

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

A research study requires an approach, which will guide the researcher to infer and interpret the information gathered from the respondents (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Therefore methods and methodology are an essential part of a research. By methods we mean a range of approaches used in research to gather data, which are used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

The word 'method' refers to those techniques associated with the positivistic model eliciting responses to predetermined questions, recording measurements, describing phenomena and performing experiments. The meaning can be extended to include not only the methods of normative research but also those associated with interpretive paradigm such as participant observation, role playing, non-directive interviewing, episodes and accounts. Methods may include the more specific features of the scientific enterprise such as forming concepts and hypotheses, building models and theories, and sampling procedures.

In short, methods refer to techniques and procedures in the process of data gathering. According to Kaplan, the aim of methodology is

To describe and analyze these methods throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontier knowledge. It is to venture generalization for the success of particular techniques, suggesting new applications, and to unfold the specific bearings of logical and metaphysical principles on

concrete problems, suggesting new formulation. (Quoted in Manion and Cohen 1973:39)

In summary, Kaplan suggests the aim of methodology is to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific enquiry but the process itself.

This is an ethnographic research and the method of data collection in this study is case study. Case study is a basis for a qualitative approach. According to McMillan and Schumacher a qualitative research is

Inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (field research). Qualitative research describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions. The researcher interprets phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2001: 395).

The purpose of a qualitative study is to give a detailed description and explanation of complex situations so as to give guidance for future research. Furthermore, it shows a relationship between events and meanings as perceived by the participants. As a result, the reader's understanding of the phenomena is enhanced (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001).

Best and Kahn (1998) further assert that qualitative study is enriched by among other things in-depth, detailed descriptions of events and interviews. They further contend that qualitative research is flexible in that it allows for adjustment of direction of the inquiry based on the ongoing experience of collecting data. The researcher is therefore able to discover reality without having to fit into a preconceived theoretical perspective. Researchers are comparatively more at liberty to find and deal with issues as they arise in their experiments.

3.1 Case Study

According to Cohen and Manion (1994), the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit. The purpose of such observation is to analyze intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalization about the wider population to which that unit belongs.

In a case study, data analysis focuses on a single phenomenon, which the researcher chooses to get the deep insight into the point of investigation (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Its purpose is "...to understand the life cycle or an important part of the life cycle of the unit" (Best and Kahn, 1998:248). This method is carried out because it is mainly concerned with the interaction of factors and events in depth. According to Soy (1998), a case is good at making people understand complex issues and can widen experiences as well as add to what already exists through previous research. Case studies do not only focus on the voice and perspective of the actors but also on the interactions between relevant groups among which are the powerless and voiceless.

I therefore chose *Fools* as my case study as I had noticed that the case study approach gives one sense of focus. In my research it grants the voiceless women who are also powerless an opportunity to voice their opinion. In this way I will be able to discover their true knowledge, experiences and thoughts without having to rely on assumptions. In this way the case study approach offers validity.

This method has been used to augment my research, as later in my analysis it will be clear how women of less privileged classes read differently from the privileged. My case study offers women previously with little representation a space to say something about their culture and representations in cinema. Interviews are not offered to one class, as it will be noticed in my analysis,

women from middle classes to working classes are also offered opportunity to interpret.

Case studies comprise different methods of data collection, namely, observation, interviews, questionnaires and documentation.

3.2 Triangulation

A case study is known as a triangulated research strategy. The need for triangulation arises from an ethical need to confirm validity of phenomena (Tellis 1997). Cohen and Manion (1980) define triangulation as, "The use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour," (1980:208). Triangulation is used to eliminate research problems from reliance on any single method. In that way it offers balance between logic and stories and therefore makes findings robust (Elwa 2001-2003). To achieve this in my research, three methods are used: ethno methodology, observation and interviews.

According to Jacobsen (1995), through triangulation, advantages of each research method complement the other and this will result in a stronger research design and more valid and reliable findings. Jacobsen further argues that inadequacies of a single method are minimized and therefore threats to internal validity are taken note of and addressed. For example, while a quantitative design strives to control bias so that facts, instances, phenomena can be understood in an objective way, qualitative approach strives to understand the perspective of participants or a situation by looking at firsthand experience to provide meaningful data.

3.3 Ethno Methodology

Ethno methodology is concerned with the world of everyday life. It sets out “to treat practical activities, practical circumstances, and sociological reasoning as topics of empirical study, and by paying attention to the most commonplace activities of daily life the attention usually accorded extraordinary events, seeks to learn about them as phenomena in their own right” (Garfield, 1968 quoted in Cohen Manion, 1980).

Ethno methodology is concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world. It is especially directed at the mechanisms by which participants achieve and sustain interaction in social accomplishments in their own terms; it is concerned to understand them from within. Little work has been done to offer black women in South Africa space to interpret their culture through representation in cinema. As a result, this method was used to achieve the purpose of the study.

As part of their empirical method, ethno methodologists may consciously and deliberately disrupt and question the ordered taken-for-granted elements in everyday situations in order to reveal the underlying process at work. Thus, my observation of women’s reactions to the representations in the film plays a very important role in this method.

