

Engaging Boldly to (Re)Think Methodology

A Book Review of *Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather*

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Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather, edited by G. Huddleston & R. J. Helfenbein. Gorham, ME, Myers Education Press, 2025, 204 pp., \$43.95 USD (softcover), ISBN: 978-1-9755-0644-5

THE REFERENCE SECTION OF A WORK IS A CORNERSTONE OF ACADEMIA that allows for researchers to guide each other from within and across fields towards wellsprings of knowledge. When we tether our works to the already-out-there, we create connections with the authors who inspire our work as we find ways to incorporate and re-imagine their works. Rarely, do we have space to talk about the impact such connections can have on us. In *Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather*, editors Gabriel Huddleston and Robert J. Helfenbein (2025) and their contributing authors share not only their academic connections with Lather's work but also their own tetherings to Patti as a friend. In these reflections, the authors share their own wrestlings with methodological assumptions, the limitations and possibilities for qualitative research that embraces the messiness of science, and their transformations of Lather's concepts to fit their own research interests. Consequently, the chapters function not only for the authors to *grab a glass of wine with Patti* (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xiv) but also for us as readers to be in community and conversation with each author in the edited collection as they describe their own theorizing and ponderings spurred on by thinking with Lather.

In *Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather*, “critiques of method and implications of philosophical developments on methodology” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xv), are traced through Lather's works across her career. For example, various authors note the call to reflect on the products of qualitative research and to reconsider “Research as Praxis”—research that requires the researcher to actively seek ways to shift inquiry towards producing

emancipatory knowledge that challenges established truths. Other concepts such as *voluptuous validity* show how Lather not only critiques postpositivist paradigms but also works to deconstruct validity to imagine what it might mean to reclaim such a term. Importantly, none of the authors frame Lather’s work as transcendent of time and cultural context. Rather, the philosophical ideas Lather works with indicate that “key issues persist of who knows, how do they know, and on what legitimate basis do they speak” (Torrance, 2025, pp. 55–56). Even if the language about research evolves, deeper questions about onto-epistemology remain and thus require researchers to always look deeper and not take any paradigmatic assumption as truth.

A sentiment not seen often enough is the concept of a transgenerational colloquium and the joy that comes from finding community within research. Irrespective of when one enters into Lather’s body of work, therein lies a wealth of scholarship and a community invested in continually challenging and working from said scholarship. A strength of this edited collection comes from the breadcrumb trail of academic works for the uninitiated scholar interested in *Getting Lost* but unsure where to even begin. Invigorating discussion with new and established researchers is the impetus for this collection. As the editors note in the acknowledgements, this book is about “a wider work that traverses our lifetimes, our shifting subjectivities” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xi).

Organization and Contents

Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather is an insightful look into the ripples and waves an academic can have in their field and how these same vibrations shift the thinking of others across time. Huddleston and Helfenbein’s (2025) organization and content of the book allows for the reader to not only grasp the breadth of Lather’s scholarly contributions but also the potential depths that *Thinking with Patti* can afford to those who engage with her work. Additionally, the editors have artfully selected contributors who can speak to some of the diverse fields that Lather has influenced, leaving readers less familiar with her work with a wealth of reading paired with the contributors’ personal insights. The introduction by the editors notes that understanding Lather as an academic and as a person leads to not only a transformation in one’s view of qualitative research but also “permeates our approach to life, teaching us to question, to probe, to never stop learning ... to care deeply about the people we encounter along the way” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xvii). It is through this lens of personal growth alongside the upheaval of paradigmatic assumptions embedded in qualitative research that makes this edited collection—and Lather’s work as a whole—appealing to the uninitiated scholar who might be seeking ways to disrupt stagnant modes of thinking and being.

Because the contents of the edited collection weaves together “Patti Lather’s far-reaching impact on education research, feminist theory, poststructuralism, and cultural studies” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xvii), this volume is organized by some chapters that explore “personal relationships intertwined with complex investigations into theory, research, and praxis” (p. xv), while other chapters apply Latherian concepts to their author’s area of interest and ask the reader not to come to *conclusions* but instead *wonderings* that push research in new directions.

Many of the authors share insights and wisdom from their work with and alongside Lather. Janet Miller’s (2025) chapter starts off the collection by recounting Lather’s academic career. Starting with their initial meeting in 1979, she paints a vivid picture of how her first shiver caused by a thought-provoking conference session led to a cascade of shivers. Rarely is the goings-on of

an academic (e.g., conferences, chats, emails, etc.) a site for deeper introspection. By allowing the reader a peak into the inner world of researchers, the editors have set the stage for personal connections, *a glass of wine with Patti* (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xiv), to be an enduring gift that “[enables] generations of education researchers to imagine, propose, and work to enact paradigm proliferations that challenge any one version of dominant authority” (Miller, 2025, p. 12). Chris Smithies (2025) reflects on their work together that led to *Troubling the Angels* (Lather & Smithies, 1997), situating their relationship within the nested layers of their milieu, while Sam Rocha (2025) recounts being a graduate student who wandered down a hallway to meet Lather, which led to many different wanderings in multiple senses. Lather is more than a methodologist; she is a philosopher.

