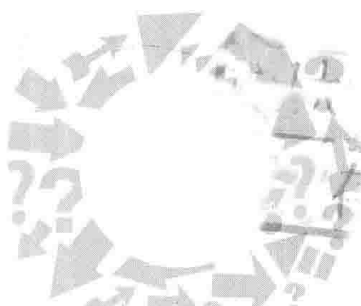


Qualitative Inquiry Outside the Academy



**Norman K. Denzin
Michael D. Giardina**
Editors

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Walnut Creek
California



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Qualitative Inquiry Outside the Academy



INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

The International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry has been hosted each May since 2005 by the International Center for Qualitative Inquiry at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. This volume, as well as preceding ones, are products of plenary sessions from these international congresses. All of these volumes are edited by Norman K. Denzin and Michael D. Giardina and are available from Left Coast Press, Inc. Series volumes include

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Norman K. Denzin
Michael D. Giardina
December 2013

Introduction

Qualitative Inquiry 'Outside' the Academy

Norman K. Denzin and Michael D. Giardina



Though questions regarding whether the university should serve strictly public rather than private interests no longer carry the weight of forceful criticism they did in the past, such questions are still crucial in addressing the purpose of higher education and what it might mean to imagine the university's full participation in public life as the protector and promoter of democratic values.

— Henry A. Giroux (2012)

I never think of myself as a researcher; I think of myself as a philosopher and a humanities person.

— Maxine Greene (n.d.)

Proem

This book was written primarily during the latter half of 2013, at a time in which public debates centered around such pressing topics in the United States as: the implementation of the Affordable Care Act; the Supreme Court decision overturning the Defense of Marriage Act, a decision which served as a major turning point in

favor of equal rights for gays and lesbians; the release of classified documents by former U.S. National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden; the racial politics of the George Zimmerman trial;¹ the Boston Marathon bombing; the existential crisis posed by Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) on contact sports; ever-growing levels of economic inequality; and the increasingly evident effects of global warming. Looking beyond U.S. borders, we also witnessed debates concerning: the death of former South African president Nelson Mandela, and his place in history; the election of Pope Francis, and the economic and social justice messages he has preached;² the civil war in Syria; and the (mainly but not exclusively) economic protests in Brazil.

Yet, too often in these debates are the voices of critically engaged scholars absent from the public discourse, whether as expert commentators in traditional media outlets or as someone who is “*translating and shortening* scholarly knowledge for *lay* persons outside of the research specialty” (Kalleberg, 2012, p. 46, emphases in original)—the latter definition of which we might generally associate with someone who acts as a public intellectual. By public, of course, we mean to invoke the word in opposition to the notion of a *private* intellectual, or someone who writes or directs his or her energies to the cloistered academy alone, and who through his or her very acts as a scholar contributes to “sustaining a knowledge economy that rewards its participants when they invest in burying and restricting knowledge” (Burton, 2009, para. 7).

Drawing in part from Grant Jarvie (2007), we have thus framed our volume to, in different ways, consider (at least) the following three questions:

- What is the capacity of qualitative inquiry to produce social change?
- What is the role of the public intellectual?
- What do we see as a way forward toward such ends, thinking ‘outside’ the academy? Or, put differently, what might a new public intellectualism look like in light of neoliberal assaults on education?³

Consider the following:

In a highly influential presidential address to the American Sociological Association’s annual conference in 2004, Michael

Buroway (2005) made a forceful call to arms in favor of a public sociology. As part of his since-updated argument (Buroway, 2008), he characterized the field of sociology—though we believe it fair to speak to higher education more broadly—as increasingly being “a hyper-professionalized sociology that fetishized its separation from society, a self-referential community that organized and policed the exchange of papers and ideas, remote from the world it studied, a community that inducted its graduate students as though they were entering a secret society” (p. 191). Or, as Todd Gitlin (2006) framed it, that we have over the last two decades experienced an explosion of “not-so-public intellectuals—obscure writers and not-so-big thinkers who were content to train specialists”; in other words, academics who were “committed to professional advancement through hyperspecialization and technical proficiency and who were (therefore, it seemed) inhospitable to both broad-gauged social thought and clear, generally accessible writing” (p. 123). C. Wright Mills (1959) goes back even farther, as Gitlin rightly points out, identifying a similar turn in *The Sociological Imagination*, when he referred to the professionalization of the social sciences as an agglomeration governed by “a set of bureaucratic techniques which inhibit social inquiry by ‘methodological pretensions’, which congest such work by obscurantist conceptions, or which trivialize it by concern with minor problems unconnected with publicly relevant issues” (p. 20; also quoted in Gitlin, p. 126).

To this end, it would behoove us to resist the pressures for a single “gold standard” of research quality and excellence, even as we endorse conversations about evidence, inquiry, and empirically warranted conclusions (see Cannella & Lincoln, 2011). We cannot let one group define the key terms in the conversation. To do otherwise is to allow the rigid disciplinarity of the scientifically based research community define the moral and epistemological terrain on which we stand, for neither they, nor the government (nor grant funding agencies, promotion and tenure committees, etc.) own the word ‘science’ (nor ‘quality,’ ‘impact,’ or ‘excellence’). Jürgen Habermas (1972) anticipated this nearly 40 years ago:

The link between empiricism, positivism and the global audit culture is not accidental and it is more than just technical. Such technical approaches deflect attention away from the deeper

issues of value and purpose. They make radical critiques much more difficult to mount ... and they render largely invisible partisan approaches to research under the politically useful pretense that judgments are about objective quality only. In the process, human needs and human rights are trampled upon and democracy as we need it is destroyed. (p. 122; 2006, p. 193; see also Smith & Hodkinson, 2005, p. 930)⁴

To give but one example of this professionalization in practice, Patricia Leavy (2012) quite rightly points out that “the existing tenure and promotion system continues to enforce disciplinarity” (para. 4).⁵ She continues:

Academics have clear incentives to design small-scale projects that can be completed and published quickly. Moreover, sole authorship is favored over co-authorship and collaboration. Further, peer-reviewed articles and/or monographs are required for tenure and promotion at most, if not all, institutions. By requiring research that produces such limited outcomes, researchers' hands are tied. It is also clear that journal articles are highly unlikely to reach the public so by privileging this form the entire academic structure discourages scholarship that is truly of value to the public. (para. 4)

Although we may not agree with Leavy's broader argument completely, we do concur that the context she contests is one that clearly promotes the professionalization of the professoriate—that promotes positivist social sciences as currently practiced and taught in U.S. higher education. It is a context that the radical historian, Howard Zinn (1997), cogently outlined in his essay, “The Uses of Scholarship,” in which he noted the five rules that “sustain the wasting of knowledge” (pp. 502–507):

1. Carry on “disinterested scholarship.”
2. Be objective.
3. Stick to your discipline.
4. To be “scientific” requires neutrality.
5. Scholars must, in order to be “rational,” avoid “emotionalism.”

Put differently, what Zinn is talking about is “intellectual professionalism” of the kind challenged by Edward Said (1996), who defined it as: