Feminist qualitative methods and methodologies in psychology: A review and reflection

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Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun

Abstract

How does the current state of the field of feminist *qualitative* psychological research reflect and enact the methodological characteristics and values of feminist research – principally, the values of reflexivity, methodological diversity and innovation, and the prioritisation of feminist political goals over procedural, epistemological and disciplinary orthodoxy? Using a review of the methods and methodologies used in qualitative research published in two key feminist psychology journals (*Feminism & Psychology*; *Psychology of Women Quarterly*) from 2005 to 2016 as our starting point, we reflect on practices, trends, and apparent norms in feminist qualitative researching. Despite methodological development, the absence of a fully realised feminist methodological vision raises important questions. We suggest a need to query and push back at canons or orthodoxies within the discipline, and advocate looking backward to go forwards: innovation does not have to be radical, and many of our methodological feminist foremothers have a lot to offer the present and the future of our discipline.

> Is there anything new under the [feminist] methodological sun? (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999: 2)

The field [of feminist psychology] has grown and developed very substantially. It is much more varied and sophisticated in its range of theories and methods (Wilkinson, 1996: 1).

What does contemporary (qualitative) feminist psychology look like? Is it marked by feminist research values? In this paper, we explore whether and how recent qualitative feminist psychology embodies claimed *key* characteristics and values of feminist research – reflexivity, methodological diversity and innovation, the prioritisation of feminist political goals over procedural, epistemological and disciplinary orthodoxy, and, more recently, 'a turn to difference' and concepts and frameworks like intersectionality (there is too much scholarship to fully reference, but e.g. Collins, 1990, Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; DeVault, 1990; Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; Lather, 1991; Oakley, 1981; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Spivak, 1990; Stanley and Wise , 1983; Unger, 1988; Wilkinson, 1988).

We reflect backwards on the state of the (methodological) art in feminist qualitative psychology, to examine the alignment between feminist methodological principles and research practice. We anchor this discussion through a review of, and reflection on, the methods and methodologies used in qualitative research published in two key feminist psychology journals – *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (*PWQ*) and *Feminism & Psychology* (*F&P*). We situate this paper within the wider project of feminist psychologists reflecting on the state of the field, and their own contributions to it (e.g., Eagly et al., 2011, Eagly & Riger, 2014). But we do not only look backwards; instead, we use our reflective analysis to provide a foundation for looking *forwards* towards the future of the field. We conclude by advocating for: the continuing importance of methodological innovation and diversity in

feminist qualitative research in psychology; a feminist qualitative psychology underpinned by a qualitative sensibility, theoretical sensitivity, and reflexivity, rather than adherence to disciplinary orthodoxy and established procedure; and ongoing reflexive analysis of our field and approaches.

Positioning ourselves

With reflexivity a hallmark of feminist research, it would not only be remiss, but deeply ironic, to not (briefly) reflect on our own positionings, and on the identities, standpoints and perspectives that inform our work as feminist psychologists and qualitative methodologists (see also see also Jankowski et al., 2017). We share tertiary education backgrounds in which the validity of qualitative inquiry, and feminist inquiry, was asserted from the start. In our different institutions, and through the visibility, inspiration and mentorship of certain feminist scholars, we found space, early on, to imagine ourselves as feminist, as qualitative, and as critical scholars – which led to us meeting as new doctoral students at Loughborough University, supervised by Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson. In countries like the UK and New Zealand, "critical" approaches[1] have to some extent supplanted experiential ones within feminist (qualitative) psychologies, but we do not subscribe to the notion that a critical orientation is *necessarily* better, more sophisticated, or more feminist than an "experiential" one. We believe both broad orientations continue to have a place in contemporary feminist psychology, and both offer the potential for nuanced and revealing analysis with potential for social change. We can and do work in both traditions, depending on the purpose of our research activity, but our theoretical tendencies lean towards the critical (e.g. Braun et al., 2013; Clarke et al., 2015).

As people, we both occupy certain positions of privilege, and of marginality – we are both white and middle class, and both (cisgender) feminist women with chronic (disabling) health conditions, and we share many values around social justice. Our differences in identity, social position and location are also relevant to us as individual scholars, as well as collaborators, but less crucial for *this* paper (see Braun & Clarke, 2013; Jankowski et al., 2017).

