The Research Imagination Amid Dilemmas of Engaging Young People in Critical Participatory Work

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Abstract: The article is based on qualitative research conducted in the UK and the USA by three critical social field researchers drawn to work with young people in participative ways. The work was grounded in the researchers' commitments to researching to "make a difference" in the lives of young people. By promoting participant engagement that might affect personal understanding and policy change. The authors discuss their use of and dilemmas of practice using critical research strategies across three separate research projects. The young people in each study face a range of deprivations and life difficulties. The methods draw from perspectives that counter the resurgent logic of positivism that are increasingly favored in contemporary academic research by funding authorities and that reflect the prevailing governing mentalities that thwart critical emancipatory research in this era of post-neoliberalism.

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1. Introduction

This article describes our commitment to participatory research with young people. In it, we portray dilemmas we encountered and the strategies we devised to circumvent impediments to our work. First, we describe the general theoretical framework of critical participatory research. Secondly, we focus on the dilemma of access in our own specific research projects, specifically those created within

the changing political, social and economic realities in which processes of research and the construction of knowledge operate today. Third, we detail particular ways we worked to open up spaces for more imaginative work by describing strategies we employed to make spaces for critical research in the context of the profoundly conservative political and economic contexts which currently prevail in the USA and the UK. We then discuss dilemmas related to the use of research findings and limits of power among researchers in funded or state-governed projects. Finally, we argue for a broadened conceptual research agenda, one that calls for new imaginative methodologies and strategies that are cross disciplinary, fully participatory and pressed forward through multiple grassroots-like collaborations. [1]

2. The Theoretical Frame for Participatory Research

Our work with young people is grounded in a theoretical framework of social justice, which is to say that we hope that our efforts will "make a difference" for participants and others (SCHOSTAK & SCHOSTAK, 2008). Specifically, social justice as a theoretical frame relies on a critical dialogue informed by diverse theoretical perspectives that pursue critique of inequity and "intentional action to make radical, fundamental changes in societal structures" (CAMBRON-McCABE & McCARTHY, 2005, p.203). The imperative for such change is located within assertions prevalent in critical theories that human life requires navigation amongst unequal relations of power, privilege, and material conditions (WEIS & FINE, 2004). Participatory inquiry affords a particular methodological structure through which social justice oriented research can move beyond critique to pursue its articulated investments in socially transformative action (CAMMAROTA & FINE, 2008; HERON & REASON, 1997; KEMMIS & McTAGGART, 2000; LINCOLN & GUBA, 2000). Our understanding of participation as a theoretical and methodological construct has grown out of a radical political-cultural agenda that has stressed the importance of listening to and honoring "voices" and perspectives of those most fundamentally affected by the circumstances in which they are placed (GARDNER & LEWIS, 1996). We deliberatively work from an ontological perspective that asserts the social world "does not consist of separate things but of relationships we co-author" (REASON & BRADBURY, 2001, p.10) and which views truth as "not a matter of static fact, but a quality of relationship" (REASON, 1998, p.165). It would be intellectually naïve to conflate this understanding of participation with the usual processes of representative democracy, since these are vulnerable to the generation of a hypergovernability. In hypergovernability, a disproportionate emphasis is placed on the functioning of democratic institutions that position society's members as beneficiaries of such institutions rather than as deliberative actors in their own right (CUADRA, 2007; O'MALLEY & AGUILAR, 2010). Within a logic of hypergovernability, citizens are enticed to become beneficiaries of democratic institutions in a way that cedes the capacity to be deliberative actors who make public decisions, and which, in effect, can serve to counter ideals of participation. Conversely, within participatory research traditions, the "right" to participate in authoritative research processes that create knowledge about the groups and circumstances in which we find ourselves has come to be understood as a crucial aspect of citizenship and, for

some, even a fundamental human right (CLEAVER, 2001). In our distinct research projects we followed tenets identified by critical, feminist and participatory traditions that reflect research conducted within a social justice framework through processes that foster agency and active participation (BLACKBURN & CHAMBERS, 2002; GARDNER & LEWIS, 1996; ESCOBAR 1995; LAPERRIÉRE, 2006; CAMMAROTA & FINE, 2008; KINCHELOE & McLAREN, 2000; WEISS & FINE, 2004). [2]

The roots of research methods which specifically emphasize participation can be traced back more than 60 years to LEWIN's (1946) work with groups in communities, and can be contextualized within MARX's assertion that the point of philosophy is not to just interpret the world but to change it (CROTTY,1998). Such approaches have grown exponentially across diverse disciplines and have gained credibility with claims of personal, political and professional gains among a wide range of groups of people (NOFFKE & SOMEKH, 2009). Participatory work has been particularly significant to development studies in the context of the poor countries of the "South" (CHAMBERS, 1983). Scholarship on developmental participatory schemes in research have been used to great effect in marginalized communities in the developed world too, but are notable for their use in countries where unrelenting poverty and deprivation make the need for development acute (CHAMBERS, 1983; MORRELL, 2008; BIGGS, 1989). Feminist research that emphasizes participant authority and voice to make central the experiences of those who have been silenced or absent, through the use of narrative, oral history, and autobiographical approaches (DEVAULT, 1999, HESSE-BIBER & YAISER, 2004; NAPLES, 2003; OAKLEY, 1994), also inform participatory research methodologies and strategies. At the same time, feminist researchers caution against a form of representational "ventriloquism" in which inquirers assert the capacity to speak for a marginalized group, often simultaneously reinscribing such persons as homogenous, coherent, and univocal groups (BRYDON-MILLER, 2004). These methodological errors that display in-group consensus without attention to modal outliers or multiple experiences are exceedingly problematic and must be understood as hegemonic constructions (BRYDON-MILLER, 2004; WEIS & FINE, 2004). [3]

