

Researching on the Edge: Emancipatory Praxis for Social Justice

Abstract

Purpose - To provoke a conversation in marketing scholarship about the overlooked political nature of doing research, particularly for those who research issues of social (in)justice. We suggest a paradigmatic shift in how researchers might view and operationalise social justice work in marketing. Our emancipatory praxis framework offers scholars an alternative way to think about the methodology, design and politics of researching issues of social relevance.

Design/methodology/approach - This is a conceptual paper drawing on critical theory to argue for a new methodological shift towards emancipatory praxis.

Findings – As social justice research involves a dialectical relationship between crises and critique, the concept of emancipation acts as a methodological catalyst for furthering debate about social (in)justice in marketing. We identify a set of methodological troubles and challenges that may disrupt the boundaries of our knowledge making. We outline a set of methodological responses to these issues, illustrating how emancipatory research facilitates social action.

Practical implications – The paper is intended to change the ways that researchers work in practical and concrete terms on issues of social (in)justice.

Social implications – While this paper is theoretical, it argues for an alternative methodological approach to research that reorients researchers towards a politicised praxis with emancipatory relevancy.

Originality/value – Emancipatory praxis offers a new, openly politicised methodological alternative for addressing problems of social relevance in marketing. As a continuous political and emancipatory task for researchers, social justice research involves empirical encounters with politics, advocacy and democratic participation, where equality is the methodological starting point for research design and decisions as much as it is the end goal.

Keywords: emancipatory praxis; social justice; politics of engagement; participation rhetoric; dialogical theory building; systematised reflexivity; research coalitions

Introduction

In unjust societies everyone is an insider, in systems of domination, no one is free of contamination (Fine, 2006, p.93)

Social justice research requires embracing polyphonic interpretations (Belova, King and Sliwa, 2008; Smith and Russell, 2016), multiple methods and actors (Swartz, 2011), power and representation (Cluley, 2019), and counterintuitive ways of seeing and knowing (Shaw et al. 2017; Tellis, 2017), to challenge the rigid line between research and advocacy and the methodological status quo of producing knowledge. As a continuous political and emancipatory task for researchers, social justice research involves empirical encounters with politics, advocacy and democratic participation, where equality is the methodological starting point for research design and decisions as much as it is the end goal.

The central aim of this paper is to provoke a conversation in marketing scholarship about overlooked political experiences of doing research, particularly for those who research issues of social (in)justice. To reimagine research with a social justice emphasis in our discipline means we must come out from the political spaces we inhabit, to research on the edge of methodological convention. Openly politicised methodological approaches embrace both science and politics in order to “see the world behind, beneath, or from outside the oppressors' institutionalised vision” (Harding, 2008 – p.120). It also means recognising problematic collaborations and empirical moments which can surface the less obvious aspects of our work, by embracing phenomena, research approaches and people that fall outside of the “typical”. By attending to both those on the “peripheries of the global economy” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2003 in Aguiar, 2016: 13) and powerful elites, we open up “relationality and interconnection between cultures of power and powerlessness” (Ho, 2016, p. 30) that

perpetuate inequalities and give the illusion that current social injustices are inevitable (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Tadajewski and Brownlie, 2008).

To initiate this conversation and address the need for a reimagined approach to social justice research, we suggest a paradigmatic shift in how researchers might view and operationalise social justice work in marketing. Our Emancipatory Praxis framework offers scholars an alternative way to think about the methodology, design and politics of social justice research.

In marketing scholarship, there is a deep commitment to social justice work that is both multi-method in scope and conceptually wide-ranging. Scholars in the areas of marketplace constraint (Bone, Christensen and Williams, 2014; Bennett et al. 2016; Markus and Schwartz, 2010), consumer vulnerability, (Baker, Gentry and Rittenburg 2005; Piacentini et al., 2014), impoverished consumption and subsistence markets (Hamilton 2012; Hamilton and Catterall; 2006; Hill 1991; Hill and Stephens, 1997; Hirschman and Hill 2000; Martin and Hill, 2012; Viswanathan, Rosa and Ruth, 2010), addictive consumption (Hirschman, 1992; Faber, 2000), market dehumanisation (Hill et al, 2015; 2016), and transformative consumer and services research (Davis and Ozanne, 2019 Higgins and Hamilton, 2019; Mick et al, 2011;) view knowledge as a route for development and improvement of society (Lynch 2000). Nonetheless, there have been limited attempts to develop an alternative methodology in the sense of an “emancipatory social research to be explored and tested in substantive studies” (Krueger 1981; p. 59). Furthermore, there have been limited attempts to resolve the uncoupling of the critical understanding of modernity from empirical observations and descriptive accounts of social crises (Habermas 2001). Inspired by the Habermasian notion of critical theory informing transformative action, our emancipatory praxis framework, in bridging the debate between critical and transformative marketing scholarship, contributes concrete ways in how we might minimise the binaries between knowledge and action.

Emancipatory elements have started to emerge within TCR and TSR studies, as evidenced by i) Hill et al.'s (2015; 2016) work on prison restrictions, encouraging democratic participation and co-theorising through poetry methods and ii) the sensitive, long-term ethnographic work of Higgins and Hamilton (2019) demonstrating the value of systemised reflexivity and relationship-building. By adopting an emancipatory praxis, researchers and participants benefit from democratic inquiry through joint participation in research exploration, learning partnerships, coalitions and communities of practice organised around social concerns and in liberal attempts to influence policy. As our discipline strives for more inclusivity, more participation and more stakeholder engagement in the research process (Ozanne and Saatcioglu, 2008; Ozanne et al., 2017), we must also not retreat from critiquing the methodological status quo. This means explicitly building in political considerations within our research methods and designs to engage in emancipatory research which aims to “increase awareness of the contradictions either hidden or distorted by everyday understandings and in doing so – direct attention to the possibilities for social transformation in the present configuration of social processes” (Lather, 1986; p. 259).