Exploring methods used in feminist psychology research practice

As good (psychology-indoctrinated) empiricists, we felt a need to ground our discussion of the state of the art in feminist psychological qualitative research with an examination of practice (and, ironically, one that used numbers!). We identified the different methods used in articles which employed qualitative and mixed methods (Q&MM) approaches, published in two key journals – *F&P* and *PWQ*[2] – between 2005 and 2016. *PWQ* is the journal of the Society for the Psychology of Women (Division 35 of the American Psychological Association). In the period of our analysis, the journal was edited by US-based Jayne Stake (2005-2009), Jan Yoder (2010-2015) and Mary Brabeck (2016), and shifted production to SAGE publications. *F&P* is also published by SAGE. The journal was founded by UK-based Sue Wilkinson, who remained editor until 2007. It was subsequently edited by New Zealand-based Virginia Braun and Nicola Gavey (2008-2013), then South Africa-based Catrina McLeod (Editor-in-Chief, 2014-) alongside editors Rose Capdevila (UK) and Jeanne Marecek (US).

These journals clearly have feminist psychology publishing as their purpose. Qualitative research has long had a home in each journal. In 1999, Sue Wilkinson reviewed the data collection methods used (especially interviews and focus groups) in qualitative empirical

articles in the first six volumes of *F&P* (1991-1996; n=77), and in *PWQ* over a similar period. The one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interview, often described as "the paradigmatic 'feminist method'" (Kelly et al., 1994: 34), and used as the only or primary research tool in many classic feminist psychological studies (e.g. Gilligan, 1982), dominated. Over half the *F&P* articles (56%; 43) used interviews; 10% (8) used focus group; no other method reached 10%. In *PWQ,* 25 studies (17% of the empirical reports published) used interviews, and only one used focus groups (an additional two used 'group discussions'; Wilkinson, 1999). This provides some useful context for our analysis of PWQ and F&P articles, more recently. We do not claim our sample as *representative* of the whole field of feminist (qualitative) psychology, but do feel it offers a useful snapshot of published research, through which to explore questions of method/ology, diversity and innovation.

The methods and orientations in PWQ and F&P

Given the historical dominance of quantitative methods in US feminist psychology (Crawford, 2013; Wilkinson, 2001), it was not surprising that only fourteen percent (56/397) of the empirical articles published by *PWQ* 2005-2016 used Q&MM, with only eleven percent (43/397) exclusively using a qualitative approach. Most of the authors publishing Q&MM research in *PWQ* were based in North America: 42 articles (75%) had at least one author (usually all) who was US-based; 4 were based in Canada. The remaining authors were located in New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, India, Macau, the UK and mainland Europe.

F&P published 234 empirical reports over the time: ninety four percent (219/234) were Q&MM, and ninety percent (210/234) exclusively qualitative – an unsurprisingly high percentage given *F&P*'s location(s), and focus on more qualitative, critical feminist psychology (Gavey & Braun, 2008). Due to sheer volume, we focused our *detailed* analysis

on a sample of similar size to PWQ, selecting three volumes (2013-15), which featured 51 Q&MM articles. For these articles, 19 authors were based in the UK and mainland Europe, 16 in Australia and New Zealand, 14 in North America, 6 in Africa (5 in South Africa), and 1 in the Philippines.

Qualitative frameworks

The qualitative research published in *PWQ* was predominantly *experientially* oriented (see Note 1); 84% of articles were completely experiential, or had an element of this broad approach. The research was often framed in terms of 'giving voice', particularly to marginalised or vulnerable groups of women, such as older black lesbians or rape victims, and very occasionally to marginal groups of men (e.g., Native American men). Most research addressed questions about participants' lived experiences and sense-making. Only a very small proportion of the qualitative research in *PWQ* utilised a critical orientation (completely or partially) – typically through use of some version of a constructionist epistemology.

Qualitative research published in *F&P* was predominantly *critical*, with 76% of articles published in 2013-15 either exclusively critical in orientation, or employing an element of this broad approach. Around half of the critical articles focused on interrogating socio-cultural texts or dominant discourses, the other half on analysing the discursive practices of various groups of (often white and middle class) women and girls, and very occasionally men. Like experiential research in *PWQ*, experiential research in *F&P* was often centred on the 'voices' and 'lived experiences' of marginalised or vulnerable groups, such as trans men, bisexual women and victims of violence.

Psychology of Women Quarterly – data collection methods

There was little diversity in the data collection methods used in the 56 Q&MM reports in

PWQ (see Table 1 for a full summary), with the interview (mostly one-on-one) dominating.

