Qualitative Research in Psychology

EXPANDING PERSPECTIVES

IN METHODOLOGY

AND DESIGN

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Participatory Action Research: From Within and Beyond Prison Bars

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Participatory action research represents a stance within qualitative research methods—an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action. With a long and global history, participatory action research (PAR) has typically been practiced within community-based social action projects with a commitment to understanding, documenting, or evaluating the impact that social programs, social problems, or social movements bear on individuals and communities. PAR draws on multiple methods, some quantitative and some qualitative, but at its core it articulates a recognition that knowledge is produced in collaboration and in action.

With this essay, we aim to accomplish four ends. First, we provide a cursory history of PAR, beginning with Kurt Lewin (1951) and traveling too briskly through the feminist and postcolonial writings of critical theorists. Second, we introduce readers to a PAR project we have undertaken in a women's prison in New York, documenting the impact of college on women in prison, the prison environment, and on the women's postrelease outcomes. Third, we present a glimpse at our findings and offer up an instance of analysis, demonstrating closely how we analyzed thematically and discursively data about "transformation" as a research collective of inmate and university-based researchers. Fourth, we articulate a set of reflections on our work as a PAR collective, the dilemmas of writing openly under surveillance.

The roles and responsibilities of outside scholars in relation to inside scholars have long been a question for theorists and researchers of social injustice. Many have agitated for a form of participation but few have articulated the nature of the work-together (see Chataway, 1997, for an exception; also McIntyre, 1997). This chapter invites readers into a prison-based PAR project, in which a team of university-based researchers and inmate researchers collaborated to document and theorize the impact of college within and beyond the prison environment. Like many before us, we sought to organize all aspects of the intervention and the research through democratic participation. Like those, our practice did not always live up to the design. We do not see insiders or outsiders as the "true" bearers of truth or knowledge, but more like Brinton Lykes (2001), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), and Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994) we recognize in our souls the relative freedom and therefore responsibility of outside researchers to speak critically and constructively with insiders about the possibilities and limits of participatory research within the walls of prison.

A Too Brief History of Participatory Action Research

Kurt Lewin has long been the name attached to the "genesis" of action research in the United States. From the 1940s onward, with vision, critique, and intellectual courage, Lewin dared to assert participant knowledge as foundational to validity; democratic and participatory research as foundational to social change. Working very much within a psychological paradigm for a greater social good, Lewin carved a space for "the development of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on 'private troubles' (Mills, 1959) which they have in common" (quoted in Adelman, 1997). Lewin challenged the artificial borders separating theory, research, and action, insisting: "No action without research; no research without action" (quoted in Adelman, 1997). At the core of Lewin's project was, like John Dewey, a refusal to separate thought from action; an insistence on the integration of science and practice; a recognition that social processes could be understood only when they were changed (see Cherry & Borshuk, 1998).

Frances Cherry and Catherine Borshuk place in historic context the power of Lewin's work while he was director at the Commission for Community Interrelations (CCI) of the American Jewish Committee. According to Cherry (personal communication, 2000), "Perhaps closest to contemporary participatory action research would be the category of research conducted by CCI: a community self-survey of civil rights in which the importance of members of the community conducting the research was stressed as essential . . . Lewinian thinking [recognized] that science and social problem-solving should be intimately connected, and that action research was inevitably participatory."

The community self-survey of civil rights, initiated under Lewin's leadership, exemplifies the kind of democratic progressive community projects CCI advocated, "attempting to move beyond academic expertise and to place the tools of research in the hands of concerned citizens" (Cherry & Borshuk, 1998, p. 129). Lewin's vision of democratic social research was compromised signifi-

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ism, and scientism and converted into a set of techniques and axioms rather
than a radical challenge to science as practiced.

Central and South American theorists and practitioners, including
Orlando Fals-Borda (1979), Paulo Freire (1982), and Ignacio Martín-Baró
(1994) have structured a set of commitments to PAR that move Lewin well
beyond the borders of psychology, into an explicit analysis of the relation of
science to social inequality, community life, and radical social change. As
Martín-Baró explained,

> If our objective is to serve the liberation needs of the people [of Latin
> America]. . . . [We must] involve ourselves in a new praxis, an act of trans-
> forming reality that will let us know not only about what is but also about
> what is not, and by which we may try to orient ourselves toward what ought
> to be" (1994, pp. 27–29). Like Martín-Baró, Fals-Borda and colleagues sought
> a set of practices that would reveal "facts" as processes, "causality" as circular
> or "spiral in nature," and "multiple determinations" rather than "immediate
> antecedents" (Fals-Borda, 1979). For Fals-Borda, like Lewin, a dynamic or
> dialectical confrontation between common sense and systematic observa-
> tions, followed by intensive reflection and action, engaged at the provocative
> borders between insiders and outsiders, were the recursive steps of PAR.

Deeply critical of the relation of science to social inequity, and equally
hopeful about science for radical social change, Fals-Borda recognized "the
possibility for the masses of workers themselves to create and possess scien-
tific knowledge; that social research and political action can be synthesized
and mutually influential so as to increase the level of efficiency of action as
well as the understanding of reality" (1979, p. 40). Across history and current
texts, these PAR scholars have worked to articulate specific principles of
PAR. At root, participatory research recognizes what Antonio Gramsci (1971)
described from a prison cell in Italy, the intellectual and political power of
"organic intellectuals" from whom counter-hegemonic notions derive, whose
lives are deeply grounded in class struggles. Herein lies the fundamental
challenge to what Habermas called "scientism" or what John Gaventa called
"official knowledge" as the sole legitimate claim to truth (Gaventa, 1993;
Habermas, 1971; Hall, 1993; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; McIntyre, 2000).
With similar commitments, Hans Toch (1967) authored a powerful article
that spoke about PAR in prison, about the knowledge of "convicts" and the
humility of outside researchers, an article well ahead of its time. We owe
much, in this chapter and in our work, to the wisdom and foresight of
Hans Toch.

Relationships, Responsibilities, and Action at the Heart of Participatory Research

In the participatory research propounded here, the silenced are not just
incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry
into the underlying causes of the events in their world. In this context
research becomes a means of moving them beyond silence into a quest to
proclaim the world (Gaventa, 1993).