To structure our emancipatory praxis framework around political concerns, we draw on the intellectual contributions of critical theorists (Freire 1997; Habermas 2006). By adopting the Freirian praxis of naming and speaking back to the reality of social problems (Dholakia 1982; Freire 1997; Habermas 2006) and the Habermasian principle of alternating back and forth between crises and critique of social life, our emancipatory praxis framework is structured along two dimensions. First, we identify a set of methodological “troubles” social justice researchers might encounter. Whilst it has been challenging to conceive of an appropriate term that captures to the fullest extent the empirical tensions and difficulties researchers can experience, we identify these issues as troubles because they represent normalised ways to reflect about, and do, social research in marketing that affect the knowledge produced and its

impact in ways that can thwart social research's transformational impact in ways that can go unnoticed. What goes unnoticed by researchers within social justice contexts can reinforce power asymmetries, silence participants and communities and ultimately lead to inaction. Troubles therefore imply methodological struggles researchers might grapple with but equally signify methodological struggles they might be unaware of. Rather than diminish the enormous efforts marketing scholars make in their daily struggles to produce meaningful work, our aim is to probe a set of uncomfortable realities and daily challenges that disrupt the boundaries of our knowledge making, especially when this deviates from more managerial orientations and forces us to consider unappealing choices (Harding 2008). Second, in speaking back to these issues, the framework introduces a set of methodological "responses", which illustrate how emancipatory research might aid the creation and implementation of transformative social actions (Thompson, 2004; Foster and Wiebe, 2011).

We begin with a discussion of how social justice research involves a dialectical relationship between crises and critique and how the concept of emancipation might act as a methodological catalyst for furthering the debate about social (in)justice in marketing. Next, we propose our emancipatory praxis framework, structured along two dimensions; i) troubles (politics of engagement; researching the powerful; participation rhetoric/representational dilemmas) and ii) responses (reciprocal research relationships/dialogical theory building; systematised reflexivity; research coalitions for social action). We offer a final reflection for scholars who might wish to reimagine their research collaborations within the context of emancipatory praxis by researching on the edge.

Researching social (in)justice: crises, critique and methodological emancipation

The relationship between theory, methods and social action stems from Deutsch and Kraus' argument that the breadth and reach of theoretical perspectives should be dependent on researchers' courage in applying their ideas to problems of social significance (Fine, 2006). They state "the remarkable things people do as participants must be viewed from the outside, knowledge must be sought even when the obstacles are considerable" (Deutsch and Krauss 1965; 215-216). This section will discuss how researching social injustice in a world that normalises it, necessitates a disruptive route to emancipation.

In the everyday politics of liberal democracies, social justice has a range of interpretations; egalitarianism covers most, but not all of that range (Baker et al, 2004) but nevertheless encompasses an ideal condition in which all members of a society have equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities (Prasad 2014). Social justice therefore presumes the existence of a relatively bounded political community with a determinable membership and shared resources (Miller 2003). According to Rawls's (1971), social justice requires that society be founded on rules that ensure broad individual liberty for all, equality of opportunity (whenever compatible with liberty) and strict limits on inequality, which can be considered justified only if the rule allowing it is either required by the previous principles or benefits the least advantaged in society. Injustice is neither natural nor inevitable but rather it is designed and globalised to privilege some and oppress others. In line with Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007), we view social justice research as both a goal and a process. So, if the *goal* of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, then the *process* for attaining this goal, needs to be democratic, participative, inclusive and affirming of human agency for working collaboratively to create change (Bell, 2007; p.2). If this is the route towards change then we suggest our methodological

approaches and research decisions should also emphasise the same characteristics. Theories of social justice need to be tested against the beliefs of participants and communities to achieve convergence between what people hold and what scholars' debate about justice, what Wittgenstein (1968) terms "meaning in use". If political and social action are tied to disadvantaged locations, then not replicating or contributing to systemic injustice (Deutsch, 2006) or civilised oppression (Harvey, 1999) in our research is key to developing a social justice approach in our discipline.

Interrogating the relationship between crises and critique, Habermas' social theorising distinguishes how critique interrogates the norms, institutions and practices of society that generate crises and aspires to find emancipatory alternatives to damaged social relations (Cordero 2014; Habermas 1988; 1990; 2001). Social injustice introduces a discontinuity that tends to be absorbed and stabilised as normal throughout society. Researchers engaged in critical inquiry within this context can therefore feel jeopardised in their efforts by depoliticisation and technocratic discourses that frame crises in the language of no alternatives (Lettow 2015; p.507). This can create empirical moments of tension for researchers, between the "ideal" (research defined by academic conventions) and the "real" (everyday struggles to engage in action). Because situations of crises affect the parameters of public discussion and scrutinise power in unforeseen ways, it is easier for us as critical scholars and social researchers to unwittingly become a virtual participant in the contexts of everyday social action - without either the conceptual tools for diagnosing crises or the means to overcome them (Habermas 1990; 348). This Habermasian view of crisis and critique as dialectically related terms in the study of social life provides a useful way to frame social justice research which highlights the "disruptions" (Habermas, 2001) of social life or a sharp division between injustice and action.

Crisis, be it social, economic, political, ecological, or cultural, compel us to rethink how our research can be of use. Commenting on the 2008 financial crisis, Habermas (2012)

communicates his concern for vulnerable social groups bearing the brunt of the socialised costs of market failure, advocating for “the whole programme of an unscrupulous subordination of the lifeworld to the imperatives of the market to be subjected to scrutiny” (p.102-104). Because it involves the experience of social injustice, crisis requires the practice of saying aloud what it invokes and examining how our research efforts might evolve to address this. With consumption and markets at the core of the most pressing social and environmental problems we endure today, a growing body of transformational and critical voices have garnered attention in marketing scholarship (Davis and Ozanne 2019). This work illuminates inequalities in the marketplace that often obfuscate the oppressed or disadvantaged (c.f. Brownlie, 2006; Burton, 2001; Hamilton, 2007; Tadajewski, 2010; 2012; 2018). As Young (2013) notes, oppression and injustice are not necessarily as result of coercion by a tyrannical power as much “as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions which are supported by the media and cultural stereotypes as well as by the structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms” (p.3-4) (Young, 2013, pp. 5,6). In our case, this may take the form of well-intended marketing scholars, who, more or less unwittingly, eschew political research topics or methods, which challenge hegemonic views of marketing scholarship and practice (Tadajewski, 2018).