The children's rights movement and new developments in the sociology of childhood have also redefined established views of the abilities of children and young people as agents who can participate creatively and effectively in research that concerns them (ALDERSON, 2001; HILL, 2004; KELLETT, 2005). These new notions have put forward a view of children as competent social actors (ALDERSON, 2001; CHRISTENSEN, 2004) who can play an active role in the construction of research and in their conscious commenting on the world in which they find themselves (PROUT & JAMES, 1997, p.23). Thus, participation of young people and children in research is becoming acknowledged as beneficial among researchers with social justice goals. [4]

More recently, participatory action research with young people has drawn academic attention (FINE, 2008). It is centered on a social justice agenda, steeped in critical race and feminist methods but also pedagogically bound,

multigenerational, politically communitarian and action-oriented. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) includes: participation (researchers and participants co-conceptualizing and implementing research); reflection as collective critique (reflection on practice, relationships and interpretation); communitarian politics (change aimed at justice and satisfaction of participants); research (not only community activism) and education (skills for organizing, disseminating and fostering social change). Such research calls first for researchers to move from positions of observation or witness to understanding, and then to shift once again to rally with young people by teaching them methods of research and working with them in smaller collectives as researchers themselves. It then seeks to awaken public consciousness that moves to action (CAMMAROTA & FINE, 2008; MORRELL, 2008; OAKES & RODGERS, 2006). YPAR is derived from the activist work of scholars of color in the United States including HORTON's work at the Highlander Center during the American Civil Rights movement (GINWRIGHT, 2008). Others trace its roots to FREIRE (2006 [1971]) and additional activist scholars in South America, and other notable participatory researchers (HERON & REASON, 1997; REASON, 2005). Current YPAR research strategies hold as central the "social analyses narrated by low income and working class adolescents and young adults" (FINE & WEIS, 1996, p.264). [5]

In short, participatory work relies on collective investigation, indigenous knowledge, participation, communitarian politics, education, and collective action (CAMMAROTA & FINE, 2008). Participants may come to recognize and understand the contradictions and conflicts that make up their world as they are involved in opening and working through these tensions toward new possibilities. Such work cultivates knowledge about circumstances amongst participants that allows them to see their world from a less partial and occluded viewpoint and to make some resolve about it. FRASER (1990) calls this dynamic the counter public, a term she used to explain ways that marginalized groups excluded from the public space form their own public sphere as parallel discursive arenas. These counter publics are cultural and social venues through which the subaltern create and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities and desires. Thus, researchers who hold critical perspectives and have social justice agendas have selected and developed participatory research strategies. They have integrated the two approaches from recognition that working to develop "full throated" participation holds emancipatory potential for young people, children and others who are silenced or marginalized—and develops the scope for critical research agendas. However, circulations of power remain a substantive dilemma within participatory methods as the representation of research findings are typically structured by an academic or other professional who coordinates the collaborative process (McCLIMENS, 2008). [6]

3. Dilemmas of Participatory Research

The prevailing interests of the neoliberal nation state, implicitly influence much of the research currently funded in the social sciences in the contemporary political contexts of the UK and USA. The matters of most importance in a particular setting are those that are most likely to be funded and endorsed by powerful social and policy regulators (KENWAY & FAHEY, 2009). Critical research, however, works to expose and dismantle the complex architecture of organizations, particularly working to destabilize notions of power, knowledge, and authority. Such conflicts lead to dilemmas in critical participatory research. SCHOSTAK & SCHOSTAK (2008) observed wryly that we should expect resistance and impediments when our research has critical aims and aspirations, since it will involve questions that can make the powerful feel uncomfortable. Critical, participatory research also creates dilemmas for researchers as well about exclusion from funding and other academic opportunities. [7]

In the section that follows the brief descriptions of our three separate research projects below, which we reference throughout the remainder of the article, we present dilemmas related to access to participants for research. We feature our work here not because we regard it as exemplary, but because our examples lend credibility to the common dilemmas that befall researchers who work in participatory ways.

- The Las Vegas Project, conducted in late 1990s, studied the ways that young girls make sense of their lives amid the mediated sexual and consumer culture that surrounds them in relationship to their own sexual identity, gender roles and sexuality as adolescents (DENTITH, 1998, 2004).
- The UK project, completed in 2004, investigated teenage pregnancy and was funded by the British Department of Health. It was a nationwide project set in three seaside towns that sought to understand the complexities involved in "becoming" and "being" a young parent (BELL et al., 2004).
- The 2002 East Coast Project investigated individual and collective engagement with autobiographical narratives of senior year students in the US participating in a school sponsored, voluntary, extra-curricular group process experience and the myriad ways that a peer group negotiates meaning and understanding of male childhood sexual abuse survival in the mid 2000s (O'MALLEY 2003, 2007). [8]

