Experience Research Social Change

CRITICAL METHODS

3RD ED.

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EXPERIENCE, RESEARCH, SOCIAL CHANGE

Critical Methods

by Colleen Reid, Lorraine Greaves, and Sandra Kirby

Third Edition

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EXPERIENCE, RESEARCH, SOCIAL CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

Research can be exciting and is often important. In this third edition of *Experience, Research, Social Change* we provide an entry point for aspiring researchers interested in contributing to research and assisting in the creation of knowledge with the goal of social change. We have written this book from a critical standpoint and hope to encourage undergraduate students, graduate students, community-based researchers, practitioners, clinicians, service providers, and policymakers in undertaking meaningful research. Research can also feel daunting, and it may be that you do not consider yourself a "researcher." In this book we guide you, step by step, through the research process using clear and accessible language, exercises, and many examples. We distill complex concepts into meaningful terms. We believe that research can make a difference in the world and contribute to positive social change, and we want to share this journey with you.

How to Read This Book

In this book, we, the authors, chose to use second (you) and third (we, us, our) person throughout the text. We made a conscious choice to do this as a way of actualizing our belief that we, the authors, and you, the reader, are all in this research process together. Unless it is stated otherwise in the text, as it sometimes will be, "we," "us," and "our" refer to the authors, the readers, and the collective voice of people contributing to the research process. To make things clearer, examples and narratives are found in text boxes throughout the text, and selected exercises will be found in text boxes off set from the main text. At the end of each chapter are some further questions for discussion and reflection and additional readings for those of you who want to delve into a topic in more detail.

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A Perspective of Research

Knowledge is power. We live in a world in which knowledge is produced and used to make change, stand as evidence, inform others, support a perspective, or justify an action. Hence, the question of who produces knowledge and how knowledge is used, and by whom, is central to understanding how power is created, taken, or maintained. Being able to produce knowledge, then, is a route to power, empowerment, and influence. This book is about how to do critical social research with an emphasis on understanding how research can make social change and improve people's lives. Social research that makes change often reflects points of view not generally seen in the mainstream, but that may be more commonly seen in the margins. We support and explain a critical view of methodology and research design, focusing on enhancing relevance and the change-making power of critical social research.

Learning how to do research is empowering in itself. It is also a route to a wider understanding of social life and a tool for interpreting the vast amounts of information and knowledge that surround us. It is a route to acquiring power, influence, and a voice as a result of documenting and producing knowledge. Indeed, bringing research processes to a wide array of groups is a route to diffusing the "power elite" and strengthening the impact of experiences that are not usually studied. It is our hope that the processes and content we describe in this book will contribute to these efforts.

Most of us have not had the opportunity to do research or create knowledge that is rooted in and representative of our own experiences. Historically, many groups have been excluded from participating in, describing, and analyzing their own reality. In many ways, understanding and doing research can be seen as a form of literacy. Without understanding the research process and being able to engage in that process, research remains distant, enabling the maintenance of the status quo rather than changing it. We believe that research that does not reflect on and analyze the social context from which it springs serves only its creators and does not enable us to engage with the nature of the knowledge and its relationship and relevance to others in society.

In recent years, some have argued that research has not represented their experiences. Indeed, research and knowledge are typically produced in a manner that represents the political and social interests of a particular (usually dominant) group. Further, research has often been a tool used to help perpetuate and maintain power relations and inequality or a limited and narrow view of what we "know." These critiques can apply to all types of research on any topic from bench research to social research. This influence extends throughout the research process. For example, the research questions or issues

that are pursued are often reflective of dominant interests. Analyses of data can be circumscribed, or erroneous assumptions can be made about results, reflecting the limitations of the questions or methodological approaches.

It is important to all of us that the processes of investigating the world not remain a specialized or elite activity. Everyday life skills of data collection, reflection, analysis, and interpretation can be enhanced with basic research training. Indeed, by claiming access to the research enterprise, you can produce or interpret evidence in ways that reflect your reality and contribute to a more comprehensive view of life.

