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This essay critically compares and contrasts two research papers, Gillian Bennett's "If I Knew You Were Coming, I'd Have Baked a Cake": The Folklore of Foreknowledge in a Neighborhood Group' with T. L. Brink's, 'Inconsistency of Belief among Roman Catholic Girls: Concerning Religion, Astrology, Reincarnation'.¹ In order to do so, this paper critically examines: (1) the context of their authorship and publication, (2) the purpose of their research, (3) the structure of both papers, (4) the type of methodologies used (5) ethical issues relating to their research and (6) the position of the researcher as an insider or outsider in relation to the participants. To conclude, (6) reflexivity in their respective papers is considered.

(1) Context

Gillian Bennett's paper appears in 'Out of the Ordinary Folklore and the Supernatural' a book published in 1995, edited by Barbara Walker.² However, the author shows in the reference section that quotes taken from participants that the research was conducted over a decade earlier in 1981. ³Brink's research was undertaken in 1976 with his findings being published two years later in a journal, 'The Review of Religious Research'.⁴ Founded in 1959, this long running journal of both quantitative and qualitative research, still in existence, examines topics related to mostly religious scholarship, consequently its intended readership is academics and other researchers into the field.⁵

Bennett is an independent researcher and former honorary research associate at the University of Sheffield. ⁶The author has had an award winning career as a scholar of folklore, and a pioneer role in introducing gender studies into folklore research. ⁷ T.L. Brink, is a U.S. social scientist, with a decades long career currently teaching at Crafton Hills College in

¹ "If I Knew You Were Coming, I'd Have Baked a Cake": The Folklore of Foreknowledge in a Neighborhood Group', in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. by Barbara Walker (Logan, Utah: Utah University Press, 1995), pp. 122-142: T. L. Brink, 'Inconsistency of Belief among Roman Catholic Girls: Concerning Religion, Astrology, Reincarnation', *Review of Religious Research*, 60.1 (1978), 82-85.

² Bennett, pp.122-142.

³ Bennett, p.142.

⁴ Brink, pp. 82-85.

⁵ The Review of Religious

Research, [www.springer.com](http://www.springer.com/journal/13644/aims-and-scope#main-content) <<https://www.springer.com/journal/13644/aims-and-scope#main-content>> [accessed 13 March 2022]

⁶ University Press of Colorado, www.upcolorado.com <<https://upcolorado.com/our-books/our-authors/item/2403-gillian-bennett>> [accessed 18 March 2022]

⁷ ISCLR, www.contemporarylegend.org, <<https://contemporarylegend.org/prizes-and-awards/linda-degh-lifetime-achievement-award/dr-gillian-bennett/>> [accessed March 13, 2022]

California who has over 30,000 citations and authored or edited fifteen books. ⁸The approach to his research is described as generally both quantitative and qualitative in nature. ⁹

The era in which the near contemporaneous papers were written is significant: Brink's paper follows in the quantitative research methods that was the dominant research paradigm at the time, whereas Bennett's research uses primarily qualitative supported by some quantitative data. ¹⁰Whilst, qualitative research methods were challenging the domination of the quantitative approach at the time, as Bryman says they 'tended to be regarded as relatively marginal in the context of the social scientist's armoury of data collection.' ¹¹ Referring to this dominant statistical based paradigm, Hennink, Hutter and Bailey say, 'the purpose of quantitative research is to quantify a research problem, to measure, and count issues and then generalise findings to a broader population.' ¹² By contrast, a qualitative approach of Bennett, Hennink, Hutter and Bailey show is 'interpretive'; an approach that allows you to 'examine people's experiences in detail by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies.' ¹³

However, Brink uses this dominant paradigm for academic research that includes astrology where there was very little mainstream academic studies as York explains, 'the University focus on astrology as a behavioural phenomenon developed in the 1990's'. ¹⁴ Similarly, Bennett notes of her work, with its emphasis on narrative, breaks new ground: 'no other study has looked at the language by which traditions of foreknowledge are discussed.' ¹⁵ In this respect both can be seen to be producing pioneer studies. Another factor providing context and contrast to their research is that Brink's interest was as a psychologist looking for underlying psychological motivations of his participants--he was a student of psychology at University of Chicago at the time of research. ¹⁶ Bennett as a scholar of folklore concentrates on what Hennink, Hutter and Bailey call people's 'individual, personal experiences' rather than Brink's search for underlying psychological motivations. By contrast Bennett was concerned with behaviours resulting from her participant's belief systems. ¹⁷ These emphasises can be seen when we consider the key content of each paper.

