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Bearing Witness: Methods for Researching Oppression and Resistance—A Textbook for Critical Research

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This paper forecasts a "fictional" methods textbook for researchers interested in studying social oppression and resistance. The volume moves between historic and contemporary writings on methods, with particular interest in questions of objectivity and subjectivity, history and psychology, relations among units of analysis, expert and construct validity, and the ever-thorny ambition of generalizability. Crafted with inspiration from Kurt Lewin, Carolyn Payton, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and many contemporary critical writers, the book is designed to provoke conversations about social research, asking—For what? With whom? and If not now, when? The essay is written to incite a re-membering, and re-thinking, of critical methods for the social psychological study of oppression and resistance.

KEY WORDS: critical methods; oppression; resistance.

Participating in the "Interrupting Oppression and Sustaining Justice" (IOSJ) conference was like a trip to an intellectual and political spa. Rarely have psychologists joined with activists and practitioners in such a productive way, to consider not only the deep scars produced by structures, ideologies, and practices of oppression but also the vibrant possibilities unleashed once injustice is challenged. For two days, research psychologists learned with activists and practitioners to think through how to *interrupt/dismantle* oppression and how to *sustain* justice in the face of ongoing political assaults.

In the midst of our conference, some of us, in small group discussions, began to think about how in a world of diasporic oppressions and flares of resistance, social research could provoke greater awareness of injustice and contribute to

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social movements more intimately. Soon our conversations turned to questions of *methods*; to consider how we research injustice—what we study, with whom, how, and for what. And so I volunteered to craft the semifictional Table of Contents of a Research Methods text in which the project of studying and interrupting oppression would be central, with the grand ambition of sustaining justice also in our methodological toolbox.

We were meeting in Harlem, New York City, intimately aware of the long reach of state-sponsored surveillance and the mass incarceration of youths and adults whose homes we could see out the seminar windows. At the time of our convening, the nation was just awakening to the conditions of mass detention in Guantanamo, the photos from Iraq, the international damage wrought by greed and global capital, and the local assaults on democracy crafted in the name of the Patriot Act. We were compelled to reach back in the history of our discipline, to the 1940s and 1950s, in order to know how to "be of use" in very dark times. I found myself envisioning a book that would remember the democratic and activist origins of social psychology, remind us of the struggle to be public intellectuals, and inspire conversations with graduate students and colleagues about methods for social research as a tool of democratic engagement. The Table of Contents might look like this:

Table of Contents
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And so we begin.

BEARING WITNESS

Chapter 1: Introduction

Social psychology has a long, and often buried, tradition of research that reveals and challenges social injustice—research designed to provoke action for a more just distribution of resources and dignity. When we draw from the archives of James and Kuklick (1987), DuBois (1990), and Allport (1979), the midcentury writings of Lewin (1946, 1948), Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif, and colleagues (1954), or the later writings of Carolyn Payton (1984), Martín-Baró (1994), James Jones (2004), M. Brewster Smith (1986a). Brinton Lykes (2001), and Patricia

Gurin *et al.* (2002), we discover commitments to justice work have a deep, if staccato presence in social psychology, extending through quantitative and qualitative methods, field and lab designs, primarily academic and primarily activist in origin. This methods book attempts to connect the dots to the present and bridge, as the conference did, a series of borders we find to be too severely drawn (see L. T. Smith, 1999). That is, we reach, intellectually and strategically, across generations, methods, and across the researcher-activist fence to conceptualize critical research projects.

The relationship of theory, methods, and social action was deeply understood in the middle years of the 20th century. In 1965, Morton Deutsch and Robert Krauss argued that the breadth and reach of our theories would be dependent on the range of our methods and the courage of our willingness to apply our ideas to problems of social significance: "More and more social psychologists, in the past decade, have turned their attention to carefully controlled laboratory studies, neglecting investigations of social behavior in natural settings . . . Often the light is brighter and vision is clearer in the laboratory; yet the remarkable things that people do as participants in laboratory experiments, to be seen in perspective, must be viewed from the outside. Knowledge must be sought even where the obstacles are considerable and the light is dim, if social psychologists are to contribute to an understanding of the human problems of their time" (pp. 215–216).

Toward a Theory of Methods

Seeking knowledge where the light is dim, this book theorizes methods for studying oppression and so we begin with a shared definition. Morton Deutsch tells us (this issue), "Oppression is the experience of repeated," widespread, systemic injustice. It need not be extreme and involve the legal system (as in slavery, apartheid or the lack of right to vote) nor violent (as in tyrannical societies). Harvey (1999) has used the term 'civilized oppression' to characterize the everyday processes of oppression in normal life. Civilized oppression 'refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer 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"'(pp. 3–4).

Theorizing oppression as structural, institutional, interpersonal and intrapsychic; outrageous and civilized; cultivated in the media, the market and the academy, Deutsch conceptualizes a multilevel frame for the study of oppression and resistance. French theorist Chantal Mouffe extends Deutsch's analysis of the "unconscious assumptions" that naturalize injustice and make resistance difficult. Drawing on Gramsci (1971), Mouffe describes the "passive revolution" by which oppression has been legitimated ideologically, producing a seeming consensus "whereby the interests of the dominant class are articulated with the needs,

desires, interests of the subordinated group" (Mouffe, 1979, p. 192). And so the question arises, how do researchers contribute to the interruption of the passive revolution? Or, in the language of Mort Deutsch, how do we design social research to "awaken a sense of injustice" (Deutsch, 2004; see also C.W. Mills, 1959)?

To take up this project, it is important to recollect social psychology's rich historic discussion of values and democratic methods. We nostalgically wander through the literatures of Kenneth Clark, Mamie Clark, Stuart Cook, Marie Jahoda, M. Brewster Smith, Maxine Greene, Morton Deutsch, Milt Schwebel, Ethel Tobach (1974), and others writing for a social psychology for justice (see IOSJ website for papers, 2004) as we listen to young researchers (Guishard *et al.*, 2003; Roberts, 2004) voicing sophisticated echoes of these debates. This book follows these cross-generational threads for democratic methods, with questions of ethics well represented throughout—not pulled for separate treatment. Each chapter is framed by a question or a traditional notion, troubled and reclaimed. And then I offer up sketches of conversations we might forge with graduate students and colleagues, activists and policy makers, for the purposes of Bearing Witness—Methods for Researching Oppression and Resistance.

