



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE SUBMITTING (DO NOT SEND AS A SEPARATE FILE)

For completion by the student:		
Student Name: EMILY ROBINSON		
Module code: HPCA7002 Module title: Researching Contemporary Cosmologies	Student ID number: 1806481	Educational support needs: No
Module tutor: BRADY, BERNADETTE		
Assignment due date: 18 March 2019		
If your module has multiple submissions please indicate which piece of work this is. 1 st		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed EFR Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ☐ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.		

Assignment Mark

1st Marker's Provisional mark

2nd Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark

Agreed Internal Mark:

External Examiner's mark (if relevant)

Final Mark

NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.

For completion by Marker 1 :

Comments:

Marker's signature:

Date:

For completion by Marker 2/Moderator:

Comments:

Marker's Signature:

Date:

AGREED INTERNAL MARK (where necessary):

Comment on process of arriving at agreed mark:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant)	
External Examiner's Signature:	Date:

Critically Comparing Two Pieces of Qualitative Research

This paper will critically compare and contrast the qualitative research undertaken by researchers Gillian Bennett, in 1995's "‘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*, edited by Barbara Walker for Utah University Press, and Jenny Blain, in 2000's 'Speaking Shamanistically: Seidr, Academia and Rationality,' published in *DISKUS* (Vol. 6). Bennett and Blain's papers will be evaluated in terms of their methodology, insider/outsider status, and literature review. Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (H.H.B.), authors of the *Qualitative Research Methods* textbook, define qualitative research as 'an approach that allows you to examine people's experiences in detail.'¹ This paper aims to elucidate methodological problems associated with the evaluation and measurement of the subjective responses of the researchers' informants.

METHODOLOGY

Focused on presenting elderly women's 'common consent and agreement' (rather than strict belief) about foreknowledge, Bennett's 1995 paper utilizes the qualitative method of interview to collect data on the perspectives of a community of elderly women that Bennett's father works within as a podiatrist.² Under the heading 'Research Context,' Bennett writes that she used her father's doctor-patient relationship to facilitate her access to the community, to 'talk to his patients during his clinic hours' by conducting research during the patients' appointments with her father. Bennett justifies this by judging it to be a 'venue conducive to personal conversation' and her father as 'an intermediary to introduce to potential informants and put them at ease.'³ Out of the 150 patients Bennett interviewed, she used the interviews of 87 women, ages 60 to 95, the majority of whom 'attended the local methodist church, as [Bennett's father] did.'⁴ Though Bennett found her subjects to be learned and open to the discussing their experiences and beliefs about foreknowledge, Bennett's analysis notes the tendency of her subjects to distance themselves from devout belief in foreknowledge and to attribute

¹ Hennink, M. M., Hutter, I. & Bailey, A., *Qualitative Research Methods*, Los Angeles; London: SAGE, (2011): p. 8-9.

² Bennett, Gillian, "‘If I Knew You were Coming I'd Have Baked a Cake’: The Folklore of Foreknowledge in a Neighborhood Group," in Barbara Walker (ed), *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, Logan, Utah: Utah University Press, (1995): p.121, 127.

³ Bennett, p. 126

⁴ Bennett, p. 127

negative characteristics or occurrences to psychic power.⁵ Bennett analyzed her subjects' responses in regards to the 'traditional values and roles' of the women; however, Bennett's data regarding their age, marital status, domestic circumstances, and religious belief was sourced from her father's knowledge and from what Bennett surmised of her interviews with the subjects.⁶ Bennett does not mention the use of other methods to allow the subjects' to represent their own beliefs and domestic situation.

In contrast, Blain's paper was less explicit about the qualitative methodologies used; while Bennett's research was the result of a focus group of patients, Blain's subjects were the product of trusted, longterm relationships from Blain's own involvement in the studied community. Blain's paper focuses on seidr, an icelandic tradition that is practiced by Heathen communities in North America and Europe as reconstructed religious tradition. Blain accomplishes this through interviews, correspondences, and first-hand accounts of Seidr by the subjects and Blain, allowing lengthy quotations in order to let her subjects speak for themselves.⁷ Blain begins her paper presenting herself as a familiar anthropologist who is researching seidworkers, people who live 'between worlds — both the everyday and shamanic worlds.'⁸ Blain draws a comparison to the work of the anthropologist, who must be fully engaged and sensitive to the world of their subjects *and* maintain an objective, scientific distance in order to produce 'valid' academic research.⁹

H.H.B. distinguishes qualitative research by its ability to 'allow you to identify issues from the perspective of your study participants, and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behavior, events, or objects.'¹⁰ Bennett's methodology offers little reflexive consideration towards the social influence that her father's presence during the interview, his position within the subjects' community, and the subjects' positions as patients receiving care may have influenced the responses of the women. Bennett also based analysis off of her father's own information and her assumptions of the women; Bennett's methodology is not valid, as her subjects' perspectives and understanding may have been influenced by social pressures. Though Blain was not explicit in what context her interviews took place, she makes clear that her research was the result of personal experience and trusted, 'insider' communication with seidworkers.