3.1 Dilemmas of access and participation in a post-neoliberal context

All field research requires one to secure the participation of "subjects." Significant difficulties often emerged in projects such as those we discuss here. At one level we discuss difficulties of access and the irritating power of gatekeepers—issues which are well established in methodological literature. However, the dilemmas of access to participation in research for young people are newly specific, given the post-neoliberal ambience in the US and UK. Our examples indicate something of the way authorities react when research touches on dangerous or hidden topics,

dialogue that might draw young people away from espoused traditional values or threaten the powerful base of market ideologies in a given locale. [9]

In the Las Vegas study with adolescent girls, school principals refused to allow space for the researcher to create extracurricular activities that might foster discussion of relevant issues of gender and sexuality, even though parents granted full permission. The ethical issues involved in the question of parental consent for research with young people under the age of sixteen remain complex in their own right. Principals' resistance in this study came from concerns that the discussions among the young women might involve some critique of the city's tourist and sex industry or engender opposition from religious groups. Any such talk was not to be sanctioned by the schools, and fears among public and private school officials of possible repercussions from a highly vocal Religious Right and the powerful corporate entertainment industry in the city were highly evident. [10]

The silencing of young women and their rights to engage in inquiry demonstrates the ways that authorities curtail dialogue and use their jurisdiction to protect themselves from any scrutiny and maintain support of the established power base in the city. In the UK project state funded schools slowly granted access for the research. A private school principal did not refuse access but invited the researcher to speak at the school exclusively to senior pupils aged 16-18 about the findings of the research on "other" young people—the kind who had become pregnant in their teenage years. His power operated to silence the participation and involvement of young people in important research that was about them. His actions offer interesting evidence of his power to protect members of this private school from "corrupting influences" but also from inspection of their actions—it offers insight into the protection offered by the free-market spaces of private schools. [11]

In both examples, space for dialogue and inquiry were denied. Space connotes not just a physical space, but a social space (combining social practices and relationships), a cultural space (where values, rights and cultures are created and changed), and a discursive space (where there is room for dialogue, confrontation, deliberation and critical thinking and the growth of the counterpublic. KEMMIS and McTAGGART (2000), in fact, assert participatory action research as a critical project "locating practice within frameworks of participants' knowledge, in relation to social structures, and in terms of social media" (p.600). Certainly, these examples of exclusion speak to prevailing views that young people are not competent witnesses to their lives. Instead, they are "confined to state of impotency, at the mercy of adults, some of whom, as history teaches us, cannot be relied upon" (HILL, 2004, p.83). Moreover, the denial of such space occurs because the work threatens the power dynamics and knowledge flow that governs contemporary Western societies, particularly in relationships that involve children and young people. [12]

4. Strategies That Transgress Power Relations: Insider Spaces

Researchers can work to navigate space as insiders and use novel approaches that seek to transgress relations of power. For example, access to and participation among the young people in the East Coast project was dramatically different. The work took place within a school site where the researcher was an insider, a close colleague of the school authorities that governed this institution and a school administrator at another affiliated site. While insider status can have difficulties regarding credibility, perspective, and power relations, it was used as a strategy in this case to negotiate the school system's gate keeping functions that typically prohibit social research in areas of youth experience perceived as controversial and potentially creating poor publicity for the school. The impact that schools have in creating large, selective voids in the research base is documented, for example, in the methodology of the National School Climate Survey (KOSCIW, DIAZ & GREYTAK, 2008) which reports an inability to gain access to lesbian, gay, bi and transgender (LGBT) youth participants via public schools in the USA. As a consequence, research outreach to LGBT youth is conducted instead via community organizations and social networking. This role of public schools in both constructing and erasing research populations is highly problematic. Deploying insider status as a research strategy to gain access to contexts and participants must be twinned with a commitment to the rights of participants to authentically represent experiences and issues that are important to them within the research base that informs educational and social policy. Thus, the methodological issue here involves navigating school constraints on access that might be posed by administrators as protecting youth or schools but which also have the effect of surveilling and disciplining the construction of social knowledge around contested issues (FOUCAULT, 1979). [13]

Gaining access in the Las Vegas study and finding ways to participate under the radar occurred when the researcher abandoned formal channels and explored alternative sites utilized by young people including coffee houses, used clothing stores, and underground music venues frequented by young people. These informal structures actually opened up the research to topics that better represented the issues of most interest among the young women—sexuality, same sex attractions, and the sex industry, for example, were identified as desired topics among them. A more authentic dialogue ensued. A group discussion on the meanings and practices associated with being labeled a "slut" or a "ho" and the experiences of one of the young women whose boyfriend arranged for a sexual experience between her and a lesbian acquaintance revealed the pressing concerns of the young women. Eventually, all the activities were orchestrated by the young women, not the researcher, which opened up possibilities that stemmed from their desires more than the intent of the researcher. [14]