Used in four fifths (80%; 45) of articles, it was the sole method in 70% (39). From this latter

group, the mean number of interviews was 23 (mean participant N was slightly higher due

to some dyadic interviews). The only other qualitative data collection used in at least 10% of

articles was the focus group (11%, 6; sole method in 5). In total then, 89% (50) of the

Q&MM papers in *PWQ* used these approaches. This fits, methodologically, with the

(feminist) experiential focus of the majority of the articles – both interviews and focus

groups were often positioned as tools for 'giving voice' (e.g., Bond et al. noted that their

interviews were "audio taped and transcribed verbatim to maintain rich detail and to

emphasise the women's own words in describing their experiences" [2008: 52]), and for

minimising the researcher's influence over the data collection process (e.g., Settles et al.

wrote that they "used qualitative focus groups to encourage women to speak about their

lived experiences rather than imposing our preconceived notions upon them" [2008: 456]).

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Psychology of Women Quarterly – analytic methods

Thematic analysis (TA) and grounded theory (GT) accounted for over two thirds (71%; 40) of

all qualitative and mixed method articles in *PWQ* – TA was used in just over half (52%; 29),

and GT in 21% (12) of Q&MM articles (Table 2 shows the full range of methods, overall and

across two time periods; this also *suggests* an increase in published qualitative research

over time). GT techniques were, often, used to identify *themes in data* – to effectively do

some kind of TA, rather than develop a 'full' grounded theory with the use of theoretical

sampling, saturation, and the development of a core category or concept. Flick (2014) dubbed this use of grounded theory 'thematic coding'.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

We found it difficult to determine whether most of the qualitative research published in *PWQ* had been conducted within a 'qualitative paradigm', as it was often conceptualised in ways that contained tensions or valorised practices qualitative paradigms tend to trouble. For instance, (post-)positivist conceptions of coding accuracy and reliability sat alongside notions of 'giving voice' and capturing the rich detail of women's lived experiences and perspectives in their own words. A lack of prior engagement with the topic and relevant literature was sometimes framed as a virtue that maintained the "objectivity" of coding. For instance, Bond et al. (2008: 52) noted that "all interviews were consensus-coded by two or three researchers, two of whom by design were unfamiliar with, and therefore presumably influenced by, previous research examining community leadership". We found the dominance of 'consensus coding' in *PWQ* (evident in 61% of Q&MM articles) troubling. With consensus coding, two or more (sometimes many more) researchers code the data independently, compare coding and agree a final set of codes (inter-rater reliability is often used to indicate coding agreement and reliability). Consensus coding was often framed in terms of minimising researcher subjectivity or 'bias', and ensuring the accuracy or reliability of coding. For example, Heath et al. (2011: 600) noted that "the need for full agreement among coders is designed to help minimise the effects of experimenter bias because it reduces the influence of any one coder over the assignment of codes."

Discussion of analytic procedures was often not *explicitly* theoretically grounded (other than through citations of existing literature), leaving it unclear how theory *consciously* or

unconsciously informed analysis. Reflexivity – personal or functional – was *rare* in the methods sections, which tended to be written in the 'objectivity-invoking' third person. These suggest that the paradigm for research in *PWQ* – whether using quantitative or qualitative methods – remains largely (post-)positivist, an approach somewhere between what have been called *small q* and *Big Q* (Kidder & Fine, 1997). Kidder and Fine characterised small q as qualitative (post-)positivism, the use of qualitative tools and techniques within a (post-)positivist paradigm, with Big Q as qualitative research undertaken within, and underpinned by, the philosophical meta-theoretical assumptions of, a qualitative paradigm (or paradigms, Madill, 2015). This Big Q approach reflects a fully qualitative sensibility, and research enmeshed with (diverse) qualitative 'values'.

We acknowledge, of course, the requirement to conform to the APA style guide when publishing in *PWQ*, and the dominance of (post-)positivist and quantitative paradigms in US psychology – that a very different (almost reverse) picture of qualitative research features in *F&P* illustrates the extent to which context potentially matters.

In summary, Q&MM research in *PWQ* was dominated by interviews and focus groups, TA and GT, was broadly experiential in approach, focused on 'giving voice' to women, particularly marginalised and vulnerable women, but grounded in a (post)positivist epistemology. The feminist researcher occupied the position of (largely) objective scientist, a neutral conduit for the voices of marginal women, and there was little evidence of reflexivity, an oft claimed hallmark of feminist qualitative research. Indeed, published research supports Crawford's (2013: 256) claim that:

> most US feminist psychologists do not spend a lot of time sitting around thinking
>
> about our epistemological assumptions. We may not even take the time to think

very much about our methods (beyond whether we are doing that Institutional

Review Board protocol or regression analysis correctly). And most US feminist

psychologists still rely on psychology's standard (and sophisticated) repertoire of

quantitative methods.

But might things be changing in the US in terms of the dominance of quantitative methods?

