ABSTRACT

NARRATIVES, BODILY KNOWING AND MEMORY

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Feminist criticism has shown the phallacy of the false distinction between mind and body as developed in enlightenment thought. Similarly memory is not simply a mental activity but is equally deposited and retained in the body. In this paper I wish to discuss what may be understood as 'bodily knowings' and how these are related to memory. Narratives or stories – which are often part and parcel of the qualitative research enterprise – form an important element in many of the empirical research projects that I have been involved in. It is my experience that research participants often spontaneously recall incidents which are connected to the body or bodily experience and which in turn illustrate 'doing gender'. This is perhaps not surprising as both the individual and collective body have been a site of struggle in gendered power relations. There are then two aspects. On the one, depth of experience can mean that the body (in addition to the mind) remembers the experience in particular or it becomes a body reflective practice (to use Connell’s term). On the other hand, it can be argued that situations that have revolved around the body in some way are the ones that ‘stick in the mind’ and are recalled in the research situation. In trying to capture the links between narratives, bodily knowing and memory, I will discuss and illustrate in particular the concept of situatedness; the idea that space and place are not neutral constructs but linked to relations of power and gender. Concrete illustrations will be taken from my research projects on the (problematic) working relationship between doctors and nurses in Sweden and on gender inequality in IT companies in Sweden and Ireland. I will further contend that the researcher’s bodily knowings are also an essential epistemological source in ethnographic work.