Addressing Voice-Related Topics in Research: An Overview of Paradigms, Methodological Approaches, Methods of Data Collection and Ethical Concerns.

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Addressing Voice-Related Topics in Research: An Overview of Paradigms, Methodological Approaches, Methods of Data Collection and Ethical Concerns.

Introduction

Singers and other professional voice users are essential to society and form a worldwide community with particular idiosyncrasies covering a variety of subjects (UNED Voice Lab website, no date). These singularities stem from, among other things, a collective unconscious that suggests that a voice reveals a person's true personality and holds a more profound truth than appearances (Shewell and Samson, 2024). As Shewell and Samson (2024) write, the voice is a two-way phenomenon shaped by emotions and personality (*psyche*) and physical characteristics of the singer/speaker (*soma*) in a way that will affect the *psyche* and *soma* of the listener as well. In this line, many fields of voice-related research appear intrinsically linked to human experiences and perspectives and might be addressed from a multiple-perspective research approach (Lim, 2024).

As an independent voice teacher and Voice Pedagogy master's student on the one hand and a female singer in the live gig circuit on the other, I am susceptible and attentive to the experiences of self-awareness and emotions of female voice professionals. I am also considering their audiences' perceptions of the singers' vocal evolution across their life span, their reactions to other changes (such as physical appearance), and the impact of these reactions on the voice professionals.

This assignment represents my first rendezvous with project research. Acknowledging the implications above explained, I believe in the necessity, analysed by Biedenbach and Jacobsson (2016), of integrating axiology in the research process; in other words, incorporating the power of values and their profound impact on the journey of knowledge creation. In my discussion, I will briefly introduce the concepts of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. An overview of the most common research paradigms will also be offered as an introductory step to developing the Feminist Paradigm and contrasting three feminist methodologies. I will also discuss the qualitative research design, focusing on grounded theory and ethnographic methodologies. Data collection methods such as interviews and document analysis will be addressed. I will also introduce the concept of triangulation and mixed-method research as a complete formula to approach voice-related research. Finally, I will outline the insider research positionality and introduce the ethical considerations to consider when conducting a qualitative study.

Discussion

Understanding and Articulating Research Paradigms: Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology as Grounding Processes

Pretorius (2024) defines the research paradigm as the philosophy that explains a researcher's beliefs about reality, how they understand knowledge, and what they value in their research. The research paradigm is designed and developed by connecting three processes: ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Pretorius, 2024). Therefore, how the researcher experiments and approaches these processes will determine their paradigm (Pretorius, 2024).

Pretorius (2024) simplifies the three abstract processes: *Ontology* explores the nature of reality: is reality objective or relative? *Epistemology* analyses how we acquire knowledge: can objective knowledge be fully processed merely through observation and the proper methods, or does it have a relative and experiential component that changes depending on the individual? Plus, is reality fixed or evolving? Maruashvili (2024) synthesises the three epistemological views that answer these questions: first, reality can be objectively recognised when measured with the proper methods. Second, reality cannot be fully acknowledged since it is created in people's minds. Third, reality is ever-changing and impossible to recognise at a given moment.

Finally, *Axiology* delves into the role of the researcher’s values and biases and how they might influence the research process (Biedenbach and Jacobsson, 2016; Pretorius, 2024). Maruashvili (2024) questions: is the researcher’s subjectivity inevitable?

Before Thomas Kuhn (1962) introduced the idea that scientific observations cannot be neutral, research had been considered an impartial, non-political process (Fuyane, 2021). Kuhn brought up the notion of paradigms as research framework providers. Other academics have later described the research paradigm as the result of intertwined ontological and epistemological processes, along with an axiological frame and the subsequent chosen research methods. (Fuyane, 2021).

