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The paper summarizes the political economy of knowledge production in an increasingly privatized, postindustrial world of knowledge society. This analysis is linked to the emergence of participatory research movements. It argues that the participatory approach to community research offers epistemology and methodology that address people, power and praxis in our postmodern, information society. The paper then describes how a participatory research project is carried out in community practice, articulating key moments and the roles of the researcher and participants. In order to develop this understanding further, it examines the efforts of two specific projects and shows how knowledge production can serve as a conceptual entry point in community organizing through which people make choices, shape action, and create social movements.

Introduction

The distinct features of post-industrialism, including the greater emphasis on information goods rather than industrial manufacturing, the mobilization of science in production and management, and a consumer-oriented economy of affluence, have been studied and discussed since the mid-1950s. Price (1963) surveyed the growth of "big science" in the 1950s and demonstrated the exponential growth rate in the production of scientific knowledge. Machlup (1962) introduced the notion of a knowledge society by analyzing the growth of the knowledge producing industries in the U.S. economy, such as education, research and development, media and communications, and information machinery. Similarly, Bell (1974) observed that information and knowledge had become key resources in the post-industrial

society, in much the same way that labor and capital are central resources of industrial societies.

Still, these economic and social developments have not led to the "carefree utopia" of cybernetic postindustrialism that fascinated early space age America in the 1960s. Instead, new technical and economic forces are creating a more culturally impoverished and ecologically destructive world system, and a concomitant degeneration of political democracy and ordinary everyday community (Agger, 1985; Beninger, 1986; Grahame, 1985). Habermas (1979) in his discussion of technology and science suggests that the monopoly of capital is now reinforced by the monopoly of information and "high-tech" solutions that has penetrated every sphere of public and private life. In our televisual democracy, for example, public life emerges from public opinion polls, whose aggregated responses to narrowly framed questions are substituted in practice for "the public" itself. The masses become a demographic construct, a statistical entity whose only traces appear in the social survey or opinion polls. Daily television news programs create false stylized narratives about contemporary political "reality" with actors, sets and scripts to report "what is true" about American politics. In this process, apathetic public participates in a simulation rather than a real representative democracy (Luke, 1991).

Changing economic and political relations, based on the ownership and control of information technologies and communication, raise important questions for community organizing in a increasingly privatized, postindustrial world of a knowledge society: Who produces knowledge and for whose interests? What are the implications of a changing economic and social order for the relatively powerless? Who are the have-nots in the knowledge society, and how do they organize against the new elements of oppression the knowledge society brings? Today's challenges call for rethinking of knowledge production in community organizing. Instead of conceptualizing research as detached discovery and empirical verification of generalizable patterns in community practice, social researchers need to view research as an arena for resistance and struggle.

This paper examines research methodologies through which social researchers and community practitioners can mobilize

information and knowledge for community empowerment. I begin by summarizing the political economy of the new post-industrial society and the role of the knowledge elite. This analysis is linked to the emergence of participatory research movements. The participatory approach to community research offers epistemology and methodology that address people, power and praxis in the post-industrial, information society. I describe how a participatory research project is carried out in community practice, explicating key moments and the roles of the researcher and participants. In order to develop this understanding further, the paper examines the efforts of two specific projects and shows how knowledge production can serve as a conceptual entry point in community organizing through which people make choices, shape action, and create social movemements.

The Knowledge Elite as Power Brokers

From a grassroots perspective, the significance of a knowledge society stems from the social relations it implies. The power of the knowledge society is derived not simply from technological advances, but also from the growth of new elites who embody and institutionalize them. With the rise of modern sciences, knowledge has become a commodity (Hall, 1979). The production of knowledge has become a specialized profession and only those trained in that profession can legitimately produce it. Knowledge becomes the product to be owned, and the expert, the specialist of knowledge, becomes the power broker (Bell, 1974). In modern society, knowledge has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of "experts" and the elite class they represent.