Chapter 2: What Shall We Do?

In his discussions of action research, Kurt Lewin explained that researchers must "feel in a fog on three counts: (1) What is the present situation? (2) What are the dangers? (3) And most important of all, what shall we do"? (Lewin, 1946, p. 34)

Extending Lewin's 1946 advice for navigating through the fog, this chapter deals with the political urgency of critical research. We invite readers to interrogate, as Lewin did 60 years ago, what work needs to be done today when surveillance and fear surround, the walls between rich and poor have thickened, and global despair and terror contaminate everyday life (see also Payton, 1984; Smith, 1986). In this chapter, we ask—For what and with whom do we undertake social research on oppression and resistance (see Bourdieu, 1999)?

While many argue that research should be dedicated to engaging with the critical consciousness of those most oppressed, French social psychologist Erika Apfelbaum suggests that public intellectuals turn our attention to "awaken" a sense of injustice in those with material and cultural power; those who do not feel the pain of injustice in their bellies; those who often refuse the knowledge and dare not listen. To this end, she invites social researchers to *tell*: "{T}he imperative to tell—the vital urge not to forget— . . . contains an injunction to the 'awakening of others' . . . While the imperative to speak is necessary in order for survivors to re-enter a humane society, stubborn deafness may be equally necessary for the inhabitants of that society as they try to keep their ethical values stable

and unchallenged" (Apfelbaum, 2001, p. 31). Apfelbaum asks us to theorize not only the speaking but the listening; to think through the conditions under which relatively privileged people are willing to hear and act on oppression.

Remembering the work of Kenneth Clark (1979) and Stuart Cook (1985), and their courageous posture in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case (see Fine *et al.*, 2004a,b for review), we know that many psychologists answered this call *to tell* in courts. Across the second half of the 20th century, we find many examples of such collaborations—the ground-breaking amicus brief crafted by Fiske *et al.* (1991) on sex stereotyping in the workplace, Craig Haney's work on the death penalty (1997), and the extensive research agenda spearheaded by Patricia Gurin and colleagues (2002) in the recent University of Michigan Affirmative Action case.

Brown v. Board of Education, *Price-Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, and *Grutter v. Bollinger and the University of Michigan* have been recognized as *nation building* legal cases, infused with strategic and passionate social science evidence and theory. Critically engaged social scientists understood, then and now, that we could situate ourselves, among other actors, in civic struggles for justice, through the courts, community organizing, scholarship, and public writing (see also Deutsch and Collins, 1951).

The academy remains one of the few spaces from which people may speak critically without (substantial) retribution. With a post 9/11 historic specificity and a chill reminiscent of the Alien and Sedition Act and McCarthy periods, social criticism and dissent are today often mistaken as unpatriotic, with the collateral damage of censorship falling heavily if unevenly. And so when democracy is under siege, "For what?" is always crucial to ponder. And if social psychologists are interested in what Sampson would call *transformative* research (1983), today we must add "With whom?"

To the question of "*With Whom?*" we find many answers distributed across the landscape of historic and contemporary social psychology. Some have worked with lawyers and movement activists to reform the existing legal systems, while others have dedicated themselves deliberately to collaboration with grassroots struggle. DeJesus and Lykes (2004; see also Cherry and Borshuk, 1998; Lykes, 2001) describe how they work, as psychologists to *accompany* activists in human rights struggles: "Social justice for indigenous peoples requires a dramatic rethinking of the meaning of human rights and human rights violations . . . it requires a deepening understanding of traditional indigenous values and customs. A liberatory psychology or human rights praxis of accompaniment must, therefore, be explicitly antiracist and reflexive" (DeJesus and Lykes, 2004, p. 342).

With shared commitments, Participatory Action Research (PAR) designs are built through collaboratives of activists and researchers (Anand *et al.*, 2001; Brydon-Miller, 2001; Fals-Borda, 1979; Fine *et al.*, 2002, 2005; Freire, 1982). With long roots in Africa, Central and South America, PAR was borne in the

soil of discontent, with a deep understanding of research as a tool for democratic transformation. Studies that rely upon participatory methods deliberately democratize who constructs the research questions, designs, methods, interpretations, and products.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) designs are organized, explicitly, to include researchers from varied bases of power and perspective. Maria Elena Torre and I have written on PAR projects we've undertaken in women's prisons and urban schools: "PAR recognizes that those 'studied' harbor critical social knowledge and must be repositioned as subjects and architects of research" (Fine and Torre, 2004).

This chapter will encourage conversations with graduate students about "For What and With Whom?" Analyzing key exemplars of research for justice, we probe why, how, when, with whom and who is made vulnerable by the research, with an understanding that social researchers should always be the most vulnerable—not those being studied or 'left' behind once the research is complete.

Ricardo Barreras (see Barreras, 2004; Fine and Barreras, 2001) relates a telling story about social scientists collaborating with epidemiologists and AIDS activists in the late 20th century—for broad-based access to needle exchange and public health. In the long struggles initiated by HIV/AIDS activists in New York City for public needle exchange programs, ACT UP activists were arrested for "illegal" distribution of clean needles. At this critical political juncture, a number of well-respected, academically credentialed scientists showed up in court to testify on behalf of ACT UP (Barreras, 2004; Fine and Barreras, 2001). Recognizing their distinct and intimately compatible roles in the struggle for clean needle exchange, activists and scientists joined forces in an historic display of solidarity for public health advocacy.

In this chapter we will review a series of such collaborations, exploring the power, delicacies and cautions at the research-activism hyphen. And we will enter the debates, prevalent in the board meetings of APA and SPSSI, reflecting the ambivalence and discomfort at the thrilling, porous, and treacherous border between social research and advocacy (Smith, 1986).