Indeed, how we attempt to research injustice as it intersects with markets, consumers and marketing phenomena – what we study, with whom, for what purpose, how and for what impact, requires us to make detailed and often bold decisions about issues that are often easier to evade than to confront. As Hirschman (1993) states, “researchers must become personally aware that they are *responsible* for the political and social consequences of their research acts” (p. 551). The remit of a researcher encompasses a vast array of such acts, from the value they place upon what they read and the studies they chose to consider (or omit), to the ethics of data collection and analysis, and the ways in which knowledge is produced and disseminated. The

narratives and worldviews that come to prevail in scholarship (and are consequently propagated more broadly through education and outreach) can perpetuate or challenge established market power structures, social inequalities, consumer vulnerabilities, and a myriad of harms and grievances. For example, the relative lack of attention given by consumer researchers to economic inequality may slow down efforts to transform conditions (see Blocker et al., 2013), whilst reinforcing the marginal position of those who experience it. In other words, our *choices* whilst producing, shaping and circulating knowledge, have moral consequences (or so we hope). Knowledge, and the ability to use it towards autonomy and clarification (Alvesson, 1994) are liberating weapons and given the political, social and ecological urgency of our times, we must endeavour to construct new approaches based on alternative tenets. Although challenging, it is in this realisation and reflexivity that a researcher's potential for embracing methodological emancipation arises, as they begin to appreciate that the "reality of the social world", including one's construction of the self is socially produced, and as such, open to transformation (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 435). In the following section, we outline our argument for scholars' investing in emancipatory research as a route towards social justice.

Emancipatory research for social justice

Equated with a critical ethos, emancipation can be seen as a "process of being set free from constraints, deliverance from physical, intellectual, moral, or spiritual fetters" (Cova and Paraque, 2019, p. 441). Recognising the interconnectedness of power and critique (Bargetz, 2015; Ranciere 1999), the adjective *emancipatory* has had a resurgence in the past decade - particularly Fraser's (2013) attack of neoliberal marketisation and the paternalistic politics of protection calling for emancipation as a third social and political strategy. Being interested in liberating people from versions of authority and control (Reynolds, 1998) that restrain thought

and action, we adopt Lather's (1986) conception of emancipatory research with its aim of "increasing awareness of the contradictions either hidden or distorted by everyday understandings and in doing so – direct attention to the possibilities for social transformation in the present configuration of social processes" (p. 259).

Remaining central to contemporary understandings of critical theory (Allen, 2015), emancipation is an on-going political process (Benhabib, 1986; Habermas, 2006; Fraser, 2013) and an attitude which embraces practices of freedom and experimentation and is anticipatory in how it foregrounds a politics of possibility (Fine, 2001; Lettow, 2015). Building on the alignment of emancipation with a political agenda, Ranciere (1999) claims that "politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part" (p.11). Emancipatory politics therefore arises when those who are on the edge of the existing socio-political order institute themselves by turning toward the principle of equality (Bargetz, 2015). In this way, we conceive emancipation as an encounter between politics and equality - social justice and equality being the starting points rather than the end goals for research design and decisions.

Critical theory's interest in emancipation can be achieved through developing "critically reflective citizens" (Alvesson, 1994) or "reflexively defiant consumer[s]" (Ozanne and Murray, 1995: p. 516), who are more capable of examining and challenging dominant ideas and perceptions that can be limiting and repressive (Alvesson, 1994), within their work, the marketplace or the whole "culture industry"(see also Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972, Holt, 2002). While critical marketing scholarship embraces the idea of emancipation (Brownlie, 2006; Tadajewski and Brownlie, 2008), this necessitates more than intellectual critique, with which most extant work in the field has been concerned. Without sustained commitment to transform society (Boog, 2003), critical theory may restrict itself to becoming a self-indulgent

intellectual exercise (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 1999), and thus risk losing its emancipatory potential (Prasad and Caproni, 1997; 289).

Certainly, any transformative theoretical, methodological or political perspective requires some understanding of futurity and anticipation, (Lettow 2015). This anticipated future is precisely the idea of the emancipated or the good society, analysing from the third-person or observer's point of view the "internal contradictions, limitations, and crises" of the existing social systems" (Benhabib, 1986; 142). As well as systematically critiquing existing social practices and institutions (Murray and Ozanne, 2009) and, in particular, conceptions of marketing and its relationship with society, an emancipatory agenda requires us to envision alternatives to such conceptualisations and structures (Murray and Ozanne, 2009; Mitchell, 2007). Two stages, identified by Murray and Ozanne (2009: 836) as the "negative" (critique) and the "positive" (envisioning) moments, should therefore be followed by a third stage of "critical participation". In this stage, scholars should move beyond critical imagination, and become active agents for change (Mitchell, 2007), who impact upon, and transform, society (Murray and Ozanne, 2009: 836). This is similar to what Swartz (2011) calls "giving back" to the participants of our studies, so that with knowledge and/or other material benefits, they are better prepared to understand and deal with oppression. This clearer emphasis on praxis as a route to emancipation (Foster and Wiebe, 2011) requires us to expand the disciplinary space of marketing and engage with a wider variety of publics and stakeholders (Murray and Ozanne, 2009; see also Brownlie, 2006; Tadajewski and Brownlie, 2008; Tadajewski, 2018), including those in positions of power (e.g. key decision-makers), as well as those who are disadvantaged (e.g. consumers with limited economic resources, minorities), as exemplified by Hamilton's and Ekström and Hjort's (2009) work. Such a concern echoes Hirschman's (1993: 552) call to incorporate "excluded knowledges into future research".

In this context, our research engagement cannot be confined to that of observing social realities from a distance, and then producing academic work that is neither accessible nor intelligible to the people about whose lives we are hoping to transform. Indeed, research can only lead to empowerment, “when it is disseminated beyond the safe bounds of the academy and becomes discussed, debated, and applied by the public” (Murray and Ozanne, 2009: 836). That is, when, it has *impact*. We must, therefore, advance ways in which we can actively engage with the audiences whose lives we want to improve, not only when we require something from them (e.g. collecting data), but also to share results and suggestions in ways that can be meaningful to them. The vulnerable, marginalised or any “others” “have a moral right to own and control knowledge produced about them” (Swartz, 2011: p. 48; Baker et al., 2004). Otherwise we may be ourselves contributing to perpetuating an academic, self-serving collective, “false consciousness” (Engels, 1971 in Hirschman, 1993) that legitimises the relevance of our work, as well as the consent for enquiring others, yet changes or transforms very little.