The ideology of the knowledge society has at its roots a modern-day faith in science as *the* model of truth (Imre, 1984). The claim to truth gives rise to hierarchies of knowledge which reinforce and legitimate the economic and social hierarchies. The truth-claim and the procedures for gaining access to that truth have historically privileged the pronouncements of trained experts over the discourses of "ordinary" people (Foucault, 1980). Today this ideology manifests itself in deference to experts, and ultimately the subordination of people's own experiences and personal meanings to expertise. As a result, decisions affecting

ordinary people are based on "expert" knowledge, denying the
rationality of individual citizens and their life experiences. Under-
standing human nature and the problems of living becomes the
purview of scientists, rendering people dependent on experts to
explain and oversee their life experiences (Berman, 1981). Hence,
the specialists dominate any debate concerning issues of public
interest because ordinary people are unable to enter the scien-
tized debate, as they lack the technical terminology and special-
ized language of argumentation (Habermas, 1979). So powerful
are the expert representations that people frequently internalize
dominant constructions, discounting their own experience. For
example, unemployed Americans are prone to blame themselves
rather than structural causes for their plight.

Unequal relations of knowledge are therefore a critical factor
that perpetuates class or elite domination. Inequalities abound -
in access to information, in the production and definition of legit-
imate knowledge, in the domination of expertise over common
knowledge in decision making. Underlying all of these elements
of the power of expertise is the expert's lack of any accountability
to people affected by his or her knowledge. The ideology of the
knowledge society is a potent one, with profound consequences
for participatory democracy. A knowledge system that "subordi-
nates knowledge of ordinary people also subordinates common
people" (Gaventa, 1993, p. 31).

Situating Participatory Research Movements

Originally designed to resist the intellectual colonialism of
western social research into the third world development process,
participatory research developed a methodology for involving
disenfranchised people as researchers in pursuit of answers to the
questions of their daily struggle and survival (Brown & Tandon,
1978; Fals-Borda, 1979; Freire, 1970, 1974; Hall, 1981). It is not
new for people to raise questions about their conditions or to
search for better ways of doing things for themselves and their
communities. What is new is to concepualize these actions as
research that can be carried out as the struggle over power and
resources, and as the generation of change-oriented social theory
in the post-industrial, knowledge society. Knowledge becomes

a crucial element in enabling people to have a say in how they would like to see their world put together and run (Deshler & Selender, 1991; Gaventa, 1988). Participatory research is a means of putting research capabilities in the hands of deprived and disenfranchised people so that they can identify themselves as knowing actors, defining their reality, naming their history, and transforming their lives (Fernandes & Tandon, 1981; Gaventa, 1993; Horton, 1990; Humphries & Truman, 1994; Maguire, 1987; Mies, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1983). It is a means of preventing an elite group from exclusively determining the interests of others, in effect of transferring power to those groups engaged in the production of popular knowledge.

This theme has been part of the civil rights movement, the women's movement, anti-war activism, and environmental movements in the United States that shifted the locus of knowledge production. A core feature of these liberation movements is the development and articulation of a collective reality that challenges the dominant, "expert" knowledge that do not reflect people's own experiences and realities. Community organizations, housing and health care coalitions, self-help groups and advocates for environmental justice are among those demanding participation in the development of social knowledge, policy and practice (Fisher, 1994;Gottlieb, 1994; Gartner & Riessman, 1974; Jackson & McKay, 1982; Kling, 1995; Levine, 1982; Merrifield, 1989; Nelkin & Brown, 1984; Sohng, 1992; Yeich & Levine, 1992). The exploitative results of international development projects triggered popular resistance to First World technology and demands for participation in development research (Hall, Gillette & Tandon, 1982; Darcy de Oliveira & Darcy de Oliveira, 1975; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Marika, Ngurruwutthun & White, 1992). The research and action of these groups challenged the monolithic authority of the traditional scientific paradigms and top-down social policy.