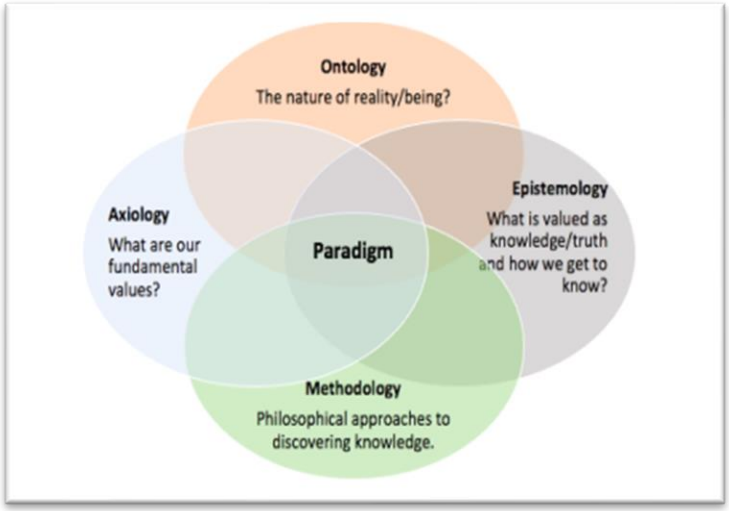

Figure 1: The Basic Elements of a Research Paradigm (Fuyane, 2021, p.30; original by Guba and Lincoln., 2005; Henry and Macpherson, 2019).

Kuhn's theories have been broadly argued, especially his views on paradigm incompatibility: what is considered an acceptable approach in one paradigm cannot be adequate in another (Fuyane, 2021). However, Kuhn further developed his theses with a more open view in which different paradigms can share assumptions and methods (Fuyane, 2021; Kuhn, 1970).

About Most Common Research Paradigms and New Paradigms

Pretorius (2024) simplifies enumerating the wide range of research paradigms into the following: Positivism, Postpositivism, Constructivism, Social Constructionism, Interpretivism, Pragmatism, and Critical Realism. They all originate from different ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies that build the philosophical foundations of the researcher's perspective (Maruashvili, 2024). However, new paradigms, such as Feminism, Phenomenology, and Hermeneutics (Tambun, Yudoko, and Aldianto 2024), or the Human-AI Teaming paradigm (Wei, Zaifeng, and Liezhong, 2024) constantly spring from the ever-evolving world of thinking. Furthermore, Tambun, Yudoko, and Aldianto (2024) emphasise that no single paradigm completely encompasses the complexities of human experience because of their limitations and that a multi-paradigm approach might be necessary to cover the empirical rigour as well as the exegetical needs for scientific groundwork. By merging empirical approaches (such as Positivism) with interpretive approaches (such as Feminism or Hermeneutics), a "holistic

understanding of Culture, Religion and Science" (Tambun, Yudoko, and Aldianto, 2024, p.24) could be achieved.

Tambun, Yudoko and Aldianto (2024) highlight interpretive paradigms' contextual and experiential nature, claiming these approaches are essential in the Arts and Culture domain. As mentioned in the Introduction of this assignment, my concerns as a Voice Pedagogy student, future researcher and voice teacher are the vocal and emotional experiences of female professional voice users over 40 (perimenopause and menopause voice in particular). The clinical reality of voice symptoms due to hormonal changes might initially suggest the choice of a Positivist paradigm to start with. However, other variables should also be observed: the experiential nature of the hormonal changes and their symptoms beyond the physical (Bos, Bozeman, and Frazier-Neely, 2020), as well as the still present gender gap, misogynistic perceptions and under-representation of women in the medical literature (Merone et al., 2022). With this in mind, I will delve first into the Feminist paradigm and contrast three of the various feminist research methodologies.

The Feminist Paradigm and Feminist Methodologies

Feminist research intends to provide evidence that can be used in addressing gender inequalities (Parry, 2020). Feminist researchers have sought to connect gender, gender equality, and experiences to the reality of intersectional gender discrimination in knowledge production (Saeidzadeh, 2023). Therefore, feminist research methodologies prioritise gender-sensitive data collection and analysis over objective methods (Saeidzadeh, 2023).