Marketing scholars have outlined a pressing need for a more radical research agenda comprising of a critical theory of society and research that combines historical, sociological, cultural and political analysis to achieve this (Denzin, 2001; Murray and Ozanne 1991; Tadajewski, 2008, 2018) together with the need to fuse critical paradigmatic diversity with engagement, theory building and the “personal” (Catterall et al. 2002; Goulding, 1999; Tadajewski et al, 2014; Tadajewski, 2010.) Agitating towards an alternate approach to research might entail embracing a more disruptive, openly politicised approach rather than only incremental changes (Pechmann et al., 2011). Focusing attention on the critical–radical researchscape, Dholakia (2012; 1982) refers to the epistemic barriers erected by the marketing discipline in executing praxis to trigger actions that are resistive, emancipatory, or revolutionary in nature. However, given the socio-economic urgency of our times, the need for

academics to play an important moral and political role in society (Mosiander et al. 2009) remains ever more pressing. Emancipation stems from repressed, institutional or environmental forces which limit our options and rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted as beyond human control (a.k.a. 'reified') (Habermas 2006). More recently scholars have advocated the relational engagement approach to help researchers maximise the long-term societal impact of their studies (Ozanne et al., 2017), achieved through collaboration with a diverse array of participants, communities and relevant stakeholders (Davis and Ozanne, 2018). This necessity for democratic relationship building and reciprocity is fundamental for societal impact, yet at the empirical level, researchers can encounter policy makers who want clear (potentially victim-blaming) descriptions of social problems, communities who would prefer to keep their experiences to themselves and others who believe academic researchers should remain "uncontaminated" by social struggles (Fine and Weis, 1996). This has been recently reinforced by Piacentini et al (2019) who have identified how marketing sits uneasily alongside notions of social impact and transformation.

With these issues in mind we must, therefore, not only embrace the methodological advancement scholars in areas such as TCR or TSR have made but also work *within, around and outside* its edges as researchers, where the rigid line separating research and advocacy is increasingly problematic (Fine and Barreras, 2003; Gamson, 1999) raising multiple ethical dilemmas (Swartz, 2011). What is therefore required is a provocative approach to research, one which embraces an emancipatory intent through the adoption of an openly politicised methodological alternative for conducting social justice work. This alternative approach, which we term Emancipatory Praxis, offers a radical methodological break from the pseudo-participatory, action-research (Tadajewski; 2010) approaches to addressing problems of social relevance in marketing. By constructing an explicitly political methodological voice, it contains

a commitment to critiquing the status quo to build a more just society. Next, we outline what an emancipatory praxis framework may look like within this marketing landscape.

Emancipatory praxis framework

To expose contradictions and anxieties in attempting to contribute emancipatory research in marketing and speak back to the reality of social (in)justice, this section sets out our emancipatory praxis framework. Aligned with Freire (1997, p. 107) we employ praxis within this framework as it represents the interplay between reflection/theory (naming) and action/practice (responses) “directed at the structures to be transformed”. In moving towards contradictory voices, counternarratives and competing understandings, we need to deconstruct methodological encounters in our struggles for social justice by thinking differently or “otherwise” (Lather, 1998) and allowing multiple methods capable of overcoming shortcomings derived from conclusions obtained from single sources of data and perspectives (Baker et al., 2004; Swartz, 2011).

Earlier in our paper we discussed the interplay between crises, critique and methodological emancipation as catalysts for researching social (in)justice. We highlighted emancipation as an on-going political task, involving a dialectical relationship between crises and critique, alternating back and forth between these positions during empirical encounters. To theoretically animate our framework, we blend this Habermasian perspective with the Freirian praxis of naming and speaking back to the reality of social problems (Dholakia 1982; Freire 1993; Habermas 2006). This aims to produce a somewhat provocative framework that gestures towards a reframing of methodological decisions and modes of researching moments of (in)justice. The following section will now identify our set of three interwoven i) troubles and ii) responses that form the pillars of our emancipatory praxis framework.

“Naming” methodological troubles

Naming involves those practices that facilitate critical conversations around social arrangements, particularly around inequitable distribution of power (Fine 2001). Both Kant and Foucault remind us that there is a troubling political conundrum at the heart of the emancipatory quest (Coole, 2015). We deliberately characterise the following as “troubles” because they represent normalised ways to reflect upon, and do, social research in marketing that affect the knowledge produced and its impact in ways that can thwart social research’s transformational impact in ways that can go unnoticed. As such, these troubles not only challenge us to find practical solutions to address them, but they also link emancipatory aims to criticality, emotion and thinking (Murray et al, 2019). They provoke us in ways that may cause uneasiness. Furthermore, this term aids our problematisation of the categorical binary of the individual researcher and society. These troubles are as follows: politics of engagement; researching the powerful; participation rhetoric and representational dilemmas.

Politics of engagement

Research which aims to be of social benefit is inevitably political as it involves a complex set of power relations. As Denzin (2001) suggests the marketing researcher is not an objective, politically neutral observer who stands outside and above the phenomenon at hand – but historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied. This argument can be extended to all knowledge we produce, “marketing theory, the concepts which accompany it [...] are all political, rather than neutral” in that they are principally concerned with “encouraging people to think about their existence in circumscribed ways” (Tadajewski, 2018), which usually supports the interests of managers. Indeed, many may feel that marketing research is inconsistent with personal values about societal welfare, especially when it is linked

to grave social problems, including obesity and compulsive consumption (Macinnis and Folkes, 2010; Simmonds, 2018). However, scholars need not be (and should not be) “handmaidens of business” (MacInnis and Folkes, 2010, 901). Rather than contesting our agendas, we should interrogate and scrutinize more often how as researchers we can utilise our power, knowledge and privilege for social ends. Bourdieu (1998) insists that researchers have a public responsibility to disrupt the sense of inevitability and to engage with communities on questions of justice and the inequitable distribution of freedom, good and opportunities. Emancipatory social theory requires us to adopt an empirical stance that is open ended and profoundly sceptical of appearances, “common sense” and taken-for-granted knowledge.