Connecting to the Social Work Tradition

The concerns and claims of participatory research also bear a striking resemblance to the historical values and mandates that shaped social work in the United States. In the early days of social work, research on the lives of poor immigrants was closely linked

to community organization and social reform, and was usually stimulated by the settlement dwellers' one-to-one contact with their neighbors (Addams, 1910/1961). Studies of the plight of orphan children on the streets of New York, of tenement dwellers, and of infants dying in foundling homes contained integrally woven components of assisting and advocating for clients, and for developing new services (Abbott, 1936; Breckinridge, 1931: Lathrop, 1905; Lee, 1937). The Hull House approach joined researchers, practitioners, community organizers and residents in dialogue, engaging them together in personal and political action as well as informing social theory. Narrative in style and rich with examples, these published studies brought to public attention the strengths and needs of people in disadvantaged circumstances, and frequently influenced social policy at the national level (Tyson, 1995).

Many decades later, the prevailing structure of professionalization, specialization and bureaucratization has separated practice, research, policy reform and social change, resulting a widening gap between knowledge development and the realities of practice. Increasingly, practice principles and methods are developed by "experts", often under controlled conditions, then imported into daily practice and tested against clients and the policy context. Such division of labor has created institutionally segregated professional roles (i.e., researchers separated from practitioners) with different aims, methods, styles and interests, thereby limiting social work's efforts to attack social problems comprehensively. Recovering the unity among research, practice and policy as one collaborative process can provide contemporary social work a different base for expertise, a knowledge that comes from people and community.

Defining Participatory Research

Finn (1994), reviewing current literature in the field of participatory research, outlines three key elements that distinguish participatory research from traditional approaches to social science: *people, power* and *praxis*. It is people centered (Brown, 1985) in the sense that the process of critical inquiry is informed by and responds to the experiences and needs of oppressed people.

Participatory research is about power. Power is crucial to the construction of reality, language, meanings and rituals of truth (Foucault, 1973). Participatory research promotes empowerment through the development of common knowledge and critical awareness which are suppressed by the dominant knowledge system. Participatory research is also about praxis (Lather, 1986; Maguire,1987). It recognizes the inseparability of theory and practice and critical awareness of the personal-political dialectic. Participatory research is grounded in an explicit political stance and clearly articulated value base - social justice and the transformation of those contemporary socio-cultural structures and processes that support degeneration of participatory democracy, injustice and inequality.

Participatory research challenges practices that separate the researcher from the researched and promotes the forging of a partnership between researchers and the people under study. Both researcher and participant are actors in the investigative process, influencing the flow, interpreting the content, and sharing options for action. Ideally, this collaborative process is empowering because it (1) brings isolated people together around common problems and needs; (2) validates their experiences as the foundation for understanding and critical reflection; (3) presents the knowledge and experiences of the researchers as additional information upon which to critically reflect, (4) contextualizes what have previously felt like "personal," individual problems or weakness, and (5) links such personal experiences to political realities. The result of this kind of activity is living knowledge that may get translated into action. Participatory research reflects goal-oriented, experiential learning, and transformative pedagogy.

Conceptualizing the Research Process: Participation and Partnership

Participatory research views knowledge production as a dynamic process of "engagement, education, communication, action and reflection" (Finn, 1994, p. 27). Knowledge exists in our everyday lives. We live our knowledge and constantly transform it through what we do. Knowing is part of our life; it informs our actions. Critical learning comes from the scrutiny of everyday

life. This knowledge does not derive from analysis of data about other human beings but from sharing a life-world together — speaking with one another and exchanging actions against the background of common experience, tradition, history, and culture (Park, 1993). It is this engagement and its impact on ways of looking and developing knowledge which is crucial, rather than the articulation of a set of techniques that can be mimicked.

Conceptualizing knowledge development as an emergent process, the discussion on the theoretical and methodological perspective centers around the conditions and actions that help move research processes in the direction of participation and partnership.