In the past five years, with both feminist and explicitly critical turns, the writings on the stance of participatory researchers have broken important new ground. Our work has been enormously influenced by five such turns. To begin, there has been a sharp recognition of participation *with,* not only *for,* community. Psychologist Brinton Lykes marked this move in her language, reflecting her stance on a project in which she

> agreed to *accompany* a friend to her community of origin in the Highlands of Guatemala. . . . [Recognizing myself] as a "situated other" within a *praxis of solidarity* [which] informs my ongoing efforts to develop alternative methods for "standing under" these realities and participating with local actors in responding to problems in daily living. (2001, p. 1)

Second, we are inspired by participatory action researchers, who drawing from critical race and legal theories have recognized the intellectual power and searing social commentary developed at the bottom of social hierarchies (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Mari Matsuda (1995), a critical legal scholar writing for an "outsider's jurisprudence," wrote, "When notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, are explained not from an abstract position from the position of groups who have suffered through history, moral relativism recedes . . . [toward] a new epistemological source for critical scholars looking to the bottom"(p. 6).

Third, from the growing literature on research for and by indigenous peoples, some participatory researchers, ourselves among them, draw from the writings of Maori theorist and researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who recognizes not only the knowledge accumulated in indigenous communities but also that indigenous values, beliefs, and behaviors must be incorporated into the praxis of participatory research. From Tuhiwai Smith we take profound insights about respect for local custom and practices, not as an obstacle to research but as a site for possible learning and shared engagement and long-term social change.

Fourth, we have been inspired and moved by the writings of critical psychologist Kum Kum Bhavnani (1994), who has authored an essay in which she struggles aloud with questions of objectivity—that is, feminist objectivity in her self-consciously political research. Holding herself responsible to satisfy high standards for quality work, Bhavnani writes about three criteria for "feminist objectivity": inscription, micropolitics, and difference. Inscription entails holding herself accountable to produce stories about young women and men that counter—and do not reinforce—dominant, stereotypic scripts. Micropolitics demands that she explicitly analyze, in her empirical texts, her relation to and with the "subjects" of her research. And "difference" reminds her that she must theorize not only the strong trends that sweep across her data, but interrogate, as well and with equal rigor, the subtle and significant "differences" within.

And fifth, Glenda Russell and Janis Bohan (1999) argue that it is crucial to theorize and strategize how PAR "gives back" to communities generous enough to open themselves up for intellectual scrutiny. Russell and Bohan are two of the very few scholars who deliberate on the questions of audience,

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product, and what is left behind. For these activist scholars, creating a legacy of inquiry, a process of change, and material resources to enable transform are crucial to the PAR project.

These five turns—toward working "with," recognizing local knowledge, respecting local practices, stretching toward a grounded "feminist objectivity," and giving back—emerge for us as guiding refinements in the practice of PAR (see also Brydon-Miller, 1997; Olesen, 1999).

A Note on Limits and Responsibility

Although many scholars have begun to write on the power of PAR, a number of feminist and critical race theorists have wandered into the other side of the conversation, daring to reveal what Venezuelan community psychologist Esther Weisenfeld (1999, p. 2) has called the "unfulfilled promises of PAR." We are indebted to these writers, because it is in their firm belief about the power of participation that they feel compelled to write honestly with caution. Thus, Patricia Maguire (2001) reflected on her training of participatory researchers in the new South Africa, and reported a low level but pervasive resistance to the dialogic, nonauthoritarian nature of the work, such that participants were as eager to contribute fully as they were to be taught or led in traditional relations of authority, disappointment emerging when they were not. Anne Bettencourt, George Dillman, and Neil Wollman (1996) wrote on participatory research as a form of grassroots organizing, and noted with concern that once a compelling project is stirred up, participatory researchers have an obligation to find, build, and then pass the torch on to an interior leadership structure to move the action forward and to resist taking up that role themselves. Cynthia Chataway (2001) offered a very careful analysis of her work with a Native American community, respectfully recognizing that although equal and public participation may be the goal of outside researchers, those who work and dwell in communities that are oppressed and highly surveyed may, indeed, be grateful for the research and yet prefer privacy as a form of public responsibility. John Stanfield II (1998) noted that participatory research has become a "partial solution" to the historic oppression of people of color in social sciences but, he continued, "rarely do researchers share career rewards with 'subjects' of color, such as coauthorships and access to authoritative credentializing processes" (p. 336).

In a useful move, Brinton Lykes, who has worked, read, and thought carefully about the delicate praxis of participatory methods in Guatemala, Ireland, South Africa, and the United States, offers a crucial and generous set of reflections on working criteria for evaluating participatory methods, including:

> the method's compatibility and/or complementarity with other existing resources in local communities with a majority population living in extreme poverty, thereby enhancing sustainability of the project . . . [and] the method's capacity to facilitate an action/reflection dialectic when new ways of thinking and/or alternative cultural practices emerge within and among local participants and their communities in response to the PAR process. (2001, pp. 195–196)

We hear all of these cautions as wisdom. We are privileged to be working within a maximum-security prison with a supportive superintendent and correctional staff and prison-based researchers and respondents, and we understand the stakes for these inmates, should they broach some forms of honesty or critical action, could be devastating. We have learned, as Tuhiwai Smith would warn us, that what appears to be "paranoia" may just be local wisdom; and not to confuse "finding your voice" and "speaking out" with courage. Thus we have learned that "equal" participation and responsibility does not mean the "same." Instead, it means endless ongoing conversations, among us, with every decision always revisited, about who can take risks, who dares to speak, who must remain quiet, and what topics need never see the light of day. As Linda Martín Alcoff (1995) has written, we are painfully aware that we always need to "analyze the probable or actual effects of [our] words on the [many, contradictory] discursive and material contexts [both within and beyond the prison]" (p. 111).

The Context for the Project

The 1980s and 1990s in the United States were decades of substantial public and political outcry about crime and about criminals. During these years, stiffer penalties were enforced for crimes, prisons were built at unprecedented rates, parole was tougher to achieve, "three strikes and you're out" bills passed, and college was no longer publicly funded for women and men in prison. Indeed, with the signing of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, President Bill Clinton stopped the flow of all federal dollars (in the form of Pell grants) that had enabled women and men in prison to attend college. It was then up to the states to finalize the closing of most prison-based college programs around the nation. At Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a vibrant college program had been coordinated by Mercy College for more than 15 years. In 1995, this program, like more than 340 others nationwide, was closed. This decision provoked a sea of disappointment, despair, and outrage from the women at Bedford Hills, who had been actively engaged in higher education and in GED/ABE (adult basic education) preparation. Within months, a group of inmates met with the superintendent and, later, an active community volunteer, Thea Jackson, and soon they, with Marymount Manhattan College president Regina Peruggi, resurrected the college—now a private, voluntary consortium of colleges and universities dedicated to inmate education.

