A Guide to Gender - Sensitive Research Methodology

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The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)

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In 2009, FAWE, with the financial support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), launched an initiative aimed at strengthening gender research in education in Africa. The initiative was in response to the recognition that gender disparities in the education sector in Africa continue to persist despite the existing international conventions that African governments have ratified to protect women’s and girls’ rights to education. Since the launch of this initiative four years ago, FAWE has partnered with female academics from various research institutions across the African continent to produce policy-relevant research on gender and education. This research has been published in three volumes of the FAWE Research Series.

We would like to note that this Gender-Sensitive Research Guide is an extension of FAWE’s ‘Strengthening Gender Research to improve Women’s and Girls’ Education in Africa Initiative’. FAWE has developed a gender research methodologies guide that will encourage rigor in gender research. The guide is designed specifically for young African scholars who have an interest in pursuing research on gender issues. It aims to help scholars to gain a better understanding of how to mainstream gender into their research from the initial phase of constructing research questions and/or hypotheses to the conclusion phase when data are analysed, compiled and reported. We hope that this Guide will help young, novice scholars with an interest in gender research to horn their skills in qualitative research and to ultimately pursue gender-sensitive research.

For many young scholars in Africa, as elsewhere around the world, research writing is often a challenging task. This is compounded by the fact that many academic institutions in Africa do not offer a Research Writing course to help young scholars strengthen their writing skills. As a result, many young scholars have a difficult time writing scholarly work and few get published in refereed journals. In this Guide, we introduce the reader to some of the gender concepts commonly used in the field of gender studies and provide a step-by-step description of how to design and conduct a gender-sensitive qualitative study. Information on how to disseminate your research findings is also provided.

“Education is the most powerful tool, which you can use to change the world” ~ Nelson Mandela
We wish to thank Ms. Oley Dibba-Wadda, the Executive Director of the FAWE Regional Secretariat in Nairobi, Ms. Hendrina Doroba (Senior Program Coordinating Officer, FAWE) and Ms. Irmin Durand (formerly of FAWE) for extending us the opportunity to participate in the development of this project. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments and Prof. John W. Creswell at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln for the permission he granted us to reprint some of his work in this guide.

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The term ‘sex’ is defined in the Dictionary of Social Sciences as the biological differences between male and female [emphasis mine], especially those directly related to reproduction and erotic pleasure (Calhoun, 2012).

Gender is a socially and culturally constructed notion about the roles of women (femininity) and men (masculinity) within a society. These roles are context-specific and therefore vary across cultures.

Femininity refers to the forms of behavior associated with the female sex, as opposed to the biological differences that define the sexes (Calhoun, 2012).

Masculinity refers to the forms of behavior associated with the male sex, as opposed to the biological differences that define the sexes (Calhoun, 2012).

Gender discrimination occurs when an individual or group of people are treated unfairly or deprived of certain rights because of their gender.

This refers to women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere (BRIDGE, 2000).

Gender equity is the equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognizing their different needs and interests and requiring a redistribution of power and resources (BRIDGE, 2000).

Gender mainstreaming refers to the integration of gender into every aspect of an institution’s policies and activities (BRIDGE, 2000).

Gender-sensitive research refers to research that seeks to understand the differential life experiences of women and men in society (Leduc, 2009).

Gender studies focuses on feminist research as well as on research that explores the construction of femininity and masculinity and other possible categories (Järviiluoma, Moisala, & Vilko, 2003).

For a more elaborate list on gender concepts, refer to BRIDGE (2000).
In the last two decades, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has been committed to promoting gender equality and equity in education in sub-Saharan Africa.
1. What is a research methodology?
Although the term ‘methodology’ is often used synonymously with the term ‘methods’ (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007), these two terms have distinct meanings. Methodology refers to “the overarching approach to research, encompassing the theoretical and philosophical ideas, focus of the study, methods to the employed, form of analysis and position of the researcher” (Jones, Rodger, Ziviani& Boyd, 2012, p. 370) whereas research methods are the actual techniques that one employs to conduct research (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007).

2. What is a gender-sensitive research methodology?
A gender-sensitive research methodology is an approach to research that “takes into account gender as a significant variable” and “pays attention to the similarities and differences between men and women’s experiences and viewpoints and gives equal value to each” (Leduc, 2009, p. 1).

