

# Feminist method and qualitative research about midlife

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This paper identifies criteria seen as essential to feminist research. In light of these criteria, issues which have arisen during our current research on women and their experiences of midlife and menopause are discussed. Issues considered include the researchers' responsibilities to participants when exploring sensitive and highly personal issues relating to participants' life experiences, and less clear cut issues such as knowledge construction, power and control. In relation to the latter the balance of power in the research-participant relationship, and the role and responsibilities of the researcher in knowledge construction, are explored. Foucault's notions of knowledge construction and power and control and the feminist researcher's position, are considered in terms of rigour in feminist research and dissemination of research reports. Issues which are seen as problematic and worthy of further debate are the relations between interviewer and interviewee, the intellectual (the researcher) as the bearer of universal values and as truth teller, and the level of critical activism possible in research studies of this nature.

## INTRODUCTION

Is there a feminist method? The question takes on significance when grappling with methodological issues in research from a feminist perspective. Feminist scholars contend that feminist research in general is distinguished by certain features, even though it may utilize a number

of different methods. This paper begins by discussing criteria seen as essential to feminist research. In the context of these agreed criteria we consider a number of issues which have arisen during our current research on women and their experiences of midlife and menopause. These issues include the researcher's responsibility to participants when exploring sensitive and highly personal issues relating to the participants' life experiences, and less clear cut issues such as knowledge construction

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and power and control. The research purpose, design and processes of handling data will be discussed in the context of ethical issues identified, most particularly the relationships of rigour in feminist research to knowledge construction and power and control.

## **IDENTIFYING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMINIST THEORY AND RESEARCH**

Feminist scholarship, once a fringe subject in university curricula, is rapidly being integrated. While there is still some way to go the integration taking place is indicated by the number of opportunities for students to undertake courses with a feminist perspective. According to Paludi & Steuernagel (1990) this is both a blessing and a curse, since the revolutionary thrust of women's studies is threatened by the growing acceptance and recognition of women's studies as a legitimate academic enterprise. Part of this evolutionary process is the level of debate which is taking place both within the ranks of feminists and in terms of attacks from outside. Questions being asked include 'What characterizes a feminist approach to theory and research?'

Attempts to identify characteristics of a feminist approach to theory and research risk reducing feminist methodology to a 'check list' of desired features. Check lists are daunting to the novice researcher and may close off options for innovative research with a feminist perspective. But more importantly they appear to present a single methodological dogma, the only way of doing feminist research. Ironically, the construction of rigid dogma is the antithesis of what feminist research sets out to do and risks mirroring androcentric prescriptive forms of research.

A typical check list of what characterizes feminist research is as follows: the principal investigator is a woman, the purpose is to study women and the focus of the research is women's experiences, the research must have the potential to help the subjects as well as the researcher, it is characterized by interaction between researcher and subject, non-hierarchical relations and expression of feelings and concern for values (one or all may be incorporated), the word feminist or feminism is used in the report, non-sexist language is used, and the bibliography includes feminist literature (Duffy 1985).

Rather than a check list approach to feminist research and theory, what is needed is a statement of essentials, that is, what it is to view the world through a feminist lens. Feminist researchers share with critical theorists the need to make a difference through research, that is, the desire to bring about social change of oppressive con-

straints through criticism and social action. The feminist criticism of critical theory concerns the implicit and uncritical endorsement of social arrangements in which women are subordinated and oppressed (Campbell & Bunting 1991). For this reason feminist research seeks to uncover the pervasiveness of gendered thinking which uncritically assumes a necessary bond between being a woman and occupying certain social roles. It should also seek to uncover the ways in which women negotiate the world and the wisdom inherent in such a negotiation. Carol Gilligan's (1982) landmark study of children's moral development which challenged traditional male views is such an example.

Feminist research which avoids detailed check lists and concentrates on a way of seeing the world has the following characteristics: women's experiences are the major object of investigation, the researchers always attempt to see the world from the vantage point of a particular group of women, and they are critical and activist in efforts to improve the lot of women and all persons (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley 1988). In such research it could, for instance, be asked whether the researcher must be a woman (and some people have concluded that a feminist orientation may be all that is required).