LATOUR (2004) maintained that as a first principle, critical researchers are required to "jeopardise this privilege of being in command" (p.216). In order to consistently shake and stir the conventional power relationships between those researched and those who are researching, we seek out transgressive ways of

working with young people, taking seriously LATOUR's (2004) challenge that "the sociologist does not know or presume to know what society is made of; instead they [sic] seek informants who may" (p.210). There are of course risks involved in accepting that respondents' conscious and reported knowledge about their situation is in some way a complete and final representation. Gendered, raced classed and other positionalities can play a role in opening up or limiting the self-knowledge. Thus, we want to claim meaning in both the fluid knowledge people hold about their own situations and in the interpretive abilities of the researcher. We also argue the benefits of introducing respondents to concepts and understandings drawn from academic work that are most pressingly relevant to their own circumstances in order to check for any resonances of interpretations that are being made about them. Our turn toward participatory knowledge, then, is contextualized within a Bakhtinian understanding of truth and meaning as dialogically constructed, attending to "a 'multiplicity of consciousnesses'; the contextual specificity of social interactions; and the often exclusionary methods by which one voice gains closure over others; as well as, crucially, dialogue and resistance to such closure" (CIMINI, 2010, p.409). [15]

4.1 Data generation

FINE (1994) advocates navigating the in-between space that "both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of "Others" (p.70). This requires us to engage a reflexive turn amongst our own subjectivities and the discursive relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, and location within a discourse that seeks to reinvent "others" through alternative understandings and representations. In the sections that follow, we describe some strategies of promise in our work that moves forward the participatory agenda within our desire to work to transgress power relations. Such strategies metaphorically shove the hyphen in favor of the researched toward more democratized methods, implicating researchers in the need to relinquish some or reinvent definitions and practices of authority. [16]

4.2 Interviewing

Each of our field projects favored participatory strategies in the research designs. O'MALLEY's East Coast project fore-grounded democratic relationships with participants by structuring collaborative inquiry groups around shared narratives. Working with procedures that value research with active subjects rather than on constructed others, participants themselves identified the experiences they wished to investigate and the processes for collaborative inquiry. Through this process, youth inquirers identified personal histories of male childhood sexual abuse as one focus of study, largely because of its exclusion from official school discourse. In this case, youth participants first took up the shared narrative of a male peer who addressed his experiences as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. This trajectory became an opportunity for the survivor to enact a personally distinct agency in how he narrates himself to others and to himself. Further, it exposed and fractured for the peer group essentialized representations of the "other" in ways that allowed for more conscious understanding of the

limitations and power dynamics inherent in how they interpret and identify one another. Participatory focus group techniques here facilitated youth choices about exposing and filling particular silences that exist in the school setting but which have importance for them as individuals and as a peer group. This is a crucial distinction regarding how the school might place whole experiences sous rature, or under erasure (DERRIDA, 1967; SPIVAK, 1974) in a hegemonic construction of youth experience that radically differs from and obscures youths' descriptors. [17]

We do not claim that these twinned strategies of insider status and rights of youth to contribute to knowledge about them guarantee the innocence of research, but they do allow significant questions to be asked about the politics of research. In DENTITH's Las Vegas project, for example, testimonio (BEVERLEY, 2000) styles of interview generated lengthy, in-depth accounts told by the subject/protagonist as central witness of the events in her experience. The researcher's questions were omitted from each 2-3 hour interview transcription and a novella-like account of each girl's life was created. This oral testimony proved to be cathartic, an affirmation of self, or painful reflections of empowerment or loss, resounding with the awareness felt by participants in early feminist conscious-raising sessions (BEVERLEY, 2000). For example, one of the Hispanic girls in the study was extremely successful in school, with the highest scores in college entrance exams as compared to her peers in her large high schools. She received many accolades and advice from well-meaning teachers and school counselors who recognized her capabilities and assumed that she would pursue rigorous post-secondary education. Her family, however, was quite poor, without legal citizenship status. She was needed at home to care for younger siblings while her parents worked sporadically but unpredictably for cash wages when available. Her written account of the almost daily difficulties she experienced navigating the demands of her traditional Mexican boyfriend and her parents with her own desires, restricted her from participating in many of the opportunities offered to her by others. Writing and talking about her life, led to the inevitable realization of the difficult choices and insurmountable obstacles she would need to make and/or likely face in her future; ones that would either thwart her academic ambitions or threaten the traditions of family and love relationship with others. [18]

Using other methods, MEASOR's UK project devised advisory groups to conduct peer research (WILLIAMS, 2004), which worked across the researched-researcher hyphen (FINE, 1994). Local advisory groups of young people were established, and had power over the direction and content of the research, which dramatically shifted the focus of the research gaze, drawing researchers' attention to what was important to young people (OLITSKY & WEATHERS, 2005). MEASOR and colleagues (BELL et al., 2004) trained a number of young people in techniques of qualitative research. The following account was taken from the field notes created during that project:

> "I set up a 'modelling interview' with Annette a teenage mother I interviewed her about her experience of 'being' a parent but at the same time tried to demonstrate experientially how to interview other young parents. Annette identified her significant experiences of teenage conception and parenting and considered how she could

discuss this with other teenage mothers. I checked my 'hunches' about what interviewed her about her experience of 'being' a parent but at the same time tried to demonstrate experientially how to interview other young parents. Annette identified her significant experiences of teenage conception and parenting and considered how she could discuss this with other teenage mothers. I checked my 'hunches' about what was significant against Annette's experiences being careful to identify what might be distinctive about her experience. This established a basic topic guide for Annette to use in her interviews leaving space for other areas to emerge" (MEASOR, field notes, February 15, 2002). [19]

