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Series Foreword

Qualitative approaches have become accepted and indeed embraced as empirical methods within the social sciences, as scholars have realized that many of the phenomena in which we are interested are complex and require deep inner reflection and equally penetrating examination. Quantitative approaches often cannot capture such phenomena well through their standard methods (e.g., self-report measures), so qualitative designs using interviews and other in-depth data-gathering procedures offer exciting, nimble, and useful research approaches.

Indeed, the number and variety of qualitative approaches that have been developed is remarkable. We remember Bill Stiles saying (quoting Chairman Mao) at one meeting about methods, "Let a hundred flowers bloom," indicating that there are many appropriate methods for addressing research questions. In this series, we celebrate this diversity (hence, the cover design of flowers).

The question for many of us, though, has been how to decide among approaches and how to learn the different methods. Many prior descriptions of the various qualitative methods have not provided clear enough descriptions of the methods, making it difficult for novice researchers to learn how to use them. Thus, those interested in learning about and pursuing qualitative research need crisp and thorough descriptions of these approaches, with lots of examples to illustrate the method so that readers can grasp how to use the methods.

The purpose of this series of books, then, is to present a range of qualitative approaches that seemed most exciting and illustrative of the range

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of methods appropriate for social science research. We asked leading experts in qualitative methods to contribute to the series, and we were delighted that they accepted our invitation. Through this series, readers have the opportunity to learn qualitative research methods from those who developed the methods and/or who have been using them successfully for years.

We asked the authors of each book to provide context for the method, including a rationale, situating the method within the qualitative tradition, describing the method's philosophical and epistemological background, and noting the key features of the method. We then asked them to describe in detail the steps of the method, including the research team, sampling, biases and expectations, data collection, data analysis, and variations on the method. We also asked authors to provide tips for the research process and for writing a manuscript emerging from a study that used the method. Finally, we asked authors to reflect on the methodological integrity of the approach, along with the benefits and limitations of the particular method.

This series of books can be used in several different ways. Instructors teaching courses in qualitative research could use the whole series, presenting one method at a time to expose students to a range of qualitative methods. Alternatively, instructors could choose to focus on just a few approaches, as depicted in specific books, supplementing the books with examples from studies that have been published using the approaches, and providing experiential exercises to help students get started using the approaches.

This book describes critical participatory action research (CPAR), a method that fosters engagement between researchers and communities that seek to document, challenge, and transform conditions of social justice. Michelle Fine and María Elena Torre have upheld the mantra of "No research on us, without us" throughout their more than 25 years of research experience with a range of communities (e.g., prisoners, students, domestic violence survivors, asylum seekers) facing multiple injustices. The powerful examples they include here will stimulate readers to deeply examine the foundational questions and processes inherent in engaging in research with communities.

—Clara E. Hill and Sarah Knox

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1 CRITICAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Conceptual Foundations

Critical participatory action research (CPAR) is a framework for engaging research with communities interested in documenting, challenging, and transforming conditions of social injustice. The preposition "with" matters enormously. It marks a dramatic shift in the design of research as usual, breaking from conventional approaches in which academics research and write "about" or "on" communities as objects of study. CPAR, instead, asserts all people's right to research (Appadurai, 2006), to ask critical questions about the systems and practices that shape their lives, and to imagine—through research—how they might be otherwise. Rooted in the activist call "No research on us, without us," CPAR projects reposition those who have traditionally been the objects of study—children, youth, communities under siege, survivors of state or interpersonal violence, immigrants, struggling farmers, people in prison, LGBTQIA+ young adults, workers, mothers, educators—as coresearchers, sitting alongside traditionally trained researchers, crafting the questions, methods, analyses, and research products. This commitment to "research with" is an epistemological, ethical, and methodological critique and transformation of research in which PhD-credentialed

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researchers (too often well resourced and White) from "outside" gather "data" from communities (too often disinvested in and of color) and then analyze and publish results with little sense of accountability to or response-ability for the people or communities about whom they are writing (Montgomery & bergman, 2017). CPAR is a modest move to democratize and decolonize research as praxis with communities under siege, one dedicated to research that bends toward action (Smith, 1999).