The design of the college was conceptualized through pillars of strong, ongoing participation by the prison administration, staff, the inmates, faculty, and volunteers. Students, in particular, are expected to "give back" in any number of ways. They teach, mentor, pay the equivalent of a month's wages for tuition, contribute to the prison community, and demonstrate high levels of community engagement once they are released (see Fine et al., 2001). Structurally, the design of the college program called for the college administrators at Bedford to meet regularly with the prison administration, the inmate committee, and a representative of the board to create and sustain a "safe" context for serious conversation—reflection, revision, and re-imagining of the college

program. It was felt to be important to design the program with core participation from every constituency because many, including the long-termers who witnessed the loss of the college, did not want the younger women to ever take the program for granted, assume its permanence, forget its fragility, or view it as an entitlement. Little did we know that the forms of participation within the college would emerge, powerfully, as one of the central positive outcomes of the college program. That is, women who have, for the most part, spent the better (or worst) part of their lives under the thumbs of poverty, racism, sexism, and violence could, in college, "hear my own voice" or "see my own signature" or "make my own decisions"—re-imagine themselves as agents who make choices, take responsibility, create change for themselves and others (e.g., family, children, and younger women at Bedford) and design a future not overdetermined by the past.

At its heart, this college program has not been simply about the taking of courses, but instead about deep immersion in an intellectual and ethical community of scholars. The physical space of the learning center—equipped with nonnetworked computers (use of the Internet is banned in prisons), contributed books, magazines, newspapers, flags from colleges and universities in the consortium—holds what Seymour Sarason (1974) called the "sense of community," a place where, the women will attest, "if I need help I can find it—even if that means someone to kick me in the ass to get back to work and finish my papers." This intellectual community also spills out onto the "yard," where you can overhear study groups on Michel Foucault, qualitative research, Alice Walker; or in the cell block where the ticking of typewriter keys can be heard late into the night; or a "young inmate may knock softly on [my] wall, at midnight, asking how to spell or punctuate. . . . " For the women at Bedford Hills, 80% of whom carry scars of childhood sexual abuse, biographies of miseducation, tough family and community backgrounds, long lists of social and personal betrayals, growing back the capacity to join a community, engage with a community, give back, and trust are remarkable social and psychological accomplishments.

Thus, when the first author was asked to conduct the empirical documentation of the impact of college on the women, the prison environment and the world outside the prison, it seemed all too obvious that a participatory design behind bars would be nearly impossible—albeit essential.

Research Design

In 1997, the Leslie Glass Foundation offered to fund the documentation of the impact of college on the prison community. Fine, professor of psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, agreed to become the principal investigator of the project, and hired a team of graduate students to help conduct the study: Melissa Rivera,[1] Rosemarie A. Roberts, María Elena Torre, and Debora Upegui. It was determined, early in the design phase, that

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[1] Melissa Rivera relocated to California early in the project and is no longer active in the research.

the project would be maximally informed, useful, and productive if there were a set of inmate researchers on the team as well (see Toch, 1967). We consulted with the superintendent, who agreed with the design, after the New York State Department of Correctional Services (NYSDOCS) provided official approval. The following inmate researchers joined the team: Kathy Boudin, Iris Bowen,[2] Judith Clark, Aisha Elliot,[3] Donna Hylton, Migdalia Martinez,[4] Missy, and Pamela Smart. Over time, NYSDOCS, through the efforts of E. Michele Staley, grew to be a crucial member of our research team, computing the postrelease reincarceration rates for women who enrolled in, graduated from, or did not participate in the college program.

Study Design

The design of the research called for both qualitative and quantitative methods (see Table 10.1). The research questions required that a quantitative analysis be undertaken to assess the extent to which college, in fact, reduced recidivism and disciplinary incidents; and a qualitative analysis to determine the psycho-social effects of college on the women, the prison environment, their children, and the women's lives postrelease.

A Glimpse of the Findings

Using very different methods, we were able to research intensively a number of questions about the impact of college on women in, and released from, prison. Integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods allowed us to more deeply probe questions that needed further explanation.

To What Extent Does Involvement in College Affect Women's Reincarceration Rates?

In the fall of 1999, the research team approached the New York State of Correctional Services, requesting that a longitudinal analysis of reincarceration rates be conducted on those women from Bedford Hills Correctional Facility who had attended the Mercy College Program and had subsequently been released. Staley, program research specialist, conducted the analyses for the project and provided data on return-to-custody rates for all participants at any

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[2]Iris Bowen was transferred to another correctional facility mid-way through the research. Though her relocation, far from family, friends, and support networks, has put incredible strains on her, she remains a vital member of the research committee.

[3]Aisha Elliot, a starting member of the research committee, stopped participating early in the project because of personal commitments.

[4]Migdalia Martinez was granted clemency in December 2000 and released, after serving 11 years, 3 months, on January 31, 2001. She remains a member of the research team.

Table 10.1. Research Questions, Methods, Sample, and Outcomes

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Table 10.1. Research Questions, Methods, Sample, and Outcomes

Research Questions	Method	Sample[a]	Outcomes
1. What is the impact of the college experience on *inmate students*?	1. Archival analysis of college since inception	N = 65	• Academic achievement • Personal transformation • Expression of responsibility for crime and for future decisions • Reflection on choices made in the past and decisions to be made in the future • Civic engagement and participation in prison and outside
	2. One-on-one interviews conducted by inmate-researchers		
2. What is the impact of the college experience on the *prison environment*?	3. Focus groups: with inmates, faculty, children, and college presidents	10 focus groups: N = 43 (inmates) N = 20 (faculty) N = 9 (children) N = 7 (presidents)	• Changes in prison disciplinary environment • Prison climate • Correction officers views of and experiences with prison • Attitudes of women not in the college program about college • Faculty's views of college program
	4. In-depth interviews with former inmates	N = 20	
	5. Interviews with correction officers and administrators	N = 5	
3. What are the *postrelease effects* of college on the women and on their reincarceration rates?	6. Surveys of faculty	N = 20	• Reincarceration rates • Economic well-being • Health • Civic participation • Persistence in pursuing higher education • Relations with family and friends
	7. Student narratives	N = 18	
	8. Statistical analysis of former inmates who attended college while in prison	N = 454 total students (N = 274 released)	

Table 10.1. *Continued*

Key Methodological Decisions

1. Create a research committee consisting of outside researchers and inmates with administrative advisors.	3. Racial/ethnic mix in research committee leadership and focus group facilitators and cofacilitators.	5. Inmate researchers choose between anonymity and authorship.
	4. Conduct focus group within prison with teen group children of inmate, rather than conduct interviews in teen homes.	6. Participants choose a name by which they are known in the report.
2. Teach inmates how to be researchers in a semester-long research methods college course.		7. Sample. Include inmates who left college in sample and those in precollege program.