Setting the Research Process in Motion

Participatory research is most closely aligned to the natural processes of social movements. As groups begin to organize there is almost always a need to understand more about the situations which people are facing together. Typically, participatory research begins with issues that emerge from the day-to-day problems of living. It builds on a belief in people's inherent ability and right to be their own agents in knowledge building and action. This sense of the problem may not always be presented as a consensually derived target of struggle. For this reason, the role of the researcher is to work with the community to help turn its felt but unarticulated problem into an identifiable topic of collective investigation.

Researchers needs to take responsibility for developing an informed and critical view of the daily realities surrounding research issues before starting the research project. They need to be knowledgeable about the specific substantive content areas of a research topic, about the cultures and life experiences of those whose lives would be the focus of the research. Researchers need to be aware of how members of a group perceive and speak about their lives. This means they must learn everything that can be found out about the community and its members both historically and sociologically through available records, interviews, observation, and participation in the life of the community. In the ideal situation, the researcher already lives in the community and partakes in its affairs. Typically, however, the researcher is not an

established member of the community. For this reason, he or she must be a committed participant and accepted by the community.

During this phase the researcher explains the purpose of the project and begins to identify and solicit help from key individuals who would play an active role in the execution of the project. In this process, the researcher acts as a discussion organizer and facilitator and as a technical resource person (Park, 1993). Together with a collaborating organization, such as a community development agency, social service agency, or community health clinic, the researcher contacts members of the community, activates their interest in the problem to be dealt with by action-driven research, and helps to organize community meetings where the relevant research issues will be discussed. This initial organizing phase of the project can take considerable time and effort. This situation demands interpersonal and political skills of the researcher as an organizer.

This pre-data gathering phase of participatory research has its analog in traditional field research, in which the researcher establishes rapport with the community for cooperation in the research process. However, the contrast is that participatory research puts community members in the role of active researchers, not merely passive providers of information.

Once community members begin to get together to discuss their collective problem, the researcher participates in these meetings to help formulate the problem in a manner conducive to investigation, making use of the community knowledge that he or she developed earlier. From this point on, the researcher acts more as a resource person than an organizer, this latter function being better carried out by community people with organizational skills and resources. The aim of the participatory research is to provide the catalyst for bringing forth leadership potential in the commu- nity in this manner. Here, the researcher shares his or her expertise with the people, recognizing that the communities directly involved have the critical voice in determining the direction and goals of change.

Dialogue and Critical Reflection

A key methodological feature that distinguishes participatory research from other social research is dialogue. Through dialogue,

people come together and participate in all crucial aspects of investigation, education and collective action. It is through talking to one another and doing things together that people get connected, and this connectedness leads to shared meaning. The dialogic approach differs from conventional "interviewing" in several respects. Interviewing presupposes the primacy of the researcher's frame of reference. It offers a one-way flow of information that leaves the researched in the same position after having shared knowledge, ignoring the self-reflective process that the imparting of information involves. The dialogic approach and self reflection require the inevitable engagement of the researcher in the critical process, in the discussion of meanings and perspectives.

Dialogue helps people to look at the "whys" of their lives, inviting them to critically examine the sources and implications of their own knowledge. The role of the researcher in this process is not only to learn from the participants, but also to facilitate learning. Education here is to be understood not in the sense of the didactic transmission of knowledge, characteristic of much of expert teaching, but rather in the sense of learning by posing questions and stimulating a normative dialogue: What are the conditions of participants' lives? What are the determining features of the social structure that contribute to creating those life patterns? What choices do the members of the group make, and why do they believe those are good things to do? What are the possibilities for their experience and action? The researcher's sharing of his or her perceptions, questions in response to the dialogue, and different theories and data invite the participants to critically reflect upon their own experiences and personal theories from a broader context. Learning involves examining the self from a new, critical standpoint. Dialogue acts as a means for fostering critical consciousness about social reality, an understanding based on knowledge of how people and issues are historically and politically situated (Shor & Freire, 1987).

