Family, Gender and Sexuality

Seminar

Reflections on Narratives of Masculinity: Mundane Heterosexualities and Beyond

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Room A1
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My talk will explore the relationship between qualitative methodologies used for sex research and the way sex is represented in everyday life. The focus will be on a cross-generational study of heterosexuality published in a co- written book with Hockey and Meah in 2007. With a focus on interviews, I will discuss how the relationship between researcher and participant contributes to the production of knowledge around sexuality and how this then relates to the practices and concepts which constitute 'sex'. The study consisted of working with 22 families in the UK, and interviewing three different generations in the same family. The women and men were aged between 15 and 90, so analysis involved comparing data drawn from interviews where a 60-year age gap may separate the researcher and the participant; and those where both are similarly aged. Questions to be discussed include: Does the researcher's adaptation of her sexual terminology reflect sensitivity or ageism? How might it direct rather than enable the speaker? How can the data be interpreted as an account of sexual experience? How have participants sought to represent experience which they found emotionally charged, taboo or have difficulty translating into words? The article I am focusing on, argues that an adequate analysis of such data can be achieved only if they are recognised as the outcome of complex layers of social negotiation between two individuals whose aged, gendered and class-based identities are sometimes shared and, sometimes, widely divergent. I will also discuss how issues raised here informed later methodological concerns around my research on sporting masculinities.