What to Expect from This Book

Reflecting of this book's title, we have divided it into three sections: Experience, Research, and Social Change. Part A, "Experience," includes three chapters. In Chapter 1 we demystify research language and the research process and explain research terminology that is used throughout the book. An overview of some theoretical and methodological perspectives that inform how we think about and conduct critical social research is covered in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 we discuss the role of the researcher in terms of her or his reflexivity, positionality, voice, and representation, as well as research ethics.

Part B, "Research," is composed of seven chapters that move you step by step through the research process. We begin with formulating the research question (Chapter 4), and then cover literature reviews (Chapter 5), research methods (Chapter 6), sampling and recruitment (Chapter 7), data collection (Chapter 8), data analysis (Chapter 9), and writing the final research report (Chapter 10). In Part B we provide many hands-on exercises as well as examples from a diverse range of research projects. This section of the book is meant to be read consecutively—one chapter leads to the next.

Part C, "Social Change," is the final section. It has one chapter that discusses the myriad things we can do once the research is complete. Drawing on knowledge translation and advocacy concepts and examples, we provide many suggestions on how to be innovative and creative with your research products.

How Can This Book Be Used?

Questions about research spring up everywhere. This book will help answer some of them. As the three of us work in our respective domains, we encounter women and men who want to better understand and interpret research, and

sometimes participate in the research process. We teach research methods to undergraduate students, supervise graduate students, and work with community groups who want to participate in research. We encounter many who need evidence on which to base decisions about changes in programs, policies, or legislation. All of these people have needs that are key to doing research differently, and they make up audiences for research and users of research. This book will speak to all who not only want to understand and follow the sequence of research steps, but also want to think more deeply about the issues involved in the production and use of knowledge.

This book will also explain the context of research. Research is done by particular people in specific social and historical contexts and is often funded by specific bodies, which means that it is both temporal and evolving and can reflect vested interests. Increasingly, social research reflects the experience and concerns of people who have traditionally been marginalized by the research process. This affects the manufacturing of knowledge and, ultimately, the placement of ideas on the public agenda.

This book will contribute to action and change. We believe that involving more and different people and groups in the research process is a necessary part of action for change. We also believe that access to and understanding of research is necessary to begin to share our various truths and expose the wider experiences of a democratic society. For example, survivors of incest or sexual abuse can engage in and use research to understand their experiences and make change by taking action. People developing systems or policies on urban transport or health care can contribute to the research process with practical perspectives from their sector, appropriate methodologies, and opportunities and methods for transferring knowledge. Nonprofit service providers working directly with people in the community can develop research questions and engage in research based on the real-life questions that arise in their practices.

This book humanizes research. When we engage in research we involve ourselves in a process in which we are constructing meaning and, ultimately, knowledge. Since the social world is multifaceted (i.e., the same situation or experience is able to give us many different kinds of knowledge), when we "do research" we involve ourselves in a process of revealing different kinds of knowledge. The knowledge we are able to observe, construct, and reveal is directly related to our vantage point and where we stand in the world. Every researcher's interaction with the social world is affected by such factors as gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, and geographic and social location. This does not mean that facts about the social world do not exist, but that what we see and how we go about constructing meaning is often a matter of context and interpretation.

Who Are We?

Colleen Reid

In 1991, when I was working on my Master's degree, I met a woman on a train who was reading the first edition of *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). We had a conversation about the book; I was instantly intrigued and bought the book the following week. As I read it, I felt that it had been written *for me*—in clear and accessible language it named my values, passions, and commitments as a researcher. It fundamentally changed what I thought was possible with research and inspired me to pursue participatory and feminist research in my graduate degrees. Ten years later, as a postdoctoral researcher at the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, I met Sandi Kirby who was a visiting scholar there at that time. After sharing many stimulating conversations about research she invited me to co-write the book's second edition with Lorraine Greaves. It was a tremendous gift to work with experienced researchers on a project that held such personal and professional meaning for me.

