

**Global Feminisms Conference, Sept. 15, 2006:
Changing the World, Changing the Academy**

**USING GF PROJECT IN CLASSROOMS:
FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODS (MCGUIRE, RIOS, WINGROVE)**

Introduction:

- We need to think broadly about what we mean by method and where/how it gets taught. There are not many (if any?) undergraduate courses on feminist methods per se, but issues of feminist “approaches to inquiry” arise in a range of different courses, at undergraduate and graduate levels. Courses not specifically labeled “feminist methods” or “WS methodologies” might still be appropriate for using GF materials.
- Related to above: let’s keep in mind how “methods” might be transposed from social science contexts to contexts where humanistic inquiry is central to the research/teaching enterprise. What kinds of humanistic “methods” might be appropriately introduced, discussed, explored using the GF archives?
- The GF project itself can be framed as a “case study” of research, activism and pedagogy which represents what and perhaps how methodological choices are made.
- On one level, the GF enterprise is one project; on another, it’s four relatively autonomous projects were carried out with different approaches
- At every level, specific decisions – those made by site coordinators and those made at the level of the project as a whole – can be interrogated. Some examples include: How were interviewees selected? Were there site-specific protocols? Cross-site protocols? Where/how was filming done?
- Interviews from each of the four GF sites contain many instances in which interviewees explicitly discuss their own choices and experiences with methodology: How to organize research? How to gather data? How to interpret it? What it is to pursue a project from a feminist perspective. The archive thus offers a range of cases of how scholar-activists have grappled with questions of “approach” from within their particular fields.

Specific Issues:

We introduced two key “issue areas” that either correspond to a particular methodology or that encompass a range of possible methods. The “issue areas” were 1) Narratives and 2) Consciousness Raising.

Producing/Constructing/Recording/Interpreting Narratives

- Narrative construction is often central to ethnography, oral history, biography and autobiographical analyses, rhetorical analysis, content analysis.
- Narrative analysis can raise interesting issues around objectivity and most generally “positivism” in scholarly projects.
- A range of ethical issues arise in interpreting – as well as gathering/recording/making – narratives.

- The very assumption of unity that comes with the telling of a life story is something to consider. The method of storytelling, whether with reference to the history of a social/political movement or of a particular life, imposes temporal limits that imply more unity than may actually exist.
- The GF archive might provide opportunities for exploring cultural and social group based tendencies in how individuals explain their life path (e.g. McAdams' research on themes in lifestory narratives).
- The materials are also rich for thinking about literary approaches to narrative (e.g., Sławka Walczewka's rhetorical analytic work on transcripts).

Clips used to discuss some of these points:

Holly Hughes (U.S.):

Raised the issue of performance and performativity. As a performance artist, Hughes actively played to the audience. Role of audience reaction.

Mangai (India):

Raised the issue of other types of presentation in the films, besides direct interview. Mangai is a theater director, and the film includes a clip from street theater she performed around the issue of newborn girls and boys in India.

Liu Bohong (China):

Raised the issue of format of the interview. Displeased with the aesthetics of the original interview, Liu Bohong had the interview retaped. She re-read her own responses from cue cards.

Uvashi Butalia (Cross-site):

Butalia speaks directly about the intersections of life stories, institutional stories and history and her own role in disseminating information contained in stories she gathered through her work.

He Zhonghua (China):

Working with the PhotoVoice project, the He Zhonghua interview raises multi-faceted example of methodological choices. The filming does as well, since participants of the project are also interviewed.

Consciousness Raising as methodology

This draws on Catherine MacKinnon's early 1970s articulation of consciousness raising as *the* "method" of feminism – both as a movement and in its scholarly advancement. How generalizable is this claim? How does consciousness raising appear – or not – as central to the interviewees' processes across the different sites? What are potential pitfalls of forging this kind of comparative assessment? Can the category (consciousness raising) be usefully complicated in and through comparison of sites?

Clips used to discuss some of these points:

Chen Mingxia (China):

She talks about the consciousness that develops when theory and practice (activism) come together. Her personal change in consciousness is also embedded in the account she gives of her activist work.