Feminist researchers have commonly rejected Positivism and the idea of an objective truth (Parry, 2020). Nevertheless, Parry (2020) also observes that some feminist researchers have turned to positivist research's methodological characteristics in their studies to detail women's experiences, prioritising a non-exploitative involvement of participants, assuring their voices are heard in the public domain (Parry, 2020, citing Dankoski 2000). Parry (2021) highlights the interdependence between the researcher and the research participant and the activist nature of the feminist research process. Feminist research is therefore presented as a "holistic endeavour" (Parry, 2020, p.8) against the simplified processes of Positivism (see Fig.2).

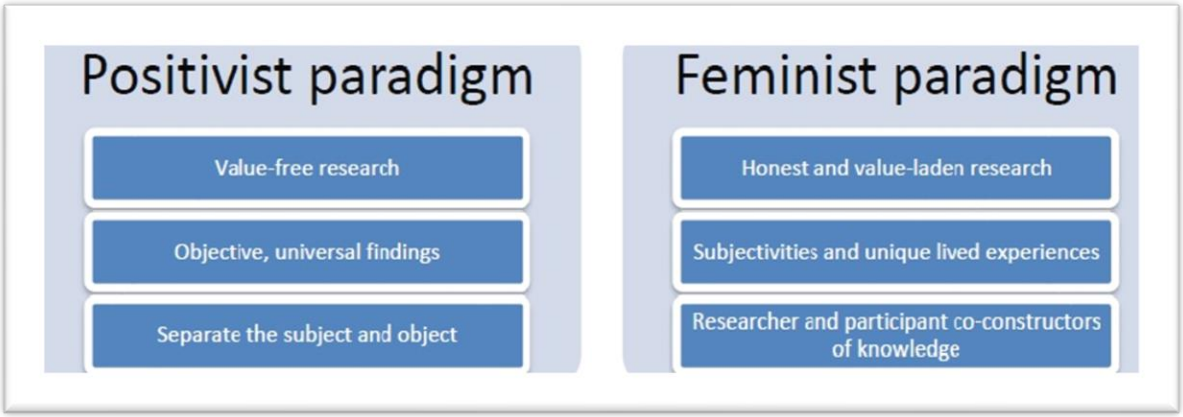

Figure 2: Core Values of the Positivist and Feminist Paradigms (Parry, 2020, p.8).

As Saeidzadeh explains, feminist methodologies stem from feminist politics, not from a "unified set of thought and perspective" (Saeidzadeh, 2023, p. 187), but sharing a common idea: the marginalisation of women in social life (Saeidzadeh, 2023). As Parry (2020) states, the feminist research question should observe the interplay of power dynamics and patriarchal knowledge structures, which is apparent in mainstream research studies.

Feminist epistemologies, methodologies (how research is done), and methods (techniques for collecting data) challenge and question imbalances related to gender, race, class, and power (Parry, 2020). Saeidzadeh (2023) highlights three feminist epistemologies, beginning with the Standpoint Theory (1970s), which claims that:

- Knowledge is partial, and no universal truth exists (Saeidzadeh, 2023).
- This emphasises women's experience to remedy the "misrepresentation and exclusion of women from dominant knowledge" (Saeidzadeh, 2023, p.189).

Saeidzadeh (2023) outlines that, in contrast, Feminist Poststructuralism criticises Standpoint Theories and argues that:

- Emphasising women's homogeneity may obscure significant differences among women and their life experiences across various social contexts.
- Gender is socially and discursively constructed as a result of social regulations.
- Gender differences are not as essential and universal as portrayed by Standpoint theorists since Poststructuralism understands power as discursive and not the property of one gender.

- Since the self is constructed through discourse, the free choice and will of the subject are limited.