Following the traditions of qualitative research MEASOR offered Annette a model of how to engage in conversation with a purpose with other teenage parents. She listened carefully to Annette while "listening beyond" (MEASOR, 1985), which involved listening sympathetically to a painful story but also thinking about ways data connected to themes. They discussed the underpinning themes, the sociological co-ordinates, as this was crucial for fostering her part in analysis of the data. [20]

While influenced by FINE's (1994) work on crossing the researcher-researched hyphen to apply our own work to practice and policy support, we acknowledge the limits of our efforts. We aimed to break through some power differentials and inscriptions of traditional research, and in the accounts presented above we offer some details of the ways we sought to incorporate LATOUR's (2004) urgings about "doing" research that did not reproduce familiar relations of power among the young people and adults. Instead, we attended to a rigorous reflexivity, one that often required complex responses to and engagements with the research participants. At times, we offered support for and generosity of engagement through our listening to painful and deeply harbored secrets. We held back advice or and expressions of surprise, working to affirm their experiences while doing our best to not "objectify" or evaluate them. At times, we offered means for problematizing experiences with them by talking aloud with them and offering social tools for deconstruction and thinking broadly, and in more complex ways with them. [21]

4.3 Quality of knowledge issues

We fully acknowledge the importance of guarding against any romantic tendency to idealize participatory methods and we recognize our own difficulties in always remembering to do so (BENTLEY, 1989). Participation can be limited, contingent on knowledge and socio-political barriers. It is important to consider that developing participative research strategies implies developing participants' knowledge and social capital. The account of our interviewing strategies above offers some insights into the ways we sought to accomplish this demand. Feminist standpoint research values the knowledge of those marginalized (HARDING, 1987). Anthropologists, working in development projects, accord significance to indigenous knowledge, and values the ways that people work skillfully to manage their resources (PANE & ROCCO, 2009). We need to ask, however, if that apparent knowledge alone is sufficient for researching one's own

context or is additional support or input needed. As KELLETT and NIND (2005) argue in relation to encouraging child-led research, the barrier to children carrying out research is not age but the need for research skills, and they can be taught to youth. Research strategies need to be developed to avoid any simple methodological ventriloquism (FULLER, 1995). When training youth as researchers is taken seriously then, researchers might achieve a hybrid identity between participation and research among themselves (FINE & WEIS 1996). [22]

4.4 Transgressing relations of power through participatory research

In all the projects, transgressive intent moved beyond a rejection of objectivist methodologies and researcher neutrality. When focusing on topics of such intense or social taboo and individual pain, conventional practices might encourage researchers to bracket off emotion so that the research participants cannot see our empathy, horror, or anger in relation. We find it ethically unacceptable for adults to enter the private worlds of young people through research to learn of realities such as abuse suffered by them, and then to withhold visibly human reactions, or maintain distance from participants through reliance on objectivist methods. This raises ethical dilemmas about the effects of re-inscribing adult silence and power and the unintentional possibility that abuse might be normalized. For ANZALDÚA (1987), the border is *una herida abierta*, an open wound that bleeds. Non-transgressive research methodologies reify researcher-researched borders in a way that opens wounds, particularly when researching such issues. [23]

In O'MALLEY's East Coast study, one of the participants in the group process being studied had deliberatively prepared an autobiographical narrative in which he shared his experience as a survivor of sexual abuse. The narrative was prepared in advance and in partnership with counseling staff at the school, and marked a significant moment of personal agency in terms of meeting a personal desire to share with his peers something of that which was hidden, invisible, and "othered" in his experience. The focal event in Drew's shared narrative involved a vacation at the shore with his grandmother and family members close in age to him when he was fourteen, the summer he was preparing to enter high school. This vacation was an annual event, and Drew cherished it each year because there were no parents and his grandmother "spoiled us all week long!" The night before they left for the shore, everyone going on the trip slept at his grandmother's house, where they ate dinner, joked and watched TV, and stayed up laughing until eleven. Drew recalls going to bed filled with anticipation, thinking of "bright, sandy beaches." With courage and integrity, he transitioned further into his narrative saying

> "I thought I'd never fall asleep. But I did, and not a day goes by that I wish the visions of a bright, sandy beach kept me awake ... even when my eyes adjusted, a pitch black cover outlined the room's furniture, the only sound heard was the clock ticking. Even at three in the morning the clock still ticks. I could feel every fiber of the soft quilt that lay under me. I could taste the dryness on my lips ... my senses were working and I was there, but I couldn't believe it. To my terror, when I woke up that

night, I was pinned on my stomach, with a man on my back" (O'MALLEY, field notes, March 12, 2003) [24]

Drew reflected on the horror and betrayal of this sexual abuse by saying that in the moment he could not scream, cry, or move. He was physically incapable of stopping this assault from someone who was "bigger, older, and stronger" and was terrified of even trying to stop him. In a quiet voice Drew added "fear struck me in a place that I never knew existed, and hope I never know again." He tried to dissociate from this abuse as it occurred by thinking about Easter dinner, racing new matchbox cars on grandmom's porch, and swimming out to the horizon, but "in the darkness I remained." [25]