The present paper derives from an ongoing project whose goals are feminist analyses of women's experiences of midlife. This project and the women participating in it have raised two sets of issues which have had much airing in this debate. First the ethical issue of whether there can or should be a truly non-hierarchical relationship between researcher and subject, second the methodological issue of the exclusive rights given qualitative methodologies in feminist research.

## **RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN MIDLIFE AND MENOPAUSE**

Research on women in midlife and menopause is an attempt to identify women's experiences and construct a picture of how women experience this reality.

Until recently the medical profession or, to use Greer's (1991) wonderful expression 'the masters in menopause' have been the major voices speaking about what is essentially a female experience. When research into menopause has been carried out it has often been within fairly restrictive guidelines, and the research design has yielded a narrow perspective. Medical research, particularly, oversimplified women's experiences by examining only those aspects of women's lives that corresponded directly to the norms of men's development and experience.

The menopausal woman is thus defined by her sexuality and her social role, and books and articles authored by doctors in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s emphasize staying young and attractive for her partner, and 'keeping the vagina lubricated' in menopause and midlife. According to Davis (1980) 'if her menopause affects her sexual performance in any way, it certainly affects her husband

he may feel he is not wanted' Nachtigall (1986) exhorts her to fend off sexual suicide when her vagina becomes dry and to 'run not walk to your nearest physician'. The menopausal woman is depicted as 'an unstable oestrogen starved' woman who is responsible for 'untold misery of alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce and broken homes' (Wilson & Wilson 1963)

Oestrogen was seen as the answer to all these problems and menopause was depicted as a deficiency disease. Today the shift is to menopause as pathology with the medical profession portraying women's future as one of the thinning and broken bones of osteoporosis and an increased risk of heart disease (See *The Australian Medical Journal*, March, 1992)

### The present study

The present paper is from part of a major 3-year project on the social construction of menopause, at La Trobe University, Australia, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH & MRC). Carmel Seibold is also conducting a longitudinal study aimed at identifying the perceptions of single women in midlife and the menopausal experience. Single women are defined as separated, divorced, widowed or never married and not currently in a partnership. The reason for choosing single women is that they constitute a significant number of women in midlife and much of the writing on menopause to date has assumed that all middle-aged women are heterosexual and have partners.

The research meets the criteria for feminist research as outlined by Lengeremann & Niebrugge-Brantley (1988). That is, women's experiences are the major object of the investigation and the goal is to capture the reality of the experience from the vantage point of a particular group of women, with emphasis on the subjective and contextual orientation. What is more problematic is the level of critical activism and whether or not it will improve the lot of women.

A qualitative research design, following the principles of grounded theory, was chosen as the preferred methodology for the study of single women. Glaser said that the best way to approach a subject is to say to the person 'teach me' — so they are also co-investigators (Glaser &

Strauss 1967). This is in keeping with a feminist methodology and with the goal of developing a substantive theory of single women's experiences of midlife and menopause. The number of participants in the study is 20. Because the method of sampling is by networking, the majority of women could be termed middle class with a reasonable level of education, in most instances, including tertiary studies.

The method of collecting data is open-ended interviewing and keeping a journal or diary. One interview was conducted initially and the participants were then asked to keep a diary for 12 months. A second interview is to be carried out at the end of the 12-month period (commencing February, 1993). In keeping with feminist theory, values held by the investigator are evident in the choice of topic as well as the type of data collection strategy employed. Longitudinal data will be set in the context of data from the larger study which involves both field research and interviewing of midlife women, as well as a representative survey of 1065 adult women.

## ETHICAL ISSUES IDENTIFIED

### Personal revelation

After conducting the first five interviews in the study of single women, issues of an ethical nature began to emerge. The first of these was the realization that the empathetic relationship which was set up during the interviewing process meant that participants revealed highly personal aspects of their lives, far and beyond Carmel Seibold's expectations (and she thought beyond their's too). In two instances the interview precipitated what could only be termed as cathartic experience. The hallmark of a 'good interviewer' is usually said to be the ability to gain the confidence of the participant and have them produce for you wonderful data. This is in keeping with a feminist research approach, namely interaction between the researcher and the participant and a willingness, by the interviewer, to invest personal identity in the relationship (Oakley 1981, Pence & Shepard 1988).

However a closer look needs to be taken. Whose interests are being served? Where is the balance of power? And though in that situation, power can be with the interviewee during the making of the data, it is the interviewer/researcher who has power of analysis afterwards. The interviewer and the interviewee are participating in a power relationship during the interview process. After data collection, that power in terms of 'apparatus of truth' (Foucault 1988) becomes problematic.

*The question of informed consent*

Whose interests are being served? The highly personal information revealed in several interviews raised the vexed question of informed consent. How realistic is it for us, as researchers, to think that a signed consent is really consent for us to, in a sense, invade people's lives? Is consent prior to an interview really informed consent? A strategy that we have developed is to have the participants read the relevant form prior to the interview and sign the form after the interview has taken place. A further strategy considered for Carmel Seibold's project (in keeping with a feminist approach to research) is to have the participants read the transcripts of the first interview at the second interview. This approach may be fraught with danger. What if they withdraw consent? At this point Carmel will be some way along the analysis phase. At this stage who owns the data?

What may be a better approach is to share some of the conclusions reached and the way in which the data is to be presented in the final report. Acker *et al* (1983) suggest that a study based on feminist principles is adequate if the active voices of women are heard in the research account. Inclusion of contextual elements in the final report is also seen as important. For example, the choice of one woman to take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) because 'I was desperate and would have done anything', contrasted with decisions made by another woman who considered taking it as a form of prophylaxis, in order not to 'end up like the woman in the milk ad'.

*Therapeutic elements*

If cathartic interviews take on elements of a therapeutic relationship, decisions have to be made as to whether the interview should be terminated. If you terminate an interview are you retreating from a relationship established? What responsibility do you have as a researcher to suggest or facilitate counselling? In this case it did not reach this stage, but there was cause to consider the possibility and whether this would constitute further invasion of privacy. For example, one woman revealed that she had been a victim of child abuse. As a feminist researcher where do you draw the line between acting as a concerned woman and taking on a therapeutic relationship. Is there such a thing as the need for a 'specialist' in this context?

*Consequences of reflection*

The study of single women requires that participants keep a diary for 12 months, so raises the possible consequences of reflection of this nature for some

women. At this stage only one second interview has been conducted and the participant expressed the view that both the interview process and the diary-keeping had been a positive experience for her. She stated 'Talking to you a year ago, and keeping this diary helped me put a lot of things in context'. This may not be the case for all women.

**QUANTITATIVE VERSUS QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY**

Ongoing debate over the scientific value of qualitative versus quantitative methods serves to obscure some basic questions that need to be asked when undertaking any research project (DuBois 1983). If a meaningful problem or question has been posed, what is important is that the method chosen must be the one most likely to yield relevant answers. Feminist scholars 'are in the process of an archaeological endeavour—discovering and uncovering the actual facts of women's lives and endeavours' (DuBois 1983). To this end challenges to a traditional epistemology have been generated by feminist inquiry in biology, economics and social sciences. To a large extent there is agreement that qualitative methods that not only admit to feminist bias but make it mandatory, should be incorporated and are appropriate because women's frame of reference is contextual and relational (Gilligan 1982, Ladner 1987, Smith 1987, Thornton Dill 1987, Wood Sherif 1987, Albino *et al* 1990, Burnell 1990, Steuernagel 1990, Worrell 1990). Harding (1986), however contends that the philosophical orientation of the researcher may be the most significant factor, and that quantitative methods may be both appropriate and serve to deconstruct empirical research within a patriarchal mode.

Harding (1987) considers that difficulty in interpreting terms like method, methodology and epistemology is at the root of much of the controversy. According to Harding, it is not the method used to gather information, but rather the unique purpose of the inquiry, the alternative explanatory hypotheses, and the altered relationships established between researcher and informer (or subject) that makes feminist research distinctive.

Harding makes a point of distinguishing between method and methodology. She describes method as the way you collect information and methodology as the theory and analysis of how research should proceed, for example, discussions of how Marxist theories of political economy, or any existing theories, should be applied. How methods are or should be used are issues of methodology not method.