Chapter 3: On Objectivity—Escaping the Moral Dangers of Distance

> {T}here is not just one legitimate way to conceptualize objectivity, any more than there is only one way to conceptualize freedom, democracy, or science. The notion of objectivity has valuable political and intellectual histories; as it is transformed into 'strong objectivity' by the logic of standpoint epistemologies . . . Might should not make right in the realm of knowledge production any more than in matters of ethics. (Harding, 1987, p. 138)

If social psychologists take up the work of bearing witness to oppression and resistance, then we must rethink *objectivity*. Sandra Harding—like Jill Morawski (2004), Edward Sampson (1983) and others—argues that elite interests have long

masqueraded as neutrality, hiding behind claims of objectivity. Hence, Harding's quote "Might should not make right in the realm of knowledge production." Some, in response, have abandoned the notion of objectivity entirely. And yet some psychologists who remain engaged in empirical work want to work toward new conceptions of objectivity. Recognizing that we are immersed in unjust social arrangements and committed to social change, we choose to wrestle with *objectivity* (see Fine, 1994; Fine *et al.*, 2000; Morawski, 2004). Unwilling to abdicate the pursuit of objectivity, this chapter imports to social psychology the writings of philosopher Sandra Harding, who argues for *strong objectivity*—achieved when researchers work aggressively through their own positionality, values and predispositions, gathering as much evidence as possible, from many distinct vantage points, all in an effort *not* to be guided, unwittingly, by predispositions and the pull of biography. With Morawski (2005), this chapter recuperates the notion of *objectivity* through flickering debates in social psychology about researchers delicately exploring—rather than denying—researchers' subjective interests, biases and perspectives.

Appreciating the devastating chill incited by McCarthyism and the 1950s, we still find buried in the pages of our disciplinary archive, hushed arguments about how explicit researchers can be about values and prevailing conditions of (in)justice (Jahoda and Cook, 1952; Smith, 1986). Some rejected the notion of objectivity entirely, as an obstacle to psychology for public action. Historian John Jackson, who writes on the history of race and racism in U.S. psychology, with particular emphasis on early 20th century, explains:

> Many of the social scientists most active in Brown [v. Board of Education] rejected the very notion of 'objectivity' that later writers have forced on them and embraced a science that welcomed the complexity of the individual in the real world. (Jackson, 2004, p. 250)

Others understood objectivity to be illusory, but a value worth aspiring toward. Carolyn and Muzafer Sherif, for instance, wrote that researchers' values and interests must be interrogated; for if ignored, they could evolve into a form of "autism" constricting data collection and threatening the integrity of data analysis:

> From the outset, research and generalizations are doomed to be deflections or mere justifications of the point of view and premises of the group or groups with which one identifies himself if one does not start his work by clear, deliberation recognition and neutralizing of his personal involvements in the issues. If this painful process of deliberate recognition and neutralizing . . . is not achieved, [the researcher's] autism will greatly influence his design of the study and his collection and treatment of data. (Sherif *et al.*, 1961, 1988, p. 11)

More recently and more forcefully, sociologists and philosophers of science have argued that the mask of objectivity and denial of researcher standpoint have fundamentally distorted what we consider social psychological knowledge, producing severely partial knowledges—with the severed parts eclipsed. By writing from a "God's eye view" (Harding, 1987), research psychologists have excised themselves from the social, projected social problems onto the bodies and psyches

of those we study and thereby eclipsed our own contribution to social processes and inequities.

"[The abstract individual] is the product neither of nature nor of society but of statistical construction" (Danziger, 1990, p. 129; see also Morawski, 2004). Many philosophers of science and critical science studies scholars argue that the illusion of full researcher objectivity and the erasure of the experimenter from social analyses have artificially produced both the *subject* and *the researcher*. The autonomous individual has sprung forth from our labs, clinical couches and academic armchairs, amputated from social relations, history and context.

If many have written on the distortions produced by "scientistic" notions of objectivity that remove the researcher and erase his/her interests, we can also find a number of scholars who have proactively encouraged researchers to construct theory and research explicitly through their values and standpoints. These writers call for researchers to engage in the world as public intellectuals, prompted by an acute sense of social responsibility. Lillian Comas-Dias delineates: "The ethnopolitical approach [which] requires psychologists to act as change agents, asking them to examine the political and social costs and benefits of their interventions . . . taking sides is not bias but an ethical choice for psychologists, a choice grounded in the truths of reason and compassion . . ." (pp. 1322–1323). From "acknowledging" and controlling our biases, to advancing human liberation, psychologists have engaged a lively debate about our strong objectivities, and perhaps even stronger subjectivities and responsibilities.

This question of *strong objectivity* is crucial to explore with those graduate students who worry they are 'too close to the topic' and with those graduate students who believe themselves to be detached and free of bias. Both groups need to interrogate *why* they are studying what they study; *what* in their own biography, curiosity or sense of responsibility spurs the questions asked; whose perspectives will be privileged, negotiated, and/or silenced in their work. Just as researchers were encouraged to undertake psychoanalysis in the past, here we are pressing students to examine the biographical wisdom and blinders they import, wittingly and not, to their studies. In writing activities and focus groups, graduate students should be asked to explore their fears, anxiety, who-am-I-to-do-this-work, guilt, responsibility, privilege, terror and projections as they develop theoretical frameworks and empirical designs. Students should be engaged in conversation about how to gather counter-hegemonic perspectives and standpoints that challenge dominant views (Bhavnani, 1994), rather than conducting research that reproduces dominant ideologies—even as these dominant views may be narrated by some of the most oppressed people in the nation (Jost *et al.*, 2004).

Beyond graduate students, those of us committed to oppression/resistance research should be carving out cross-generational analytic spaces—what Kurt Lewin and Mort Deutsch called "work groups"—to cultivate the theoretical surprises that

can be unearthed in the empirical material once the fog of unacknowledged subjectivities is cleared. This involves creating collaborative contexts for and with students and colleagues, in which we critically think through theory, design, interpretation and use; where we engage in rigorous, collective self-reflection, critical distance, and ongoing social analysis and conversation about our lens, our framing of the problem, the data we've gathered and what we can't/don't see (see Fine and Weis, 2001 for examples of graduate students' writing on reflexivity, objectivity and strong subjectivities).