Are there signs of greater acceptance and *crucially* understanding of qualitative research,

particularly that conducted within a qualitative paradigm (or paradigms, Grant & Giddings,

2002), and the use of a more diverse methodological tool kit? There were certainly more

Q&MM articles published in *PWQ* in the 6 years between 2011 and 2016 (36) than the 6

years between 2005 and 2010 (20); in the more recent period, there was also greater

reference to methods developed, and methodological authors based, outside of the US

(e.g., interpretative phenomenological analysis; Braun & Clarke [2006] TA), and more

engagement with discursive and critical approaches. Beyond *PWQ*, Yoder's (2016) and Hess-

Biber's (2016) editorials in *Sex Roles* are encouraging, as is the broader climate for

qualitative psychology in the US, with the establishment of The Society for Qualitative

Inquiry in Psychology and the journal *Qualitative Psychology*.[3]

Feminism & Psychology – data collection methods

There was greater diversity of data collection methods, and data sources, in *F&P* than *PWQ*.

Interview and focus group methods still dominated Q&MM data collection, but to a lesser

degree (56% [122] used interviews; 11% [24] used focus groups – in total, 62% [135] used

one or both method). The mean sample size for (single method) interview studies was very

similar to *PWQ*: 21 interviews (the use of dyadic interviews again meant the mean number

of participants was higher). Beyond interviews or focus groups, those publishing in *F&P*

seemed to favour data sources that facilitated a focus on socio-cultural texts or dominant discourses (see Table 3[4]), probably reflecting the predominantly critical orientation of *F&P*-published articles.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Feminism & Psychology – analytic methods

Discourse analysis in some form was the most popular method of analysis in *F&P* by a wide margin, used as sole analytic approach, in combination with other methods, or as some sort of hybrid approach (see Table 4). Looking across the first and second halves of the time period, narrative approaches appeared less frequently in the more recent period, as did GT. The greater use of content analysis reflected use by US authors, an increasing presence in *F&P*.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Due to the large number of articles, we focused on a 2013-15 subsample to explore the more 'qualitative' aspects. Methods sections were stylistically often written in the first person, bringing the 'voice' of the researcher into prominence. Despite this, statements or consideration of personal reflexivity remained almost as rare in method sections as they were in *PWQ*. Most analyses *were* theoretically grounded, and the use of consensus coding was rare (the three instances all in papers by North American authors). These results aligned with what we had anticipated: *Big Q*, and particularly critical, qualitative research dominated *F&P*, suggesting perhaps that *critical* qualitative approaches occupy a position of orthodoxy. If we consider innovation and breaking with tradition hallmarks of feminist research, then we ought to question what is lost, as well as gained, if one approach becomes an almost default 'right' way to do feminist qualitative research.

In summary, interviews and focus groups were used in a majority of Q&MM articles in *F&P*, but a wide range of other data collection methods and data sources were also evident. Most Q&MM research was firmly Big Q and broadly critical in orientation – some type of broadly discursive approach was used in just under half of Q&MM articles, but again, a wide range of other methods were also used. However, despite a strong sense of authorial voice in many articles, personal reflexivity was not often evident.

Things that trouble us: some reflections and cautious challenges for the field

We now turn to a more reflective mode, to consider that this analysis might suggest about the state of the field, what sits uncomfortably for us as (feminist) qualitative scholars, and what we would offer in response. We are troubled by the continuing dominance of (post-)positivism in qualitative research in *PWQ*, and specifically the use of techniques like consensus coding, and coding in a theoretical vacuum, as well as the broader lack of evidence of reflexivity across both journals. We argue that these things do not just matter from a qualitative *quality* perspective, they matter from a *feminist* perspective.

From a qualitative *quality* perspective, *transparency* – to draw on Lucy Yardley's (2000; 2008) open-ended, flexible quality principles – is important. It matters if philosophical and conceptual assumptions are not in alignment with methodological practice (as we frequently find in the use of certain forms of TA [Braun & Clarke, 2006]). Demonstrating sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2000; 2008), 'owning one's perspective' (Elliott et al., 1999), or being reflexive, are also crucial – not least because 'coding' is inevitably and inescapably an *interpretative* (and therefore situated) process (Morse, 1997). An approach which places consistency above situated-interpretation of data (e.g., through using a [simplified] coding manual to generate inter-rater reliability) risks superficiality: "it will simplify the research to