We consider this book a back-pocket guide rather than a "how to." We offer an introduction, an orientation, to the commitments and practices that ground the approach that we hope you will make your own in your specific contexts. We write from our positions at The Public Science Project and Critical Psychology doctoral program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York where we have participated in a range of CPAR projects for 25 years—in prisons and schools, with high school students, college students, women experiencing domestic violence, asylum-seeking families separated at the border and detained within the United States, and community members in the Bronx and Brooklyn fighting against aggressive policing and gentrification and for urban farming and community control of their culturally responsive schools and local resources (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). With coresearchers, we write to change policy, support organizing, educate the public, re-present communities often misrepresented by scholarship or media, and build theory. In this book, we sketch images of how deeply decentralized and critical research has been undertaken with communities and offer some examples, making visible the questions we have asked ourselves and the communities with whom we collaborate, the decisions and mistakes we have made. If you are looking for a methods book with an atheoretical or ahistoric formula or algorithm, put the book down now—you will be disappointed. If, however, you are willing to think through the deeply contextual and relational critical science questions, commitments, and processes involved in researching with communities on issues of profound, intimate, and urgent concern, drawing on a range of methods, with humility and the skills you likely already have, read on.

We write this volume in the midst of a pandemic and a time of unending state and interpersonal violence against people of color—African Americans and immigrants. At the same time, we witnessed inspiring uprisings, led largely by young people of color and joined by allies from across racial and ethnic groups, ages, genders, and sexualities, informed by evidence gathered bottom up. We all know the names of wealthy White people impacted by COVID-19 who have been reported on in the news, but we will never publicly hear the names of the "essential workers" and their family members who have taken ill, the people in prison who have died of COVID, the children in

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detention camps and youth or adults in prisons, on the streets, and in public housing who are also impacted—and at staggeringly higher rates—but without tests, without a vaccine, without health care, the hundreds of thousands deemed not newsworthy. The virus has only exacerbated and made hypervisible long-standing inequalities that have built and defined our nation. We all witnessed the state-sanctioned slaughter of George Floyd and learned of the murder of Breonna Taylor and so many other African Americans killed by police. For some of us, this was news; for others, the killings echoed stories our grandmothers warned us about. As we bear witness to state-sanctioned violence against Black, Native, and immigrant communities, we must reckon with the fact of our deeply unequal connections. We must reveal and contend with the policies and structures that intimately link us, that breed and legitimate inequities that create and inflate privileges for some of us, that simultaneously produce brutality for others of us. CPAR is an approach to psychological research in which research collectives intentionally investigate these power differentials and inequities that hide under the banner of "normality" as part of their methodological praxis. Wisdom and care, vulnerabilities and points of view, are exchanged across diverse experiences and standpoints, through participatory inquiry, purposefully guided by those who are most impacted, as a humble gesture toward knowledge justice (de Sousa-Santos, 2014).

Our goal in this volume is to be as clear as possible about our values and decisions in design, analysis, writing, and the actions that grow from our critical inquiry. We are not saying to do it this way or follow the exact steps we have taken. Instead, we offer, throughout the text, moments to pause for CPAR reflections—questions, ethical considerations, epistemological commitments—for research collectives to take up in relation to their particular contexts. While we hope our work speaks to a broad audience, in many ways, we are writing with special attention to those located in universities who yearn to build research collaboratively and respectfully with communities outside the academy. It is to graduate students and faculty that we share these considerations, commitments, and questions as a way to help you deepen inclusion and participation on your research teams and with those who participate in your studies, to encourage you to get beneath the dominant stories and bring to the surface important counter-narratives and knotty contradictions in your work, to provide strategies for developing accessible analyses for widespread dissemination and provocation, and to create pathways for you to move your collaborative research toward action.

CPAR is shaped in conversation and dialogue, across lines of power and difference, and in ways that are deeply contextual and relational. Like any

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good GPS, we will help you think through where you are beginning and where you want to end and then offer a set of possible routes toward just research.

WHY CPAR? CRITICAL ELEMENTS

CPAR offers a way to think about how, with whom, and for whom we design research, analyze our findings, and disseminate results. The research sits atop a heavy existential, political, and ethical question: To whom are we—as researchers, often but not always based in universities—accountable? This question anchors all CPAR projects, particularly in times of crisis.

The acronym CPAR reflects the critical elements and values that underlie this approach. The *C* stands for critical, which means that our projects are rooted in a range of social theories focused on questions of power, structural and intimate violence, and inequities and that our projects are shaped by a collective anchored by those most impacted by injustice. Criticality materializes in our theoretical perspectives and our research collectives. Theoretically, CPAR projects draw from a range of critical perspectives: critical race, feminist, poststructural, decolonial, disability, Marxist, Indigenous, and/or queer theory. In terms of our research collectives, our designs are developed around questions of power and inequity, in collaboration and dialogue with those most affected by injustice. This line of vision—built from everyday lived experience with the policies and conditions under study—widens our understandings of the shape of the problem, expands the kinds of evidence and methods necessary to document inequities, and influences how and to whom we choose to present our findings in the larger world.