Researcher's Reflexivity: A dialogic approach requires both the researcher and the participants to help create and maintain authentic and mutual relationships. This involves ongoing relationship and raises ethical issues around power, status and authority, as well as critical reflection over their roles, intentions, actions and

content. The forging of a partnership is not easy with people who have been victims of a dominating structure; traditional attitudes and negative self images reinforce subordination to outside researchers. And for the researcher, it may be difficult to relinquish the role of expert, imposing one's ideas consciously or unconsciously. To counter these tendencies, researchers must engage in explicit reflexivity, that is, they need to examine the sources of social power in their lives and how these sources appear in their research. Their class, culture, ethnicity, gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors must be placed in the frame of analysis and in the research report (Harding, 1991). Ultimately such an emphasis involves a cross-checking mechanism on the hubris of intellectuals and power relations that underlie the formation of knowledge itself.

People's Participation: Envisioning a new, egalitarian partnership requires both the researcher and community members to break with old, hierarchical patterns of interaction between researcher and researched. "Old" patterns may be most successfully broken and "new" roles created when all collaborators make a clear commitment to continually scrutinize their interactions. Community members must be willing to "call" researchers on their unexamined assumptions of authority and expertise. In turn, researchers must be willing to be confronted on such assumptions and to take a back seat to community experts. Researcher-community partnerships are more likely to succeed if all participants in the collaborative endeavor are expected to share responsibility for acknowledging and discussing patterns of interpersonal conduct. In this way, the collaborative researchers strive for an equivalent voice rather than a dominant voice in the research process.

Research Design and Methods

Participatory research, in theory, draws upon all available social science research methods. However, because participatory research is premised on the principle that the people with a problem carry out the investigation themselves, it excludes techniques that require a separation of researcher and researched, such as when experimental "subjects" are kept ignorant of the purpose of the study. Methods that are beyond the technical and material

resources of the people involved in the research are also excluded. Field observation, archival and library research, and historical investigation using documents and personal history, narratives and story telling, as well as questionnaires and interviews, have been used in participatory research.

Once the research question is formulated, the researcher presents to the group methodological options that can be considered within the available personnel and material resources of the community, and explains their logic, efficacy, and limitations. This aspect of participatory research serves to demystify research methodology and put it in the hands of the people so that they can use it as a tool of empowerment. This is a long-range goal of participatory research toward which the researcher moves the process by sharing his or her knowledge and skills with the groups.

Communication is a key methodological concern in participatory research. It draws upon creative combinations of written, oral and visual communication in the design, implementation and documentation of research. Grassroots community workers, village women, and consciousness raising groups have used documentary photographs to record and reflect their needs, promote dialogue, encourage action, and inform policy (Ewald, 1985; Wang & Burris, 1994). Researchers use theater and visual imagery to facilitate collective learning, expression, and action (Antrobus, 1989). Other forms of popular communication are utilized such as collectively written songs, cartoons, community meetings, community self-portraits and video-tape recordings (Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990; Conchelos, 1985; Randall & Southgate, 1981).

Critical knowledge development calls for a creative blend of traditional methods of inquiry and new approaches. Use of alternative communication methods in participatory research has both pushed researchers to re-examine conventional methods and opened up the possibility of using methods that previously would not have been considered legitimate.

Action and Knowledge

The path from knowledge generation to knowledge utilization is direct in participatory research, since the same actors are involved in both activities. Often in participatory research, what is investigated is not a theory to be applied but rather the ways of

implementing a practical idea, such as leadership development in the labor and civil rights movements (Horton, 1990), starting a community cooperative (Conti, Counter, & Paul, 1991), policy initiatives for inner city youths (Checkoway & Finn, 1992) or a homeless persons union (Yeich & Levine, 1992). In such instances, action takes place concurrently with research activities. The truth and appropriateness of the views and decisions of a particular group cannot be tested other than in action. Only in action can it be determined whether their goals and purposes have been recognized and acted upon, and whether obstacles remain. This is not a detached analysis but an ongoing lived experience through research which provides the basis for a constant reformation, elaboration, and development of research problems and analysis, with the political objective of the elimination of the problem. The power to name the conditions of injustice must be accompanied by the power to act whereby research and political action become fully integrated.

