



Context, Conditions, and Catalysts for Change: A Qualitative Investigation Of The Promotion of Gender Equality

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Abstract

In the twentieth century many strategies were used to advance gender equality. As feminist movements have evolved, our approaches adapt to the milieu. The aims of this research were, first, to understand the perspectives of people currently working in or designing social justice programs on which factors enabled those programs to achieve their aims; and second, to identify the role, if any, of affective empathy in the interventions. We interviewed 16 experts from eight countries about how they worked to bring about gender equality or other social justice outcomes. Experts worked on diverse programs that used various methods, including awareness-raising, social media campaigns, sport, political advocacy, and lobbying through mechanisms of the United Nations. We thematically analysed the transcripts, then applied framework analysis to explore whether and how the programs used intersubjectivity, multisensory engagement and empathic embodiment (all of which are theorised to be elements of affective empathy). We concluded that to advance gender equality programs must first consider the *context* and the *conditions* of the program, then build a *connection* to *experiences* that can facilitate changes in the gender-based biases or behaviours that drive inequities through *embodiment* that is supported by *dialogue*. The findings reveal that long standing feminist theory is crystallising in novel ways resulting in re-imagined forms of praxis towards gender equality.

Keywords: Affective empathy, connection, dialogue, embodiment, experience.