Another feminist research methodology that stands out and Saeidzadeh (2023) discusses is the Feminist Intersectionality approach (1980s), which points out that:

- Race and class, along with gender, affect women's experience, employment and social life.
- The nature of power and knowledge is multidimensional and multilayered; therefore, to understand how knowledge is produced, it is fundamental to be aware of the subject's degree of privilege.
- The conception of "woman" as a universal concept is challenged.

Feminist ideologies encompass a range of ideologies that place human rights at the centre rather than focusing on a single aspect of gender inequality (Parry, 2020). I feel inclined to consider the intersectional approach for my research since, as Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) advocate, feminists exist in all sizes, shapes, and colours—just like voices.

Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed-method Approaches in Research

"Different research purposes require different research designs and analysis techniques" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p.1286). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) acknowledged the importance of carefully describing the type of approach in research and complying with an analytic procedure to increase accuracy. In most medical schools, for example, there has traditionally been a quantitative approach to research that has left unsolved specific problems related to healthcare systems (Tavakol and Zeinaloo, 2004).

Quantitative research relies on the positivist approach, which entirely depends on observations, measurements, and the separation of the knower from the object since a value-free reality is separated from any observer (Tavakol and Zeinaloo, 2004). According to Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007), feminists challenged the supposed value neutrality of positivist social science. Feminists argued that the positivist paradigm's dominance stemmed from its privileged status within patriarchal power structures, not from its objectivity (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007).

Qualitative research, by contrast, relies on a holistic approach to conducting inquiry (Saeidzadeh, 2023) and is based on the premise that “reality is socially constructed, complex, and constantly changing” (Tavakol and Zeinaloo, 2004, p.79). The first qualitative approaches to medical studies were strongly criticised since they were considered a mere collection of personal views subjected to the inquirer's bias, “lacking reproducibility and generalisability” (Tavakol and Zeinaloo, 2004, p.78). However, Pope and Mays introduced in 1995 that qualitative research in health systems might help to understand social phenomena in natural, rather than experimental, settings (Tavakol and Zeinaloo, 2004). According to Pope and Mays (1995), specific medical questions, such as compliance with medication regimes, require a qualitative approach (Tavakol and Zeinaloo, 2004). Therefore, the research question is key to deciding the appropriate methodological approach. In qualitative research, designing starts when the researcher formulates the research question, which can be redefined during the research process (Saeidzadeh, 2023).

The following sections will discuss qualitative research, grounded theory methodology, ethnography as research designs (often used in qualitative health sciences research), and two data collection methods: interviews and documents.

Qualitative Research Design: Grounded Theory and Ethnography Methodology

Saeidzadeh (2023) affirms that qualitative research focuses on everyday life, including the discourses, experiences, and practices that shape it. According to Saeidzadeh (2023), qualitative designs share commonalities: they are conducted in a natural, not clinical setting and a specific context. The researcher directs them, and they are focused on the participants’ views and involve constant flexibility and creativity during the research process (Saeidzadeh, 2023). Conclusions are based on the researcher’s interpretation of the issue and involve reflexibility, a concept I will develop in the following chapters (Saeidzadeh, 2023).

Seibold (2000, p. 147) suggested that “developing a methodology for certain types of qualitative research is an ongoing research project.” According to Seibold (2000), citing Harding (1987), methodology describes how research should proceed, whereas method refers to the techniques for gathering evidence. Even though the research process should be sequential, method-making and data exploration may co-occur (Seibold, 2000). This is a prevalent feature of the grounded theory methodology and can pose

challenges for the researcher, as it may complicate the overall organisation of the research process (Backman and Kyngäs, 1999).

Research design involves planning that outlines how a researcher will carry out a study, aiding in the execution of an organised and coherent investigation (Saeidzadeh, 2023). A qualitative research design comprises the research question, data collection methods, analysis methods, and findings (Saeidzadeh, 2023).