Chapter 4: On History

> An understanding that our work is embedded in a historical context is extremely important.... {We} focus in this article ... on our subjects' social experience *over time*. By ignoring the historical dimension of our subjects' social experience, not only do we unnecessarily impoverish our understanding of our subjects' lives, but we also ignore an important source of information to account for apparent inconsistencies in research findings. (Stewart and Healy, 1989, p. 30)

This chapter invites social psychologists to think in complex ways about psychology and history. Kum-Kum Bhavnani (1994) calls for psychologists to theorize, for instance, *why* certain social psychological questions have been investigated at particular moments in history and why others have been suppressed, to understand *how* some knowledges have been produced and others trivialized, and to challenge the hegemony of *total knowledges* represented as universal laws, true for all, over time:

> If it is accepted that scientific insights are social in origin, then these origins may be analyzed by tracing the historical development of such insights. Thus, a historical approach can facilitate answers to questions such as why a particular issue is investigated at a particular point in time. For example, why was it that the end of the nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth saw considerable interest in relying on arguments about the brain size of black people and white women to explain apparent differences in cognitive abilities between these groups and white men ... A historical approach may also facilitate the posing of questions as to how such knowledge is produced—that is, who produces it and how it becomes privileged. The logic of this argument is that a historical approach encourages questions to be raised about the political economy of knowledge production. In this way, a historical approach can eliminate the idea of total knowledges; thus, objectivity and truth come to be seen as concepts which are historically situated and situationally specific. (p. 27)

Like Stewart and Healy (1989) and Bhavnani (1994), a number of psychologists have been particularly persuasive about our need to revisit our understandings of how we got to today, whose stories/perspectives have been privileged and whose have been suppressed, and how we might otherwise tell the stories of the past (see Cross, 2003; Galletta, 2003). This methodological concern is central to students of oppression and resistance.

Fundamentally challenging the *presentist* orientation of social psychology, which assumes that what is *now* has *always* been and is therefore natural, (Fran

Cherry 1995; Cherry and Borshuk, 1998; Klineberg, 1986) has culled from historic archives to re-assemble the "stubborn particulars of social psychology." Warning against social psychology's predilections toward presentism and decontextualizing, Cherry has skillfully scrutinized the very specific contexts from which some of our key, taken-for-granted psychological findings have been plucked. She recasts our understandings of the Kitty Genovese murder as an instance of violence against women—not simply or generally "diffusion of responsibility": "By the 1980s, my thinking about this incident {the Kitty Genovese murder} might be better expressed this way: violence was directed at yet another woman by a man and no one intervened to help her .... I began to take more seriously the view of social psychology as a science that thrives within historical and cultural contexts and with that my views on experimentation were also altered" (Cherry, 1995, p. 21).

Like Cherry, historians of psychology and psychologists who work with history as a method seek to excavate the past with depth and specificity. Some aim to expose the dominant, cumulative misrepresentations of history. Ignacio Martín-Baró, the social psychologist-slain Jesuit priest-activist scholar working in El Salvador, argued that a central task for critical social researchers was to uncover the collective lies that have been told about a people's history, and excavate the *untold stories* so that historically oppressed people could reconstitute collective identities:

> In El Salvador the established power structure has concealed reality and systematically distorted events, producing a Collective Lie.... The Lie consists in constructing a reality that is ideologically compatible with the interests of the dominant class ... [with] at least three consequences: the country's most serious problems have systematically hidden from view; the social interests and forces at play have been distorted; and people have internalized the alienating discourse as part of their personal and social identity ... Given the.. Lie, there arises a need to increase critical consciousness through a process of de-ideologization—to which social psychologists can and should be contributing ... public opinion surveys can play a small yet significant role ... shaping a new collective identity. (Ignacio Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 189)

By locating the production of knowledge in history, as Cherry and Martín-Baró exemplify, these researchers seek to produce knowledge that is at once contextually specific and yet broadly generalizable.

As will be explored in Chapter Eight, historic and contextual specificity cannot be mistaken for a limit or brake on generalizability. To the contrary, I want to argue that only with specificity can researchers identify the very conditions necessary for generalizability. In 1941 Horkheimer made the argument that researchers must search for "the universal within the particular ... and instead of moving from one particular to another and then to the heights of abstraction, should delve deeper and deeper into the particular and discover the universal law therein" (p. 123). I worry that in contrast to Horkheimer's advice, social psychology has come to abandon the particulars in the search for the universal; that we have come to believe that the generalizable can only be found in large samples rather than deep analysis; that percentages, rather than ideas, travel across time

and space; that ideas or theory must evacuate particulars when, indeed, it is only through particulars that we see the sustained dynamics of the general.

Chapter 5: Studying Power Across Levels of Analysis

> The psychology of justice has relevance to widespread, deadly conflict in which moral exclusion is normalized and crimes against individuals, groups and humanity go unpunished .... In societies struggling to rebuild after widespread and intransigent violence, inclusion needs to be substantial and multidimensional ... it is important to consider both immediate and long-term approaches to justice, as well as justice at both micro and macro levels, so that individuals and small communities are not lost in thinking about the larger society, nor are larger societal issues lost when considering the circumstances and well being of individuals. (Opotow, 2002, pp. 201–216)

This chapter takes up a central challenge for social psychologists: to reveal how power works to produce, sustain, and naturalize social inequities across multiple levels of analysis. If, as Foucault (1977) suggests, power distributes unevenly throughout systems, then research on the broad reach of injustice must account for all forms of social relations within those systems, not simply documenting the "damage" or "resilience" of the bodies or (un)consciousness of "victims." Opotow (2002) argues persuasively that when studying oppression or moral conflict, the *unit of analysis* must be systemic, even if the *unit of data collection* is a particular slice, group, person, event or part of the whole. In 1948, Kurt Lewin offered similar reasoning:

> The essence of a group is not the similarity or dissimilarity of its members, but *their interdependence*. A group can be characterized as a 'dynamical whole'; this means that a change in the state of any subpart changes the state of any other subpart. The degree of interdependence of the subparts of members of the group varies all the way from a 'loose' mass to a compact unit. (1948, p. 54)

Moving from Lewin's "dynamical whole" to Deutsch's articulation of systems of oppression, the unit of analysis for studies of oppression must be the full structural system and the dialectical interdependence therein. In unjust societies, everyone is an insider. In systems of domination, no one is free of contamination. There are no bystanders, no witnesses and no positions of neutrality. Persons who benefit from social arrangements, and persons who 'merely' watch, are affected by and affect the social systems in which some unduly suffer (see Fine and Weis, 2005 on compositional studies).