8. Conduct focus groups, facilitated by inside and outside researchers, with subsamples to:
(a) pursue themes that emerged from individual interviews and
(b) maximize opportunities for dissenting opinions.

9. Individual interviews rather than focus groups for correction officers.

10. Interpretation session. Data analysis by inside and outside researchers.

11. Writing final report in a single voice.

aSome women participated in more than one data source.

time since release, and then return to custody rates for all participants within 36 months of release.[5]

Using the standard NYSDOCS measure of 36 months, out of the 274 women tracked longitudinally, 21 college participants returned to custody. Thus, women who participated in college while in prison had a 7.7% return-to-custody rate. In contrast, an analysis tracking all female offenders released between 1985 and 1995 revealed a 29.9% return-to-custody rate within 36 months. Women without college are almost four times more likely to be returned to custody than comparable women who participated in college while in prison. Women with no college are twice as likely to be rearrested for a "new term commitment" (a new crime) than women with some college. In addition, women with no college are 18 times more likely to violate parole than women with some college. In other words, *college in prison reduces the amount of postrelease crime and even more significantly heightens responsible compliance with parole expectations.*

To What Extent Does Engagement in College, and Completion of a Degree, Affect Women's Psychological Sense of Themselves, Past, Present, and Future?

We review, now, how we analyzed the qualitative individual and focus group interviews for evidence of "transformation." We were struck, in examining all of the data, with the extent to which women spoke of college as a source of personal change, transformation, and new selves. Theorizing transformation, however, proved to be a multilayered task. The process of analysis moved us through four readings of "transformation."

Initially all of us read all of the transcripts and heard a *discourse of split selves:* As the research team first read through the transcripts, we all noted recurring talk of "old" and "new" selves; the "before-college me" and "after-college me." Women in prison and those recently released repeatedly credited college with facilitating a personal change from their old ways to their new (read "better") way of life. With an intentional and sharp separation of old and new, the women drew clear distinctions between the "me before" and the "me now:"

> I'm not the same person that went to prison. If you knew me before, you would never know it's the same person. [I made] a complete turn around.

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[5] Staley relied on the following methodology:

[NYSDOCS] matched the file [of college students from the Mercy College registrar's office] with our department's release file that included releases between 1985 and 1999, using DIN (Departmental Identification Numbers assigned to each inmate).... [I]ncluded in the analysis were only the inmates that were released from NYSDOCS' custody subsequent to their participation in the college program. Of the 454 cases provided, 274 college participants have been released from NYSDOCS since their college participation. This is the sample that was used in the follow-up analysis to determine how many of these participants returned to NYSDOCS' custody. With respect to the return-to-custody analysis, I used the same survival analysis methodology that is used to prepare our department's standard return-to-custody report, *1995 Releases: Three Year Post Release Follow Up.* (Personal correspondence, Staley, Aug. 22, 2000)

> And I'm proud of that, 'cause I like me now . . . college made me face me and like me now. (Ellie)

> When I first came to Bedford Hills, I was a chronic disciplinary problem, getting tickets [issued for disciplinary infractions] back to back. I had a very poor attitude as well, I was rude and obnoxious for no reason, I did not care about anything or anyone. . . . Then I became motivated to participate in a number of programs, one of which was college. I started to care about getting in trouble and became conscious of the attitude I had that influenced my negative behaviors. . . . College is a form of rehabilitation, one of the best. (Denise)   —

Within this discourse of split selves, there was a particularly relentless attempt by the women to derogate their past selves. This, then, produced the occasion for our second reading through the transcripts. Heeding the advice of Celia Kitzinger (2000), we wanted to avoid the tendency to rush too quickly through material that seemed obvious or superficial, even idiomatic. The research team reread and discussed the transcript sections on transformation generating and pressed for deeper interpretations with each pass.

As the earlier excerpts illustrate, we were interested to hear how harshly many of the women described their "former selves": angry, antisocial, drug abuser, disrespectful both to self and others, having little to offer the world. These characterizations were typically followed by descriptions of "complete" and "total" personal changes: productive, working, motivated, knowledgeable, worthy of pride. This trashing of women's past lives was read initially by Graduate Center researchers as a language of internalized self-blame and self-hatred.

> Cause we were some wild kids when we were younger. We were angry. We didn't understand the system. This was our first time ever being in trouble. So all we wanted to do was fight. We didn't interact with anybody, we weren't social. So now [we're] like totally different. We look forward to coming to college. . . . And it's like I changed, just totally changed. And my sister came [to college] a couple of months afterwards and changed, but we did it together. (Erica, describing herself and her sister early in their incarceration)

The inmate researchers, on the other hand, heard in the same transcripts a familiar language of redemption that echoed the kind of talk heard in counseling, 12-step programs, support groups, church, and even in discussions about upcoming parole board meetings. An old "bad," "unworthy," "negative" self is vilified and then redeemed as a new "positive," "productive," "good" self.

> When I first came here I had a chip on my shoulder that I wanted somebody to knock off. . . . I stayed in trouble. I was disrespectful. I had no self-respect, no respect for others. And it took a while for me to change gradually through the years, and . . . when I started going to college that was like the key point for me of rehabilitation, of changing myself. And nobody did it for me, I did it for myself. . . . And I went and I did it and I accomplished things that I didn't think I could accomplish. (Roz)

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Together as researchers, we worried that this language, used by the women about themselves, sounded so much like the language used by those in some policy circles attacking women in poverty, women of color, and indeed women in prison. Thus across the transcripts we analyzed for overlapping discourses of redemption as well as social ideologies that place blame for social problems squarely and exclusively within individuals (usually racialized), with no history and no context.