I am choosing to develop two qualitative research designs: the grounded theory approach and the ethnographical approach. The grounded theory approach is one of the most common approaches in qualitative health studies (Backman and Kyngäs, 1999). It has proved helpful in discovering the primary concerns of patients, families, or health professionals and how those people manage them (McCallin, 2003).

Brandiet's (1994) clear definition of ethnographic work could serve as a foundation for future scholars who have reviewed ethnography. According to Brandriet (1994), ethnography is a research design that focuses on understanding the people of a cultural system to discover meaning and experiences as perceived by the people who inhabit the system. Therefore, it may also be well-suited to understanding a healthcare system. The researcher becomes immersed in the community to understand their experiences (Brandiet, 1994). In ethnographic work, data collection involves in-depth interviews with key informants, and the data analysis comprises description and interpretation from an 'emic' perspective, that is, the viewpoint derived from the study participants (Brandiet,1994).

On the other hand, according to McCallin (2003), the grounded theory approach aims to generate new theories after analysing the data. It is employed to study the intricate dynamics of human interactions and the structures that produce them (Bahri et al., 2016). Researchers will find basic guidelines in the literature but have to be creative since there might be a lack of specific rules for conducting research (McCallin, 2003). Still today, according to Tarozzi (2020), methodological prerequisites of grounded theory are not explained well in seminal texts. Also, creativity might be key to this research process (McCallin, 2003). McCallin (2003) also states that data must be systematically collected and constantly analysed through comparative analysis. This process requires time, patience, and good organisational skills. The researcher must be open-minded, as they are not working with established structures, boundaries and assurances (McCallin, 2003).

TABLE

Ethnography and Grounded Theory: Similarities and Differences

	Ethnography	Grounded Theory
Features	Empirical Inductive Holistic Descriptive Discovery oriented Seeks to understand people of a culture	Empirical Inductive Holistic Exploratory Discovery oriented Seeks to understand social processes
Data Collection	Fieldwork In-depth interviews Participant observation Key informants Immersion in cultural environment	Fieldwork In-depth interviews Participant observation Purposive sampling Immersion in social environment
Data Analysis	Rich description Interpretation from emic view Explanatory theories of culture Data grounded in cultural experiences Theory generation	Patterns/Themes Constant comparative analysis Interactional processes conceptualized Data grounded in social processes Theory generation

Figure 3: “Ethnography and Grounded Theory: Similarities and Differences” (Brandriet, 1994, p.8).

Observations in ethnography are akin to those in grounded theory and other qualitative studies; however, ethnographic observers tend to have a more comprehensive view (Bahri et al., 2016). Bahri et al. (2016) argue that the observer in grounded theory, aligned with the research objectives, focuses solely on a single aspect of the study. In contrast, the ethnographical observer considers all available elements in greater detail (Bahri et al., 2016).

Both grounded theory and ethnography effectively explore unknown phenomena and build theories without prior frameworks (Brandriet, 1994). Both include interviews as the primary data collection sources (Brandriet,1994), which I will explore in the following section.

Interviews and Documents as Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research

1. Interviews

Interviews are conversations that gather information from individuals' everyday experiences (Saeidzadeh, 2023). According to Saeidzadeh (2023), interviews are characterised by these features:

- The interviewer makes decisions through the process.
- However, the interviewee contributes to the process of knowledge production. Therefore, the two sides interact.
- An interviewer typically follows these steps: identifying the population, classifying the questions, reaching out to the population, designing the interview guide, determining the location, recording, transcribing, and analysing the interviews.
- Interviews can be structured or semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews generate a flow in which the researchers may discover new topics they had not previously considered.

According to Demirci (2024), interviews are the most prevalent method for collecting qualitative data due to their familiarity and relatively low cost. However, interviews may have limitations, such as social desirability bias; the prevailing cultural discourse and language constraints can hinder them, and the quality of the interviews is greatly influenced by the skills and experience of the interviewer (Demirci, 2024). Demirci (2024) insists on careful planning and processing before and after the interview to overcome these limitations and thoroughly consider the participants' sensitivity needs.

