

The CORTH Methods Workshop

Hosted by the [CORTH Doctoral Forum](#), the CORTH Methods Workshop took place on Friday 27th March. The workshop aimed to encourage discussion and reflections on the methods we use when researching areas such as sexual and reproductive rights, maternal health, gender, bodies and families. Some of the questions explored in the workshop included:

- How can we bridge the quantitative-qualitative gap?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of various methods that we've used?
- How can we work at the intersections to capture experiences and activities?
- How do we bring the personal into our research - i.e. thinking about our 'self' as the researcher as well as the 'selves' of the researched?

[Beth Mills](#) (IDS) started the workshop with reflections on her use of visual methods, including body mapping, participatory photography and journey mapping, to explore women's embodied experiences of AIDS biomedicine in South Africa. Beth talked about the ways that visual participatory methods can offer an insight into people's everyday lives, and often bring to life stories that researchers otherwise wouldn't have access to. Beth also emphasized the importance of tailoring our research methods to our participants, and showed us evocative body maps drawn by HIV positive participants to reflect their embodied experiences of ARVs.

[Janet Boddy](#) (ESW) then discussed various challenges related to cross-national methodologies within the Novella Family Lives and Environment study in India and the UK. Janet told us that a significant challenge lies in assumptions about the direction of learning between the Global North and South – i.e., that knowledge can only productively move from the former to the latter – and that the Family Lives study aims to disrupt such assumptions. Janet provided examples of the productive insights offered by holding contrasting contexts together within cross-national methodologies – for example, shared understandings of place, privilege, and 'responsible affluence' that emerged in the study from wealthy families in urban India and rural UK.

[Gill Love](#), in the first year of a PhD in Sociology and Gender Studies, spoke about the life narrative method that she will be using to explore women's experiences of abortion. Gill spoke about the importance of a narrative approach when researching sensitive topics in order to consider participants' experiences within the wider context of their lives, rather than simply reducing participants' lives to particular 'events'. However, Gill also spoke about the potential pitfalls of assuming that the life narrative method is more 'empowering' than other methods, given the complexity of power relations within any research interaction.

[Padmini Iyer](#), in the third year of a PhD in Education, reflected on her experiences of using mixed methods when researching young people's experiences of gender and sexuality in Delhi secondary schools. Padmini discussed the ways in which her expectations of the 'order' of quantitative methods were considerably undermined during fairly chaotic experiences of data collection in schools. However, Padmini suggested that adopting an ethnographic approach both enabled her to productively capture and reflect upon the 'messiness' of data collection, and added more nuanced understandings to both quantitative and qualitative findings.

In between these presentations, there were rich discussions and reflections among workshop participants, both on the particular issues raised by the presenters and on wider issues of research methods and methodology. Discussions around power relations within research were particularly prominent – for example, challenging assumptions that certain methods (e.g. body mapping) could not be used with elite participants, or using alternative approaches to cross-national research to disrupt global flows of learning. The question of research methods and boundaries was also raised, with pre-fieldwork doctoral students particularly interested in what 'appropriate' boundaries between researchers and participants might look like, and how forms of reciprocal exchange might be established within research interactions.

At the end of the workshop, we explored ways in which we might continue these discussions and reflections in the future – a session focusing on body mapping was mentioned, as was an online platform in order to share writing and examples of data among CORTH members. We're also looking forward to next term's CORTH Doctoral Forum event, which will be a workshop exploring experiences of and approaches to achieving 'impact'.

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