An example of applying an existing method, whilst addressing a methodological deficiency, is the research of Elqvist-Saltzman, as described by Eveline (1992) Using the life-line approach to the study of social change and gender, traditional graphs mapping the comparative patterns of women's and men's lives and their linear trajectories were used. It became apparent that the method as it was currently employed demonstrated a male bias, since non-remunerative work of women was shown as 'declines'. The methodological deficiency was overcome by turning the graphs upside down and colouring in the spaces between the linear trajectories. No longer was unpaid reproductive work signified by a 'comparative decline' but rather registered as a substantive 'green hill'.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and should answer questions such as 'who can be the knower?', 'what tests must be passed in order for knowledge to be legitimated?', and 'can subjective truths pass as knowledge?'

Harding's (1987) contention that ways of applying research methods are issues of methodology and not method, itself appears at first reading to be self-explanatory and a plea to 'let the methodology fit the question'. If the question is about discovering and understanding women's experiences, the ideal way of answering the question may well be by using a qualitative research design producing open-ended data, whose analysis is by the methods of phenomenology or grounded theory. However, if the purpose of the research is also aimed at uncovering patterns of behaviour, testing claims of gendered experience, or perhaps at deconstructing knowledge (such as the research by Inga Elqvist-Seltzman), there may well be a place for quantitative methods or mixing of methods.

This suggests that feminist scholarship should not demand one method, but also that there is danger in making assumptions about 'a method of feminist research'. Klein (1983) warned against inventing an 'equally tyrannical Goddess method' of research, and emphasized that the aim of feminist researchers should be how they want their research to differ from patriarchal scholarship. Feminist approaches to research have developed enormously since then, as illustrated by Shulamit Reinharz (1992). Reinharz has documented the ways in which feminist researchers have used and modified existing methods, and developed innovative methods of research. Nonetheless, the exclusive reliance of some feminists on qualitative research can be seen as consistently aligning feminism with research methods that do not support strong claims to generalizations. Too much feminist research uses qualitative data only illustratively,

facing the challenge that quotes have been selected to support a preconceived argument. Inherent in this dilemma is the question of power and knowledge, most particularly who holds power, how power is constituted, and how this relates to knowledge construction.

## KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION, POWER AND CONTROL

Ethical and methodological issues alike raise questions of knowledge construction and related power and control. During the interview process the importance of monitoring the power dynamics was consciously recognized in order to provide a basis for drawing adequate conclusions about findings.

Knowledge construction also occurred within the interview. A number of women saw the interview as a way of gaining information and dealing with their fear and anxiety. Whenever information was shared we were always careful to emphasize what was our opinion, differentiating opinion from specific information where a source could be cited. Providing information was always a balancing act. If there was a request for specific information and we considered that we had information of value, it was usually provided at the end of the interview.

## TELLING THE TRUTH

In terms of the ongoing research process and specifically as regards data analysis and theory construction we need to pay attention to issues related to reliability and validity, in order to ensure that our view is valid. Assuming that a valid view is a 'truthful' one it is worth developing the notion of truth referred to earlier. Foucault (1988) sees a person as occupying a position of truth by virtue of being attached to an 'apparatus of truth' such as a university. The responsibility of the researcher in this context appears to be to acknowledge their role in knowledge production and strive for 'truth' while being aware that 'truth is linked in a circular fashion with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it'.

Where does this leave the feminist researcher? We are sure we would like to disclaim any part in the process of perpetuating an institutional 'regime of the production of truth'. We are not sure we can. If, according to Foucault, the problem is not changing people's consciousness but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth, a research report issuing from a university may be suspect. The most we can do is be aware of the problem and ensure that, as much as is in our power,

we have produced a report that accurately reflects the phenomena we as investigators claim to represent. Every effort should be made to ensure that readers of the research report (ideally including women upon whom the research impacts) find meaning and relevance in the study. It is only if this is achieved that the question of critical activism can be dealt with.

### Rigour in feminist research

The issues articulated by Foucault (1988) regarding knowledge production and truth raise the question of rigour in feminist research. Hall & Stevens (1991), drawing on a number of texts, identify two criteria to inject rigour into feminist research. They are dependability and adequacy. In this project we seek both, aided by the use of a computer program NUDIST 2.3.1 (Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Search and Theorising).