As we theorized the relationship between the discourses of redemption and derogation of poor women, inmate researchers reminded the research team of a simple fact that, though obvious, Graduate Center researchers had looked beyond: Crimes had been committed by most of the women with whom we spoke. The discourse of redemption, it was suggested, serves as a powerful coping strategy for women desperate to understand themselves as separate from the often destructive behavior that led them to prison. By staying within a story of two separate selves, women can assert judgment over their past actions without having to face the pain of integrating complicated histories—past selves now despised, past behavior now regretted—into their present selves. The task of analysis then became to look back across the data for connective tissue between past and present selves, for instances where women reflect critically on their lives.

> But then just to sit down and read it all and discover that you don't even like half of this stuff here about you. But this is you. You know, you from you. And it was like, oooh! . . . so I [re-]wrote it and I read it and I re-read it and I re-wrote it and I sort of like condensed it [from 20 pages] into like about six pages. . . . it was like really deep because it was no escaping then. (Rhonda, on documenting her past for her clemency petition)

Through reconceptualizing past, present, and future selves as connected, we began to understand that personal change, or transformation, was not a simple declaration of starting anew with a "clean slate." The women were trying to describe personal change or transformation as a process in which a woman recognizes her past, present, and future selves in relation to each other and within social context, both in and outside the prison. And most were articulating the role that college played in helping them draw these lines of connections.

Using this line of analysis, we resisted thinking of lives and selves as existing outside of social context, without community, without history. In addition, we began to understand that women bring pieces of "old" selves into "new" selves, and that these pieces of the past selves inform and cocreate, within a social historical context, a present ever-changing self. And that college is one of those sites in which women can, in a community, acquire a language and the skills of reflection, through which these lines of connection can be drawn. Thus we undertook our third reading of the transcripts, seeking this connective tissue. For Sondra, a student, this means recognizing her multiplicity and negotiating which pieces of herself are useful in moving her life in the direction she chooses:

> It's still in my character, but I don't let it come out. It doesn't prove anything. Before, I didn't care. Now I see I can achieve, do anything I put my mind to. I have matured. . . . I can set examples now. (Sondra, addressing past behavior that led to disciplinary problems)

> I know the decision to continue my education will help me in the long run, yet my aspiration is to somehow help the young women who are coming into prison in record breaking numbers. My past allows me to speak from experience, and the academic knowledge I have obtained allows me to move forward productively, hopefully enabling me to help these younger women recognize and reach their potentials. (Crystal)

In Crystal's comment, we can see that recognizing these connections in oneself can lead to an understanding of self in community and responsibility across generations. Crystal sees her past in the younger women's presents and her present in their futures. This recognition led our research team to a fourth stage of analysis, in which we sought evidence of transformation talk located within a discourse of community and social responsibility.

Finally, after many readings and much discussion, we came to see that *a discourse of responsibility* was operating to link old and new selves, and that the women viewed college as the intellectual and personal site in which they could develop such a discourse in community while in prison. As fundamental, the women recognized that in the absence of programs like college, they would not have been able to move into reviewing their pasts, reseeing their crimes, narrating a sense of responsibility for past and future.

> I can think and talk about my victim now. It's not just "the bitch cut me and I cut her back." Even that idea comes out differently now, "the girl cut me and I chose to strike back." Those words weren't in me before, but now, just having the words to articulate things, puts them into perspective differently. (Tanisha)

> My involvement with college . . . has opened my eyes to all of the things that were wrong in my life. Now I have a sense of priority, a sense of accountability and I have made a legitimate premise for myself on which to build . . . my needs are still important, but not at someone else's expense. (Vanessa)

As these women testify, our quantitative and qualitative data confirm what other researchers and prisoners have found: Core elements of higher education, such as self-reflection and critical inquiry, spur the production of critical subjectivities, transformed and connected selves, and in turn transformed communities (Conway, 1998; Faith, 1993; Germanotta, 1995; Rivera, 1995). These interior transformations in self bear significant consequence for the women and for their incarceration rates. Said another way, individuals move from being passive objects to active subjects—critical thinkers who actively participate in their lives and social surroundings; who take responsibility for past and future actions; who direct their lives, networks, and social actions in the world. Moving across readings of the transformation narratives, we came to see the social psychological links between college, transformation, and social

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responsibility. We turn now to our transformation as researchers on a participatory research team.

We Created Among Us: A Team of Women Scholars

A world may come into being in the course of a continuing dialogue.

Maxine Greene (1995, p. 196)

We met often as a team, sometimes once a month, sometimes more and sometimes less. Encumbered by limitations on privacy, freedom, contact, and time, we are as profoundly moved by our shared capacity and desire to climb over the walls that separate and carve a small delicate space of trust, reciprocity, and the ability to argue respectfully about what is important to study, to speak, and to hold quietly among ourselves.

In this space for critical inquiry, we walked across barbed wires outside the windows and inside the room, through our racialized and classed histories, between biographies filled with too much violence and too little hope and biographies lined with too much privilege and too little critique. We engaged in what Paulo Freire (1982) would call "dialogue," a "relation of 'empathy' between two 'poles' who are engaged in a joint search" (p. 45). Freire deployed dialogue in an effort to provoke critical consciousness or *conscientizacao,* which "always submits . . . causality to analysis; what is true today may not be so tomorrow" (p. 44). Freire sought to create educational spaces, in our case both a community of learners and a community of researchers, in which "facts" were submitted to analysis, "causes" reconsidered, and, indeed, "responsibility" reconceived in critical biographic, political, and historical context. The task, then, was not merely to educate us all to "what is," but to provoke analysis of "what has been" and release, as Greene would invite, our imagination for "what could be."

As one of the inmate researchers, Missy, explained, "I look at this research project as a way of giving back, motivating and hopefully helping the program and the participants, and even the researchers—I want them to hopefully have a different outlook on what education means in prisons. I'm hoping that we reach a younger generation. To pass on our stories. . . ."