⁵ Bennett, p. 127, 128-133, 133-135

⁶ Bennett, p. 127, 133-135

⁷ Blain, Jenny, 'Speaking Shamanistically: Seidr, Academia and Rationality,' in *DISKUS* (Vol. 6) (2000): p. 1

⁸ Blain, p. 2

⁹ Blain, p. 2

¹⁰ H.H.B., p. 9

INSIDER/OUTSIDER

The insider/outsider continuum is also referred to in qualitative research as ‘emic’ knowledge (providing an insider perspective) and ‘etic’ knowledge (the outsider’s perspective).¹¹ Bennett’s position on this insider/outsider continuum is that of outsider, as Bennett’s subjects constituted of a homogenous sociocultural group of elderly women in one neighborhood.¹² Yet in the beginning of her paper, Bennett notes that the research took place in *her* ‘own hometown’ and was contingent upon *her* beliefs of how the ‘women’s social situation and moral code [shaped] the folklore that they share.’¹³ Blain’s hometown connection to the community could have allowed for further ‘insider’ engagement with the subjects; Bennett could also have used the position of ‘insider’ to reflect on how her hometown and own experience being raised by a member of this community (her father) would have influenced *and informed* her beliefs regarding her subjects’ folklore.

In contrast, Blain’s paper was shaped by her own curiosity of the insider/outsider debate in academia, and how it mirrored her own experience as a seidworker *and* anthropologist. The aim of Blain’s paper, as described in her abstract, ‘reflects not only on what “insiders” do, but also on academia and its practices and discourses.’ Blain starts her paper as an ‘outsider,’ an anthropologist who must take on a new experience of a wedding dance, and vacillates to laying vulnerable her ‘insider’ position as seidworker, including her own testimony of the experience. Blain uses the positions on the insider/outsider spectrum to illustrate the value of the subjective experience, and subjective response of her subjects, in academic research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In critically reviewing Bennett’s work, questions of methodological and reflexive validity were brought into question; in analyzing her literature review, Bennett locates her work within the tradition of 18th and 19th century antiquarians, citing John Aubrey, Francis Grose, William Henderson, and Catherine Crowe. She notes the waning degree of specificity in which these antiquarians were able to orally obtain peoples’ strict beliefs regarding foreknowledge. Though she cites her own and David J. Hufford’s research, a further explanation of how the antiquarian tradition and contemporary anthropological interest intersect or contrast may have informed her methodology: were the antiquarians strict in their interview methodology? If not, how does their approach yield data and what

¹¹ H.H.B., p.18

¹² Bennett, p. 127

¹³ Bennett, p. 122

value can we extract from an antiquarian methodology? This may have given Bennett's work firmer theoretical grounds for her interview methodology.

As Blain's paper tackles what it means to be an 'insider,' her literature review is written in the same manner — her argument is well-footnoted, but her literature review is shorthand. In describing academia's response to seidr, Blain uses the terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism' to describe the religious experience and beliefs of the heathen community. Though no explicit definition is offered, the use of this term speaks to a larger 'insider' community within academia that are concerned with 'shamanistic' human activities and communities. Blain uses her literature review to highlight this academic work and finds that shamanism 'is not one part of aspect of culture that can be examined or not, as the ethnographer chooses.'¹⁴ By understanding that her own engagement with shamanism informs her reality, Blain makes the case for personal accounts of the author as academically valid.

CONCLUSION

This paper critically compared and contrasted qualitative research undertaken by researcher Gillian Bennett and Jenny Blain, written in 1995 and 2000, respectively. By analyzing their methodologies, position on the insider/outsider continuum, and literature reviews, this paper was able to identify Bennett's areas of reflexive concern and Blain's utilization of the insider/outsider continuum in the evaluation of their subjects' responses.

¹⁴ Blain, p. 5

WORKS CITED*Primary Sources*

Bennett, Gillian, “‘If I Knew You were Coming I’d Have Baked a Cake’”: The Folklore of Foreknowledge in a Neighborhood Group,’ in Barbara Walker (ed), *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, Logan, Utah: Utah University Press, (1995): p. 122-142.

Blain, Jenny, ‘Speaking Shamanistically: Seidr, Academia and Rationality,’ in *DISKUS* (Vol. 6) (2000).

Secondary Sources

Hennink, M. M., Hutter, I. & Bailey, A., *Qualitative Research Methods*, Los Angeles; London: SAGE, (2011): p. 8-18.