### Dependability

Dependability, unlike reliability in the empiricist tradition, does not decontextualize the data and does not expect or require that observations be constant across investigators. One of the basic premises of a feminist perspective emphasizes the uniqueness and contextualized nature of women's experiences, and interpretation within this context, rather than their standardization and repeatability. However, if different investigators using similar analytic procedures perceive similar meanings, this increases the dependability of the research. As a group researching midlife and menopause we have already had some confirmatory experiences. On comparing our early impressions of the data we have been constantly surprised at the similarity of our conclusions. It remains to establish formal team processes ensuring the constant comparison of analyses and rigorous explanations of different interpretations. The computer program facilitates this process by allowing data to be retrieved at will and ongoing comparative analysis to be carried out. Two researchers can index the same file thus contributing to inter-coder reliability.

Dependability can also be ascertained by examining the methodological and analytical 'decision trails' created by the investigators during the research itself. An audit trail of this nature has been achieved by group conferences in the larger menopause project, where members have taken turns to critique the processes being engaged in. The qualitative methodology chosen with an emphasis on field notes has assisted this process. Auditing the inquiry (i.e., determining whether the decisions made are

congruent with their circumstances, and assessing whether interpretations and recommendations are generally supported by the data) strengthens the dependability of the project. At this point, as data is being processed, the audit trail provided by the computer program ensures that no data are lost and each team member is working within the same framework.

### Adequacy

Reliability and validity are seen as continuous and are encompassed by the term adequacy (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Adequacy of inquiry implies that research processes and outcomes are well grounded, cogent, justifiable, relevant and meaningful (Hall & Stevens 1991). Hall and Stevens suggest the following measures of adequacy: reflexivity, credibility, rapport, coherence, complexity, consensus, honesty and mutuality, naming, relationality and relevance.

*Reflexivity and credibility* Our design includes reflexivity at every step. The result is constant questioning of our own assumptions and values, the research process, the initial question, the goals of the study and the process of inquiry. In the study of single women this has caused change in the focus of the original question. A set of questions identified by Christman (cited in Hall & Stevens 1991) is useful when analysing the data. They are: 'How is this woman like me? How is she not like me? How are these similarities and differences being played out in our interaction? How is that interaction affecting the course of the research? How is it illuminating and/or obscuring the research problem?' This process is made rigorous by both the team meetings and the indexing capabilities of the computer programs, which makes preconceived assumptions within coding categories overt. The contextual logical operators enable interaction to be tracked throughout an interview or interviews (Richards & Richards 1991).

Some of the tenets of grounded theory are relevant here. It requires that the data are continually compared with and against each other. It also emphasizes that theory building occurs with analysis of data and is not merely a verification of preconceptions. This also contributes to credibility particularly in the light of grounded theory's emphasis on the identification of the negative case.

*Rapport* As a criterion of adequacy, rapport reflects how well participants' reality is accessed. Establishment of a relationship of trust while essential can, as we have

already noted, be a double-edged sword. In the single women project Carmel Seibold's situation as a middle-aged single woman with similar life experiences has aided this process. Carmel has found almost all participants willing to be involved over a period of time and active in recruiting other participants.

*Coherence* This quality indicates a unity in the research account derived from all the observations, records, responses and conversations involved in the research process (Mishler 1986). How cogent are the analytical interpretations? Are they sound renderings that communicate the essential meaning of the raw data? How well do they relate to the basic research questions? Do they make sense in the light of a broader understanding of social, economic and political realities? The computer program allows tracking of all forms of the research account, ensuring comprehensive comparative analysis. This process will also be assisted by ongoing group involvement and discussion as data analysis proceeds.

*Complexity* While acknowledging the similarity of experiences the researcher is also attempting to identify the differences between, and to capture the complexity of, women's experiences. In the study of single women, while there are a number of similarities in their experiences, what is emerging is the wealth and variety of experience.

*Consensus* This refers to the emergence of recurring themes in the data. The more the researcher confirms women's expressive meanings by identifying recurring themes, the greater the accuracy of data. Searching for negative cases, divergent experiences and alternative explanations are ways in which, as researchers, we can strengthen conclusions regarding experiential consensus. Hall & Stevens (1991) make the point that consensus may at first glance appear to be at odds with complexity, but stresses on 'being aware of and demonstrating consensual meanings does not eliminate the need to present women's experiences in their full complexity'. This has caused a degree of reflection in the study of single women. In an effort to reach consensus every effort must be made to avoid making the data fit emerging categories that reflect the researchers' own experiences. The computer program contributes towards inhibiting this process.

