

SEQUAL Seminar #2

LIFE HISTORIES IN FEMINIST RESEARCH: Theoretical background and empirical examples



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“As feminists, we want to represent the lives of women and to give them some opportunity to represent themselves, their problems and their solutions, while recognizing that only partial success in these aims is possible....there will be no solution without these voices”

- Townsend 2005:14

Positivism framework

The objective world: *“to find out something that is true for other people in similar circumstances or generalisable”*. Quantitative research.

- **Positivist approach:** roots in the natural sciences and is seen to be objective. *“Scientific knowledge is a direct reflection of a real objective world.” “Scientific research is characterised by experiments where data are gathered that critically test hypotheses”. “It attempts to systematise knowledge through generalizable principles.”*
- **Post-positivism:** *“the truth can only be slowly and imperfectly arrived at given the limitations of the research process”. “the research cannot take a neutral or value-free position in the research.” “the researcher’s background helps shape the research and its results.” “The aim is still to be objective but there is a recognition that this is impossible.”*

- Deductive process
- A hypothesis is formulated based on previous research
- Findings can be generalised
- The researcher aims to be objective and neutral
- Data are used to support or reject previous theory

Feminist approach in the research

- **Feminism:** “The personal is political” ➡ Knowledge production is a political act (consciousness and responsibility)
- **Decolonial feminism: Alternative source of knowledge** ➡ Incorporate other perspectives of knowledge (women’s/marginalized groups’ knowledge vs techno-positivist masculine science)
- **Knowledge as a transformation key** ➡ Social Transformation
 - ✓ **Collective construction of knowledge (co-construction)** (convergence with research –action scholars and Freire’s pedagogy)
 - ✓ **BUT also Intersectionality** raising awareness of structural barriers of intersectional discriminations of voices, based on country of origin, ethnicity, education system, race, and other individual and collective social identities, should be recognized.
 - ✓ **Reflexivity:** refers to the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research process and how these may have influenced the research. In feminist practice it is important to reflect about choices made about what to study and what studies, that are, according to cultural studies, culturally and socially bounded decisions that reflect power and values (Schnabel, 2014)
 - **Positionality**
 - **Subjectivity**

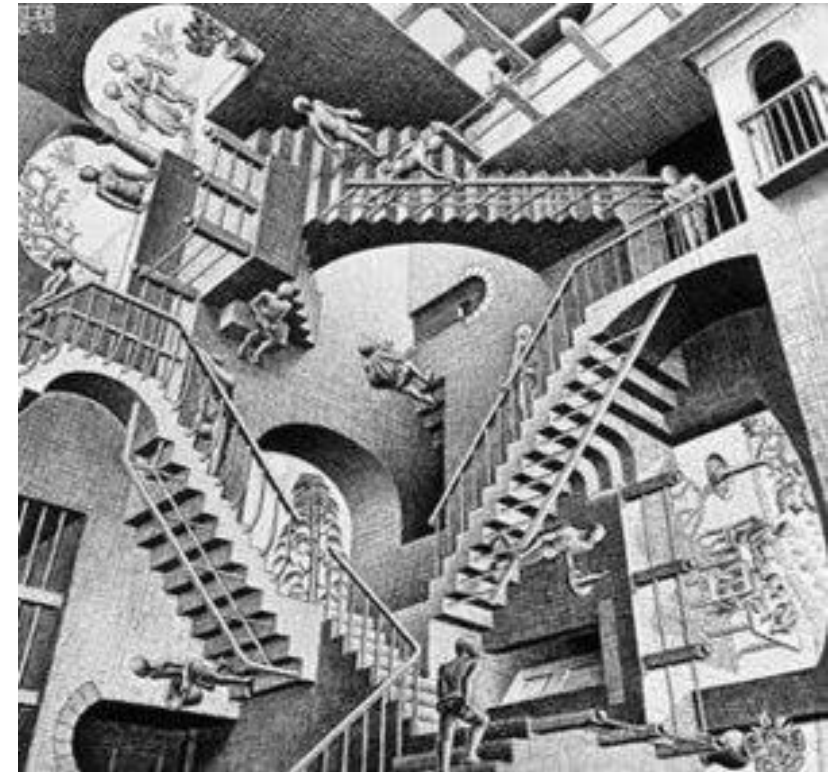
Reflexivity

❖ Positionality:

Recognition of power dynamics that may exist between researchers and subjects of research and the impact in the research and in generating and circulating knowledge (Rose 1997)

❖ Subjectivity:

The conscious and unconscious thoughts and notions of an individual, one's sense of oneself and way of understanding one's relation to the world (Cahill 2007 and Weedon 1987)



Subjectivity importance

- ❖ Recognize that subjectivity is present in knowledge production → define and measure it.
- ❖ Studies of complex units (ex. rural world) present discontinuous realities with different social identities → specific treatment of each one.
- ❖ Analysis of individual trajectories in the framework of the primary reference groups (domestic group, ethnic minority, etc.).