And Yet: Between Us Inside and Out

This space of radical openness is a margin—a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a "safe" place. One is always at risk. One needs a community.

bell hooks (1984, p. 149)

We are, at once, a team of semifictional coherence, and, on the ground, a group of women living very different lives, defined in part by biographies of class, race, and ethnic differences. Half of us go home at night; half of us live in the prison. Many of us bring personal histories of violence against women

to our work, and all of us worry about violence against, and sometimes by, women. Some of us have long-standing experience in social movements for social justice; others barely survived on the outside. Some of us are White, Jewish, Latina, Caribbean African American, some mixed. Most of us are from the mainland of this country, a few born outside the borders of the United States. The most obvious divide among us is that between free and imprisoned, but the other tattoos and scars on our souls weave through our work, worries, writings, and our many communities. Usually these differences enrich us. Sometimes they distinguish us. At moments they separate us. We understand ourselves to carry knowledge and consciousness that are, at once, determined by where we come from and shaped by who we choose to be (Harding, 1983; Hartsock, 1983; Jaggar, 1983; Smith, 1987).

Pamela Smart, inmate researcher, wrote,

> Most research on prisons is conducted by outside investigators. However, there is an incredible source of skills right inside these walls. Inmate researchers can establish a comfort zone with interviewees that many outside researchers cannot. Because a lot of people in prison are less trusting of outsiders, they may not be entirely forthcoming with their responses. However, inmate researchers, by the nature of their statuses as inmates, are often viewed by participants as more trustworthy. Just because I am in prison does not negate the fact that I am also a competent researcher. Using prisoners as researchers is a valuable experience that is beneficial to both the participants in the study and the readers of the results.

Questions of Design: How Participation Shifted Our Questions, Methods, Analyses, and Writings

We offer next a series of key methodological, ethical, and theoretical decisions we, as a team, made within the prison project and try to articulate what difference the participatory design made with respect to the questions we asked, the methods we used, the sample we selected, the procedures we undertook, the analyses we generated, and the writings we produced.

CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATION: THE UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE SEMINARS. With the wisdom of C. Wright Mills (1959) and Franz Fanon (1967) and buoyed by the commitments of participatory researchers before us, we began our work with an understanding that full participation of all researchers requires common and complementary skills, understandings, trust, and respect. Artificial collaboration would have been easy to accomplish. Simply having women in prison around the table would have been an exercise in what Nancy Fraser (1990) recognizes as the bourgeois version of a public sphere: inviting political unequals to the table and calling that democracy. A number of the women from inside the prison were already published (Boudin, 1993; Clark, 1995), but most were not. Thus, from the start, we committed to working through questions of power, trust, and skill by offering a set of courses on research methods within the prison facility, an undergraduate course and a graduate-level seminar. In the undergraduate course, students were assigned

a final project in which they would have to generate a specific question of personal interest under the larger umbrella question, "How does college impact the women in the facility, the prison environment and the women/children postrelease?" Once questions were formed and reformed, each inmate interviewed at least five other women about her question, analyzed, interpreted, and wrote up her results.

What was profound about this experience—a simple exercise in building a cadre of inmate researchers—was that the women came to see their personal experiences as fundamentally social and political. And they acquired research experience.

In the graduate seminar, the same kinds of social scaffolding occurred. Personal problems of "having a crazy neighbor who screams all night" unraveled crucial analyses of the politics of mental health and prisons. An off-hand remark about the proliferation of gangs in women's prisons sparked a rich theoretical discussion of the power of college and other programs to create intellectual and political spaces for personal and community engagement.

Thus, a crucial feature of participatory work is the building of a community of researchers—this means shared skills, respect, trust, and common language. This does not mean, however, consensus.

CREATING SPACE FOR DISSENT AND INSIDER KNOWLEDGE. As indigeneous researchers (Smith, 1999) and participatory action researchers have long recognized, insiders carry knowledge, critique, and a line of vision that is not automatically accessible to outsiders (Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993; QSE, 2000). There were three ways in which insider knowledge profoundly moved this project. First, prison staff and administrators, as well as inmates, simply know things that outsiders do not—formal and informal procedures, lines of authority, practices and their consequences, for instance. Second, insiders understand the profound connections between discrete features of a community that outsiders might erroneously see as separate and divisible. Understanding life at the intersections, as Kimberle Crenshaw (1995) has so beautifully articulated, is critical to the sustenance of an organization and can be perversely misunderstood by researchers who work to extract "variables" from the tightly woven fabrics of organizational life. Third, these insiders understand the power and politics of privilege, privacy, surveillance, and vulnerability.

PRIVACY, VULNERABILITY, AND SURVEILLANCE. Women living in prison have little privacy. Layering a participatory research project atop of this absence of privacy seemed problematic to the Graduate Center researchers. In this facility—one recognized nationally as respectful, participatory, high on commitments to women's growth and low on troubles—even here, given the concerns of security, women's diaries and books have been searched during our time in the facility; notes taken away; poetry destroyed. Questions of where to store the data, and still provide access to the inmates for analysis and interpretation, continue to plague us as outsiders. Indeed, at one point one of the inmate researchers asked the appropriate question about exploitation, "So we just collect the data with you, and then you get to analyze and interpret it?"

It was clear that although all the inside interviews were coconducted by an inmate and a Graduate Center researcher, that the Graduate Center researchers would interview the corrections officers. Some inmates we interviewed wanted to change their names for the final report and others demanded that their original names be kept intact, pointing out that in too many instances they have been erased from the outside world. At many moments in our work, we would need a document, a report, or materials from offices around the prison. When an inmate would ask for such information, there might be nervous caution about giving her requested documents, and yet when one of the Graduate Center researchers would ask, she would more often be told, "Take it— return it whenever you finish." These incidents constantly reminded us of the realities of being in a prison and about our denial about prison.

SELF-CENSORSHIP: AN INSIDER'S DILEMMA. An inmate doing research is also a person trying to survive and to get out of prison. This dual reality is always present in the mind of the inmate researcher. As researchers and writers of the research, we are always looking for truths, or the closest that we perceive to be "true." As prisoners we are always saying, "Is it safe to say this?" "What kind of harmful consequences might flow from this either for ourselves personally or the program or individuals about whom we are writing?" Self-censoring is as much a part of being an inmate researcher as "truth seeking."

We worry that writing something negative about the prison or a program may lead to negative consequences, removing those of us who are inmate researchers from a program, from one living unit to another, far from friends or increasing pressure around any of the life details of living in prison. As inmate researchers, we worry that defining negative truths may create tension between ourselves and the women with whom we live and work. Our relationships with our peers are a basis for survival. We live in a closed community in which everything is tied together. There is no exit.