*Honesty and mutuality* These qualities rely on a research process which is open and mutual, with no hidden agendas. Participants are assumed to be truth tellers and

are equal participants in the research process. Every attempt has been made to achieve this in our research. A genuine interest in each woman's experience was expressed in the interview process, as well as gratitude for her time and effort. As previously noted, information was freely and honestly given. We have already addressed the ethical issues of interviewing and in this context are attempting to illustrate how honesty and mutuality can contribute to adequacy of research findings.

*Naming* This is defined as learning to see beyond and behind what one has been socialized to believe in as being present (Daly 1978, DuBois 1983). It involves describing women's lives in their own words and generating concepts and categories which directly reflect women's experiences. This has relevance in the research study on single women since what is emerging in the data is a denial of some of the stereotypical pictures of menopausal women created by medical and socio-cultural researchers and writers.

*Relationality* Klein (1983) stresses relationality or collaboration with other scholars in the research process. One of the most rewarding aspects of the research to date has been the opportunity to work in a team. The mode of inquiry has been participatory and non-hierarchical with emphasis on support, dialogue and discussion. As previously noted this has provided opportunities for critical reflection and questioning. As data analysis proceeds continual monitoring of the process of data analysis will serve to increase the adequacy of the report.

*Relevance* This may also be described as tactical authentication, and, as a form of adequacy, refers to whether the research can serve women's interests and improve the condition of women's lives (Wallston 1981). Relevance directly relates to the level of critical activism inherent in the study.

Carmel Seibold has found herself querying the level of critical activism inherent in the study of single women. The final objective of the study of single women and midlife and menopause is not only to successfully complete a PhD, but also to publish papers with a view to sharing the findings with women in midlife. The question which needs to be asked is whether publishing results which show only one view of reality will improve the lot of women? Does a research study of middle class women serve to empower women from less advantaged socio-economic groups or does it serve, as Weedon (1987) suggests, to further marginalize them? We must be wary of defining what a woman's experience is through

feminism and of constructing and shaping it thus through our research. If, as Weedon contends, women may feel alienated from their own life experiences since they do not fit naturally within the meta-narrative of patriarchy, the task is to transform both the social relations of knowledge production and the type of knowledge produced. We think that the extensive sampling and inclusion of health practitioners in the larger study of midlife and menopause, may go some way towards ensuring a broader view of the experience and, most particularly, of exploring how knowledge is socially constructed.

Another issue to be considered is whether there is a danger in glorifying women's experiences. If what is needed is a co-ordinated approach to issues of health and possible discrimination in the workplace, a study or a substantive theory about one group of women may have limited usefulness. A number of studies with differently situated inquirers may be the answer.

## GROUNDING THEORY AND FEMINIST RESEARCH

In the 'philosophy of ambivalence' Harding (1986) argues against 'falsely universalising theory' and for toleration of tension and incoherence in our theories. Harding maintains that this provides valuable clues to the dissonance of the lived social reality from which theories derive. The methodology chosen for this study, grounded theory, strives for coherence in the development of theory but at the same time stresses that grounded theory does not develop grand theories. In this way it does allow for incoherence in theories in general, by stressing the particularity of the individual theory.

According to Wylie (1987) 'coherent theories are not desirable at any cost, specifically not at the cost of submerging the insights of and the understandings of diversely situated inquirers'. Wylie contends that what Harding rejects in reacting against 'falsely universalising theory' is not coherence as such but coherence arbitrarily constructed and inappropriately imposed. This has meaning for Carmel Seibold in terms of the relevance of publication of a study which depicts just one view of reality. We think it is essential that all studies of women in midlife and the menopausal experience be critically analysed and value derived (or not as the case may be) from them all.

## CONCLUSION

Various methods are possible in feminist research, consequently a qualitative research design was seen as appro-

priate for a study of single women's lived experiences of midlife and menopause, while both quantitative and qualitative methods were seen as appropriate in the larger study. We have briefly considered those aspects of the chosen method of data analysis for qualitative data which meet the criteria of feminist research and have assisted in dealing with ethical issues, most particularly knowledge construction, power and control. Ethical issues which remain problematic and are worthy of further debate are the relations between interviewer and interviewee in the interviewing process, the intellectual as the bearer of universal values and as truth teller and the level of critical activism possible in studies of this nature.

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