Transforming a Community Through Research: Case Examples

The previous section outlines the basic tenets and processes of participatory research. In order to develop this understanding further, the discussion now moves to an examination of two specific projects to illustrate how the principles of participatory research are applied in mobilizing people to analyze their experience, articulating indigenous knowledge, and devising practical plans and strategies to meet their needs.

One such context is offered by the work of the Leicester Black Mental Health Group in Britain (Westwood, et al., 1989). This participatory research focuses on how black people's lives and protests have been "psychiatrized" through the normal discourse of knowledge production. These are crucial issues of concern because black people, especially young black men are over-represented in mental hospitals.

The research project was developed within this context involving an extended period of dialogue among those in the research group of the Black Mental Health Group as to the conceptual field in which the work should be conceived, executed

and presented. It was in these discussions that they decided to focus attention on the collection of "narratives of sickness" not simply because this would give voice to the previously silenced black mentally ill, but also because narratives/narrators would construct subject positions. Coupled with the active involvement of black people in agenda-setting roles, the research made a crucial shift away from the black people as the "others" who are objectified through their inclusion as examples or cases within psychiatry - a major example of the power-knowledge complex. The diagnosis was a mystifying label which did not, for black women and men, aid in understanding the often frightening and painful experiences that constituted their lives. Through the collection of narratives of sickness, the research process provided a forum where they reconstructed their biographies; the onset and experience of mental illness; and their treatment by psychiatry. Many of them acknowledged that they were ill, vulnerable and in need of specific forms of help which they did not receive. It is a sadly familiar story.

The research was not bound to the narratives. Crucial information also gathered in the research was statistical data indicating the over-representation of black people diagnosed as schizophrenic. In calling attention to this and using the official statistics, the research project illuminated how symptoms and diagnosis at the micro level were related to policy design and implementation the macro level. Such analysis linked the over-representation of black people in the mental health system to the politics of racism.

Equally, they were not content just to tell what was a very painful and compelling story. Instead, they allied the publication of the research report to a community-based conference at which psychiatry and mental health management could engage with black people and respond to an agenda for action against racism in mental health care. It was a powerful encounter and one which has proved to be ongoing and empowering for local black people. In part, this is because the issues go to the heart of the lives of black people in Britain; power and knowledge, surveillance by the state set against the psychic damage of racism, exclusion and unbelonging in Britain.

Another example comes from the efforts of rural Chinese

women who have employed photo novella (documentary picture stories) as a participatory method to document, discuss, and organize around their collective health interests, with the shared aim of improving life conditions in their communities (Wang & Burris, 1994). Putting cameras in the hands of children, rural women and grassroots workers, instead of health specialists, policymakers, or professional photographers, photo novella allowed them to be recorders and potential catalysts in their own communities. This work originated as part of the Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program supported by the Ford Foundation assessing the needs of rural women of two counties of Yunnan Province, China.

As a first step, the Program established the provincial and county guidance groups in order to improve coordination among policy leaders who address the social, economic, cultural, and biomedical factors that affect women's health. The guidance group provided a structure to address policy questions that would emerge from the women's photographs and discussions. The guidance groups consisted of provincial and county leaders from the bureaus of poverty alleviation, education, family planning, and health; researchers from universities and policy organizations; and cadres from the Women's Federation. It was at guidance group meetings that needs assessment research was proposed, discussed, and revised.