3. What is the importance of gender sensitive research?
Conducting research that pays attention to both the experiences of women and men is important in that it ensures that none of these two groups are left out, ignored or become invisible in research. Gender research can also provide the avenue through which inequalities based on gender are addressed. Indeed “by highlighting differences between how women and men fare, advocates can make the case for the urgent need to reduce gender inequality” (BRIDGE In Brief, 2007, p. 1).

4. What is FAWE doing to promote gender-sensitive research in sub-Saharan Africa?
In the last two decades, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has been committed to promoting gender equality and equity in education in sub-Saharan Africa through advocacy as well as through lobbying of governments in the region. In 2009, FAWE, with the financial support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) launched a research initiative to strengthen gender research in education. Specifically, the initiative sought to encourage African women researchers to carry out rigorous empirical research on women’s and girls’ education in Africa. As part of its continued efforts to promote gender-sensitive research, FAWE has developed this research methodology guide to help enhance the research capacity of African women scholars –particularly the young scholars who are just beginning a career in gender research or who have the interest to embark on such a journey.
5. Why is it important that young African women researchers develop the capacity to conduct gender-sensitive research in sub-Saharan Africa?

Gender research in Africa has been the domain of Western scholars for decades dating back to the 1970s when western feminists first began writing about the experiences of African women. As odd as it is that white women more so than African women have written about the experiences of women in Africa, it is not surprising given the global hegemony that the West enjoys. However, this dominance by the West in the representation of African women has not escaped criticism. Indeed many women scholars from Africa and elsewhere in the Third World as well as women of color in America have argued that white feminist scholarship in many instances misconstrues and misrepresents the realities of African women. Mohanty (2003), in her book *Feminism without Borders*, critiques the ways in which western feminist discourse portrays African women, arguing for example, that this discourse lumps African women into a single category of “oppressed”, “dependent”, “powerless” women when in fact African women like women elsewhere in the world constitute a heterogeneous group.

In the context of this history of misrepresentation of African women’s lived realities, and in light of African nations’ commitment to promote gender equality and to empower women (MGD 3), it is crucial that African women develop the capacity to research and write accounts of their own realities. While in recent years an increasing body of research on gender in Africa by African women scholars has begun to emerge, this research is still quite limited when compared to the research done by their Western feminist counterparts. One of the reasons that few African women scholars pursue gender research is because of lack of funding. Young women scholars in particular face a difficult huddle because they are inexperienced and may not have an established history of publication as their seasoned colleagues. To ensure that an increasing number of African women researchers join the caliber of scholars writing on gender issues in Africa, we must develop the capacity of these scholars to do research that is credible, rigorous and adds insight to our knowledge of gender. The more knowledgeable we are about the wide array of gender-related issues impacting the continent of Africa, the better prepared we will be to address these issues.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting. It provides in-depth investigation of individuals, groups, or institutions as they naturally occur. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they feel that people and their actions are best understood when they are observed in social

2 Feminist scholarship constitutes an aspect of gender studies (Järviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkko, 2003)
and cultural contexts. Qualitative research uses interviews, direct observation and open-ended questionnaires on small samples of target groups to gain in-depth understanding of a program, project, or educational activity. Although qualitative research findings may not be representative of the general population in a statistical sense, the findings may be transferable to similar contexts.

6. Designing a Qualitative Study

There are various steps to be followed in designing a qualitative study. In this guide, we will use Creswell’s (1994) format below as a pointer to our discussions on design. Although this format is quantitative, it is useful here because it is a standard format for journal articles and as such, is relevant for a qualitative study as well.

Example 1.
Quantitative Format

Introduction

Context (Statement of the Problem)
Purpose of the Study
Research Questions or Objectives or Hypotheses
Theoretical Perspective
Definition of Terms
Delimitation and Limitations
Significance of the Study

Review of Related Literature

Methods

Research Design
Sample, Population, or Subjects
Instrumentation and Materials
Variables in the Study
Data Analysis

Appendices: Instruments

7. Basic Steps in Qualitative Research

7.1. Identifying Your Research Topic

An important first step in doing research is identifying your research topic. There are numerous factors that can lead you to choose a certain topic for research. For instance, you could be inspired to conduct research on a topic because of your experiential knowledge of the
issue or because you identify an area of research that is not well understood. Marshall and Rossman (1999) write that:

In qualitative inquiry, initial curiosities for researchers often come from real-world observations, emerging from the interplay of the researcher’s direct experience, tacit theories, political commitments, interests in practice, and growing scholarly interests (p.25)

If you have an interest in gender issues and seek to pursue a gender-sensitive study, it is important for you understand what a ‘gender-sensitive’ study implies. We have found Rudduck and McIntyre’s (1998) description of gender-sensitive research to be quite useful. These scholars write that:

It is important, however, to distinguish between research which includes attention to gender, research which is gender-sensitive and research which is feminist. Research can mention gender as a variable…without actually paying any attention to the social, cultural and political construction and significance of gender identities and gender relations. Gender-sensitive research goes beyond treating gender as a variable no more and no less important than height or eye color and declares that gender is a social and cultural phenomenon whose influence deserves to be taken seriously in research (p. 173).

7.2. Developing Research Questions
Qualitative researchers rely on research questions rather than hypotheses to guide their study (Creswell, 1994). In any given qualitative study, one should have a central research question accompanied by associated sub-questions (Creswell, 2003). Maxwell (2009) writes that, “the research questions serve two main functions: to help you focus the study… and to give you guidance on how to conduct it…” (p. 229). Research questions can be difficult to construct particularly for beginning students of qualitative research. For example, some students begin questions with terms such as “to what extent”, to “what degree”, “what is the impact” and so forth. Maxwell calls these sorts of questions variance questions and cautions against using them in designing a qualitative study since such questions seek to establish whether there is correlation or causality between variables and hence are more suitable in quantitative rather than qualitative research (see Maxwell, 2009, for a more elaborate discussion on research questions).

In a gender-sensitive study, research questions should reflect the need to understand both women’s and men’s perceptions of an issue and the narratives they tell about their lived
experiences. Moreover, questions should be constructed using language that is sensitive to the both genders.

Tip: Avoid using language that may suggest bias towards a certain gender. You also need to ensure that the questions you pose are objective and not intent on portraying a particular gender negatively.

7.3. The Statement of the Problem
The statement of the problem is a section in the research proposal that many young, novice scholars have difficulty writing. One reason that this might be the case is because these young writers are not clear on what constitutes a problem statement. Creswell (1994) defines the problem to be studied as “the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study” (p. 50). Consistent with this definition, a problem statement identifies the issue that needs to be explored or examined by drawing on the relevant extant literature. Therefore, a well-written problem statement should demonstrate that the researcher is familiar with the existing gap in the literature.

7.4. Purpose of the Study
When writing your research paper or proposal, it is important to state the aim(s) of your study. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), qualitative research may be exploratory, explanatory, descriptive or emancipatory. An exploratory study explores phenomenon that is not well understood while explanatory research seeks “to explain the patterns related to the phenomenon in question”. Descriptive studies “describe the phenomenon of interest” while emancipatory studies focus on empowering the researched community to take social action in order to emancipate themselves (p. 33).

7.5. Significance of the Study
Students of qualitative research sometimes tend to conflate ‘the purpose of the study’ with ‘the significance of the study’. However, these are two different sections. Information under the “significance” section should articulate the importance of conducting the study and whom it is likely to benefit. When conducting a gender-sensitive study, you need to be clear on how women and men will benefit from your study. You could also discuss the need to formulate new policies to enhance the lived experiences of both these groups. Given that gender-sensitive research is emancipatory, a discussion on what actions could be taken to help empower the community under study would be imperative.
7.6. Delimitations and Limitations

Your section on delimitations should explain, “how the study will be narrowed in scope” while the limitations section should “identify potential weaknesses of the study” (Creswell, 1994, p. 110). In a study of intimate partner violence for example, your delimitation could be that you propose to recruit only those spouses that are legally married. A limitation on the other hand could be that you have a small sample size and as such cannot make generalizations to the larger population.

7.7. Theoretical Perspective

Qualitative research is often situated within a specific theoretical framework. In very simple terms, theory is used to help us understand social phenomena. Maxwell (1996), provides a simple explanation of what theory is by writing that:

> It is a simplification of the world, but a simplification aimed at clarifying and explaining some aspect of how it works. Theory is a statement about what is going on with the phenomena that you want to understand. It is not simply a framework, although it can provide that; rather it is a story about what you think is happening and why. A useful theory is one that tells an enlightening story about some phenomenon, one that gives you new insights and broadens your understanding of that phenomenon (p. 32).