Linda Powell Pruitt studies the racialized dynamics of educational oppression. She challenges psychologists who have narrowly and mistakenly located Black "underachievement" exclusively in the bodies of Black youth, failing to study the production of "merit" inoculated into White bodies, and the systems that produce both:

> A new visual metaphor of Black underachievement would be a knot with many strands in both black and white. There are tiny intermediate twists that have been in place for many

> years and are hard and tight. Some of the twists are brand new and have been tied over the old. The black strands and white operate like a hoist, holding each other in place. Pulling at the black strands alone will not untie the knot and may actually tighten it. The white strands must loosen as well. This loosening will inevitably involve pain and learning for Whites as they explore their privilege, incompetence and profound interrelatedness with people of color; they will need to explore their own discourse of deficit. Blacks will also need to explore our dangerous ability to lead, creating and owning our discourse of potential. We must also face those areas of fear of and collusion with the larger social system that we both love and hate. (2004, p. 242)

Powell Pruitt asks readers, theorists, and educators to understand the ‘problem’ of underachievement as a dynamic problem of a system in which merit attaches conspicuously to some (White) bodies and deficit to others (bodies of Color). She insists that the unit to be theorized and researched encompasses the whole of racialized social relations, the specific institution in question and the social relations within, not merely the ‘black strands’ (see also Fine *et al.*, 2004; Fine and Burns, 2004).

As Bronfenbrenner helped us see in 1979, the task of social researchers is to theorize across levels and resist the common sense explanations by which individuals are the site for analysis, blame, responsibility, and data collection. In this chapter, we rely upon exemplars of social research that both sharpen and stretch across levels of analysis, interrogating the movements of power across history, structure, social relations and lives, and the theoretical understandings of the webbing that connects (c.f. Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fine and Weis, 2005). In these works, no unit is too small to see the fingerprints of the world. And no world is too abstract to see the footprints of individuals and movements who choose to make an imprint.

Chapter 6: Validities and Threats

As Chapter three works through the notion of researcher *objectivity*, this chapter is dedicated to opening up and reclaiming another traditional element of research methodology—*validity*. In particular, readers are challenged to deepen their thinking about expert and construct validity.

Expert Validity

Expert validity was fundamentally challenged at the conference, and in this volume would also be re-assessed. Refusing to toss the concept out, we invite researchers to expand our appreciation of where “expertise” lives. Drawing on standpoint and critical race theory (see Collins, 1991; Matsuda, 1995), we see that research designs shift dramatically once there is a recognition of varied forms of expertise that are distributed, but not legitimated, throughout unjust systems.

A number of researchers have asked—“Who is excluded from the (research) room?” and “How does this affect what we think we know?” Julie Blackman (1994) has written on battered women who kill and the social psychology of arrested mothers, speculating on what theorists and policy makers have lost by not listening closely to the women’s views of marriage, intimacy, heterosexuality and violence. Likewise, Pam Reid and Edward Vianni have written on the policy and program needs of poor women (2002), with an eye of concern about how social planners have designed programs “for” but rarely “with” these women.

In this chapter, we extend these questions to determine whose expertise has been ignored, undermined, or over-written in our studies of social oppression and resistance (Gaventa, 1993). If researchers consider expertise to be lodged primarily with other PhDs who have been socialized in the language and logic of our theories and methods, to what extent does social research align itself primarily with dominant discourses, ignoring the expertise of those who suffer most? If methodologists insist that being “too close/involved/emotional” is a bias, but “too far/disengaged/rational”—in the face of injustice—is not, to what extent have we fundamentally clouded our theoretical and empirical insights? Is it not particularly problematic in the study of oppression that we have, in fact, widened the space between “expertise” and “experience?”

One epistemological response to this problem can be found in Participatory Action Research projects (PAR), fertilized by the writings of Lewin (1946), Fals-Borda (1979), and Freire (1982). Participatory action research projects are designed explicitly by a collective of people who import varied bases of expertise to the project. Drawing on participatory research in prisons and with youth in schools and communities (see Fine *et al.*, 2001; Fine *et al.*, 2004; Fine and Burns, 2004), our research teams have brought together the deep and varied local knowledges of those who live/work/survive on the bottom of social hierarchies, with elites, outsiders and those who believe themselves to be bystanders. Our aim has been to create what Mary Louise Pratt calls a “contact zone” (see Torre, 2005). Varied forms of expertise sit in conversation, producing a social analysis much more dense and splintering than any singular perspective could birth. The delicate practice of joining these varied bodies and diverse forms of expertise, to generate questions, gather and analyze data and determine products, creates a collective, dynamic plurality of expertise, coalescing around points of agreement, dissensus and surprise.

There are significant debates percolating across PAR projects—for instance, should the research team ‘equally’ value perspectives of those oppressed and those privileged, or more heavily weight the perspectives of those who have been the victims of injustice? And if we do the latter, might we confront the dilemmas that Jost *et al.* (2004) have written on, that hegemonic perspectives can be heard from the ‘top’ and the ‘bottom’ of social hierarchies? Some who work with PAR argue that the research collectives should constitute safe spaces, and include only those most desperately affected by injustice (Ginwright and Cammarota,

2002). Others have written on the advantages produced by gathering an explicitly diverse collective of persons who bring distinct forms of power and capital to the table (see Torre and Fine, 2004). With either resolution, PAR nevertheless insists that the notion of expertise is troubled. New bodies are brought to the table as researchers. With a transformative sense of expertise, PAR projects raise other methodological questions that have been easily resolved (or sidestepped) because only "like minded scientists" have been allowed in the room. Once expertise multiplies and dissensus fuels the conversation, participatory action researchers have to think through what constitutes triangulation (should distinct forms of data confirm and/or challenge each other?); who needs to be out of the room to achieve "inter-rater reliability," and what happens if they enter and we struggle together toward a thicker understanding of reliability and expertise.