There are many variations of participatory action research (PAR), as elaborated later in this book, in which children, youth, elders, and others engage with academics as coresearchers. An important distinction is that CPAR focuses intentionally on questions of power and injustice, intersectionality and action. We view critical research as one more resource in, by, and for movements for justice.

As in all PAR projects, the *P* in CPAR stands for rich and deep participation by a collective of researchers, including and centered on those most impacted by the issue being studied. Optimally, a diverse research collective is involved throughout: in theorizing, crafting research questions and designs, figuring out methods and samples, conducting analysis, and writing up the findings. As you will see in Chapters 2 and 3, however, it is not enough to "invite" "diverse" people into the research team; processes must be engaged so

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everyone's gifts and lines of vision are visible and animated, and all forms of privilege (e.g., academic, White, highly educated) are checked.

The *A* signals that CPAR projects link research with action through a range of forms: scholarship, social policy, teaching, legal reform, organizing, and sometimes theatre, spoken word, graphic arts, comics, digital shorts, music, and more. The overall aim of most projects is to build theory from the ground up, advance social change, reeducate the public, and provoke to action both people in our communities and those who bear witness.

The *R* represents a commitment to systematic inquiry—qualitative, quantitative, and/or mixed methods; historical and visual; creative and traditional—undertaken as democratic knowledge production, centered in the perspectives of those most silenced.

In many ways, CPAR is like other approaches to research. As you will see in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, we begin with theoretical frameworks drawn from existing literatures but always in lively conversation and contestation with other social and cultural ways of knowing, as well as the diverse and textured standpoints and experiences of our research team members. Together, we engage in *collective reflexivity* to explore how our biographies and experiences inform how we see the issue at hand, share questions, and develop designs, analyses, and writing. We unpack our individual and collective perspectives and the emotions we carry into the inquiry. We address and try to tease apart our differences, questioning perspectives borne through hegemonic privilege and oppression. We attend closely to the perspectives of those who have most endured unjust conditions. These collective knowledge-building activities allow us to thicken what we know of "the field" and uncover a set of research questions worth asking, questions that prioritize, in the spirit of liberation theologian and social psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994), justice for the most marginalized.

Once our research questions take shape from our collective deliberations, we craft a design and spend time producing and sharing knowledge within the research group and then beyond. Borrowing from Sandra Harding (1991), we call this *strong objectivity*—the relentless and rigorous bringing together of various points of view, kinds of evidence, and arguments in critical inquiry and dialogue, to ask questions for which we do not yet know the answers. This process itself—as you will see—is humbling, invigorating, at times treacherous, and at others joyful, but it always, we argue, enhances the validity of the research.

As you will read in later chapters, we care about traditional social science commitments, including objectivity, validity, generalizability, reflexivity, and ethics—but with a critical edge. We see these as crucial aspects

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of the collective project of creating a public science. CPAR research collectives are organized according to the commitment to research as democratic knowledge production. We intentionally expand who is considered an expert and what knowledges hold value. We challenge the presumed exclusive authority of the academically trained researcher and take seriously our response-ability to producing research materials with and for the communities, movements, and/or groups we are working with and alongside.

WHERE COLLECTIVE WISDOM GROWS: PARTICIPATORY CONTACT ZONES

CPAR projects are designed by vibrant and diverse research collectives that include a range of coresearchers. A research collective may include neighborhood residents, activists, lawyers, community leaders, educators, elders, historians, artists, and others who share a passion for the issue of study. We engage these collectives as *participatory contact zones* (Torre, 2009), spaces where differently positioned people come together, with distinct relationships to power and vulnerability, where our differences are cultivated as resources. As you will see in our discussion of CPAR projects throughout the book, within participatory contact zones, dynamics of power and the related inevitable tensions they produce are analyzed and understood as method, as part of (not an interruption of) the research process.