(2) Key Content

Bennett's focus is to uncover how common belief about knowledge of the future

⁸ Expert Gallery Suite, www.bepress.com< <https://works.bepress.com/tlbrink/>> [accessed 12-03-2022]

⁹ Expert Suite Gallery, <https://works.bepress.com/tlbrink/>

¹⁰ Bennett, p. 140.

¹¹ Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.1.

¹² Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 2nd edn. (London: Sage. 2020), p.17.

¹³ Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, p. 10.

¹⁴ Michael York, np

¹⁵ Bennett, p.126.

¹⁶ Researchgate, www.researchgate.net<<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tl-Brink>>[accessed 19th March, 2022]

¹⁷ Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, p.117.

amongst a group of primarily ‘elderly women’ shapes their moral code.¹⁸ Brink’s paper based on data collected from a set of Catholic schoolgirls, is predicated on testing the hypothesis that cognitive theories show ‘ individuals strive to attain and maintain a consistent set of attitudes’ in this context, in relation to religious beliefs.¹⁹ Brink’s aim is to understand the psychology underlying his participants seemingly incompatible beliefs rather than an enquiry into the nature or expression of the beliefs themselves. Bennett accepts that seemingly incompatible beliefs – psychic gifts are ‘a God-given sensibility.’²⁰ Bennett’s research centres on how these beliefs have an effect social behaviour and informs their moral codes of a community.²¹ Whilst both paper are logically constructed they differ in many respects:

(3) Structure

Brink’s paper covers only five pages and begins with an abstract summarizing the key points of the article together with his findings. In a short paragraph, he provides a review of the literature. Brink uses a clear structure using headers to signpost sections of his paper: first he presents his ‘Hypothesis’, followed by ‘Procedures and Results’—this section includes a reproduction of his questionnaire and the results. He concludes the paper with a ‘Discussion and Conclusion’ section and references. By contrast, Bennett’s paper is twenty pages in length. Bennett divides her paper as follows: Introduction, Historical Perspective, Research Context, then three sections covering the narrative content, traditional values, possible negative aspects of psychic power, followed by conclusion and references.

Academic Rationale.

As Hennink, Hutter and Bailey describe successful research methods are underpinned by a clear academic rationale or purpose contained in the researcher’s question.²² Bennett’s rationale appears in her first paragraph in quoting Beaumont on ‘common consent and agreement’ of foreknowledge.²³ Similarly, Brink also has a rationale is contained in his hypothesis section : ‘ Therefore, it is hypothesized that a study of beliefs adolescent girls will show an acceptance of only one of the belief sets (Roman Catholic, astrology, reincarnation) accompanied by a rejection of the others.’²⁴

Literature Review

Also, intrinsic to ethnographic research according to Hennink,Hutter and Bailey is to provide a literature review upon which to draw and reflect.²⁵ Brink’s literary review is short, comprising one paragraph.²⁶ This may be due to word count limit and lack of secondary

¹⁸ Bennett, p.122.

¹⁹ Brink, p. 82.

²⁰ Bennett, p.139.

²¹ Bennett, p.122.

²² Hennink, p.31.

²³ Bennett, p.122.

²⁴ Brink, p.82.

²⁵ Hennink, p .30.

²⁶ Brink, p.82.

literature relating to astrology –as York states.²⁷ Though he does reference Wuthnow's, 1976 paper, which was a contemporaneous study into astrology.²⁸ However, Bennett acknowledges she faced similar lack of secondary literature but instead draws on an extensive study of the primary literature.²⁹ In doing so, Bennett provides a thorough historical context, and more recent quantitative studies in Finland and Leeds.³⁰ From this overview, she identifies two strands of foreknowledge and applies this to a contemporary context: 'By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, there were two main strands in British folkloristic writing about foreknowledge: on the one hand, accounts of divinatory practices and the interpretation of signs and tokens; on the other, accounts of visions, dreams, and "presentiments."'³¹

Bennett proposes that these strands are represented in contemporary society in the first case 'chiefly represented by astrology, fortune-telling, or visits to psychics or mediums.'-external stimuli.³² The second strand 'finds its principal expression nowadays in the concept of extrasensory perception ESP' –these dreams, visions are internal stimuli.³³ This theme weaves through her paper, with the author consistently making reference to these binary distinctions, for example in her discussion of delving, where these twin strands are used to show a moral divide between the external—divinatory techniques such as Ouija boards and séances are considered a misuse of any psychic gifts and only bad outcomes arise—whereas 'unsought for precognitive experiences' have positive outcomes.³⁴