Construct Validity

This section addresses the methodological standard of *construct validity*. Two challenges are raised about how social psychologists have framed our leading constructs in social psychology. First, we look at social psychology's long-standing tendency to generate constructs that represent and naturalize *consensus* and *coherence*, at the expense of evidence of dissent and contention. The 1950s and 1960s were filled with studies that "proved" the widespread desire to conform, comply and obey authorities. The fame of Herb Kelman (1958), Solomon Asch (1956), Leon Festinger (1964), Irving Janis (Janis and Gilmore, 1965), and later Stanley Milgram (1983) rides on the backs of these conformity studies. Theoretically and politically very important work, these studies were self-consciously designed to challenge the then dominant representations of the "biological man" who was affected by drives and interior motives. These social psychologists sought to reveal the power and plasticity of the social. But by crafting and maintaining a discipline organized primarily around variables of consensus and dissonance reduction, we have problematically under-theorized the political mechanisms of coercion and hegemony, and the personal and collective bases of resistance, dissent and revolution (Fine, 2004a,b; Moore, 1979; Sampson, 1983). Thus, our first challenge to construct validity (as we have known it) is to inspire within social psychology a meta-consideration of broader range of constructs, particularly those that trouble the production of seeming consensus, and those that account for challenges in the conformity dynamic, counter stories, outliers, queers and silenced voices (Harris *et al.*, 2001). Without this work, we run the risk of documenting a social psychology of oppression that occludes the rich and relentless moments of resistance initiated historically and today by social movements and by individuals who dare.

We can find, in our disciplinary history, scholars who have punctured consensus talk, but they haven't always been granted a sustained hearing. The groundbreaking work of Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna on ethnomethodology

and the theoretical significance of outliers comes to mind (1985), recently resurrected in the pages of *Feminism and Psychology*. Likewise, there is more recent work by Rhoda Unger on radical marginality (2000). As Serge Moscovici and colleagues (Moscovici *et al.*, 1969; Moscovici and Personnaz, 1980) demonstrated with their work on "minority influence" as a protest against conformity studies, these works ask us to consider what we learn from those who dare to differ, resist, challenge, and refuse dominant influences and categories (see Hall and Fine, 2005; Van Ora, 2004) and what we lose by ignoring them.

If the first challenge to construct validity involves a meta-analysis of which constructs have risen to the top of social psychology, the second challenge turns to the interior of our constructs, and addresses our discipline's cold shoulder to contradiction, ambivalence, and variation. Leon Festinger's (1964) writings on the press to reduce dissonance and establish equilibrium have had an enormous, and some would say dampening, impact on the field. The belief that people cannot tolerate contradictions tames so much of the vibrant, existential dissent that percolates just under the surface of society; flattens the wild and exciting variations that exist within human cognition, emotion, relation and action. As Jennifer Hochschild argues in her essay in this issue, it is in the complexity of "white ambivalence about equality" that we learn about "whites' simultaneous endorsement of the norm of equality and rejection of steps that could promote it." Inside the knot of ambivalence lay the seeds for progressive change, collective resistance and to honest, better, and more generalizable theorizing (see Guishard *et al.*, 2003, see also www.iosj.com; Harris *et al.*, 2001). The challenge, then, is to generate psychological constructs that are at once theoretically sturdy and yet allow for variation and dissonance within. (See William Cross, Jr. on variation within Black identities, 1991; Kay Deaux and Tiffany Munn-Perkins on multiple identities, 1999; Hall and Fine, 2005; Kimberle Crenshaw on intersectionality, 1995; Jason Van Ora, 2004; Janie Ward on critical resistance, 2000.)

Chapter 7: Generalizability—Toward Theory and the Social Imagination

> The potential social value of this study derives precisely from the fact that normal, healthy, educated young men could be so radically transformed under the institutional pressures of a 'prison environment.' If this could happen in so short a time, without the excesses that are possible in real prisons, and if it could happen to the 'cream of the crop of American youth,' then one can only shudder to imagine what society is doing both to the actual guards and prisoners who are at this very moment participating in that unnatural 'social experiment. (Zimbardo, 1973)

This chapter seeks to open up what is perhaps the most vexing and difficult question in the social sciences—the question of generalizability. In common use, generalizability sanctions the application of findings from one study to other settings. As a discipline, I would argue, social psychologists have been both too

concerned with the technical specificity of empirical generalizability and under-concerned with generalizability of theory and action. This chapter will investigate a more plastic and hopefully productive frame for generalizability—seeking the conditions under which research findings can move across settings (see Steele as example, 1997).

Rather than defining generalizability as a direct and technical extension of a finding or set of findings, the chapter will develop two distinct conceptions of generalizability. *Theoretical generalizability* refers to the extent to which theoretical notions or dynamics move from one context to another. *Provocative generalizability* would offer a measure of the extent to which a piece of research *provokes* readers, across contexts, to generalize to 'worlds not yet,' in the language of Maxine Greene; to rethink and reimagine current arrangements.

On Theoretical Generalizability. In 1991 I published a book called *Framing Dropouts*, on the social psychological contexts and dynamics of inner city public high schools that produce extraordinarily high rates of drop-outs. Concerned that in the typical neighborhood high school in poor communities of New York City, only 20–40% of the 9th graders survive to senior year, I designed an ethnographic analysis to study how 'drop outs' were produced. Spending a year in high school, attending classes, working in the office, visiting the homes of graduates, current students and drop-outs, conducting interviews, focus groups, surveys and archival investigations, I generated a portrait of an institution that was producing, seamlessly, the mass exodus of Black and Brown youth of poverty, with an ideology that justified their exit as if sad, but inevitable. I searched to find the villain who was tossing bodies out the window, and I sought the gangs of disruptive youth who were actively tossed. But I found neither. Instead I witnessed a slow, drip feed of youth out of the doors of the school, and thereby exiled (more or less permanently) out of the fantasy of the American dream.