Individually constructed world (own experience):

- Narrative research: *“The researcher explores the live of individuals and the story of their lives.” “The narrative interview is designed to allow the participant to give a detailed story about their life or part of it.”*
 - ✓ Largely inductive
 - ✓ There is recognition that other people may make similar sense of their experiences but that each account is unique.
- Researcher subjectivity creates knowledge → Knowledge co-construction: subject + practitioner researcher (reflexivity).
- For marginalized groups (women’s testimony) to narrate a story allows them to be conscious about themselves and their processes.

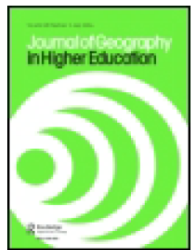
Feminist approach in the research

➤ Knowledge as a transformation key ➡ Social Transformation

- ✓ **Embodiment** invitation to researchers to overcome the duality of mind and body challenging the positivist science-based knowledge production.
 - novel ontological but also epistemological approaches that have often led to new methodological proposals of working with literature and arts (Benessia et al., 2012)
 - Examples drawing from activist research and decolonial anthropology: epistemic-corporeal workshops that consider body and emotions as spaces from which to explore collaboratively (researchers and non-) embodied and experiential knowledge
- ✓ **Reciprocity and ethic of care for transformation** emerges from the practice of reflexivity that motivates researchers to counteract asymmetrical or extractive relationships when we identify them (Smith 1999).
 - ✓ It implies demonstrating long-term commitment to local research partners, pursuing questions and needs they identify, engaging with them as co-researchers and returning results for a better understanding, offering training and capacity building.
 - ✓ It also implies nurturing a new culture of collaborations, shared learning and relationships of trust, respect of time and conviviality, essential for understanding complex social and spatial processes (Caretta and Faria 2019).

We should start from ourselves...

Autoethnography (Caretta et al 2018, Oberhauser & Caretta 2019)



Journal of Geography in Higher Education

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“Who can play this game?” The lived experiences of doctoral candidates and early career women in the neoliberal university

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Mentoring early career women geographers in the neoliberal academy: dialogue, reflexivity, and ethics of care

Ann M. Oberhauser & Martina Angela Caretta

Received 01 Feb 2018, Accepted 04 Dec 2018, Published online: 11 Dec 2018

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Creating sharing spaces:

- group processes (internal for the research group)
- Open forums (external with the rest of the community): climate change forums

Contributions from feminist scholarships

Feminist empiricism	Feminist postmodernism	Feminist standpoint theory
Keller	Haraway, Smith	Hartsock, Rose
Current scientific methods abolishing androcentric bias	Situated knowledge, partial knowledge federated in solidarity	Successor science founded on feminist epistemology
Feminist scholar activism/activist scholarship	Feminist political ecology	Feminist anthropology
Hewitt	Rocheleau; Nightingale; Buechler and Hanson	Lugone ; <u>Women, Culture, and Society.</u>
Militant ethnography that play a role in knowledge production; corporeal workshops	Investigate unequal power relations in everyday practices; Knowledge building becomes a relational process. Use of mixed methods combined with ethnography, photo voice, co-writing, life stories	Complex subjectivity; engages often with feminists from non-Western traditions (Latina feminism); ethnographic embodied methods

Life history methodology

A coherent and thoughtful interpretation of someone's own life.

The objective is to achieve a “subjective” record that can inform us of the relationship between subjectivity (subject construction process) and memory.

It does not obtain information or evidence by itself.

➡ It needs a further elaboration and interpretation process.

➤ Life story vs life history:

✓ Life story: a person narrates her story how it is.

✓ **Life history**: life story + other documents (personal documents or objects, pictures, letters, etc.) to support the narration.

➡ Researcher compares the personal narration with other documents to elaborate the life history. Reconstruction of individual – society dialectic by means of the autobiographical account.

➤ Narrator – narrate the relation: researcher takes part in the narration process. It is a mutual process.

➤ The Life History can be used in the initial stage of a project to suggest new hypotheses unknown a priori.