While the original study (O'MALLEY, 2003) provides a more comprehensive engagement with Drew's narrative, his rational for sharing it in the group process, and the peer group's response, the deeply personal nature of his shared narrative argues here for nothing other than participation. In other words, the researcher who witnesses this narrative has an ethical obligation to be humanly present to both the speaker and the peer group. Observation, note taking, recording, and journaling all fall far short of the ethical imperative to be present, to visibly engage, to relate and respond as a human being in this context. Insofar as one of the primary purposes of inquiry is to heal the alienations that characterize modern consciousness, participation provides a throughway to relationality and healing that objectivist and Cartesian methods necessarily reinscribe via the distance and fragmentation that they evoke (REASON, 2005). Within a paradigm of participation, researcher and researched become co-inquirers who are collectively engaged in, transformed by, and transforming of the inquiry process. [26]

5. Dilemmas Regarding the Use of Research

All research requires attention to outcomes, and, in the case of endorsed projects, researchers can be painfully alerted to the limits of their power in the dissemination of findings. These issues are particularly significant when research is funded by government or private entities and subject to the post-neoliberal politics of our times. In the US and the UK examples free market entities and governing bodies rule out and erase discussion of factors of social exclusion, poverty, and the limited opportunities that configure rates of teenage pregnancy or explain entry into the sex industry. Opportunity for participation in critical discussions about the implications of social inequities for the lives of young people was effectively sealed off for participants most clearly in the Las Vegas and the UK research. While such discussions were more substantively evident in the East Coast study, this was clearly more a function of the researcher's use of insider status as an access strategy than an indicator of the absence of post-neoliberal restrictions on inquiry involving issues of social exclusion or historically taboo topics. SCHEURICH's (1997) work on the archeology of social problems contributes the argument that public attention is drawn to the responsibility of the individual to a specified social problem—teenage welfare mothers, for example, while excluding other contributing issues. The problems of brutal economic inequality, social exclusion and political impotency are not considered. In late

modernity, such conditions are sharpened by neoliberal policies, but are specifically ruled out of consideration in neoliberal accounts. Critical accounts to dismantle the discourse are relegated to academic venues with much smaller audiences. [27]

One significant dilemma relates to how accountable the researchers are to the people they claim to represent, and the extent to which measures exist to ensure their accountability. As researchers in a democratic but profoundly unequal society, our commitment to fostering social justice aims led us to select participative methods. In the UK study our funders also declared their commitment to participation and consultation in their support for funded research. Nevertheless, events that occurred when the information was published in the tabloid press, provoked significant questions about the control that researchers and funders had over the dissemination of their research. In MEASOR's project, the British tabloid press used government reports on the study's findings to publish intrusive and sensationalist reports about the research. The Sun newspaper screeched "By the Sleazeside: Teen Pregnancies Boom at Partying Resorts" (August 2, 2004). The Sun displayed pictures of a mostly-naked girl who sported a speech bubble, in which a model commented disapprovingly about the findings of the research relating to drinking and sexual activity in the resorts. The Sunday Telegraph stated "Welcome to Casual Sex on Sea" (August 1, 2004) and highlighted the teenage pregnancy rates for Blackpool and Brighton, both towns involved in the research. The Daily Mail explored in salacious detail "Why Seaside Girls are Twice as Likely to Become Pregnant" (August 2, 2004). Newspapers justified the moral necessity of informing the public of the licentious activities while leaving readers smug in the security of their difference from these stigmatized young people. [28]

Media publication of the research requires new mindfulness to the problems which can arise when we allow knowledge "which has been private to float into public view" (FINE & WEIS, 1996, p.262). Working within a critical paradigm sometimes leads us to adopt the soothing notion that we are free of the provincial understandings that exist in other places. STRATHERN (2000) warns "[t]here is nothing innocent about making the invisible visible" (p.282). SPIVAK (1988), TRINH (1989), and BHABHA (1994) have all argued that the disruptive potential of the dispossessed lies partly in their ambivalent visibility, and invisibleness offers them some protection. We need, then, to question who, ultimately is served by our work. [29]

The dilemmas here reflect the renewed discourse of "good science" as that knowledge which emanates from deeply embedded and narrowly positivistic traditions in the US and the UK as well as across the Western world—trends that threaten qualitative research through resurgent neo-positivism and new reductionism, particularly visible across the professions. More menacing, however, are the contemporary political, economic and social conditions apparent across the Western world (WACQUANT, 2008), described by some as "post-neoliberalism"—the complex conditions that currently emanate among ideologies that seek to limit governments, promote the free-market, trust in the abilities of

capitalism to self-correct, foster individualism, and call for a return to conventional values (LATHER, 2010, p.11). A particular characteristic of post-neoliberalism vis-à-vis neoliberalism is evident in government's implication in advancing neoliberal policies and structures. All of these tensions are redefining the global society, the role and authority of governments, and the policy-making process. [30]

This was certainly evident in the Las Vegas study in which the public school system refused to endorse any of the research activities, including recruitment of participants or use of school building space for meetings. Despite the fact that DENTITH was well known to many of the school officials and had collegial professional relations with them, she was not invited to use school space for her research and interviews. In fact, officials made it clear that only activities that focused on the transfer of information related to girls' academic success, literacy, and/or future vocational choices and preparation for college would be permitted on school grounds. Likewise, in MEASOR's UK study, school officials only permitted access to schools if the topic of discussion centered on abstinence sex education including dangers of early sexual activity and dismal outcomes of teen parenthood. [31]