3.3.1 Observation

At the heart of every case study lies a method of observation.

1. Participant observation

Observers engage in the very activities they set out to observe. Often, their ‘cover’ is so complete that as far as the other participants are concerned, they are simply one of the group members.

2. Non-participant observation

Observers stand aloof from the group activities they are investigating and eschew group membership.

It is frequently the case that the type of observation undertaken by the researcher is associated with the type of setting in which the research takes place.

Dianne Bell argues that observation "...is a technique that can often reveal characteristics of groups or individuals which would have been impossible to discover by other means" (1993:209). The observational method relies on a researcher's seeing, hearing and taking notes of these observations. Observations are realistic because the observer is capturing the actual scene. In other words behavior can be recorded as it occurs naturally. According to McMillan and Schumacher,

The primary advantages of using observational methods are that the researcher does not need to worry about the limitations of self-report bias, social desirability, or response set, and the information is not limited to what can be revealed accurately by the subject (2001:273).

Bell (1993) further argues that direct observation may be more reliable because it helps to discover rather than be reported about what people claim to be doing. The observer gets the actual thing.

3.3.2 Interview

This is a survey method in social research and interviews range from the formal interview in which set questions are asked and the answers are recorded on a standard schedule, through less formal interviews in which the

interviewer is free to modify the sequence of questions, change the wording, explain them or add to them; to the completely informal interview where the interviewer may have a number of issues which she raises in conversational style instead of having a set questionnaire.

Walter Borg (1963) puts forward that the direct interaction of the interview is the source of both its advantages and disadvantages as a research technique (quoted in Cohen and Manion 2001). One advantage, for example, is that it allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection. A disadvantage, on the other hand, is that it is prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer.

In my case, it was easy to deduce the women's responses as I very well identify with their backgrounds. As a black woman I understand the women's primary languages. I come from basically the same cultural exposure as they do. In short, I identify with the women's experiences and connect with them. Therefore interviewing them myself allowed greater depth. As for the above-mentioned disadvantage, it was not possible given the fact that the questions formulated for the interview were open ended and the questioning was very much guided by responses. This means there was greater room for articulation.

An Interview may serve three purposes; firstly, as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives. Secondly, it may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones; or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships. Finally, the interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking.

There are four types of interviews,

- 1. Structured**

One in which the content and procedures are organized in advance. The sequence and the wording of questions are determined by a means of a schedule and the interviewer is left little freedom to make modifications. It is characterized as a closed situation.

- 2. Unstructured**

This contrasts with structured and is thus an open situation, having greater flexibility and freedom.

- 3. Non-directive**

Its principal features are minimal direction or control exhibited by the interviewer and the freedom the respondent has to express her subjective feelings as fully and spontaneously as she chooses or is able.

- 4. Focused interview**

This type focuses on the respondent's subjective responses to a known situation in which she has been involved and which has been analysed by the interviewer prior to the interview. She is thereby able to use the data from the interview to substantiate or reject previously formulated hypotheses.

3.3.3 Focus Group Interviewing

It has its advantages and disadvantages as a means of collecting data. It has the potential for discussions to develop, thus yielding a wide range of responses. Such interviews are useful where a group of people have been working together for some time or common purpose, or where it is seen as important that everyone concerned is aware of what others in the group are saying. Group interviews can also bring together people with varied opinions, or as representatives of different collectives.

As identified by Merton and Kendall (quoted in Cohen, 2001); focused Interview differs from other types of research interviews as such:

1. The persons interviewed are known to have been involved in a particular situation: they may, for example, have watched a TV program; or seen a film; or read a book or article; or have been participants in a social situation.
2. Using her analysis as a basis, the investigator constructs an interview guide. This identifies the major areas of inquiry and the hypotheses, which determine the relevant data to be obtained in the interview.
3. The actual interview is focused on the subjective experience of the people who have been exposed to the situation. Their responses enable the researcher both to test the validity of her hypotheses, and to ascertain unanticipated responses to the situation, thus giving rise to further hypothesis.

Though Merton and Kendall suggest that focus group interviews are of little use in allowing personal matters to emerge, in my analysis it is clear that this is not the case with my research. The women I interviewed very much allowed personal matters to surface. One can deduce from their comments and answers that this is their first time to be given space to interpret. They were angered by the representations. There has always been very little place for black women to articulate.

3.4 Research Design

In this study I have employed a case study as a means of collecting data. Case studies use the results obtained from one case and the researcher then draws a

generalization out of it. Greater validity and reliability was maintained as this study involved three groups as case studies. Best and Kahn (1998) argue that case studies are not confined to the study of individuals and their behavioural characteristics but are suitable for all types of communication and institutions. On the basis of this claim I selected three groups of black South African women staying in Johannesburg.