All researchers have to make decisions about what to put in or take out of the research. These decisions relate to protecting individuals, protecting communities, or protecting groups or programs within a particular community. In this sense, insider researchers in a prison are not alone in making choices— many of these issues have been raised by Tuhiwai Smith (1999) on indigeneous researchers, feminists of color including Aida Hurtado (1996), hooks (1984), Beth Richie (1996), all working on questions of gender and sexuality subordination within racialized communities. However, operating among these choices of inmate researchers is a tendency for self-censorship that is almost survival instinct. Self-censoring comes from the instinct of self-protection in a context that is one of total control over one's day-to-day living conditions, day-to-day work, and personal freedom.

ISSUES OF POWER AMONG THE PAR TEAM. One of the values of qualitative research is to challenge the traditional power relations between those who do the research and the object of the research through a participatory process. But the realities and dynamics of prison, as the social context of this project, also affects the quality of work and the participation of the prisoner researchers

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in stated and unstated ways. As prisoners, we are always bounded by roles and rules of a closed institution. Some argue that we are in prison to be punished; others argue that we are in prison to be corrected. But in any case, we are essentially objects that must be controlled. On the other hand, we are striving to take responsibility for our lives, to become active, responsible *subjects*. This conflict of roles and expectations plays itself out in our roles as researchers in this project.

As the research evolved over time, some of us felt more constraints. Inmate researchers each had some area of involvement, but we had less knowledge of the whole. What was our role and how did it differ from the "outsiders"? Toch (1967) argued that prisoners can be useful as translators/"bridgers" in the interviewing and analysis of the data. But what was their relationship to the larger project, its conclusions and results?

At points some inmate researchers felt cut off from the project. An inmate researcher explained these feelings as a series of plaguing questions: "Was it just my imagination? Should I raise this in a meeting? Would I be seen as an interloper, a troublemaker? Am I stepping over the bounds? Whose bounds? Who has the power?" Some of these power issues can be addressed by creating a process among all the researchers. But another dimension has to do with the great divide between inside and out; the very physical and practical nature of our being cut off and limited as prisoners. As *inmate* researchers, we cannot meet among ourselves without permission and oversight. We cannot tape-record interviews. At the end of the day, Graduate Center researchers leave and we stay.

As we moved toward the data analysis stage of the research project, and each of us took on some writing, a few of us began to articulate some of these questions and concerns. The research team talked about how to overcome some of the restraints imposed by time and place. Transcripts of focus group interviews were brought in, so that the insider researchers could read through them. This provoked a conversation about how to increase researcher access to the data without compromising the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. When two of the outside researchers raised that they were presenting some of our work at a conference outside, we discussed how to include the insiders' perspectives and spirits. These discussions went beyond seeking practical solutions, as we became aware of the dimensionality of time and space, shaping the contours of our collective efforts. Over time our work as a team, particularly in the process of analysis and writing, we became a research team in which the distinctions between insiders and outsiders faded as other dimensions of our experiences emerged—women, mothers, graduate students, Spanish-speaking, comfortable with writing, spiritually focused, and so on. Our team had a life and a spirit, which grew inside our walls; now all of us together had to figure out how to transcend the walls to communicate what we had learned together.

As our work moved toward analysis of the data, our roles got fuzzier. Often the inmate researchers were the ones to caution against romanticizing inmates or using a highly politicized phrase like "the prison industrial complex," fearing that we would alienate our audience. We are not just "insiders," which denotes

place. Most of us feel acutely responsible for the crimes that brought us here and for the impact of our actions on others. We truly do feel for the public's anger about crime and feel responsible to address the legitimacy of that anger in our work. But it is hard for us to climb out of our own sense of responsibility, to feel entitled to claim a critical voice. Our work with outside researchers, who brought their sense of freedom to level clear critiques of social policy—so long as it was grounded in the data—stretched our capacities to think the unimaginable, to be socially responsible and critical.

EMOTIONS AT THE TABLE. The consequences of our work are many. We research and write to document the impact of college on women in prison; to support the continuing of a college program that is, as one inmate researcher described, on "sandy footing"; to encourage other prisons and universities to consider similar collaborations and to illustrate the power of education in prison. On a personal level, we write to secure a program of which some of us are students, some are staff, and some are board members. These intimate relationships bring both a passion and fever to the work, as the future of the program moves between solid and unstable ground. The emotions that flow around this tenuous nature of the program have an impact on our research effort as they demand time and space from us, often in our meetings together. In a research meeting it is common for us to flip-flop between hope and despair, possibility and fear as we face the realities of our relationships to the college program, the research, and to each other. These emotions and our commitments to reflexivity in our work at times leave us numb—the result of too many feelings. Sometimes in a research meeting we pause as a research member details the difficulty of registering new students eager to start the program with one or two courses, as she silently fears the program may close before these students graduate. Other times we deliberately stay clear of conversations that are too painful, keeping on task as a way to feel control when there is little available. We wrestle with how to communicate these emotions in our writings, how to honor their influence without getting derailed. The context and physical environment of our research is harsh, noisy, and without privacy, by design. We sit, after all, in a maximum-security prison where half of us are prisoners and all of us are human.

LOST BODIES. One of the challenges of participatory work is the coordination of bodies around the research table. People bring outside commitments, unexpected illness, and even unexplained absences because of hectic lives. At the prison we have the added challenge of working within the rules, regulations, and limitations set by the facility and the state. Inmate members of our research team have been randomly called out of our meetings by officers and at times have not been given notice about changes in meeting times. As inmates, Bedford Hills researchers have little control over being called to the doctor, the visiting room, or even to a cherished trailer visit with family. One inmate researcher was transferred, mid-project, to a facility near the Canadian border, almost 500 miles away, and another inmate researcher has had to focus her energies instead on issues related to her case.

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This movement of bodies in and out of our meetings has meant that, at points, the research has taken longer. At other moments, the process of updating each other has served to keep our articulations of the research clearer and more focused. In addition, the extra time we have been afforded through this process has strengthened our sense of being a true research "team" as our relationships have grown over time. Each struggle we have individually and collectively undergone has helped us to better understand each other's ideas and theoretical perspectives. Overall, when we sit around the research table we pay attention to who is missing, and in this sense the bodies are never truly "lost." Rather, what results is a discussion and writing that is infused with the bodies, minds, thoughts, and spirits of the women, coresearchers, who have come and gone. And though our hearts often ache, our collective work, without question, is richer for it.