Lather’s contributions to theory and theorizing are many. Harry Torrance (2025) maps out how Lather lodged a vital critique of scientism, which has rippling effects. Susan Adams (2025) comments on the gift that Lather has been to feminist theory and practice, Lisa Mazzei (2025) focuses on Lather’s contributions to post-humanist theories and new materialisms, and Sarah Sterner (2025) notes Lather’s post-structural efforts. Ideas of a rigid truth are dethroned, and offered instead are ways of thinking, feeling, and being in different ways. As readers, we are all invited to deeply consider our assumptions and how we move in the world.

Maggie MacLure (2025) extends the work of challenging paradigm by charting Lather’s contributions in (post) qualitative inquiries as a researcher, “drawn to that which resists containment within boundaries and evades representation” (p. 101), who is likened to a seismograph, a means of registering vibrations without assigning truth, and a sorcerer, a means of channeling the possibilities of inquiry that lie outside of more normative ways of knowing and being. Elizabeth de Freitas, Kate O’Brien and Nathalie Sinclair (2025) demonstrate putting theory to work by taking concepts such as *incalculability* (Lather, 2017), *ruins of knowledge* (Lather, 2007), and *validity* (Lather, 1993) and playing with these concepts to find new avenues of thought with the incomputable, diagrammatic ruins, and the unthinkable. Elissa Bryant (2025) takes up the idea of *re-memembering* (Lather, 2016) as she maps out Jiu-Jitsu as an example of how one might narrate a methodology. Rounding out methodological considerations is Deborah P. Britzman’s (2025) chapter on how Lather’s research opened up the floodgates to “treat research as a situation” (p. 159) and the importance of vulnerability. Methods and procedures can, and must, be interrogated without a reassuring conclusion of a best practice. This chapter is an apt summary of how Lather played with theory over the years as well as an homage to their deep friendship. All contributors in this collection ask us to think about (post) qualitative inquiry not as an “an infinite deconstruction of meaning or deferral of a plan of action” (Lather & Lewis, 2025, p. 181) but as a vulnerable process requiring us to shed methodological certainties and *Get Lost* in the possibilities of research as praxis “in order to engage in committed, self-reflexive and critical work that situate[s] inquiry as it is lived” (Miller, 2025, p. 11).

As the reader delves into the diverse emotional and intellectual connections inscribed by this collective of those inspired by Patti Lather, one can begin to conjure an impression of her as a scholar and a human. Moreover, MacLure’s (2025) apt metaphor of referring to Lather’s work as that of a sorcerer holds true: her insights bring forth the unconscious. Readers, new to and intrigued by Lather, will likely be encouraged to seek out her tomes and think with her to suss out what else lies underneath, waiting to be explored and taken in a new direction. When reaching the end of the collection, as if invoked by the reader’s growing curiosity about the collection’s inspiration, Lather appears to humanize this previously illusionary version of herself. While this idea was built by the love of her collaborators and community, Lather shows us that what we see in others can also be

complex and messy in all sorts of ways—and some of these ways are beautiful. As humans we experience pain, anger, frustration, fear, and more. These feelings often fall outside of what is typically shared within academia, but for those in a (post)qualitative view, these aspects of ourselves give us pause as we reckon with what we write and share with the world. The life and work of an academic is not just what is captured within the confines of a publication. Rather, the harsh realities that are experienced by us also in turn influence how we think and research. By ending this collection with Lather’s own retelling of her experience of getting an abortion alongside her entanglings with other academics’ works, we are reminded that community and love come with messiness and complexity.

Audiences for the Book

Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather asks the reader to not just know the concepts developed by Lather but further to learn the context in which these concepts were developed, the influence she’s had on her contemporaries, and the ways these concepts still evoke questions and wonderings from the editors and contributing authors. This edited book would be particularly useful for both emerging and established scholars interested in learning the historical shifts in qualitative inquiry, the academic writings that are influenced by and/or have caused said shifts in methods and methodological views, and how current researchers theorize using Latherian concepts. Researchers from various domains and disciplines (e.g., Feminist/gender studies, curriculum studies, cultural studies, social work, and more!) would benefit from reading how these different areas of research draw from the same well of inspiration.

A Parting Thought

In Lather’s concluding remarks, she reflects on her overarching goals as a researcher: legitimizing qualitative research by wrestling with what makes research *scientific* and offering alternative methods when working in social sciences. On these two fronts, Lather more than succeeds. This edited collection is a testament to the variegated means that a research project can grow: challenging the hegemony of social sciences by *Getting Lost*, deconstructing postpositivist concepts like validity and offering ideas such as the incalculable, imagining forward and enacting possibilities through the research process, and so much more. However, the purpose of this edited collection is not to act as just a roadmap to research in education, for even a well-loved map with charted out alternative routes prescribes research as already settled. As Lather reminds us, research as praxis is the necessary tool to bring about a world we want to live in. When we change our research vantage point, just as contributor Harry Torrance (2025) did when confronting the limitation of an interview in an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm, we open ourselves to new possibilities that in turn invite theoretical and political provocations within us. The contributors, while deeply moved by Lather’s works, all contribute their own extensions and permutations of what qualitative research can be by confronting their own questions and frustrations with the world their research lives in. The reader is invited to “[imagine] and [fabricate] a new architecture for qualitative inquiry” (MacLure, 2025, p. 106) by continuing that process of morphing and challenging conceptions of qualitative inquiry with a community of scholars.

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