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?**