such an extent that all of the richness attained from insight will be lost" (Morse, 1997: 446). From a *feminist* perspective, we potentially do a disservice to those who have entrusted us with interpreting, and sometimes 'giving voice' to, their experiences, if we inadvertently restrict nuance and diversity through valorising consensus in coding practice. A qualitative paradigm makes inter-rater reliability 'a myth' (Morse, 1997), a chimera. If meaning occurs at the intersection of data, analyst(s) and social context(s), inter-rater reliability at best shows that coders have been trained to code in the same way, not that coding is accurate or reliable (Yardley, 2008). We invite feminist psychologists to *reject consensus coding* (or, at the very least, to 'own' their [post-]positivist assumptions, and *justify* them), particularly when publishing in feminist psychology journals – and to disrupt, rather than reinforce, some of the foundational myths of psychology, myths that qualitative paradigms can reveal and dissolve. This is not to advocate only for solo coders! But to move from *assuming* more coders are better, and from a sensibility of reaching consensus when more than one researcher is involved in coding and the analytic process, to a sensibility of collaborative analytic exploration and reflection.

Furthermore, we are troubled by feminist psychologists' adherence to the rhetoric of researcher objectivity, effectively disavowing their own subjectivity and voice. In (post-)positivist feminist qualitative research, analysis becomes conceptualised as a neutral, descriptive process, and tools like interviews and focus groups positioned as a means to access 'voice'. There is little evidence of personal or functional, or indeed theoretical, reflexivity, processes essential for clarifying what the data represent, and what knowledge claims you can make on the basis of them. Wilkinson (2001: 17) noted the "crucial importance of the researcher's theoretical perspective for the type of conclusions she is able to draw". This absence seems *particularly* problematic, given the focus on marginal and

vulnerable groups in experiential research in both *PWQ* and *F&P*. Without personal reflexivity or author positioning, it is difficult to assess if feminist psychologists are 'representing the other' (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). But given the predominance of white/middle class women in academia, this seems likely at least in some cases. We are troubled that such researchers might not be taking *responsibility* for their interpretations of the voices of marginal or vulnerable groups of women, and the risks of 'discursive colonisation' that represents (Mohanty, 1991). The answer to Lather's (1991: 827) *still* vital question, "have I kept my authority from being reified?" seems often to be a resounding 'no'. By positioning interpretations as accurate and unbiased – rhetorically inferring that anyone would have interpreted the data that way – feminist psychologists negate *responsibility* for their interpretations, obscuring the fact that "giving voice is fraught with interpretation" (Gorelick, 1996: 38). We suggest that feminist psychologists "must learn to trust themselves and their judgements and be prepared to defend their interpretations and analyses" (Morse, 1997: 447). Even *as* we recognise the other complexities and challenges a 'post-truth' world creates.

Relatedly, we are troubled by the different *lenses* applied to the talk of different groups of women in *PWQ* and *F&P*. The talk of white, middle class women was seemingly easily interpreted through a 'critical' lens, whereas data from marginal and vulnerable groups was mostly situated in a 'giving voice' approach. This difference is presumably related to the complexities around representing 'others', and an idea that this approach is somehow inherently respectful. It may be. But there is something uncomfortable about the way this seems inadvertently to reproduce some problematic power relations, somehow suggesting that these women's voices are not as complex and contradictory, and/or that these women are not positioned in discourse in the same ways as more privileged groups of women (akin

to the critique of the hashtag 'firstworldproblems'; Madrigal 2011; Poole, 2015). Feminist

psychologists do not have to take a critical/discursive perspective to acknowledge that the

experience recounted in an interview "is always emergent in the moment, that a telling

requires a listener and that the listening shapes the account as well as the telling, that both

telling and listening are shaped by discursive histories" (DeVault & Gross, 2014: 179).

Michelle Fine (1992) powerfully argued that we need to demystify the ways in which we

select and use the voices of participants; and we agree with Cosgrove and McHugh (2001)

that experiential research in feminist psychology requires a more reflexive approach to

'giving voice'. The researcher's interpretive authority should not go unquestioned. Our

interpretative practices change the voices heard, if we position ourselves as the arbitrators

of truth and knowledge, the emancipatory potential of our research is undermined.

Moreover, "a critical approach does not have to be a dismissive or 'debunking' approach"

(DeVault & Gross, 2014: 179), and we need to consider the ways in which our choices and

practices around acts of representation may be problematic, even if they (also) seem

respectful.