A Note on The Ethics of Qualitative Research in Interviews

Conducting empirical research based on interviews requires researchers to obtain ethical approval (Saeidzadeh, 2023). Researchers must guarantee informed consent, privacy, and protection of the participants' information and identity during and after the research (Saiedzadeh, 2023). Moreover, ethics go beyond obtaining permissions: ethics involve how the researcher relates to the participants; for example, feminist ethics in research prioritise the coproduction of knowledge with the participants (Saeidzadeh, 2023).

2. *Document Analysis*

Document analysis is “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents printed and electronic (computer-based and Intenet transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009, p.27). Documents can include text and images that are recorded without any intervention from a researcher (Bowen, 2009).

According to Bowen (2009):

- Documents include various formats as valuable research materials.
- Documents are available in libraries, newspaper archives, historical society offices, and organisational files.
- The analytic procedure comprises various steps: finding, selecting, evaluating and synthesising the data found in documents.
- Document analysis is often combined with other data collection methods, including quantitative methods, creating a mixed-methods research design. The researcher must thoroughly detail the data collection.

Document analysis has advantages and disadvantages compared with other qualitative research methods (Bowen, 2009). According to Bowen (2009), the primary benefits are efficiency: document analysis is less time-consuming, and availability: numerous documents have been made public, particularly in the Internet age. Also, cost-effectiveness: document analysis is less costly as data from documents have already been gathered; easy-referencing: references and details are already provided in the papers; and stability and coverage: documents cannot be altered by external actions and may cover various subjects, settings, and times.

Bowen (2009) also lists the main disadvantages of document analysis as a data collection method: they might be insufficient in detail; documents are created independently from the research; therefore, their detail on the subject of the research question might be limited. Also, selectivity can be biased. Sometimes, document availability might be associated with corporate policies and procedures. Related to this, I would like to highlight Sankofa’s (2023) observation that documentation can serve as a means for an individual or institution to utilise the judicial and executive powers, thereby reinforcing dominant norms, expected behaviours and societal values, particularly in Western-capitalist societies.

Following Sankofa’s (2023, p.745) assumptions: “documents are not objective nor innocuous” and can create unequal power dynamics. However, Bowen's (2009) view on document analysis focuses on benefits that significantly surpass limitations, considering its efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, Saeidzadeh (2023) reports that

integrating quantitative data with qualitative material has represented a valuable tool feminists advocate to enhance and develop feminist theories. This combination allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the issues and contributes to a richer theoretical framework.

Mixed-Methods Research and Data Triangulation to Establish a Feminist Research Framework

Mixed-method research combines quantitative and qualitative analysis (Bowen, 2009). Tavakol and Zainaloo (2004) remarked that after a long debate between qualitative and quantitative research methods, clinical scientists have demonstrated that quantitative and qualitative research are complementary rather than one superior to the other. Quantitative research reveals “how many” and “how often,” while qualitative approaches explain the “why” questions (Tavakol and Zainaloo, 2004). Integrating quantitative and qualitative data in mixed-method studies to complement each research approach is also known as “triangulation” (Alele and Malau-Aduli, 2023). According to Alele and Malau-Aduli (2023), triangulating can help to:

- Ensure the research findings are validated and strengthened by presenting various viewpoints on the same phenomenon.
- Pinpoint discrepancies and complexities to enhance clarity and effectiveness.
- Identify and explain biases and increase the validity of the findings.

Furthermore, according to Fetters, Curry, and Creswell (2004), qualitative data should be used to determine the validity of quantitative data. Qualitative analyses may guide the creation or enhancement of quantitative tools or interventions or inspire hypotheses for testing within the qualitative aspect of the quantitative study (Fetters, Curry and Creswell, 2004).