Underpinning Bennett's paper and contained in the internal/external opposition are clear definitions of what she means by foreknowledge, whereas Brink only provides simplistic definitions of astrology, reincarnation.³⁵ Further, unlike Bennett, he does not refer back to this literature. Instead, he looks for alternative sources, a paper by Wuthnow not contained in the initial literature review to explain why his hypothesis was not confirmed.³⁶ Brink concludes on an assumption, unsupported by his data, that the problem is that adolescents that their need for inconsistent beliefs provide 'security in the face of confusion and uncertainty'.³⁷

(4) Methodology

²⁷ Michael York, 'Contemporary Academic Study of Astrology', *The Astrology Book*, 2nd edn. (Visible Ink Press, 2003), np.

<https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/_/cite.aspx?url=https%3A%2F%2Fencyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com%2FContemporary%2BAcademic%2BStudy%2Bof%2BAstrology&word=Contemporary%20Academic%20Study%20of%20Astrology&sources=viAstr> [accessed March 19 2022]

²⁸ Brink, p.84.

²⁹ Bennett, p.126.

³⁰ Bennett, p. 125.

³¹ Bennett, p. 124.

³² Bennett, p.124.

³³ Bennett, p.124.

³⁴ Bennett, p.139.

³⁵ Brink, p.82.

³⁶ Brink, p.84.

³⁷ Brink, p.85.

Bennett combines the emerging technique of qualitative research supported by an element of quantitative data. Butler defines this as the use of ‘mixed methodology.’³⁸ Brink uses a solely quantitative approach. Both research projects study female participants: Brink’s participants are 227 Catholic schoolgirls from a working class demographic in a suburb of Chicago. Participants were those present in religion classes. Brink’s methodology is to use a questionnaire the results of which he reproduces in his paper. The questionnaire is limited, comprised of statements with which the respondents can only agree or disagree-- creating a closed enquiry.³⁹ Bennett’s explains her participants were 120 middle class women from a suburb of Greater Manchester. They were recruited using her father as a gatekeeper—all were patients as his podiatry practice.⁴⁰

Bennett’s methodology comprises of in depth interviews with participants and she describes the process of gathering the material during patient consultations. However, it’s not stated how structured or unstructured her questions. Bennett also collects quantitative data from her study and draws on demographic data –reproduced in her paper.⁴¹ Bennett is very clear about her methodology and her participants are, as Hennink, Hutter and Bailey suggest, given a ‘voice’ with their narrative reproduced in detail to support her research.⁴² With Brink, whilst results from the closed questionnaire are shown, there are no follow up questions as you might find in qualitative research methodology of Bennett; for example, it might have been useful to ask the respondents why they thought they held inconsistent beliefs? Further questions can be asked of Brink’s research—why chose that group- and why those questions?

(5) Ethics

Ethical considerations are the cornerstone of contemporary research, finding initial expression in the Belmont Report of 1978, including concepts of informed consent, right to refuse participation, minimise harm, anonymity, confidentiality.⁴³ It is instructive to note that Brink’s study predates this and Bennett’s was only a few years late—no doubt ethical considerations have developed out of the experience of early researchers such as Brink and Bennett. However, both Brink and Bennett’s research can be seen as raising ethical questions when viewed through a contemporary lens. Some examples of the main issues include:

- a) Bennett sits in on a medical examination conducted by her father, which would be seen now as a confidential setting and her father provides her with demographic private health data.⁴⁴
- b) Informed consent is described in general terms, e.g. ‘with their permission’-but there are no specific details how this was given.⁴⁵
- c) Questions of conflict of interest arise are relevant here as her gatekeeper was a prominent member of their community in a position of authority given his role as a doctor—although

³⁸ Judith Bell and Stephen Waters, *Doing Your Research Project*, 7th edn. (London: McGraw-Hill, 2018), p.24.

³⁹ Brink, p. 83.

⁴⁰ Bennett, p.127.

⁴¹ Bennett, p. 128.

⁴² Hennink, p.38.

⁴³ Hennink, p.71

⁴⁴ Bennett, p. 127.

⁴⁵ Bennett, p.127.