We argue reflexivity is key! Doing good research with people who are 'different' from us (in

socially patterned, and typically power-differentiated, ways) begins with exploring,

increasingly understanding, and taking responsibility for, our *own* locations and standpoints

(Harding, 1991). In order to effectively hear the voices of 'others', we need to "study who

we are, and who we are in relation to those we study" (Reinharz, 1992: 15) – this is a

starting point, rather than an endpoint. And sometimes our endpoint might be recognising

we ought not to do the research at all (e.g., see Smith, 2012). We suggest that feminist

psychologists should include autobiographical material that reveals their socio-political

'agenda'; there is always a risk that researchers assume a hegemonic and colonising role,

and we should be on guard for this. Of course, reflexivity is not easy to achieve, and is rarely if ever 'complete'; self-knowledge is, like all knowledge, at best partial and incomplete (Reay, 2007). Mauthner and Doucet (2003: 425) observed that "a profound level of self-awareness and self-consciousness is required to begin to capture the perspectives through which we view the world, and … it may be impossible to grasp the unconscious filters through which we experience events". We reject the fatalism of authors who (therefore) question the value of accounting for the researcher's positioning, because such accounting will inevitably be partial and incomplete. And argue that bracketing it from the rest of the research and interpretative processes – for instance, through taking a 'mantra approach' – reeling off a list of positionings, and then relegating them to the side-lines of the research (Hesse-Biber, 2007), is not what the field needs. That there are inevitably limits to reflexivity does not mean we should not try to be reflexive. However, actualising the claimed importance of reflexivity to feminist research remains a challenge our scholarly community needs to work towards. In our reading, feminist psychological interview research, conducted through an experiential lens, in many ways seems more influenced by the concerns of the wider discipline, than by the wonderfully reflexive feminist methodological literature on interviewing (DeVault & Gross, 2012). We argue this type of feminist psychology would benefit from being more feminist and less (mainstream) psychological. Through conforming to (research) norms that do not fit (our) feminist ideals, we validate the norm, and reinforce the position of *Big Q* qualitative scholarship as *different* from that norm – rather than changing the norm. We encourage leaning *out* from the quantitative/positivist norms of the wider discipline, rather than leaning "in" (as much as we can).

Reflecting forwards

In writing this paper now, earlier feminist methodologists' statements about diversity and innovation in feminist scholarship seem *still* worth reiterating. Characteristics of feminist research invite diversity and innovation: being driven by goals and questions, not disciplinary orthodoxy; emphasis on reflexive praxis and situating research in its social context; being inclusive of difference and diversity; and developing more egalitarian, and often collaborative, relationships between researcher and researched. Our choice of methods, and the ways we implement particular methods, should ideally *not* be dictated by the ones we have been taught, the ones our supervisors and mentors favour, ones that 'fit' with disciplinary orthodoxy, or the ones implicitly adopted as canonical standards. That said, of course we recognise the constraints in some contexts, and the need to conform, at least sometimes, with local or disciplinary orthodoxy in order to gain (and *keep!*) access to the academy.[5]

We see evidence of methodological innovation but also what we might provocatively call methodological stagnation in *PWQ* and *F&P*. Innovation and diversity (for instance in theoretical, methodological or conceptual approaches) are lauded as measures of the maturity of the field and of its future, but innovation in practice seems often thin on the ground. Although certain methods predominate – particularly, a continued reliance on (face-to-face) interviews – in the feminist scholarship we reviewed, different types and orientations to data collection, and analysis, are evident, but still in a minority. The provocative question we put to our peers (and ourselves) is whether we are working (enough) to promote a flourishing, diverse methodological and conceptual toolkit for our field, or whether we are inadvertently, or maybe even intentionally, policing a narrowly bounded 'canon' for what feminist psychological qualitative research can and should look like.

Although we do not advocate innovation *just* for the sake of it, our first answer to the

question 'why innovate?' would be 'why not?' We believe good qualitative, including

feminist, research needs to retain a focus on *adventures* rather than recipes, to evoke Carla

Willig (2008), and in a rapidly changing work, ideally our methodological and conceptual

tools need regularly to be revisited in light of the needs and context of the time. There is

evidence this is happening. Feminist psychologists *have*, for instance, expanded media

analysis to explore online and social media (examples from *F&P* include websites, vlogs and

online forums). Yet the potential of the virtual world to interact with participants remains

relatively untapped. We have been excited by the possibilities for conducting interviews and

focus groups online using video-calling technologies (e.g. *Skype*), multi-user domain and

instant messaging software, email, online forums and other social media (see Braun et al.,

2017). Using *virtual* interviews and focus groups, and encouraging our students to do so, has

enabled research that would not otherwise have been possible (not least because of tight or

non-existent research budgets; and less and less time available for research, particularly

research outside the agendas of funding bodies or unlikely to produce 'high impact'

publications). Virtual platforms enable us to give participates more choice in *how* they

participate in research, to tailor participation to their needs, and give them greater control

over the research environment. They can facilitate people feeling able to respond openly

without fear of judgement, embarrassment or discomfort, which also means people might

choose to participate who otherwise would not have. This includes recruiting samples

beyond 'the usual suspects' of white, middle class, able-bodied straight participants.