Furthermore, we suggest that researchers are often defined as beyond politics, as disinterested observers and analysts, and knowledge is “innocent” and untainted by political agendas. However in the quest for rigour and knowledge, we preclude a debate about the politics of research production (Fine 2006). As representations of the social world, are a fundamental dimension of political struggles and intellectuals have a virtual monopoly in this realm (Bourdieu 1993), academics create virtual, textual and statistical realities which frame the existence of those who cannot name their own world (Lynch 2000). As Habermas (2006) observes a growing depoliticisation of crises by means of administrative decisions, technical knowledge, and legal procedures disengaged from democratic politics and public communication - such challenges urge us to recognise the ideological constraints on our thoughts as producers of knowledge, (Hirschman, 1993; Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). This requires reflexivity about the prejudices, assumptions, motivations and ideologies that shape our own reasoning and (more or less) unwittingly influence the phenomena we investigate the lenses through which we view them, and those things we fail to notice (Brownlie, 2006). By muting alternative voices or controversial topics, we ratify and legitimise dominant ideologies (Hirschman, 1993; Eagleton, 1991). In keeping with this, Tadjewski

(2012) discusses at length how marketing theory has frequently shied away from questions of racism and prejudice, often reaffirmed and reproduced in marketing's practices (Burton, 2009). For scholars who consider themselves public intellectuals or scholars adopting a political stance in their work is a conscious choice to avoid moral and ethical distance, it does not mean we are taking sides. Marketing scholars focusing on social justice issues must therefore constantly negotiate the contradictory state of being personally radical but publicly privileged who also possess the powers of final definition (Baker et al., 2004; Aguiar, 2016) in terms of theory development and meanings created.

Researching the powerful

In recent times we have witnessed a growing number of studies include the voices, contexts and circumstances of those who experience different forms and manifestation of vulnerability from a consumption and marketplace perspective (c.f. Baker et al. 2005; Hamilton 2012; Mason and Pavia 2006; Piacentini et al. 2014) to name but a few. These include various individuals or groups that for various internal or social circumstances are “at risk for stigmatisation, marginalisation, and perhaps unnecessarily limited options” (Pechmann et al, 2011 p. 25). However, there are few marketing studies on the influence of the wealthy and powerful from a marketplace context. In order to be socially impactful, we must also aim to explore the generative forces and processes that maintain others in positions of influence or dominance (Baker et al., 2004; Lynch, 2000). “Studying up”, as Aguiar (2016) discusses can unveil how social advantages and resources are reproduced, legitimated and used for private gain by elites who decide on behalf of the others. As exemplified by Ho's (2016) anthropological account of Wall Street, understanding the culture and shared assumptions of elites can be vital to understanding the functioning of the institutions that they control. However, elites often go unstudied because are hard to gain access to, so it is almost impossible

to conduct a meaningful survey of them (Aguiar, 2016). Moreover, society frequently takes elites' representations of themselves at face value (Ho, 2016), which can lead us to think we already understand them.

So, how do we conceptualise and interrogate the unfairness of privilege and its impact on the lives of many of our participants? As a theoretical tool, "privilege" can examine the previously invisible roles of those who occupy such positions (O'Sullivan, 1999). Social theorists suggest that the existence of privileged positions means that structures and systems are also destructive for those who occupy these social locations (McIntosh, 2002). Through the lens of privilege, the previous immutability of the lifestyle, behaviours and life choices of the elite can be examined and challenged (Choules, 2006). The significance of certain power characteristics will change with the specific context (McIntosh, 2002) and with it, the nature of the particular exclusionary discourse.

This issue is further complicated by the fact that the privilege accorded to empirical knowledge makes research powerful in its' own right. Habermas (2006; p.418-419) distinguishes between four categories of power; *political power*, which by definition requires a legitimisation process passing through a public sphere that has the capacity to foster considered public opinions. *Social power*, which depends on the status that one occupies within a stratified society; such statuses are derived from positions within functional systems which delivers *economic power* as a special kind of social power and the power exerted by the *media* as those in charge select and process politically relevant content and thus intervene in both the formation of public opinions and the distribution of influential interests. If privilege, in all its' forms sits unchallenged, then social spaces will reproduce the damage of social stratification and injustice. Integral to an emancipatory praxis is the need to include people who benefit from social arrangements and those who merely "watch" power unfolding, so that research on the daily lives of people are theorised and researched in relation to deep structural constraints, such

as those of capitalist markets or patriarchy. To this end, Fine and Weis (2012) call for *critical bifocality* - theoretical and empirical attention to structures *and* lives, enabling researchers to adjust to varied contexts and accompanying institutional arrangements as their work progresses.

Participation rhetoric and representational dilemmas

An emancipatory praxis, challenges researchers to interrupt the hegemony of elite voices that dictate what is good for others and engage in a polyphonic practice, which attempts to capture different voices (Smith and Russell, 2016). In other words, it negates looking at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of a dominant (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18), which only serves to sustain and legitimate the former's power (Hirschman, 1993). Rather, it suggests that researchers have the power to interrupt dominant conceptions and constructs, to reframe social realities and to introduce data typically withheld from popular view (Fine, 1996).

Towards this aim, we need to be aware of the rhetoric surrounding “participation” in our research, although Ozanne et al. (2017) detail the importance of inclusiveness – we should consider an expanded approach of “nothing about us without us” (Nagar, 2002). That is, as marketing scholars and researchers we need to seek counter-stories and ask “who is not here?” There is a danger that the voices of particular groups or forms of knowledge may be drowned out, systematically silenced, misunderstood or misrepresented as research and researchers engage with dominant academic and public discourses. (Fine 2001). To avoid this presence of absence, or the “dormitive framings” we fail to notice (Brownlie, 2006: p.508) we have an obligation to interrogate on whom we apply our scholarly gaze and who is protected or not as we write about the lives of our participants (Fine, 1994; Fine and Weis 1996). The legitimacy of one individual or group to represent another remains unchallenged in scholarship on social marginalisation as it intersects with markets and consumers. Although Lee (2017) suggests that

representation-focused research aims to develop an increasingly accurate representation of the world under study, debates on voice and authority have still received limited attention in marketing scholarship, with two very recent exceptions (Hutton and Lystor, 2020; Mamali, 2019). Even in critical marketing literature that denounces the hegemony of market-oriented goals in today's societies, authors will frequently default to "consumers" as the word that they use to refer to people going about their lives. More generally, theorising about people's relationship to marketing, or indeed any social phenomenon, will necessarily involve making claims about "typical" behaviour or relationships. Acknowledging those erased by theorising, being alert to whether our construction of a "typical consumer" systematically disadvantages some groups and seeking to redress the balance in other publications can and should be a normal part of our work.