Bennett stresses that participants were ‘at ease’ in that environment and from the interviews extracts shown, participants appear to be honest.⁴⁶

d) Participants anonymity is protected however as Bennett explains, individuals were given pseudonyms.⁴⁷

e) Hennink, Hutter and Bailey highlight the importance of a communal benefit, which can be seen here, as the group appear to cohere around their worldview.⁴⁸

Brink’s ethics are also problematic:

1. All are children/adolescents aged between 14-18. This would be a major concern ethically for contemporary researchers.⁴⁹

2. Brink doesn’t say if or how consent was given—the questionnaire appears to be part of a required class. It is not clear if the children were given the choice to opt out of the study.⁵⁰

3. Whilst, no participants are named, enough information is provided relating to the school for pupils to be identified.

3. Brink doesn’t address of what benefit to this community his research might be.

(7) Reflexivity and Outsider/Insider Perspective

Key to contemporary ethnography is the concept of reflexivity. As Haynes describes:

Reflexivity is an awareness of the researcher’s role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research, enabling the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he or she affects both the research process and outcomes.⁵¹

As Hennink, Hutter and Bailey point out, this attention on possible bias and assumptions on behalf of the researcher has become a fundamental feature and challenge of contemporary qualitative research.⁵² Viewed from this perspective, both papers, because of the time they were written, lack this aspect to differing degrees: Brink’s paper the author is largely anonymous—apart from where he writes, ‘the author was somewhat surprised’.⁵³ There is an element of reflexivity in Bennett’s research as she states how she made several failed attempts to work out how to do research her questions plus she is aware that the topic might be a ‘sensitive’ one.⁵⁴ In a clear example of reflexivity, Bennett’s reflects how she easily assimilates the participants ‘vocabulary’.⁵⁵ This is another example of Bennett undertaking

⁴⁶ Bennett, p. 126.

⁴⁷ Bennett, p. 142.

⁴⁸ Hennink, pp73-74.

⁴⁹ Brink, p.83.

⁵⁰ Brink, p.83.

⁵¹ Kathryn Haynes, ‘Reflexivity in Qualitative Research’, in *Qualitative Organizational Research*, ed. by Gillian Symons and Catherine Cassell (London: Sage 2012) pp. 72.

<<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526435620.n5>>

⁵² Hennink, p.72.

⁵³ Brink, p.84.

⁵⁴ Bennett, p.127.

⁵⁵ Bennett, p.125.

pioneer methodology whereas Brink shows how quantitative research may lack this element—however, Brink acknowledges that his work ‘raises more questions than answers’ which can be considered reflective.⁵⁶

Similarly, key to contemporary qualitative research is the position of the researcher as either an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ to the participants or community they are studying, what Hennink, Hutter and Bailey calls, the emic –insider view-and etic—outsider view.⁵⁷ As Hennink, Hutter and Bailey write, the emic perspective ‘seeks to understand people’s lived experience from the perspective of people themselves.’⁵⁸ 15 We can see this in Bennett where the participants speak at length about their worldview.⁵⁹ However, in Brink’s paper, the participants are not given an opportunity to tell their stories as they are in Bennett’s, further, it is not clear what his relationship is to the school his religious beliefs or his relationship to the school in order to examine any bias on behalf of the researcher.

CONCLUSION

Both papers describe research that was undertaken in the late 1970’s-early 1980’s. When viewed from a contemporary perspective, they were written at a pivotal moment when the dominant paradigm of quantitative research was being challenged by the emerging qualitative methodologies, with Brink’s paper representing the former and Bennett’s the latter. Brink’s paper, whilst coherent and logical, lacks the fundamental aspects of a research paper as understood viewed from a contemporary research perspective particularly in view of the insights and methodology of qualitative research. For example, Brink’s paper lacks a clear literature review, referred to throughout, and his conclusions aren’t supported by his data, whereas Bennett provides a clear thread throughout based on reference to her literature and the concept of ‘internal’/external’ derived from her study of primary sources. Again, viewed through a contemporary lens, both research methods share ethical concerns, particularly those of Brink—Bennett’s qualitative methodology showing advantages. Further, Bennett allows her participants a voice not available to Brink’s participants as he is looking for underlying psychological motivations of his subjects, whereas Bennett’s research is interested in how her participants’ beliefs affect her subject’s worldview. In terms of reflexivity, there is an element in Bennett’s work that is absent in Brink. Overall, these papers provide an historical overview of two types of research methods and contrasts between the two.

⁵⁶ Brink, p.84.

⁵⁷ Hennink, p.18.

⁵⁸ Hennink, p.15.

⁵⁹ Bennett, p.138.

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