However, mixed-method research has found critiques regarding the development and conceptualisation of this approach (Fàbregues et al., 2021). Fàbregues et al. (2021) summarise this criticism:

- The terminology employed in mixed methods evidences a lack of consensus. MMultiple definitions for the same term and different terms for similar concepts are used, which may generate confusion (Fàbregues et al., 2021).

- Some of the mixed methods literature may have highlighted the distinctions between the two methodologies by displaying their traits in separate columns of a table, overlooking methods that blend aspects of both approaches (such as surveys with open and closed-ended questions or qualitative studies that include descriptive statistics). This may attempt against the very nature of mixed methods (Fàbregues et al., 2021).
- Some researchers may give the quantitative data a higher status because they consider the qualitative component a complement to the main quantitative one. This may lead to neglecting the added value of mixed-method research (Fàbregues et al., 2021).
- Using very specific typologies (a clear-cut classification of a long list of methodological features imposed by theorists, according to Fàbregues et al., 2021) simplifies the research process and detracts creativity from the process.

Still, Fàbregues et al. (2021) conclude that future research is needed to confirm the assessment described.

Positionality of the Insider Research in Conducting a Qualitative Study

It is essential to mention the unequal power relations between the researcher and the research subjects (Saeidzadeh, 2023). Saeidzadeh (2023) considers reflecting on these relations during knowledge production crucial. The researcher's positionality should be clarified, and power hierarchies should be dismissed (Saeidzadeh, 2023). Furthermore, according to Parry (2020), feminist researchers would reject claims of objectivity and value-free data collection tools traditionally dominated by Western patriarchal canons to use their lived experiences, interpretations and subjectivities as resources of new knowledge. Feminist researchers cannot be removed from the subject (situated knowledge) since their worldview has influenced the development of the research question in the first place (Parry, 2020).

According to Parry (2020), to reduce the bias of feminist positionality, feminist researchers:

- View the research process as a collaborative one between researcher and participant. The findings should reflect the participant's feelings and experiences.
- They have to be mindful and critically reflective about their situated knowledge. Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) cite Sandra Harding (1987) as a developer of the

feminist standpoint theory, which focuses on the value of using reflexivity as a resource of knowledge.

- They have to address data distortions to include the experiences of traditionally marginalised groups and expand the scope of feminism.
- They have to comply with ethical considerations, especially regarding powerlessness and representation. I will discuss these considerations in more detail in the following chapter.

Ethical Considerations in Conducting a Qualitative Study with a Feminist Approach

Parry (2020) points out that feminist research should recover marginalised voices and explore social justice. In this context, reflexivity is a fundamental ethical principle in feminist research (Parry, 2020). Reflexivity involves asking questions about protecting the participants: Will this research empower them? Would they be harmed? (Parry, 2020). Chege (2012) identifies subject-centredness, sensitivity, empathy, and flexibility as key in this endeavour. Employing straightforward language and a clear research outline will eliminate uncertainty in grasping its purposes (Parry, 2020). Furthermore, according to Parry (2020), the research study should facilitate participants' openness, with research outcomes that should be “liberating and transformative” (Parry, 2020, p.21). This is one of the reasons why I believe a feminist approach is needed when studying menopause voice symptoms, emphasising the collective nature of knowledge production, fostering social transformation and dismantling networks of unequal power relations (Parry, 2020).

Conclusion

After reading and evaluating the literature, I have developed my understanding of the research process. I have concluded that, even from a feminist perspective, a multi-paradigm approach is necessary for fully addressing the research aim. Parry (2020) states that a key feature of feminist research is the recognition of diverse practices, the adoption of various methodologies, and the continuous redefinition following concerns representing women. I have decided to continue exploring the grounded theory methodology since it aligns with the philosophy of research I am essentially inclined to.

Interviews may be my primary data collection source, although I might consider other sources, such as questionnaires and surveys, in addition to interviews and document analysis. Regarding ethical concerns, I would like to delve further into power relations in healthcare and professional voice environments.

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