We have a responsibility to examine whose experiences have been ignored, undermined, over-written in our studies, as the act of representation is a political act that involves a web of cultural meaning and social connection (Kobayashi, 1994). Even with those with whom we do write, in the absence of the empirical opportunity to provide an "own account" perspective we must be conscious about how we theorise and conceptualise the worlds of those with whom we have little contact. We must avoid, for example, the colonisation of their worlds for our own ends or the careful choice of their "best accounts" (or parts of these) to legitimise our claims and theories. As Belova et al (2008) argue, the challenge for the researchers "is to unravel the story without forgetting their own role in the making of it" (p. 496).

Commenting on the public life of representation in narratives, Gready (2013) highlights the positive turn in how marginalised and subaltern voices have increasingly been included in social science accounts but emphasises how these very participants still have little control over representation, interpretation and dissemination of their voices (Spivak, 1988). So "control"

for participants operates on a continuum from no control, from no sight of transcripts or no say in publication avenues) to full control; from commentary on the accuracy of the interview transcript, to commentary on analyses and interpretations of their interviews and commentary on research findings for publication (Miller, 2000). This continuum marks a shift for participants from information providers to analysts, from sources of information to partners in knowledge production. To this end we also need to negotiate our writing, which should be relevant, meaningful and clear to our participants (Nagar, 2002), and also in the “correct” academic style to get our research published. Although participatory action research aims to overcome these issues and has been successfully executed within marketing scholarship (c.f. Hill et al. 2015; 2016; Hutton, 2015; 2016; 2019), some troubling elements remain regarding ownership and power of the participant voice. As Gready (2013) stresses, voice without control is meaningless. Whilst the current marketing focus on relational engagement of stakeholders and working collaboratively to overcome barriers (Davis and Ozanne, 2019, Piacentini et al. 2019) edges us closer to being more democratic, we should also look to reconstitute the principles of participation and responsibility as it occurs through marketing discourses to discipline, subjugate and colonise us.

“Speaking back” to methodological troubles

In this section we discuss how emancipatory research might work in practice in response to the preceding set of methodological troubles we have just outlined. Progressive scholars (Apfelbaum, 2001; Baker et al., 2004; Fine, 2006, Heron, 1981) have attempted to suggest or document the type of measures that should be followed in order to achieve emancipatory outcomes. We draw on their ideas, founded on the dual premise of power sharing and the ethical right to research and have looked to the disciplines of sociology, education and social psychology to provide compelling examples of how the following responses work in practice:

reciprocal research relationships through dialogical theory building; systematized reflexivity; research coalitions for social action.

Reciprocal research relationships through dialogical theory building

Emancipatory research involves developing a reciprocal relationship between researcher and participant. This requires a democratisation of the research relationship so as to enable participants to understand and change their situation (Baker et al 2004; p.181). This should help to redress the imbalance created by the differences of power between the researcher (who ultimately retains the power) and the researched (Aguiar, 2016) This reciprocity may involve engaging individuals and communities in the early stages of research design, shaping, planning, developing and implementing the research plan as it is only through such participation that marginalised groups can begin to control the naming of their own social reality (Lynch, 2000; Aguiar, 2016). Thus, participatory research favours methodological approaches that allow collective analysis of how lived experiences of power and knowledge emerge (Hall, 1992).

The relational-engagement approach (Ozanne et al., 2017) advocates for greater relationship building with stakeholders who have first-hand experience in addressing social problems. Whilst we fully support this idea, an emancipatory-praxis approach pushes further advocating for individuals and communities represented by these relational stakeholders to enter into this engagement from the outset to facilitate a more enabling, more ethical and more democratic participatory experience. If participatory research is to make a central contribution, in providing an ethical, epistemological and political framework (Holland et al., 2008) it must be initiated and led by research participants. Otherwise participation is tokenistic and potentially oppressive (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008) in other words, participation becomes troubling and contradictory. Whilst, we acknowledge that researcher-led projects on social

issues in our discipline approach their work with a mindful and ethical sensitivity when representing the stories of participants, experienced participatory researchers remind us that marginalised people have interrogative histories, questioned by authorities (often as suspect people) and treated with antagonism and care-less-ness, so a democratised interpretation includes those who know from everyday life (Dodson, 2007; Hutton, 2019). This challenges us to think about what we mean by participation in research relationships.

A noteworthy example of the value of research initiated and led by participants is the work of Tuck et al (2008). Their Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD) is a YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research) initiative focused on education provision in New York City. Aged 16-22, the CREDD researchers are working class, ethnically diverse, and represent a wide range of educational experiences. As a non-academic and non-government-led research group, they approach research as a “right” (c.f. Appadurai, 2006), demanding access to the conversations, policies, theories and spaces to which they are typically denied and further demanding that their research informs these efforts:

“Our work stands in opposition to the kinds of research that have been and continue to be used for domination. Everyone is involved in developing research questions, project design, data collection, data analysis and dissemination – everyone is responsible for making their space a participatory space where we are not erased from our work”
(p.51)

CREDD exemplifies emancipatory research as a political process and attitude, practicing freedom and experimentation to generate answers to questions of personal and community concern. Their Gate-ways and Get-aways inquiry explored push-out activities in NYC public high schools and educational alternatives. Using surveys, focus groups, cold calling on elite educational decision-makers, memoirs, archival research and visual mapping activities the

group combined these insights with exercises from Boal's (2002) Feirean- inspired, Theatre of the Oppressed (through drama social reality is understood) to initiate co-theorising with participants. This is a powerful illustration of those on the edge researching and engaging in emancipatory praxis – embedding and critiquing aloud social injustice in their society, in their research sites, amongst the collective and within the larger community (p.50-51).