6. Young People and the Potential for Transformation Through Research

Contemporary neo-liberal views hold imminent negative implications for the researched and all others who are positioned marginally across the globe. The increasingly evident post-neoliberal state, described earlier on by BOURDIEU as a "crisis in politics" (1999, p.2), has fostered new dilemmas in participatory field research. As researchers working with young people in participative ways, we are interested in participative research that works to promote social change among marginalized people. For example, young people's understanding of sexual abuse, trauma, and survival in the East Coast project blurred the constructed border between the abused/abusing "other" and the whole Self (OLITSKY & WEATHERS, 2005; LAPERRIÉRE, 2006). Questioning the reality of the hyphen (FINE 1994), participants engage an answerability in which they began to see one's self in the alien "other." Likewise, candid dialogue about sexuality and desire among young women in the Las Vegas project, blurred the artificial boundaries between sexual identity, desires and behaviors, helping them to see how the social constructions of sexuality within society works to define and limit them as subjects and sexual beings (NAIDOO, 2007). In both projects, young people deconstructed their own complicity with dehumanizing projection and stereotypes. [32]

In O'MALLEY's East Coast project, Drew's narrative became an opportunity for peers in the collaborative group to re-image their understandings of Drew, to critique social processes of dehumanization in which they had become implicated, to locate oneself in relation to survivors of sexual abuse, to affirm for self and others an ethic of respect for human dignity, and to experience some quality of personal vulnerability through authentic empathy. [33]

Participatory methods also allowed young people to recognize they have limited their freedom and allowed others to exercise power over them. The larger implication of this work lies in the need to create safe spaces for young people to work the ruins of the border (LATHER, 1986) or to engage with the messiness of science (LATHER, 2010) through a recognition of a multiplicity of varied, contradictory, and ambiguous life experiences and social identities that resist cultural imperatives to "Other" those who endure painful experiences in silence and exclusion. [34]

In DENTITH's Las Vegas work, for example, Megan, one of the young woman in her study contacted her with some urgency one evening. She wanted to meet and recount an experience she had with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend had been urging her for some time to have a "lesbian" sexual experience with a women he knew who had expressed attraction for this young woman, his girlfriend. Apparently he had been urging her for months to "do it" with this woman and had consistently made plans for such an encounter. Megan resisted and, instead, at a later date and just before her conversation with DENTITH, decided to choose her own partner for such experimentation. The extent of the encounter consisted mostly of some kissing and fondling in the back seat of someone's car. When Megan told her boyfriend, he showed mild annoyance at her initiation of the incident and almost no interest in her experience at all. In fact, he quickly changed the subject. In the context of the small group (three research participants and the researcher), Megan asked them to help her make sense of the event. The group, ultimately, concurred that his actions were more likely based on the desire to control her and her sexuality than on any interest he had in observing or learning about her experience. The group concluded that this might be attributed to the pervasive male gaze and objectification of women in the context of Las Vegas, one in which women are typically sexual objects and seldom portrayed as sexual subjects. The group also determined that perhaps the desire to engage in these sexual encounters with other young women might stem from the desire to be sexual subjects, rather than sexual objects in their own right. In DENTITH's field notes, she noted that these powerful insights emerged from within a safe space in which such messy life experiences were opened up for scrutiny while insights from social theories were offered up, allowing all of them to wade through the ambiguities and contradictions to create new understandings. [35]

A further example of the potential of research to shift "knowledges" and "make a difference" is offered by considering established names and terms in MEASOR's UK study. "Teenage" and "welfare mothers" are pejorative terms. Those researched chose to use the term "young parents" when they spoke of themselves. It has different resonances from names used for them by authorities and the media. "Teenage pregnancy" or "teen pregnancy" speaks of the fact of the pregnancy and the sexuality involved rather than the long term commitments of parenting. It was one element in a process of challenging the processes of "othering" to which these young people were subject. It allowed them to query the toxic metaphor of the welfare queen. As researchers, then, we provide knowledge of the struggles on the part of those who are "othered," building and sharing

counter public knowledge as a means of helping them slip out from the powerful grasps that cultural imperative has on us all. [36]

6.1 Disrupting "othering" in the research process

It may be that one of the significant ways that we can research to make a difference is through challenging some of the hegemonic categories of late modernity. Each of our projects worked to erode the tough membranes that divide people and so profoundly and brutally transfix them as "Others." All of the projects offered opportunities for young people with difficult issues to start telling a different story about themselves both to themselves and to others, and to begin to shift their own perspectives about themselves. This speaks to the need to allow for the transformative potential of participating in the research experience among young people who have painful, abusive or negative life stories. The projects allowed space for these young people to challenge not only the view taken of them by others but to also challenge the impact of that "othering" process on themselves. It offered space to start telling a different story about oneself to oneself—a critical first step to questioning stigmas and unearthing the tentacles of labels that have burrowed into the self. [37]

In O'MALLEY's East Coast project, Drew recalls reflecting on another person's shared autobiographical narrative in an earlier group experience as being

> "when I took my first step. I glossed over it by saying 'something really bad happened.' But I was proud of myself for finally beginning to acknowledge the problem. It was during [this] that I also heard someone else's and realized that someone else went through what I did. Slowly I began a process of recovery I should've started four years ago." [38]

