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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

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?