As a research team with different lived experiences, areas of expertise, and comfort with academic skills such as statistics, we read the existing literatures together and contrast the academic literature with what we know from our own biographies, cultures, music, and affects to understand more fully the issue we are studying—whether it be aggressive policing, the overincarceration of people of color, experiences of youth who are pushed out of school, queer youth in schools, young people aging out of foster care while in college, women experiencing domestic violence, families separated at the U.S. border, students of color attending predominantly White universities, or restorative justice. For each project, we host research retreats—or first gatherings—where we collectively paint the landscape of issues we will be researching. We share our distinct standpoints, interview each other about our lives and related experiences, and build on our collective knowledge about our topic, reading and discussing articles, watching short films, watching and/or conducting interviews, searching archives, and reviewing public data. All materials "on topic" that we review together should be accessible to varied literacy levels, languages, and (dis)abilities; in these research retreats, we bring together materials that are academic and popular, historic

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and contemporary, music and art, written by youth and elders, cultural materials and social media. As we move between our lives and past and contemporary ideas about our topic, we build trust among each other as we encourage dissent and work through our sometimes clashing points of view. We challenge perspectives borne in privilege and seek the buried wisdom that has been silenced in the margins—the knowledge of the "special-ed" rooms, the juvenile justice facilities, the shelters, beneath and inside mental health diagnoses, and detention camps. These conversations are often messy; we bump into each other and sometimes say things that are hurtful. When this happens—and it happens to all of us at one point or another, across all our differences—we apologize, deepen our learning, recommit to each other and our shared goals, and try to keep building valid social inquiry that we move research toward action.

Please note that negotiation of power is part of all research, even in the "lab." The difference is that in conventional research, these conversations are usually unacknowledged. For example, consider graduate students working with faculty who have the final say or are the only ones given credit or large-scale public health research where graduate students conducting research and/or analyses are not recognized. In these cases, rarely are differences respected, aired, or addressed through a lens of power. In CPAR, they are understood as the marrow of CPAR knowledge production.

Our participatory contact zones carve out a "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1973) where we can speak and listen, argue differences and disagreements, develop trust together, stumble, say I am sorry, learn from mistakes, challenge each other, grow new analyses, and build a more critical and imaginative knowledge base—precisely because we dare to inquire together. Members of the collective often establish guiding ethical principles so the contact zone is safe enough: commitments to group practices and research methods and analyses that are antiracist, antisexist, anti-homophobic, anti-xenophobic, anti-Islamophobic, anti-ableist, and so on, and when someone slips up, we develop processes to acknowledge, question each other, and grow. Engaging power (or Whiteness or elitism, etc.) is not easy. Conflicts do and will surface, even in "participatory" contact zones—see Chapter 3—when traditionally trained researchers engage in critical inquiry with, and not on, individuals and even when research team members "choose" to stand and work together in solidarity. It bears repeating that CPAR is not necessarily a comfortable experience; reflecting on the colonizing history of psychology and research and trying to collaborate across it can be bumpy and challenging, but when tied to the work of creating a different future, it can also be exhilarating.

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The commitment to collectivity runs deep, from beginning to end of a CPAR project. On projects with large and small budgets, we are intentional about collective ethics, credit, process, power, money, authorship, child care, transportation, language, food, vulnerabilities to state violence, our purpose, and what actions and audiences we need to address. Coresearchers are compensated for labor and time with combinations of stipends, movie tickets, gift cards, college credits, food, metro cards, child care, translators, and travel funds. In our written work and our videos and online productions, we are all acknowledged as coauthors, and when we present the work, in our various capacities and contexts, everyone gets credit. Our first collective "product" is usually a report, brochure, community event, or policy document designed to give back the evidence or stories and statistics to the community and activists and policymakers or those leading campaigns for change. We also write academic papers together and present at academic and activist conferences. For more detailed images of the work, please visit The Public Science Project (https://www.publicscienceproject.org), where you can look through participatory projects conducted in prisons, schools, and communities; read academic papers; watch youth-created videos; and review legal testimony we have submitted based on our scholarship.

SITUATING CPAR IN THE QUALITATIVE TRADITIONS

CPAR reflects an epistemology, not a methodology. While we are allied with many scholars who work in the qualitative traditions, CPAR signals a distinct way of thinking about who has knowledge, who holds expertise, and how new knowledge can be produced, across differences, when the perspective of those most impacted by injustice are privileged and fueling movements for change are prioritized. CPAR methodologies are often both qualitative and quantitative, visual and creative, and typically closely aligned with a variety of qualitative traditions, including grounded theory (Levitt, 2021), decolonial epistemologies (Smith, 1999), decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2010), intersectionality (Collins, 1991, 2012; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 2008), and liberation theory (Martín-Baró, 1994). That is, in CPAR, we are interested in how people make sense of the worlds they inhabit and the worlds they make. Participatory researchers collaborate fully and respectfully with communities under siege, rather than gathering top-down narratives.

A basic commitment of CPAR is to create space within the research practice to re-view and challenge the dominant stories being told about