From a gender perspective, theory should help us understand the distinct differences between women’s and men’s lives and why these distinctions exist. In feminist scholarship for example, there is a lot of theorizing on why women are oppressed and / or marginalized in society. There is also theory on the differential, and in many instances, discriminatory practices that women experience. Other theories seek to explain the roles that women play in society and how these roles differ from those of their male counterparts. Theory has also been used to explain the role of religion in the subordination of women across diverse cultures. In the field of psychology, theory helps illuminate a lot of issues including the biological and gender differences between women and men.

Tip: When choosing a theory, you must ensure that it has relevance for your study and that it helps provide insight into the phenomenon you seek to understand.

7.8. Reviewing Related Literature

The literature review is an exploration of prior related research. It is an important step in research because it helps one to become familiar with what other researchers have done on the selected topic of study. The literature review plays a number of other functions. Marshall and Rossman (1999) list what they term as “four broad functions” of a literature review as follows:

i. It demonstrates the underlying assumptions behind the general research questions
ii. It demonstrates that the researcher is knowledgeable about related research and the intellectual traditions that surround and support the study
iii. It shows that the researcher has identified some gaps in previous research and that the proposed study will fill a demonstrated need
iv. It refines and redefines the research questions by embedding those questions in larger empirical traditions (p. 43)

In organizing a literature review, the researcher should keep in mind that a lit review serves to justify why the author’s work is needed and what the author’s work will contribute to the topic. Hence, the literature review provides an avenue for the researcher to join in on a scholarly conversation. The literature review is not a summary of articles and books written on the study topic but rather a critical synthesis of the most pertinent literature on the topic. Therefore, the researcher must be very selective and include only the literature that contributes significantly to an understanding of the topic.

When conducting a gender-sensitive research, your review of the literature needs to reflect the differences between women and men’s realities, whatever the topic might be. In her study of sexual coercion among young people in Kenya, Erulkar (2004) reviewed studies on sexual coercion among youth in sub-Saharan Africa, focusing for the most part on the prevalence of coercion among the female population. However, she also mentioned that there was a deficiency in the literature on sexual coercion among young men noting that, “male’s experiences of sexual coercion have been virtually ignored by developing country research” (p. 183). This is a good example of how one could ensure that their lit review pays attention to both genders.
7.9. Overall Research Strategy

There are three distinct overall strategies of conducting empirical research namely: qualitative research, quantitative research and mixed methods research. According to Creswell (2003), the decision as to which approach one uses to conduct an empirical study is dependent on “the research problem, the personal experience of the researcher, and the audience(s) for whom the report will be written” (p. 21). Table 1.2 below which is adopted from Creswell’s (1994) other work captures his ideas about reasons that could lead researchers to choose one research strategy over another.

Table 1.2
Reasons for Selecting a Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Quantitative Paradigm</th>
<th>Qualitative Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Worldview</td>
<td>A researcher’s comfort with the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions of the quantitative paradigm</td>
<td>A researcher’s comfort with the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions of the qualitative paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and Experience of the Researcher</td>
<td>Technical writing skills; computer statistical skills; library skills</td>
<td>Literary writing skills; computer text-analysis skills; library skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Psychological Attributes</td>
<td>Comfort with rules and guidelines for conducting research; low tolerance for ambiguity; time for a study of short duration</td>
<td>Comfort with lack of specific rules and procedures for conducting research; high tolerance for ambiguity; time for lengthy study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the Problem</td>
<td>Previously studied by other researchers so that body of literature exists; known variables; existing theories</td>
<td>Exploratory research; variables unknown; context important; may lack theory base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience for the Study journal editors and readers, graduate committees</td>
<td>Individuals accustomed to /supportive of quantitative studies</td>
<td>Individuals accustomed to/ (e. g., supportive of qualitative studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Creswell (1994, p. 9). Reprinted with permission from John W. Creswell

Gender research, which cuts across various disciplines, is not restricted to a particular research strategy. Chrisler and McCreary (2010), note that quantitative and qualitative
methodologies are the two main approaches to conducting gender-based research. However, it is important to acknowledge here that the mixed methods research approach is also increasingly being utilized in studies about gender. In this guide, we have focused primarily on the qualitative research paradigm.