The book gained popularity among critical theorists in education, urban educators in particular. And so I lectured nationally. One evening, after a detailed presentation on the book and its methods, an educator from rural Maine stood to say, "The same thing happens here." I couldn't imagine what she meant. The original school was located in the heart of Manhattan, with students drawn from Central and East Harlem. With a largely Jewish faculty and Black and Latino student body, I couldn't believe that here, in rural Maine, "the same thing happens." And yet this educator expounded on her initial observation—"We also have a practice of throwing out some students, as if it were inevitable or for their own good. It's a broad-based theory of disposability; that many, maybe most of our students—the poor ones at least—won't make it, and then we design schools to make it true." I credit this unnamed woman with the inspiration for theoretical generalizability. There was nothing in the stubborn particulars (Cherry, 1995) of the New York City setting that would have suggested easy transfer. And yet a theory and practice of disposability traveled easily up Route 95 to rural Maine. (See Levin, this volume on theoretical generalizability of worker collectives.)

In reviewing an earlier draft of this essay, Morton Deutsch commented to me, “Generalizability is the most important and vexing feature of social sciences.” We were sitting, at the time, in the basement of the Fortune Society, a home for men and women recently released from prison. It was the day before Mort’s 85th birthday, and the social psychologists among us were all trying to imagine our footprints in the sand; trying to figure out how our research did or didn’t speak to these men and women, or the policies that would choke them or enable them lives of dignity. I returned home to consult Deutsch and Krauss (1965): “Theory is the net men [sic] weaves to catch the world of observation—to explain, predict and influence it . . . . Some are all-purpose nets meant to catch many species of behavior, others are clearly limited to a few species; some have been constructed for use near the surface, others work best in the depths. All of the theorists, however, are deeply committed to the view that ideas are important and that data from the world of observation must be enmeshed in a web of ideas if there is to be a significant scientific yield” (Deutsch and Krauss, vii, 1965).

In the search for theoretical generalizability, we design and conduct research, gather up our findings and we seek “all-purpose nets.” But for scholars of oppression and resistance, the threads of these nets have to be stitched in serious and sustained conversation with those who are assaulted by oppression, resisting it and/or cleaning up the mess created by widespread social injustice.

To enhance the theoretical generalizability of a study, researchers/research collectives might create settings like the one in the Fortune Society for conversations among researchers, activists, practitioners and theorists who draw from distinct contexts to discuss how, or under what conditions, common and distinct dynamics occur across samples and settings. These conversations would be wide-reaching, not simply a presentation of ‘findings’ from researchers to practitioners/activists, but conversations that deeply investigate what about these findings resonates (or not) in particular settings, and then across settings. Together, we would discuss how the next generation of research could be designed to support the work of policy, activism and practice, or reveal dynamics that need to be better understood.

In addition, researchers might challenge ourselves, at the end of each empirical paper, to specify/speculate on the contextual conditions necessary for findings to transfer across sites. Moscovici and colleagues (1969) model just such a nod toward theory for action when they conclude their laboratory based research report on “minority influence”:

> We have the right to say that the consistent minority, in one experiment, provoked a real modification in the norm of the majority and not only in its response. If this phenomenon is rare in the laboratory {a reference to the proliferation of Asch-like studies in conformity] it is not in political life. Thus, a political party often adopts the ideas of the vocabulary of another party or social movement. Yet citizens continue to vote for this same party, to respond to this party’s slogans. For example, in France the Gaullist government in framing its own education program, adopted part of the rhetoric and the program proposed by students and workers in May 1968. Nevertheless, when a Frenchman votes for the Gaullist party he

> believes that he is 'responding' to the same political body and in the same manner as he did in the past . . . Indeed, it is conceivable that minorities are more capable of changing the majority's code than its social response, while the majority would have more influence on the individual's verbal response than on his intellectual or perceptive code . . . Great innovators have succeeded in imposing their ideas, their discoveries, without necessarily receiving direct recognition for their influence . . . Thus, if we really want to understand the process of social influence, it is not enough to study more carefully the role of minorities and of innovation. We must begin to explore more subtle mechanisms of influence than those which are at work in direct and visible acceptance of norms and judgments proposed. (378–379)

In the midst of the Fortune Society, a loving and cooperative environment in which former prisoners clearly rose to their finest, it was clear that Deutsch's (1974) Crude Law of Social Relations was in the room—"characteristic processes and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship (cooperative or competitive) tend also to elicit that type of social relationship" (p. 365). If you create conditions of cooperative interdependence, people will interact cooperatively, and if you create conditions of contrient, punitive or violent interdependence, most people will exhibit the predictable behavioral correlates. Joanne Page, Director of Fortune Society and daughter of Holocaust survivors, told us that she welcomes men and women into the Castle Residence if they qualify—by being recently released from prison, homeless and sober—with a simple, "Welcome home. Remember that here you are not the worst thing you have ever done, but may become the best." And so we bathed in an emotional context that brought to light and life the vitality of Deutsch's Crude Law.

Just as Philip Zimbardo and colleagues invoked in 1973, in the original quote of this section, it is most important that social scientists try to figure out what the Stanford prison experiment says about prisons then and now, and about the Abu-Ghraib atrocities in Iraq. Such theoretical generalizability is the raison d'etre of basic and applied research on social injustice.

On Provocative Generalizability. There is another form of generalizability I want to offer here, one inspired by Maxine Greene (1995), who argues for work—research, literature, art, music, dance—that "fights the numbness of oppression." Like Morton Deutsch she argues for work that "awakens a sense of injustice," and creates "openings" for what we do not yet know, have not yet experienced. She contrasts the creative provocation of an *aesthetic* experience with its opposite, the numbing of pain produced by *anesthetic*. Working with John Dewey's quote that "facts are made and repellent things," Greene writes that without reflection, openings and re-analysis, facts deaden us to what could be.

Drawing from Greene's inspiration, *provocative generalizability* refers to researchers' attempts to move their findings toward that which is not yet imagined, not yet in practice, not yet in sight (see Roberts, 2004). This form of generalizability offers readers an invitation to launch from our findings to what might be, rather than only understanding (or naturalizing) what is. Greene's desire for social and ethical imagination rises as a standard for social research; does the work move readers to act?