Researching online has also enabled us to 'mess around' with other methods – like story

completion (Clarke et al., 2015; Clarke et al., 2017) and qualitative surveys (Braun et al.,

2013; Opperman et al., 2014; Terry & Braun, 2017), both methods introduced to *qualitative*

research, and championed, by feminist researchers (e.g. Kitzinger & Powell, 1995; Milner & Jayaratne, 2014), but still rarely used. These methods have provided a way of doing the research we want to do, as feminists, and for mentoring students into research, with few resources.

A claim of methodological innovation remains rather fraught, however. Claiming innovation invites a 'call *that* innovative?' critique; attempts at innovation conversely risk a 'why aren't you doing (face-to-face) interviews?' critique – something we know both students and establish academics encounter. Both types of response encourage stagnation, and we call on feminist psychologists to instead promote innovation. Some innovations are seismic shifts, ones that radically change the research landscape. Others offer gentle waves that imperceptibly, but inevitably, shift the contours of the shoreline. Over the decades, innovation has developed across the whole domain of feminist qualitative research – and although feminist psychologists have not always been *the* innovators, or even early adopters, sometimes we have, and it has been fostered and flourished in feminist psychology, in a range of ways (even as certain orthodoxies appear to dominate in some contexts). Innovation can involve: re-imagining established qualitative methods (e.g. interviews or focus groups online), or of quantitative techniques (e.g., surveys; story completion; see Braun et al., 2017); adopting/adapting methods used in other disciplines (e.g., Bridger, 2013); and through radically re-envisioning research endeavour, activity, representation, and the very idea of 'results and research reporting' (e.g., Rice et al., 2014).

If we want a rich and vibrant field of feminist psychology, one that demonstrates the vitality, diversity and innovation that feminist methodologists advocated so strongly for – which we do – continuing to ask questions of *what* we do, and *how* we do it, and indeed *why* we do it,

remains vital. For innovation, we need to keep method and methodology as central considerations in the conceptualisation of what we do and who we are, as feminist psychology scholars, rather than implicitly treating them as scaffolding that we only pay partial attention to, and that eventually falls away. This is not a call to reject the many tools already in our toolkit – we do not endorse "a view that the established social science methods of the past are 'old hat' and inappropriate" (Wiles et al, 2011: 601). Nor is this a call to methodolatry (Chamberlain, 2000)! Quite the opposite. It is a call to deep thinking about how we do what we do, to reflexivity, and even to fun!

We acknowledge that doing things differently (even if just a *bit* differently) is not necessarily straightforward or easy – depending on institutional contexts or the journals feminist psychologists choose or are expected to publish in, there are all sorts of potential roadblocks along the way. Some of these challenges might reflect the (unreflexive) articulation of either a canon around interviewing as the de-facto method of choice, or the assumption that 'standards' for certain qualitative research are universal. But as a community of scholars, we also are responsible for *producing* the field. We, through our research and writing practices, through our supervising, reviewing, and editing practices, construct the shape of the field. Without us, the field does not exist, and as much as we are constrained, we also have some power to intervene, in ways micro and macro. We hope this paper has offered inspiration – and a mandate – to expand the boundaries, to query and push back at canons or orthodoxies within the discipline. But in doing so, we want to advocate for looking backward to look forwards, acknowledging that innovation does not have to be radical, and that our methodological feminist foremothers have much to offer in the present and the future.

Notes

[1] The diversity of qualitative research can be characterised in many ways; we like the broad distinction between an 'experiential' and 'critical' orientation (Reicher, 2000). *Experiential* qualitative approaches focus on people's 'lived experiences' and sense-making, underpinned by what has been called a 'hermeneutics of empathy' (Willig, 2013), and a conceptualisation of language as reflecting and giving access to the psychological or social meanings presumed to sit behind it. Such research has often been framed in terms of 'giving voice', particularly to marginalised groups, and based on realist or critical realist ontologies. *Critical* approaches focus on meaning construction and the interrogation of meaning, underpinned by what has been called a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Willig, 2013). They tend to adopt a constructive or performative conceptualisation of language, based on relativist or critical realist ontologies and constructionist epistemologies.

[2] We chose not to include *Sex Roles* because of the effective exclusion of *Big Q* qualitative research under Irene Frieze's editorship. In a 2008 editorial, Frieze noted requirements for qualitative research published in *Sex Roles* to use consensus coding and inter-rater reliability (or participant validation), to ensure "that someone else might draw the same conclusions about the data" (p. 1), and to provide frequency counts.