A related feature of reciprocity is theory building through dialogue (Lather 1991). This involves a democratisation of theoretical construction, a reordering of power relations between the researcher and the named world. Yet this seems counter-intuitive as theoretical imposition is the natural predisposition of researchers – grounding frameworks in the context of the lived experience challenges this issue (Lynch, 2000), thus helping to overcome representational dilemmas. When we combine the question of participation and representation (through dialogue) it is possible to identify a participation continuum where individuals get to choose the parameters of their relationship with researchers through co-knowledge production. This is important to highlight as the language and politics of engagement are concerned with truth and falsity in relation to a real world in which human interests and human suffering are real (Chilton, 2004). Developing and building reciprocal research relationships is not without its difficulties but that should not deter us from building this into our work as an important pre-design phase when establishing new studies. What it does entail is a radical (re)altering of our empirical work to consciously restructure power relations and to hand-over the mantle of expertise to the very people experiencing injustice and facilitate their stories in a way that is actionable (Fine 2006). This commitment to collaborative interpretation of meaning is challenging –the interpretative moment is understood as the intellectual provenance of the scholar, the research “expert.” As we have highlighted with the CREDD research initiative, co-theorising and cooperative inquiry at the analytical stage is possible through the adoption of particular methods that enable participants freedom to experiment.

To illustrate, Dodson's (1998) pioneering sociological study on low-income women's efforts to juggle childcare as they enter the low-pay US labour market. Using Interpretive Focus Groups (IFG's) she intentionally asked participants to unpick findings from her extensive in-depth interviews, asking "is this what you mean?" Participants examined data typed onto newsprint taped to the wall and from these activities, women offered analytical detail about the paradoxes of the data, suggesting to the researcher alternative ways to "get what we are saying", advising, "you can't just say it like that". Also using co-operative analysis, Schmalzbauer (2005) spent a year of active member observation in a grassroots organisation exploring the experiences of undocumented immigrants from Central-America. Her participant interviews revealed stories about poor working conditions, racism and abusive treatment by landlords, yet when asked if they felt there were barriers to social mobility in the United States, participants answered No. To address this contradiction Schmalzbauer used IFG's, asking community members to share their data by reading aloud from their transcripts and then facilitating a discussion around the emerging themes. This important step enabled her to decipher participants' codes of politeness and silence and helped her understand their fear of "speaking critically of America to an American" (p.832).

Habits of power and habits of hiding can shape many research encounters, but when community members take on the role of analyser, these habits are interrupted, enabling sharper and more transparent realities to surface. Buraway's (2004) call to move research discourse beyond the academy into silenced communities and social movements – means relinquishing our sole authority over interpretation. Inviting the ways that researched people observe, feel about, critique, agree with, or hold contempt for those who study them presents a more fundamental deviation from social norms (Dodson, 2007; p.840), but this is a valuable step in keeping participants worlds at the centre of analytical efforts.

Systematised reflexivity

Informed by democratic engagement and a commitment to change, systematised reflexivity occurs through the constant analysis of one's own theoretical and methodological presuppositions whilst retaining an awareness of other people's definitions and understandings (Lather, 1986; Lynch, 2000). Whilst reflexive praxis entails examining issues related to the research process, such as the authority and representation of voices – newer reflexive aspects have evolved to include the way researchers consciously “write” themselves into the text through an interrogation of their social location and an analysis of their discipline as sites of knowledge production. This is apparent, for example in Śliwa's et al (2015) sound reflexivity on how their assumptions arising from being “middle class, white, Western academic subjects, belonging to a different generation than most of [their] students” (p. 13) led them to design and implement their pedagogic intervention in ways that initially hindered their judgment of some students' work as uncritical. By interrupting data in this way through intertextuality such as pleated texts (Richardson, 2000) researchers edge closer to dismantling oppressive representations in their work. If researchers heighten their awareness of the cultural conditions of their past and current experiences (Hirschman, 1993) they may start noticing things they would otherwise fail to (Brownlie, 2006), whilst growing more mindful of their presence and effects on their work. Cultivating researcher reflexivity that attends to the researcher/researched dynamics and to the historically, culturally and contextually situated nature of the knowledge we produce (see e.g. Tadajewski and Brownlie, 2008; Bettany and

Woodruffe-Burton, 2009) is, thus, seen as a fundamental element of any emancipatory effort (Hirschman, 1993). Recently, acknowledgement of colonising conditions, researcher guilt and confessional accounts of impression management for instrumental (researcher) gain have emerged (Mamali, 2019). Whilst reflexivity is not necessary for emancipatory praxis, an ethically disinterested reflexivity would not result in any tangible change to research efforts (Baker et al., 2004), it should therefore be paramount to embed a reflexive element in our work to surface how we as researchers can inadvertently contribute to injustice. Denial of the researcher standpoint only distorts knowledge production as self-emancipation through reflection leading to a transformed consciousness or 'perspective transformation' (Fine, 2006; Habermas 2006).

Research coalitions for social action

An emancipatory praxis must apply to all aspects of research involving the conceptualisation, design, interpretation and action/advocacy stage of our work. The linking of researchers with those experiencing injustice is vital if research is to be part of capacity-building process for social change (Baker et al. 2004). So reciprocal dialogue and reflexivity enable and support collaborative scholarship which is the impetus for action. These coalitions, whether formal or informal can bring about deeper intellectual analysis, original approaches to framing social problems and a mindset of innovation to deal with the troubles of the political context of research (Fonow and Cook 1991; p.5). This moves researchers to look for ways to engage in activist research collaborations to unearth, interrupt and open new frames for intellectual and political theory and change (Fine, 2001). In activist collaboration: i) authors are explicit about the space in which they stand politically and theoretically, ii) texts display critical analysis of current social and ideological arrangements and; iii) narratives reveal and invent disruptive

images of what could be (Fine, 2001; Lather 1986). As emancipatory praxis is anticipatory, offering a politics of possibility, knowledge is therefore best gathered in the midst of social change projects through collaborative power-sensitive conversations (Haraway, 1988).