In the 1980s, Edward Sampson argued that traditional conceptions of generalizability worked only in closed systems. To the extent that researchers would wish psychology to *transform*, rather than *reproduce* social arrangements, Sampson argued, we need a more ambitious goal. He offered the term *morphogenesis* to "describe a changing pattern of relations in response to information exchanges rather than the kind of static and mechanical closure that is useful only when dealing with closed systems" (p. 75). Drawing on critical theory, Sampson made a strong, self-critical case for a psychology "developed in the service of societal transformation . . . the relationship between the sciences of human life and society is bound up with matters of interest and value. They cannot be neutral, indifferent and disinterested, for their understandings of human life will either contribute to societal reproduction or potentially contribute to societal transformation" (p. 121; see also Lather, 1985). Like Sampson, Susan Sontag, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, speaks to the provocation of the photograph or the televised viewing of war abroad:

> The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the far away sufferers—seen close up on the television screen—and the privilege viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all our good intentions) an impertinent—if not an inappropriate—response. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we might prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark. (2003, pp. 102–103)

Sontag is quick to note that although we cannot know the pain of others in our bodies, we must resist the temptation to distance or grow weary. We must view scenes of torture and ask how would this be? How could it be otherwise? And, as Greene asks, What can I do to repair the world? Research on utopias (Kidder, 2003), worker and residential collectives (Levin, 2004; Vanderslice, 1995), movements for resistance (Moore, 1979), the Israeli Refusenik soldiers who refuse to serve in occupied territories (Declaration of Israeli Reservists, 2002), deep looks at institutions and madness (Goffman, 1961; Rosenhan, 1973) and life on the margins (Hall and Fine, 2005) may be our most vivid examples, begging us all to ask—What else is possible? How could it be otherwise? And again, "What Shall We Do?"

One could imagine research articles that end with provocative stretches, that interrupt the passive voice to ask readers what will happen if nothing is done, or what might happen if something were done. Discussion sections could offer exemplary actions of policy changes, organizing, educational projects, more research, and legislative changes taken in concert with social research.

Further, to inspire readers toward a sense of existential obligation, we might craft conclusions that invite researchers' agency and responsibility. In her book

Death without weeping: The violence of everyday life, Nancy Scheper-Hughes writes ethnographically on mothering in poverty in Brazil, where many children die young and maternal-child bonding has a rhythm distinct from the materially affluent bonds found in many parts of North America (1993). Among the many features of the book that I admire, Scheper-Hughes periodically interrupts the text to remind readers not to judge (or to stop judging) these mothering practices in isolation, but to recognize that what typical North American readers think of as "good mothering" requires substantial material resources, privileges, and supports that these poor Brazilian women typically lack. By interrupting the text and speaking directly to readers, Scheper-Hughes insists that readers not distance, evaluate, or remove themselves from the material and cultural production of what looks like "good" or "bad" mothering. She positions readers as audiences of responsibility and agency.

Most research is written with an "as if" contract assumed between researcher and audience—I'm objective and you're objective; we're both "watching" society in the making; I won't discomfort, only inform, you. As with some pieces of art or performances, we may think about writing research in ways that move readers to think through implications, actions, collusion, social responsibility, and social imagination (see Roberts, 2004 on the IOSJ website).

Provocative generalizability, joined with earlier thinking about strong objectivity, insists that both researchers and readers, like participants in the research, are positioned and present: thinking critically about injustice in our everyday lives and analyzing how unjust distributions of resources and opportunities affect our comfort and discomfort, our dependencies, privileges, joys, our moments of shared pain, and potential collective actions.

Chapter 8: Beyond Research . . . . Injustice is Not (Just) a Cognitive Problem

> I would suggest that it is absurd for us not to make our stand clear on matters of injustice, that failure to do so does grave image damage to us in the public's eye and that to continue to ignore damage done by social injustices that are readily apparent through use of our sense organs and consciences severely weakens our credibility. (Payton, 1984, p. 392)

The critically engaged scholars cited here would probably all agree that social injustice is not simply a cognitive problem. With enormous variation, they recognize the possibilities and also the limits of social research to awaken a sense of injustice, to provoke social action. And yet all embody a sense of responsibility and urgency, to join larger struggles and coalitions in courts, communities, movements, schools, and churches and to contribute the tools of social research to broad-based struggles for social justice. In this spirit, this chapter explores historic and contemporary examples of researcher-activist collaborations. Examples drawn from SPSSI, The Psychologists' League, Psychologists for Social Responsibility, Kurt Lewin's Commission on Community Interrelations, and Morton Deutsch's

International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution model collaboratives entrenched at once in the worlds of theory building, policy development, community organizing, and social action.

In this last chapter we introduce examples of activist-research collaborations that have been dedicated to *Stir[ring] It Up*, in the language of Rinku Sen (2003), including: the Highlander Center, involved in participatory research with youth, elders and the struggles of residents in Appalachia; the Paolo Freire Institute working globally on critical education; the Harvard University Civil Rights Project, bringing together policy analysts, organizers, journalists and researchers on critical issues of racial injustice in education; the Applied Research Center, where organizers, writers, and activists gather social research to support their campaigns for racial justice; the Rockridge Institute directed by George Lakoff to reinvigorate both a vision and language for a social justice of inclusion; the Center for Policy Studies in Washington, D. C., which produces critical work on economics, prisons, and social well being with a particular analysis by race and class; the Poverty and Race Research Action Council; Mort Deutsch's International Center for Conflict and Cooperation and the collaborations borne during and since the IOSJ conference.

Today we find ourselves in a political period of urgency and despair. The academy remains one of the few remaining spaces within which dissent is possible. Here social critique and outrage are recognized as forms of knowledge; inquiry is valued as oxygen for democratic sustenance; collaborations are possible and necessary for sustaining global movements of resistance. And so we craft a book on methods for a psychology not yet, but perhaps a psychology that once was, a book that takes rigor and justice seriously.

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