Anna Lipowska-Teutsch (Poland):

She describes the complications of empowering – helping to raise consciousness – of women who are victims of domestic violence only to arrive at a situation where the system no longer sees them as ‘good victims.’

General discussion:

- **An important element of feminist methodology is taking data back to the subject and getting their input**
 - Think about Liu Bohong interview and her request to refilm.
 - What differences in taking the raw material v. taking the analysis back to the subject?
 - How much contextual information about the process itself is necessary? Should this be available on the web?
- **Visual culture:**
 - Visual construction as important as narrative construction. How does the visual context affect meaning?
 - What you can construct about a woman or a cultural world from the visual presentations? What might you misconstrue? (For example, a concern that the China interview might reinforce a stereotype because of the “news-anchor style” appearance of interviewees.)
- **Rhetorical analysis**
 - The materials are very appropriate for teaching students how to analyze different narratives, kinds of content, performances, etc.
 - Assignment idea: Read the transcripts at home, see the clips in the classroom, write up an analysis as a paper assignment.
- **Interview technique**
 - The materials are very appropriate for teaching students interview techniques – how much do you prompt, how to follow-up, what do you read into what an interviewee says as she says it?
- **Theory/epistemology/ontology**
 - How might the materials be used to teach students to theorize? Pose questions such as: Use these interviews to theorize the constitution of “facticity”?
 - Consider specific approaches. For example, use Derridian techniques to read these clips.
- **Genre analysis**
 - Genres can emerge from and/or exemplify a particular moment or period within a culture/society. “Patterned ways of making meaning” that create a genre.
 - Ethno-methodology – bracketing certain kinds of questions across cultures, groups, trying to resuscitate a worldview.
 - What is said and what is not said...
- **Genealogy as method**

- Emphasizing disjuncture (compared to a more linear, potentially teleological approach), modes of transmission, and contingent changes over time.
- **Comparative methodologies**
 - The materials are very appropriate for teaching students what it means to do comparative work.
 - What are the different ways to compare with these materials? Across sites? Within sites? By themes? By form of activism? By content in interview?
 - Helping students to become aware of the assumptions they bring when making comparisons.
 - What do you need to flesh out from the interviews themselves in order to do meaningful comparative work?
 - Instead of comparing according to a category like experience in marriage, how about ‘what triggers politicization?’ What makes women identify with other women is a hallmark of feminist action - what triggers that? The need to frame the right sorts of broad questions instead of invoking certain categories.
 - Use comparison to destabilize concepts that we hold on to.
- **Activism**
 - How to use these materials to think about the methods of activism? Is this a resource for relatively discrete presentations of certain techniques (e.g., coalition building)?
 - These materials can serve as a starting point to discuss the question of the local as the primary site of activism. In what ways is it the transnational movement that sets in motion local movements?
 - What influences remain over time? What ideas get appropriated by other groups? (For example, the current gender agenda of the World Bank was a feminist agenda in women’s development in China decades ago.)
- **Other feminist/social justice methods that can be brought into a discussion around GF as method**
 - A social justice commitment creates a research agenda and methods that are different from traditional science/research. Challenges the entire traditional scientific framework.
 - Different approaches to politicization in the context of education theory and teaching (e.g., Paulo Friere v. GF approach, or compare with bell hooks’ approach).
 - Challenge conventional notions of the political. Personal transformation, emotion, etc. as connected to the political.
 - Action research: strategy and outcomes. How do you do the least possible harm and develop relationships with participants/subjects to gain knowledge?
 - Example of assignment: Examine the extent to which the term feminist is used, accepted or rejected, etc. as a kind of ‘methods’ used in each site for coming to consciousness. Look at what happens in people’s telling of their stories/work. Emphasize the *how* of it: the internalization or concretization of gender justice issues.
- **Performance and performativity**

- Performance as a form of CR. The ‘voicing silence’ clip (Mangai street theater) excerpt is a literal performance. What does this say about CR as a method in activism?
- Consider Butler and Austin – how is gender being performed? Do we see reiterations of certain cultural modes of femininity or feminism? Is there a mode of being a woman that is performed?
- Consider performances of class, caste, ethnicity, age.