
Methodological challenges: How to examine issues that are hidden and undisclosed?

Häkkinen, Antti & Salasuo Mikko (eds.) 2015. *Salattu, hävetty, vaiettu. Miten tutkia piilossa olevia ilmiöitä*. Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, Nuorisotutkimusseura, julkaisuja 161. Tampere: Vastapaino. pp. 346. ISBN: 978-951-768-496-5.

Social scientists Antti Häkkinen and Mikko Salasuo have edited a book that has gathered together a fascinating collection of methodologically and ethically challenging articles. All of the articles differ from each other, and their perspectives range from folkloristics to social work to criminology. However, the themes and perspectives of the book as well as the deeply committed attitude of the researchers mean that the book is nicely unified as a whole.

The book is divided into three sections. The first articles deal with criminality, underground life and the police, whereas the second part is about shame and silence. The articles discuss such issues as forbidden sexualities, ethnicities and doping in sports. The third part of the book discusses the interconnections between social services and individual life events: children and their upbringing, labour and the family life, which is silenced in certain circumstances. The book has multiple, changing perspectives, but the main point is tied together via several differing methods: all of the articles deal with ethically and methodologically difficult topics, and each article presents possible solutions for them.

Underworld and the authorities

The first section of the book begins with Antti Häkkinen's article about 19th century criminality in Finland and its influences on individual lives.

He discusses how the notion of criminality was constructed in relation to questions of power, social marginalisation and sub-cultures, all of which are tightly connected to social hierarchies. Häkkinen argues that in the 19th-century, the poor in Finland were seen as causing trouble, i.e. as unemployed, as engaged in prostitution and criminality, and as alcoholics. Häkkinen writes that the common term for the problematised social class at the time was 'the poor', and this was the main reason for the rest of the problems. This theme is pursued in the other articles as well: in the last section, the focus is on the fact that ideas about bearing children and images of good motherhood had a similar cultural and societal background, which had an impact when decisions were made regarding individual lives.

Similarly, drug users and their counterparts, the police (in Heini Kainulainen's text), had different roles in society and its discourses. Pekka Hakkarainen writes about substance abusers, and mainly about drug abuse; he discusses how reliable results can be attained by studying drug users, who were seen as criminals in the eyes of society. He suggests using multiple sources from the same time period to achieve the best results, but that in itself does not help with the problem of maintaining research ethics and anonymity: the so-called 'moral panic' (also Cohen, Stanley 1972. *Folk Devils & Moral Panics*. London: Paladin, pp. 83) about drugs and criminalisation may cause users to become marginalised and lead to other problems as well, and was seen in Häkkinen's article, which is based on 19th century material.

Unspoken words

Ethnologist Jan Löfström's article starts off the second part by asking how a researcher can distinguish between issues that are absent or silent or not talked about in the material. Löfström

examined the pejorative folklore about homosexuality in 19th century agrarian Finland, and was surprised that he could not find any commentary on it. Löfström writes that the reasons for the absence might have to do with the work-based values of Finnish agrarian society, which allowed for a rather flexible gender system. A patriarchal system based on a rigid separation of genders, one which would have supported such stereotypes about gender, was not a part of agrarian Finland at the time and it seems there was no place for such a folklore in the material. But the question of silence or absence is not always so clear. Anne-Mari Souto, Veronika Honkasalo and Leena Suurpää emphasise that experiences of racism are tightly connected to people's identities, and with sensitive issues it may be easier to not to talk about the issue and repress the memory rather than talk about it. For a researcher, identifying methodologies that allow for asking the right questions or using the right words when examining sensitive, silent issues can be problematic, and it is often necessary to move to one side or read between the lines in order to hear the hidden stories. Problems can still occur, as Mikko Salasuo writes about in his article. It is possible that people just do not want to take part in the research. They are not ready to talk about their lives. One reason for this can be a sense of shame, as with those caught doping (the subject of Salasuo's article), or painful experiences, such as experiences of racism.

Social work, children and private lives

In last part of the book, each article focuses more on the social questions and individual rights of children and mothers. Miina Keski-Petäjä begins by reviewing 1950's medical information on women who contacted a doctor in order to have an abortion: the attitudes and patient archives reflected the attitudes of the time, which were quite different from current attitudes. The narratives reveal how medicalisation, authorities and social questions were strongly connected to the everyday lives of the women's bodies. The shame and problems related to controlling one's own body are presented in discussions with social workers, and the problems could then later on lead to larger

social problems. Kaisa Vehkalahti, on the other hand, writes about the official archives of social work. She asks, what kinds of narratives do official papers offer for a researcher? In her material, the official archives paint a hierarchical picture of child care, of a system where the poor or socially marginal were completely ruled by the authorities and their opinions. The same topic continues in Elina Pekkarinen's text, when she writes about contemporary social work and the problems of secrecy: how to stay confidential and at the same time try to be equal and open when conducting social work, where emotions are strongly bound up with the customers and informant's lives and also strongly affect the researcher.

Conclusion

None of the researchers in the book can give simple, straightforward methodological answers for the reader, but they all provide personal, deeply-felt, well-articulated pictures of exceptional research cases. Even if the focus of each text is somewhat different and dependent on the researcher's background, the main themes are tied together quite well: thanks to good editors and interesting, descriptive articles.

The main themes of the book focus on the problems of verbalising sensitive, difficult issues, on the stigmas involved in such cases and on the issues of authority versus marginality. These themes relate to social class, its connections to poverty and images of good citizenship, all of which are intertwined with power and authority: who is a full member of society, who is the one to make decisions and how will these issues be expressed in (public) discourses?

Methodologically, the book poses questions and provides perspectives more than offering any final answers, but that is natural with the hidden, controversial and problematic themes of this nature. The field and the research practices also influence the researcher, and that is present in almost all of the presented cases.

With challenging topics, it is often necessary to use multiple sources and use them critically. Themed interviews or anonymous questionnaires, historical material from places that are not typically used, and archives that can be closed

to the public can all be examined with the same sensitivity. The methodological advice of the book is to listen and give space and words to those being interviewed. In other words, it is important to give a voice to those who are not allowed many

words in public discourses. The study is worth reading for anyone, but especially for those who struggle with their fieldwork and its complexities.

Kaisa Nissi