Research coalitions, learning partnerships and working groups constitute mutual educational forums to engage in such conversations and to critically work through theory, design, interpretation and use of knowledge. In this way, research is made available to participants as a tool for critique, progress and action. It evolves from the production of original ideas and new knowledge (as it is normally defined in academia and other knowledge-based institutions) - into the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one's current knowledge (Appadurai 2006). To illustrate this, we turn to a Mumbai-based initiative, PUKAR: Partners for Urban Knowledge and Action and Research. This collective brings together young people from the urban area, journalists, architects and early career researchers to develop a common dialogue on the future of the city. Their goal is to combine research and action in the arts, humanities, film and media, with research on the economy, infrastructure, and planning. Drawing on urban sociology, coalition participants develop essays about their buildings, their streets, and their families, taking photographs of those things they know about, to envision more public forms of debate and communication. This wider conception of research is a conduit for participants to develop the triple capacity to inquire, to analyse and to communicate through research as an essential capacity for democratic citizenship (Appadurai, 2002; 2006). In research coalitions, activist groups from among people motivated to take political action by a strong commitment to their own group, later, become willing to work with other groups (such as researchers) in order to foster the interests of their own (Hochschild, 2006, p.59).

Using research coalitions for social action, Lykes (1989) co-conceived a political activist-based research project with Guatemalan Indian women. Documenting what the

psychology of liberatory struggle involved over a ten-year period, the study produced a gendered archive of political resistance which, without collective development, would have remained hidden and repressed – the very thing Lykes and her participants sought to overcome. It remains a concrete resource for exiting Guatemalan communities to refer to, as well as an important reference for social psychologists exploring the theoretical issue of political resistance (Fine, 2001). Similarly, Cahill et al's (2008) research project, "Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of Young Womyn of Color", examined the relationship between mischaracterisations of young women and a lack of resources in their community. Working with researchers from City University New York, they determined the focus of the project as equal partners by "facing stereotypes as a collective" (p.106). Using free writing and reflective note taking as research rituals to enable them to think through issues around personal experiences of racism within their neighbourhoods, served as preparation for the sharing and comparing of excerpts as a form of political communication, which Habermas (2006) deems an essential mechanism for the enhancement of cooperative learning and collective problem solving. Commenting on the politics of research coalitions Lykes observes, "the decision to engage in collaborative research does not de facto resolve competing interests – rather it affirms a commitment on the part of both the researcher and participant to engage the research process as constructors of our own reality (1989; p.179).

Piacentini et al (2019) identify how stakeholder and community relationships are difficult to establish, maintain and gain momentum due to a number of barriers related to goal misalignment, resource tensions and misconceptions, however it is vital that we continue to build research collaboration around common social justice interests. Although we cannot erase power differentials entirely, it is through the praxis of struggle – through reflection and action upon the world – that we are able to transform it (Freire, 1997). As researchers we have a responsibility to come out from the political spaces we occupy and take up the responsibility

of working in the public sphere. To produce collaborative research with an eye towards action, we need to consider relinquishing procedural control and sole analytical authority to participants. As our examples illustrate, research coalitions and collectives develop learning partnerships, they invert who frames and who is framed by “problems” and who gets to construct research questions, designs, methods, interpretations and outcomes. The value of collaborative relationships and dialogical theory building is that ultimately, research becomes part of the lives of participants - they become the architects of critical inquiry within an emancipatory praxis framework.

Insert Figure 1 here

Final reflections: reimagining research for social justice

From the outset, our intention has been to provoke a conversation in marketing scholarship about the overlooked political nature of doing research by identifying a set of methodological troubles researchers can encounter, particularly those who research issues of social (in)justice. In speaking back to these struggles, we introduced a set of responses to illustrate how emancipatory research might work in practice. Moving forward, a central task for emancipatory praxis researchers is to confront issues of empirical accountability — the need to offer grounds for accepting a researcher's description and analysis, and the search for workable ways of establishing the trustworthiness of data in new paradigm of inquiry (Lather, 1986). The radical pulse of emancipatory praxis can be traced through learning partnerships, coalitions and communities of practice organised around social concerns and in liberal attempts to inform or influence policy. Ultimately the intention of emancipatory research is action. Mies (1983) reminds us that “social change is the starting point of science” so in order to be involved in its

realisation we, as researchers must undertake our own engaged praxis, abandoning the safety of focusing on subjects at the centre of mainstream scholarly attention to embrace the creative potential of being on the edge and using it productively with an eye towards transformation. Emancipatory praxis offers marketing scholars an alternative methodological direction in the hope that more impactful and useful ways of knowing can emerge. The issues identified in this paper are not about moving from the edge into the centre of knowledge making in marketing scholarship, but rather about recognising problematic collaborations, redefining scholarly endeavours, and reimagining roles in research with a social justice emphasis. By researching on the edge, research becomes the means to push the constraints of one's established habits of mind and to gain reflexive and critical perspective (Thompson, 2017). When researching on the edge we use our personal, cultural and social locations and memoirs as important sources of knowledge which in turn inform our views on marketing phenomena and what might be right or wrong with the world. Some scholars may choose to stay resolutely on the edge as a form of principled self-exclusion, what Chomsky (2000) views as an important source of independent, external pressure on the mainstream. Others may elect to adopt the status of the outsider-within (Hill-Collins 1991) or choose marginality as a highly adaptive strategy as it represents a form of empowerment as it has been chosen by the individual not imposed on them (Rubin 1982). Whichever stance researchers embrace, many social scientists have a contradictory view of themselves and the world (Unger 2000), which creates tension for their work but yet also contributes a potency and diversity to social justice debates and to the marketing discipline more broadly. Our emancipatory praxis framework advocates staying on the edge to be of use. Whilst this may appear counter-intuitive, we believe that when it comes to social justice, we can observe unjust phenomena and its manifestations with fresh eyes unencumbered by conventional methods, approaches (Tellis, 2017) and apolitical value-systems.

We do acknowledge that emancipatory research praxis poses many challenges – most significantly, its fundamental challenge to the institutionalised power relations between researchers and research participants. However, as disciplines such as marketing are evolving, a greater emphasis is being placed on impact and transformation as evidenced by performance-based research funding systems in many countries, devoting attention to research’s impact and effects on society. Within this context, an emancipatory praxis is more enabling than restraining as it widens the lens through which we know the world (Baker et al, 2009). We cannot ignore that we live and research in a more unjust reality (Fine 2006), so to render conditions more just in our work requires research and advocacy to become inextricably linked. This means recognising and naming rigid and distorted notions of knowledge which fail to capture the textured experience of “doing” social justice research. Ultimately our research must strive to name and speak back to the reality of our world, participants’ world - the unjust world in which we all live (Cammorota and Fine 2006; Freire 1997).

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