There are numerous paradigms within the qualitative tradition that one could choose from when designing a study. These include but are not limited to ethnography, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study (Creswell, 2007). It is important to specify in your research proposal which particular paradigm(s) you will employ in conducting your study. Any of these paradigms would be suitable for a gender-sensitive study. Your choice of the paradigm is dependent on what your study is about. For example, if you would like to study prostitution among young women in Kenya, phenomenology would be a good choice because its focus is to understand “the essence of a lived experience” (Creswell, 2007). On the other hand, if you want to research on an aspect of culture such as patriarchy and how it is used to reinforce women’s subordination, you could consider employing a critical ethnography. A critical ethnography helps illuminate the oppression of a particular group(s) within a culture. For further reading on qualitative research paradigms, you could refer to Creswell, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994 and Patton, 1990. Please note that these are just a few examples. To find other sources, check with your University library or search the Internet.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to conducting fieldwork, researchers should take into account the following ethical considerations:

1. Permission to conduct research should be obtained from the relevant research board;
2. The researcher should seek informed, voluntary consent of prospective research participants and their parents/guardians (in the case of minors);
3. Prospective research participants should know beforehand the exact nature of the researcher’s study, why it is being conducted and the benefits or risks of involvement;
4. Research participants should be informed about the voluntary nature of the study;
5. The researcher should avoid any research procedures that could cause physical and/or emotional harm to research participants;
6. The researcher should ensure the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of research participants;
7. The researcher should be cognizant of sensitive cultural issues and ensure that his/her study does not contravene the norms, values and beliefs of the society within which the study is undertaken;
8. The researcher should be aware of his/her own biases and seek ways to eliminate these biases;
9. The researcher should be cognizant of the power dynamics that class, race and gender may create between himself/herself and the research participants;

Research Site, Sampling and Sample Size
What influences a researcher’s decision regarding the selection of the research site, sampling and sample size is the type of questions to be answered, the type of research being conducted (quantitative or qualitative), the proposed research design and the characteristics in the population one wants to study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Site Selection
The selection of a research site is guided by the following considerations: the site will provide data to address your research questions; physical accessibility of the site; social and cultural accessibility of the site (language, culture and gender barriers won’t prevent data collection); safety of the site; familiarity with the site. The researcher’s time frame and budget also determine the selection of the site.

7.10. Sampling
Maxwell (2009) writes that, “whenever you have a choice about when and where to observe, whom to talk to, or what information sources to focus on, you are faced with a sampling decision” (p. 235). In other words, sampling entails among other things, selecting your research site(s), potential participants and events to be observed.
There are numerous techniques that one can employ to sample research participants (see Miles & Huberman, 1994, for a list of these sampling techniques).
A gender-sensitive study must ensure that where possible, an equal number of participants from both genders (male and female) are sampled.

Tip: Avoid using sampling techniques that may lead to the exclusion of certain individuals or groups, especially those that are often marginalized (e.g. poor, illiterate women, women from ethnic minority groups, persons with disability, persons who identify as gay or lesbian etc.).
7.11. The Researcher’s Positionality

In any given research, there is always a power differential between the researcher and the person(s) being researched. Often, the researcher is at the top of this power hierarchy while the one being researched is in a subordinate position. As a gender-sensitive researcher, you must think about the ways in which to minimize this power differential. For example, if your research is in a rural location where a majority of people are illiterate and do not speak the official national language (such as English or French), you may consider conducting your study in the local language if you are a local or speak the language. If you are not a local and do not speak the language spoken in the area of study, then you may want to recruit an interpreter to help facilitate the study. If your study is likely to be more long-term (e.g. an ethnography), you could take the time to learn some local terminology long before you get to the field. Another strategy you could employ to minimize the power hierarchy is blending into the culture by dressing in attire that conforms to the setting in which your study is taking place. Vignette 1 below, cites an example of strategies that Mkandawire-Valhmu and Stevens (2010) employed in their study of HIV in Malawi to “flatten” the power hierarchy in their research (p. 686).

Vignette 1

In their study of HIV and gender-based violence among Malawian women, Mkandawire-Valhmu and Stevens (2010) note that they attempted to minimize the power hierarchy between them and their research participants by employing a number of strategies. The Mkandawire-Valhmu who is the first author of the article, conducted interviews in her local language, Chichewa. See the quotation below for other strategies she engaged in:

“For instance, she dressed in clothing common in the context, limited use of technologies with which women were unfamiliar, prioritized verbal over written communication and used inclusive first-person plural we in posing questions” (p. 686).