Similar instances were evident among Drew's peer group. Group discussions and participatory experiences became opportunities to renegotiate the narratives youth had been telling themselves, often in ways that promoted their own healing and fostered some personal liberation as echoed in Drew's process above. [39]

6.2 Shifting power to the "researched"

FOUCAULT (1993) argued that there may be projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, "to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can simply, by its nature, assure that people will have liberty [since] ... Liberty is a practice" (p.162). If we take LATHER's (1986) notion of catalytic validity in the research process even further, we could imagine that research strategies might be taught more directly to young people for their own purposes—garnering information and sharing it publicly in ways that mirror the power and authority typically designated only to adult researchers or policy makers. [40]

In this way, we see that the power and status wholly necessary should now be offered freely to our "subjects" in order that they might truly shape public knowledge and influence policies and practices with the same credibility and

authority that research has afforded to us as university researchers. In an example from the UK study, researchers arranged for young mothers who had helped shape and direct and carry out the research, to be included in the key feedback sessions to the Department of Health and Education funders of the research. Young mothers came to London for the day and their regional accents and excited voices echoed surprisingly loudly through the formal and expensive granite, glass and steel buildings. The "voices" of young people and the "voices" of different regional assumptions and priorities could also be clearly heard in the data that emerged. It is an unusual sound in the academic world and in the world of government departments, and one in which researchers should insist be presented more frequently. Research knowledge gleaned from studies designed and conducted within intergenerational relationships of researchers, community activists and young people in communities, such as those described by YPAR participants can illuminate experiences and help policy makers make inroads into public arenas that have long disregarded the voices of young people. [41]

6.3 Accountability

One significant dilemma relates to how accountable the researchers are to the people they claim to represent, and the extent to which measures exist to ensure their accountability. As researchers in democratic but profoundly unequal societies, our commitment to fostering social justice aims led us to select participative methods. In the UK study, our funders also declared commitment to participation and consultation. Nevertheless, we needed to question whether the implications of their involvement and support had been fully considered. [42]

Offering young people some control of the research is fraught—as adults we expect control, as researchers we are anxious for the results to cover the areas that we or the funders desire, and as academics we struggle with recognizing the problematic within academic writing. In each research project carried out here, a tidy *pax academicus* could not run unhindered. And, in the end, the advantages were clear. The voices and experiences of young people could be clearly heard in the data that emerged, an unusual sound in the academic world and in the world of government departments. The research messiness had implications for validation, which the researchers had to take responsibility for, but the authentic voices that emerged from what young people considered important broke many of the networks of a traditional research design. [43]

7. Summary and Conclusions

We have aimed in this article to demonstrate ways that participatory research methods show promise by offering the status of "knower" to those with stigmatized standing or those who are most vulnerable to the mechanisms of social exclusion. We have attempted to provide examples of ways that engagement in participatory research can open up spaces for the development of counter public discourses. Such spaces can be seen as sites that can offer emancipatory potential in terms of understandings and shifts in awareness for individuals that have the potential to begin processes of personal and social

change among the subaltern groups we worked with. HARTSOCK draws our attention to the significance of moments when diverse and disorderly "others" begin to speak and chip away at the social and political power of the "theorizer" (1987, p.195). Such moments have significant consequences as they highlight how those who are without power deny the particular authoritarian insight into "reality" specified by those who have power. They challenge the power of those who construct and fortify the "public sphere" (HABERMAS, 1989). The data presented here show young people beginning to undermine the ideas they are circumscribed by and challenging the constructions of power made by others. We have also illustrated some of the dilemmas and dangers we encountered in our work, illuminating their relationship to the larger competing discourses of neo-liberalism that depict the contemporary global context. We acknowledge the critiques of participatory methods' efficacy, such as ESCOBAR's (1995) concern that the architecture of discourse formation nonetheless remains the same, or that complex and unresolved research dilemmas now have been relegated to diffused, grass-roots process that will have limited success with large scale policy reform (EYBEN, 1994). However, we remain encouraged and energized by this work. Participatory work can conjure up a social imaginary that works against the grain of established research institutional practices (KENWAY & FAHEY, 2009, p.36). It offers a means by which we can seriously consider the problems of the everyday from the underside, outside of the established structures. When the established research community opens up and begins to converse across a wider sphere, new research communities can be forged through democratic sharing and mutually produced knowledge. Examining the literature on new participatory research clearly indicates the ways that participatory research is multiplying and new identities of the "research being" (p.36) are thriving, expanding established notions of what it means to do research, for whom, for what, and by whom. Today, the need to think more about quality, relevance, significance and application in research is fundamental. Global communities are becoming spaces in which meaningful research is feasible and more pertinent than ever before (APPADURAI, 2001). [44]

We have discussed the larger context for research, particularly the post-neoliberal ideologies that threaten research development, production and dissemination. However, it is also clear that neoliberal thinking and related practices should not be critiqued in hierarchical or one-dimensional manner. Often these are contradictory, taken up in specific ways according the context. We call for participatory methods, research that begins and is situated outside, around or beneath previously legitimated methods and practices. Certainly, an emergent new paradigm in social research beckons us to move beyond the mere politics of inclusion and participation in contemporary research with youth into a more meaningful intergenerational research that imagines collaborative, inclusive and empowering research with young people in wholly new configurations. [45]

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