

5. Course Oral History and Life Stories

Candidates:	all PhD-students
Credits:	3 ECTS
Data:	5, 12, 19, 22 en 26 January 2010
Time:	13.00 - 16.00 pm
Place:	Room 319, PC Hoofthuis, Spuistraat 134 te Amsterdam
Teacher:	prof. dr. Selma Leydesdorff
Registration:	huizinga-fgw@uva.nl
Fee Huizinga members:	none
Fee others (niet-Logos):	€ 250
Max. number of participants:	12

Memory is volatile, it is not a source we can trust as we can with some other data. Memory work is about finding many approaches to what happened and many interpretations. In this course we shall look at oral history and the life story approach in order to analyze the kind of knowledge we find when we interview about memory and the past. Personal histories and (auto) biographies have traditionally played an important role in historical, sociological, cultural and gender studies. The meaning and significance of personal experiences are central to such research. Personal experiences are sometimes used to prove the existence of unfamiliar viewpoints and unknown histories. This course seeks critically to reflect upon the status of such knowledge, and on the ways in which it is produced. What kinds of insights, for instance, may or may not be discovered through personal interviews? What is the relation between the spoken and the written word? What do images mean in relation to sound? To what extent and in what contexts can individual responses be seen to acquire general significance?

General starting-point for discussion is the study of life stories and oral history traditions in the social sciences. In due course, additional attention will be paid to alternative modes of in-depth interviews. Issues to be investigated in particular concern the questions of intersubjectivity; (self) reflection; identification with the Other and her/his past; and the interviewer's role in the process of meaning/knowledge production. What are our responsibilities towards people we interview, and does this change when we deal with gender studies. What does closeness mean, what is distance? Do we have to agree with our interviewees? Is there a special feminist responsibility, and what does academic research mean.

During the course students will be asked to participate by preparing commentaries on the literature. The students will write a final paper on the design of an interview project they might intend to do or actually are doing. They will discuss in 4 to 5 pages the questions that can be answered by interviews, and the kind of material they will get through this method.

Deadline for registration: 20 November 2009