7.12. Using a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Data Collection

Data collection techniques vary depending on the nature of your study and on the paradigm within which your study is situated. The most commonly used qualitative data collection technique is the in-depth interview. One may have an individual interview or a group interview (also known as focus group interview). When considering either of these methods, it is important to reflect on your research topic and determine if interviews would
be the right approach to soliciting the kind of information you need. If you are researching an emotionally sensitive topic (e.g. abortion, genocide, rape, etc.), you need to think about the strategies you will employ to protect your interviewee(s). If you are researching the rape of women in the Congo for example (or any other context for that matter), you need to think about the mechanisms you will put in place to ensure that you protect your research participants from being traumatized as a result of narrating their experiences of sexual assault.

If you choose to use focus groups and have to interview both women and men (or girls and boys), you also need to think about whether or not to interview these two groups together. There are topics that are quite sensitive and could make women and men uncomfortable if interviewed in the same setting. In such a case, you may need to segregate these two groups. In situations where it is conducive to interview both women and men, you also need to ensure that both have equal opportunity to respond to questions and that no one particular group dominates the conversation. A good way to go about this would be to develop what is known as an interview guide or protocol (Patton, 1990). An interview protocol usually contains the following information: (a) a heading, (b) instructions to the interviewer (opening statements), (c) the key research questions to be asked, (d) probes to follow key questions, (e) transition messages for the interviewer, (f) space for recording the interviewer’s comments, and (g) space in which the researcher records reflective notes (Creswell, 1994, p. 152). Having such a guide would be handy; it will help you focus the interview better and enable you to channel specific questions to each group of participants.

When using other forms of data collection such as surveys or questionnaires to retrieve information from research participants, you need to ensure that these instruments are designed to retrieve “potentially relevant sex/gender differences in your data” (European Commission, 2009, p.16).

7.13. Data Analysis
Marshall and Rossman (1999) have defined data analysis as “the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (p. 150). There is no single formula to be followed when analyzing qualitative data (Patton, 2002). One important thing to note is that qualitative data analysis is a process that occurs concurrently with data collection (Creswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 1996; Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2013, Schutt, 2011). As numerous scholars of qualitative research have shown, there are numerous techniques that can be used to analyze qualititative data (Creswell, 1994; Dey, 1993; Maxwell, 1996; Maxwell, 2009; Maykut& Morehouse, 1994; Schutt, 2011).
Given the numerous methodology texts that explore how qualitative data are analyzed, we will not recount here the procedures of analyzing qualitative data. Instead, we will focus attention on how to interpret such data using a gender-sensitive lens.

Gender-sensitive research data is best analyzed through a gender analysis. According to Acker (2003), adopting a gender analysis means, “being alert to gender-inflected dimensions of any topic under study” (p. 393). She argues that a gender analysis requires attention to be paid to the obvious and subtle ways in which cultural beliefs about women and men influence the nature of what people do. Acker differentiates a gender analysis approach from “a sex differences approach, where contrasts between women and men are necessarily simplified in order to highlight them” (p. 394). According to Acker, a gender analysis may include such comparisons but puts greater emphasis on social and cultural expectations associated with gender and the ways they are incorporated into everyday life as well as being building blocks for social structures. The analysis should seek to identify the gendered consequences of seemingly neutral policies and practices in society that position women differently. Hence, a gender analysis should improve our understanding of how gender influences relations between men and women.

Tip: Whatever technique you resort to in the analysis of your data, you should ensure that your overall interpretation of that data paints a clear picture of the differences between men and women’s lived experiences. As Moerman and Van Mens-Verhulst (2004) note:

Presumably a gender-sensitive research approach will tend to decrease the number of general truths about men as categories. The eventual gain will be a more real-life picture of the differences between men and women as well as a set of similarities between men and women that is no longer based on assumptions but sound evidence (p. 50).