Life history and feminist approach

01

Make the role of women/indigenous/others subjects visible to a larger public through the written words

02

Rescue women experiences, knowledge and historical memory.

03

Give to women a central role in scientific/academic field.

04

Search for alternative versions of official history.

Evolution of traditional knowledge between “genDerations”: Study of one livestock keepers family in Estana, Catalan Pyrenees

1900	Generación 0	1940	Generación 1	1970	Generación 2	2010	Generación 3	2017
VACUNO LECHE EXTENSIVO 3-6 cab. OVINO CARNE 100 cab.		VACUNO LECHE EXTENSIVO 14 cab. OVINO CARNE 30 cab.		VACUNO LECHE EXTENSIVO 30 cab. VACUNO CARNE 60 cab. EQUINO CARNE 30 cab.		VACUNO CARNE ECOLÓGICO 100 cab.		
Cerdos (4) Gallinas (10) Conejos (3) Burro (1) Vacas de tiro	Huerta Trigo, maíz Patatas Judías	Cerdos (4) Gallinas (10) Conejos (3) Burro (1) Vacas de tiro (2)	Huerta Trigo, cebada, maíz Patatas Judías, garbanzos Alfalfa	Cabras (20) Cerdos (6) Gallinas (20) Conejos (10)	Huerta Patatas Alfalfa	Gallinas (20) Conejos (10)	Huerta Patatas Alfalfa	

Población: 40-50 familias.
Inexistencia de servicios básicos.
< 60s: Extrema dependencia del medio físico para actividad agraria
Producción: autoconsumo > venta.
Bajo conocimiento científico-técnico.
(García, 1998)
Subsistencia como modo de vida.

Nivel estatal: receso actividad ganadera. No afectación local.
Comienzo despoblación.
Inexistencia de servicios básicos; se construye carretera rudimentaria.
Adaptación a enfoque productivista y comienzo industrialización. Aumento de la competitividad por los recursos locales.
(García, 1998; Roigé et al. 1995)
Subsistencia como modo de vida.

Despoblación acusada.
Servicios básicos: carretera, agua corriente y electricidad.
Alta presión de intensificación.
Pérdida de actividad agraria: aumento superficie boscosa y disminución cultivos.
(Fillat et al., 2012)
Dependencia de insumos de externos.

Se interrumpe línea estudiada debido a abandono de actividad.
Toma de relevo por otro individuo de la familia.
Pérdida de un núcleo familiar amplio en las actividades agrarias y de autoabastecimiento.

Tasks by age and sex/gender

Ganado-Producto	Producción			Obtención (sacrificio, ordeño)	Transformación-Preparación	Venta
	Manejo-Reproducción	Alimentación	Toma decisiones			
Vacuno lechero	Adulto	Adulto mayor Niños/as	Adulto	Adulto/a, adolescente		Cooperativa-leche: Adulto Mercaderes-terneros: Adulto Directa-leche: Adulta
Ovino	Adulto	Adulto	Adulto	Sacrificio: Adulto	Ordeño: Adulta Leche: Adulta mayor	Adulto
Caprino	Adulto	Adulto	Adulto	Sacrificio: Adulto	Ordeño: Adulta Leche: Adulta mayor	Adulto
Caprino autoconsumo (generación 2)	Adulta	Adulta Niñas	Adulto/a	Sacrificio: Adulto	Ordeño: Adulta Leche: Adulta joven	-
Porcino	Adulta	Adulta	Adulta	Adulto	Adulta	-
Avícola	Adulta	Adulta Niñas	Adulta	Adulta	Adulta	Directa: Adulta
Cunícola	Adulta Niñas	Adulta Niñas	Adulta	Adulta	Adulta	Directa: Adulta

Mujer	Hombre	Ambos
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- Activities with higher economic remuneration carried out for the most part by men.
 - Man assumes power in decision-making.
- Activities for family self-sufficiency carried out by women.
 - Non-recognition of women as an economic subject in the capitalist world.
 - Economic income they generate is related to illegal and unpaid work
 - No access to subsidies.
 - Women do not consider themselves livestock keepers, but caregivers of the family
 - Sociocultural gender construction.
 - Non-recognition of the indispensable work that care work represents.