Local Women's Federation cadres selected a representative group of rural women who would reflect to policymakers the range of their peers' concerns. A total of 62 women, representing over 50 villages, received intensive training in the techniques and process of photo novella. They photographed their home place and environment in which they work, play, worry, and love. A person need not have possessed the skills of the "elite," such as the ability to read or write, to participate in photo novella. As this project demonstrated, photo novella can be taught to a person who has little or no formal education.

As a need assessment tool, photo novella provided a creative and appealing method by which village women could document the health issues of greatest concern, communicating them to policy makers, donors, program planners and implementers, line agencies, the provincial and county guidance groups, and their

own communities. At the same time, photo novella explicitly focused on other forms of empowerment through participation. The process emphasized the use of village women's documentation of their everyday lives as an education tool to increase their individual and collective knowledge about women's health status and to empower women to mobilize for social change. For example, a photograph of a woman weeding her cornfield as her baby girl lay alone was a lightening rod for the women's discussion of their burdens and needs. When families must race to finish seasonal cultivating, when their work load is heavy, and when no elders in the family can look after young ones, mothers are forced to bring their babies to the field. Dust and rain weaken the health of their infants. Photographs provide both evidence and validation for shared concerns.

A central aim of photo novella was to contribute to an environment where rural women's self-defined concerns entered programmatic and policy discussions. Although many programs have been initiated on behalf of rural women, it was almost unheard of to seek out, systematically and deliberately, their point of view. The top-down and vertical structure of Chinese bureaucracy and logistic constraints of feasibility (e.g., resources and transportation) did pose challenges to the photo novella process, but overcoming these obstacles was itself one of the successes of the program. Photographs elicit visceral reactions, and that is one of the key advantages of photo novella in reaching policymakers. A rural women normally could not gain access to a county-level official, or communicate with a westerner. Her photos do. Through them, her ideas and hopes may receive a powerful audience.

Through participatory research, people's knowledge and experiences that were private pains have become a collective document, collectively produced and owned. Their new relationship to knowledge production provided them not simply a voice but a speaking position, allowing them to make new claims to legitimacy when faced with psychiatry and health services management. This is one way political agendas are shifted by research and the balance of power in the power/knowledge complex becomes a contested terrain. Thus, research methods and skills can be appropriated for counter-balancing work by oppositional groups

and can thereby empower people individually and collectively in specific contexts.

Conclusion

Participatory research is a way of seeing and a form of knowing that employs historical knowledge, reflexive reasoning, and dialectic awareness to give people some tools to realize new potentials for the emancipation and enlightenment of ordinary individuals today. By refining people's thinking abilities and moral sensibilities, participatory research hopes to equip individuals with a new consciousness of what must be done and how to do it. This consciousness might help them determine what their best interests should be and lessen the victimization that people impose on themselves from within or that is forced upon them from outside.

Participatory research does not claim critical knowledge as a privileged form of "true science." Instead, it accepts its potential fallibility, as well as awareness of its own precarious and contingent relation to social change and the inherent difficulties of self-reflective mode of theorizing. Because self-reflection is itself historically situated, it cannot make any claim to a transcendence. Second, although reflection may reveal an interest in emancipation, it does not necessarily or automatically provide a linkage between this interest and actual emancipatory action. That is, even if one has developed conscious-raising and unraveled ideological distortions, emancipation still requires active political engagement, choice and commitment. All human beings are entangled and enmeshed in a recalcitrant reality made of enduring cultural traditions, the demands of everyday existence, and often unyielding personal identities that no participatory researchers can ever wholly unravel. Any critical theory that ignores these realities run the risk of becoming itself ideological. Its dialectic outlook must also alert resistance efforts to the unexpected and unintended results of any human action as individuals and groups oppose the prevailing systems of power, position and privilege.

In the 1990s we talk of alliances, coalitions, and working together. At the same time we also speak of building our alliances for change on authentic voices of people through which people make choices, shape action, and create social movements. We

have much to gain by critically engaging with the theory and practice of participatory research as we face the many challenges ahead.

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