As we publish the third edition, where I have taken on the role of first author, it is gratifying to see how this book has evolved and the circle it has travelled. Today I am an educator and community-based researcher in the Faculty of Child, Family, and Community Studies at Douglas College in Vancouver. I am also an adjunct professor at the University of British Columbia (Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Medicine) and Simon Fraser University (Public Policy, Faculty of Arts). The central themes in my work are to examine health in the contexts of oppression, suffering, and stigma for marginalized groups; and to use community-based research approaches to study and promote health for marginalized groups. To that end I draw on the theories and practices of engagement, transformative learning, social change, and feminism to teach and research in the areas of health promotion and public health, gender and women's health, inclusion and mental health, community development, and therapeutic recreation.

Lorraine Greaves

I have been interested in social change and action research for many years, first as an activist in the women's movement and later in academic, advocacy, and policy circles. Spanning these worlds has anchored my career and illustrated to me how important it is to understand research processes and to engage others in contributing to the development of evidence. As Senior Investigator and former Executive Director of the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health in Vancouver, I had the rare opportunity to create a research centre that translates and carries out "women-centred" research and

that values the change-making potential of research for improving women's health. Previously, I led the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children in London, Ontario, where anti-violence goals underpinned an action research agenda and influenced the choice of research questions, the research partners, and the process of approaching the research. I learned a tremendous amount from all of the partners and collaborators at both of these centres. I was also involved in thinking about the development of the Institute of Gender and Health at the Canadian Institutes for Health Research launched in 2000 and promoted the inclusion of specific attention to women and gender.

What questions we ask in research, who gets to be involved in the research process, as well as what we do with knowledge when we discover it are all critically important to understanding the impact of research, the development of knowledge, and human life. What questions we ask and how we frame those questions affects the knowledge-creation process. All of these issues continue to matter and concern me in my daily life and work and have been amply demonstrated to have an impact on our collective well-being. I continue to write books and articles, speak, do research, and consult on how to integrate equity and gender into programs, policies, and research initiatives in several countries around the world. Research usually underpins all of these efforts.

Sandra Kirby

I am a Professor Emerita at the University of Winnipeg and have been an educator, activist, coach, athlete, and researcher for virtually all of my adult life. My own understanding of doing practical research began when, as a Master's student at McGill University, I did a quantitative study on preferred leadership styles among athletes at the novice and high-performance levels. I tried to distance myself and be objective and removed from the research as it developed so that I could present the consequences of the study as if it all mattered equally. But, as an Olympic athlete, my own experiences were intertwined with the research project. I cared about how it would turn out and what it might change. However, the research methods of the day had no room for my experience in my research. Fortunately we are now in a much different research methodology place.

My research path includes many social change areas: athlete retirement, gender equality, sex and gender issues in sport, sexual abuse, homophobia and disability, home care and palliative care, and racialized communities and police services. The main thread of my work has almost always been connected to equity, safety, health, and sport. From a small core of researchers addressing harassment in sport (most notably Celia Brackenridge in the UK), Lorraine Greaves and I completed the world's first national quantitative study on sexual

harassment and abuse of athletes in 1996 and, from that, published the world's first book on the subject, *Dome of Silence: Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport* (Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2000). Sport has not been the same since, so we know our research joined with that of others to bring about positive social change. Now I am one of the founding members of an organization called Safe Sport International (http://safesportintl.org.uk) and the world of sport is much more aware and responsive to child protection issues.

My attention continues to be on action research, feminist approaches, and making change. This was the essence of the first edition of *Experience, Research, Social Change: Research Methods from the Margins*, co-authored with Kate McKenna in 1989, and for me it remains true for this third edition, which reflects advances in thinking about perspectives, methodologies, ethics, technology, and knowledge translation in critical social research.

How We Wrote This Book

Developing this book has been a collaborative effort. Some of the examples that we use throughout the book come from research projects that we have been involved in over the years in research centres, communities, colleges, and universities across Canada. They often involved many other researchers. The insights they provide have contributed to our understanding of and our commitment to the expansion of both the process and content of social research with a view to making social change.

Contributors

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