[3] That said, in our experiences of submitting to *Qualitative Psychology* so far, reviewers have suggested various strategies we *should have* employed to ensure the 'accuracy' of our findings and avoid 'bias' in coding, including using multiple independent coders 'blind' to the research questions, and testing the reliability of the coding.

[4] Categorising articles and methods in *F&P* presented a challenge due to a large number of short reports of various types published in *F&P*, and less use of tradition empirical reporting formats. The tables come with the caveat – which nicely illustrates the interpretive work that goes into any kind of coding and categorising! – that some methods, particularly the methods of data collection, could have been categorised in more than one way. Furthermore, the counts of empirical articles include what we call 'borderline empirical' articles (involving *some* data/analysis) – as some articles in *F&P* were not *easily* classified as either empirical or theoretical.

[5] We are often the main stakeholder in our research – we depend on our research for employment and promotion. Nevertheless, it is important to keep asking and reflecting on how feminist research goals intersect with those of the increasingly neoliberal academy (e.g., Gill & Donaghue, 2016; for a slightly different reflexive account, see Jubas, 2012).

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Table 1: Qualitative data collection methods in *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 2005-2016*

Method of data collection*	No of (56) Q&MM reports using this method	% of Q&MM reports[§]
Interviews	45 (39 sole qualitative method)	80% (70%)
Focus groups	6 (5 sole qualitative method)	11% (9%)
Qual/MM questionnaire/survey	4	7%
Secondary sources – documentary	2	4%
Secondary sources – online comments	2	4%
Ethnography	1	2%
Educational materials	1	2%
Other method ('research conversations')	1	2%

*NB that some papers used more than one method.

§ Percentages are rounded to full percentages; combined with multiple method use this means they do not add to 100%

Table 2: Qualitative analytic methods in *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 2005-2016*

Method of analysis*	2005-2010	2011-2016	Overall/56	% of Q&MM reports[§]
Thematic analysis (TA)	5	18	23	41%
Grounded theory (GT)	5	5	10	18%
Discourse analysis	2	6	8	14%
Thematic decomposition	2	0	2	4%
Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)	0	1	1	2%
Narrative analysis	1	0	1	2%
Content analysis	1	0	1	2%
Consensual qualitative research	1	0	1	2%
Listening guide	0	1	1	2%
Not specified	0	1	1	2%
A combination of two methods (GT & TA [N=5], TA & IPA, GT and ethnographic content analysis)	2	5	7	13%

*NB that some papers used more than one method.

§ Percentages are rounded to full percentages; combined with multiple method use this means they do not add to 100%

Table 3: Data collection methods in *Feminism & Psychology, 2005-2016*

Method of data collection*	Number of (219) Q&MM reports using this method	% of Q&MM reports using this method[§]
Interviews	122 (98 sole qualitative method)	56%
Focus groups	24 (11 sole qualitative method)	11%
Secondary sources – traditional print and broadcast media	21	10%
Secondary sources – online media	15	7%
Naturalistic data	12	5%
Qualitative or MM surveys/questionnaires	12	5%
Secondary sources – documentary sources	10	5%
Ethnography/autoethnography and observation	10	5%
Secondary sources – literature	8	4%
Participatory methods	5	2%
Case studies	4	2%
Educational materials	4	2%

Diaries	2	1%
Story completion	1	0%
Visual methods	1	0%
Other method (e.g. research conversations, workshop)	5	2%

*NB that some papers used more than one method.

§ Percentages are rounded to full percentages; combined with multiple method use this

means they do not add to 100%

Table 4: Qualitative analytic methods in *Feminism & Psychology, 2005-2016*

Method of data analysis*	2005-2010	2011-2016	Overall/219	% of total Q&MM empirical§
Discourse analysis (DA)	30	45	75	34%
Not stated	30	14	44	20%
Thematic analysis (TA)	12	20	32	15%
Narrative analysis (NA)	11	2	13	6%
Conversation analysis (CA)	10	2	12	5%
Grounded theory (GT)	8	3	11	5%
(Qualitative) content analysis	1	5	6	3%
Thematic decomposition	1	2	3	1%
Interpretative phenomenological analysis	1	2	3	1%
Other method (textual semiotic analysis, membership categorisation analysis)	0	2	2	1%
Combination of two methods^	5	14	19	9%

*NB that some papers used more than one method.

§ Percentages are rounded to full percentages; combined with multiple method use this means they do not add to 100%

^ This included: TA & DA [N=8]; DA/P & CA [2]; case study analysis & TA; GT & NA; GT & DA; NA & DA; TA & NA; and 'hybrid' methods (thematic DA [2]; thematic NA; narrative discursive analysis)