7.14. Verifying Research Findings

Verifying the information you collect during fieldwork is a critical component of your research. As with quantitative research, which deals with questions of validity and reliability (Golafshani, 2003; Joppe, 2000; Krefting, 1990), qualitative research also places emphasis on ensuring that research is credible. Krefting (1990) writes that:

Just as there is a need to look at the accuracy and trustworthiness of various kinds of quantitative data in different ways, there is also a need to look at qualitative methods for the different ways in which to ensure the quality of the findings (p. 215).
In this respect, qualitative researchers can employ multiple strategies to ensure that their work fits the credibility threshold. Krefting (1990), lists some strategies that would contribute to the credibility of a study namely: prolonged contact with participants, use of a reflexive field journal, triangulation, member-checking, peer examination, interview techniques, time sampling, coherence between the raw data and their analysis and the expertise of the researcher as a human instrument.

**Writing the Conclusion**

The conclusion section sums up the study and provides a succinct overview of the research results. The conclusion of your research report should state the research problem/question studied, the methodology used and the key findings of the study. The conclusion should highlight how the gap in knowledge has been filled. Further, the conclusion should indicate how the findings of the research maybe used or applied in practice. The limitations of the research should be clearly stated here and suggestions for further research given. Markman, Markman and Waddell (2001), observe that ‘the conclusion is the only “original” contribution you offer in your paper’ despite the fact that no actual new information is introduced in the section (p. 90). The conclusion should therefore include the researcher’s opinion about the research, what the researcher has learnt and why the subject under study is important.

### 7.15. Reporting and Disseminating Findings

**Reporting findings**

The paradigm within which your study is situated, will determine the way in which you write your final report. There are various ways to present your findings. For example, if you employ a narrative inquiry paradigm, your best approach would be to use a literary style of writing to describe the storied lives of your research participants. A literary narrative is one where the narrator tells a story about his/her character(s). Typically, the narrator uses artistic language to describe the character(s) and the unfolding events in the “story”. Another way to present your findings is to write a “thick description” of what you observed in the study setting and what you heard from interviewees about their lived experiences (Patton, 1990). For further reading on how to report findings, we recommend the following resources: Anderson, 2010; Clandinin, 2007; Creswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman; 2006, Schutt, 2011; Stake, 1995. These sources are just a few examples. We highly recommend that you search for other sources.
How to Disseminate Findings

It is important that you find ways to disseminate your research findings so that other people who have an interest in your work can access it. There are several ways that you could disseminate the findings of your research. For example, you could share your findings at workshops, conferences and seminars that have a relevant theme to your research. Another way you could share your work is through publication of research articles in refereed journals, monographs and research series. You can also publish opinion articles in local newspapers, press releases, flyers, posters, brochures, policy briefs, study newsletters and Internet sites.

As a young scholar looking to develop a career in research, it is critical that you get your work published in an international peer-reviewed journal annually. A peer-reviewed journal is a journal whose reviewers have expertise in your field of study. This type of journal is also known to as a refereed journal. To access a peer-reviewed journal, check out your University library online database. You could also use Internet search engines such as Google Search and others to locate a journal. Journals typically have guidelines for publishing manuscripts. It is important that you pay attention to these guidelines when preparing your manuscript.

Getting your work published in a journal is a daunting task. Journals are very selective and screen manuscripts thoroughly. Therefore, it is not automatic that the manuscript you submit will be considered for publication. Depending on the quality of work you submit to the editor, you may be asked to revise the manuscript and re-submit it, or your work could be rejected all together. If the worst happens and your manuscript is rejected, you should not give up. Instead, go back to the ‘drawing board’ and review the comments from the editor and others who reviewed your paper. Such feedback is valuable. It will help identify the weakness and strengths of your paper and also guide you on what to do to improve your writing. For further reading on things to consider when presenting a qualitative research paper to a journal, we recommend reading Anderson’s (2010) article titled Presenting and Evaluating Qualitative Research which is freely accessible online. You can also access it in the American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 74(8).

Tip: To improve your chances of getting your work published in an international peer-reviewed journal, request at least two or three seasoned scholars in your field of study to read your draft and give you some feedback. Once you have received the feedback, take time to revise your paper accordingly. If you are weary of your writing skills, it may be helpful to have someone proofread your final draft prior to submitting it to a journal. Lastly, if you want to be a good writer, you must develop a reading culture. As Donovan (2013) has observed in her book 10 Core Practices to better writing, “If you want to write well, you must read well, and you must read widely” (p.6). So, nurture the academic in you by making reading and writing and part and parcel of your daily activities.
References


A Guide To Gender - Sensitive Research Methodology


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