Cultivos	Preparación		Cuidado diario	Recolección	Venta
	Preparado tierra	Siembra			
Huerta	Adulto	Adulto/as Niños/as	Adulto mayor Adulta	Adulta	Adulta
Patatas	Adulto	Adulto Niños/as	Adulto	Adulto Niños/as	Adulto/as
Cereales	Adulto		Adulto	Adulto	-
Forraje/alfalfa	Adulto		Adulto	Adulto (Adulta, niños/as)	-

(Escruriol et al. 2014; Langreo y Benito 2005; Siliprandi, 2013)

Life histories objectives

01

Understand and value the socio-cultural and ecological heritage of agri-food systems in mountain territories

02

Visualize and enhance the voice and agency of women in these systems and analyze gender relations

03

Assess the potential that traditional knowledge and social innovations have in responding to the great challenges and global environmental and socio-economic changes



Life histories method

- Selection (snow ball method) of interviewed women in livestock sector
 - including shepherdesses, women livestock operators and cheese producers, wool craftswoman.
 - Ages ranges from 25 years old to 80 years old.
 - They are women from traditional origins in the region and sector, new comers and migrants
 - They are women who have an active role in managing the livestock or the dairy and wool products alone or with husband or with family. We also interviewed mothers, grand mothers, sisters, wife
- In-depth biographical-narrative iterative interview: the researcher spent several days with the woman in the house, in the field/mountain, in the farm.

Life histories method

- Situated ethnography: knowledge building becomes a relational process.
 - The researcher followed the activities along the four seasons to capture the different activities where women were involved and to respect the way of organizing the work in the rural world.
 - Embodiment: The researcher work with women in the field to feel and live the everyday experiences of women
- Open questions (as suggested by Rosenthal):
 - Addressing a phase of the interviewee's life
 - Addressing a single theme in the interviewee's life by opening a temporal space
 - Addressing a specific situation already mentioned in the interview
 - Eliciting a narration to clarify an argument already made before
 - Addressing a non-self-experienced event/phase or transmitted knowledge





Life histories method

➤ Main sections:

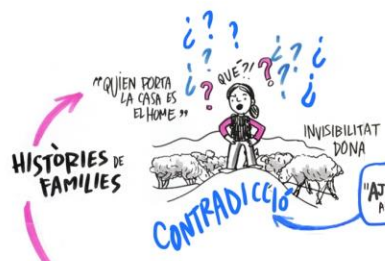
- History of the family and her life; critical events
- Motivations, feeling (emotions) and living in the rural world and the profession
- History of mentors, sources of knowledge and transference
- Gender relations in the family (activities along season roles and responsibilities; power dynamics), within the community (power dynamics within communitarian institutions), within organizations of the agri-food sector (power dynamics within farmers organizations, events etc.) and society
- Perceptions of changes (environmental, cultural, socio-economics, policies) and challenges and impacts on her life/women life
- Everyday practices and responses to personal, social, sectoral, territorial challenges/changes

Life histories method

- Caring the process and the relationships
 - demonstrating our commitment to local partners,
 - pursuing questions they identify,
 - engaging with them as co-researchers by sharing interview transcripts with individuals and then preliminary results at regional workshops,
 - involving participants in artistic communication of the results of the research



Benvingudes



EL ROL DE LES DONES I SU POTENCIAL ESCOLTAR LA VEU DE LES DONES LA RAMADERIA COM PATRIMONI ECOLÒGIC INTERACCIÓ SISTEMA SOCIAL I SISTEMA ECOLÒGIC

FEMINISME RURAL i RAMADERIA d'ALTA MUNTANYA



El Pallars està ple de dones per conèixer,
cada una amb la seva història.

De joves i no tant joves.
De dones nascudes aquí i de novingudes:
per amor,
per passió pels animals,
per estimació a la muntanya,
o que arriben buscant un determinat estil de vida.

I també hi ha aquelles dones
que havien marxat i que tornen al cap d'un temps,
amb estudis i coneixements i un nou entusiasme
per viure a muntanya.

Tens un mapa?



Analysis

Coding (inductive/deductive) with Nvivo; grounded theory

- Embodied perceptions of environmental hazards
 - Feelings and emotions
 - As Neimanis and Walker (2013) remarked, women express, then, their ethos of responsiveness to such urgency, because they are “weathering” their bodies and time.
- Exploring everyday spaces and lived experiences of adaptation to and mitigation of climate change
 - Role of women among abandonment, conservation of TEK and innovation
- Diversity of pathways and intersectionality in the face of urgent responses to climate hazards and other multiple stressors
 - Divergence of stories, Convergence of discriminations
 - how social and political institutions may “take part in the construction and reinforcement of injustices and intersectional categorisations”