These groups comprise of women from different cultural backgrounds who speak different languages as they originate from different tribal groups according to their provinces. The women are of different classes and ages. Some are from the lower class while some are professionals with good jobs. The other group is that of students aspiring for a better class in the society. Their age difference is meant to represent different generations, which obviously means diverse experiences. McMillan and Schumacher categorize the case study used as 'sub-units'. They define sub-units as

Contrasting groups who are likely to be informative about the research foci. These studies are not viewed as statistically comparative nor as usually exclusive, they are often selected to investigate the extent of the phenomenon or the diversity of the phenomenon. The researcher examines the first group thoroughly and then selects another group to contrast or to collaborate the first group (2001:398).

Some such-sub units are male/female, black/white, young/old, or dropouts/graduates. In each group I used age and class to guide me in understanding the diversity and uniformity in behaviours and responses by participants. Therefore, I was able to investigate the similarities and contrasting issues portrayed by the focus groups.

3.5 Obtaining Permissions

Vas (1997), states that ethical considerations are vital to conducting research. Informed consent, which implies that the subjects have a choice about whether to participate, was secured prior to data collection. I encountered no difficulty as I had developed a social relationship with interviewees over a substantial period of time.

When I approached the participants they wanted to know what the interviews were all about and how much time was required to participate and the moment they learned about a film to watch, they became enthusiastic and were willing to sit. What was mostly intriguing for me was the fact that the first participant I would approach would be more than willing to bring friends along. This made it easier for me to categorize groups according to age and class. Neither my recorder nor my note taking intimidated any of the participants.

3.6 Selecting the Site and Sampling

As the title of the research indicates, the study is on representation of women in *Fools*. This is a South African film; therefore, women that are suitable to interpret the film are Black South Africans as they are the ones represented in the story. Although data is collected in Johannesburg it does not necessarily mean that all the women originate from Johannesburg. All the places used to screen the film and conduct interviews were made suitable to all participants. The sample groups were chosen according to age to match ages of women portrayed in the film. Furthermore, women from different classes were selected as part of the interpretive groups. The first focus group had four members while the next two groups comprised of five members each.

3.7 Using Multiple Sources of Evidence

As already mentioned above, a triangulated study is any study that has several different data sources, or involves multiple investigators, or tests multiple competing hypotheses, or combines two or more kinds of data collection methods (Vas, 1997).

According to Yin, Bateman, and Moore (1983), “case studies using multiple sources of evidence are rated more highly in terms of overall quality than those relying on a single source of information” (quoted in Vas, 1997:203). Evidence for this case study was obtained from four sources: document analysis (the film *Fools* as a document), researcher as a participant-observer, direct observation and interviews.

1. Document analysis

According to Patton (1980),

Document analysis in qualitative study inquiry makes use of excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and open ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys (quoted in Vas, 1997:203).

Documents provide valuable information because of what the researcher learns directly by reading them. They can also provide the stimulus for questions that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing. The data provided by documentation is stable in that it can be revisited where the researcher needs to use it prior to and after the study.

In this study I regard the film *Fools* by Ramadan Suleman (1997) as a document to be analyzed. I watched the film prior to study. I discovered that the film was made after the first South African democratic elections and features three generations of black women. It is an ideal tool to use in gathering information from the participants. They as well watched the film in their respective groups while I observed them. They subsequently responded to the interview questions in relation to the document that had just informed them. I encountered no difficulty in obtaining *Fools* as it is a South African film and I could easily buy a copy from the distributor, Film Resource Unit.

2. Direct Observation

Direct observation (with the researcher acting as an outsider, non-participating observer) occurred during the screening of the film. Observation happened as a casual data collection activity to put participants at ease. From time to time notes would be scribbled based on the comments and reactions of participants towards whatever happened in the film.

3. Researcher as a Participant-Observer

Using the participant-observer strategy, the researcher seeks to interact with the participants observing and engaging in their activities with them and others who are involved in the social environment under study and, through these involvements, to reconstruct their reality. This was very easy given that I am a black woman, can speak their languages and identify with culture. For that reason, these qualities helped the women in opening up to me. In reality, I was just one of them.

4. Interviews

The purpose of the research is to conduct an ethnographic study of women's interpretation of *Fools* focusing on gender, race, class and

generation. The film features black women with ages ranging from 20s to 60s. Therefore, three groups of women in relevant ages were formed to interpret the film in an interview manner following the screening of *Fools*. The interview was the method effective in capturing the feelings, attitudes, and interpretations of the black women under study.

Even though open-ended questions were formulated as an interview guide, this study also employed the informal, conversational interview earlier referred to as 'unstructured interview'. Both provided effective methods of inquiry, as I was interested in capturing deep and sensitive feelings, as well as the reasons for the participants' feelings and perceptions, opinions, and attitudes towards women in *Fools*.

During the informal, conversational interview, the questions emerged from the immediate context and were asked in the natural course of a conversational exchange. During the open-ended interview, participants in their respective groups were asked the same questions in the same order. This technique served to reduce interviewer effects and bias.

3.8 Using Recording Modes

Data was collected primarily through digital-recorded interviews. Digital recordings were needed to ensure the accurate and complete transcription of responses to open-ended interview questions. The study depended on the completeness and accuracy of the record of what each member of these groups said and how they said it. The digital recorder allowed for the fullest and most in-depth exploration of complex issues without loss or misinterpretation.