AUDIENCE. Throughout this project, we constantly reminded each other, whether subtly or overtly, that we must consider our audience. The inmate researchers, in particular, were extremely cognizant of the public sentiment regarding crime and regarding prisoners in general. We anticipated a hostile, angry audience bred in times where popular "tough on crime" attitudes prevailed. Probably because of our awareness regarding the animosity toward prisoners, at times some of the inmate researchers became our own worst enemies, as their fear fueled a desire for self-censorship. Playing the roles of devil's advocates inmate researchers forecast the concerns and arguments of those we imagined would challenge our findings.

Anticipating reaction outside of the prison was often overshadowed by the stark reality that both the inmate and graduate center researchers also had to consider the prison administration's reaction. As the data collected were discussed and analyzed, strong opinions formed. Some of us wanted to include those opinions as part of our interpretation of the findings. However, the inmate researchers often reminded the group that, although they might not actually suffer a typical prison "punishment" (e.g., cell confinement, loss of privileges, etc.), vocalizing strong opposition to some facility policies might result in angering the very people who hold power over them. As a result, some voices have remained silent. The realization of our limitations has made some of us both disappointed and angry. It is interesting to note, however, that these moments have seemed to weigh as heavily on the outside researchers as on the inside researchers. Perhaps the concern of the graduate center researchers results from the fact that the suppression of any one voice in the symphony of PAR alters the final composition of the research.

QUESTIONS OF GENERALIZABILITY. There were many moments in this work, particularly in writing up the final report (Fine et al., 2001), and even in writing this chapter, that we sought to understand what is particular to the Bedford Hills experience of college in prison, but as important, which findings and dynamics are generalizable to other contexts. That is often a question asked of qualitative material—if the analysis is so rich, context-dependent, and particularized, have we learned anything that can be taken to other contexts?

We believe, with respect to both the substance of college in prison and the praxis of participatory work, there is much to be generalized. In this project, as in all other projects with which we are connected, we begin with a commitment to theorize the relations of the part to the whole so that we can ask here and in universities, high schools, community-based organizations, and prisons around the nation, "How does education transform young adult lives, biographies and sense of possibility—in prison or out? How does achievement, earning a diploma, and graduation further affect sense of self and responsibility to community? How do mothers returning to college affect children's academic well-being? How does college afford social critique and personal responsibility?" Certainly there are specific features of this prison, with this college at this moment in time, that shape the experience and consequences; but there are also significant dynamics that carry across time and space that may look very different in rural Minnesota, in a men's prison, or a community college on a Native reservation. But some of the deep complex relations of education, voice, and community appear to resonate across very divergent contexts.

Turning to participatory research, we discover that here, too, many of the issues that have plagued—and defined—our work together are knotty for any group of insiders working within an organization. Writing *as an insider* on domestic violence in Native communities, racism within gay men's organizations, sexism in a Black church, exploitation of domestic labor in suburban White communities, domestic violence within the lesbian community—for each of these topics, we have met researchers and practitioners who have self-censored, worried that the material was "too hot" and would be "badly used" against the community, that the researcher would be shunned, the research attacked, the story silenced even more. In most instances, the researchers ultimately figured out ways to talk about the material so that the right questions of theory, politics, and practice could be opened up. So we place the concerns of women inmate researchers writing from within prison inside a broad, ethical community of scholars working on critical issues within the local webs of organizational and community life.

How Do We Ever Walk Away? As we enter the final stages of the research, many of us have been filled with the mixed emotions of pride, hope, and sadness. There is a shared sense of pride in the success of our collective efforts and the potential for our work; hope that this potential will be fulfilled; and sadness that to end this project will end our ability to meet regularly and therefore lose our personal relationships and intellectual intimacy. Again the reality of working across razor wire and steel bars reminds us of the limitations of our social positions.

How do we continue what is no longer allowed? An inmate researcher, perhaps in an attempt to move beyond her own feelings of loss, describes the oncoming transition as "arriving at dessert," recognizing that once the project is over we can finally indulge in all the digressions and tangential conversations that were put aside because of the time constraints of our rigorous research agenda. However, the levity of this light-hearted comment lasts only a moment as we remember that just as we will no longer be able to meet regularly, the prison does not allow outsiders to bring in food.

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What's to Be Gained From Participatory Action Research?

We spent much time, as a research collective, discussing what is to be gained from PAR. There are, of course, the instrumental gains—insiders know more, know better, and know more details of how an organization, community, and indeed a prison operates. Outsiders, in contrast, have the freshness to ask the deliberately naive questions (Kvale, 1996) and have the relative freedom to speak a kind of truth to power that may provoke new lines of analysis. We dance between detachment and engagement. Yet, on reflection, rarely did we operate as two separate and coherent constituencies. Instead we grew to be, over time, a group of women with very distinct and sometimes overlapping commitments, questions, worries, and theoretical and political concerns.

In prison, as in any institution under external surveillance, insiders know details of daily life, understand the laser-like penetration of external scrutiny, and are more likely to refuse to simply romanticize—or pathologize—that which happens within. Indeed, in our collaborations it has been the inmate researchers who recognized that our design needed to include dissenting voices, narratives of critique, perspectives from dropouts. It is entirely possible that if outsiders, alone, collected the qualitative material we would have gathered material that would have been essentially a sugar-coated greeting card of praise for the program, collecting discourses of redemption, transformation, and positive affect, unchallenged and underscrutinized. "Research performances" of the good student would likely have gone unchallenged. In contrast, inmate researchers are able and willing to say in an interview, "Are you kidding, *you* have changed? You just got a ticket. . . . " or identify a correction officer known to be ambivalent about or hostile to the college, or arrange an interview with a recently arrived young woman member of a gang not yet ready for college. To the question, "Don't the inmates *bias* the research design in favor of positive results?" we respond that the inmates, far more than the outsider researchers, knew where to gather more problematic material, how to press for complex— not just sugar-coated—responses, and consistently refused to romanticize inmates as powerless or as victims.

Inmate researchers understand intimately and thereby theorize profoundly the complex interconnections that constitute prison life, both as inmates and as researchers within the facility. Although Graduate Center researchers assumed college to be a "variable" connected to, but relatively insulated from, other aspects of prison life, the inmates understood the connections that had to be recognized. Thus, for example, we learned that because of a recent shift in disciplinary policy in the facility, women can no longer bring pens out to the yard. Anyone seeking or offering tutoring or homework assistance on the yard must be denied—or helped with a crayon. With metal detectors and sometimes pat-frisking required for women to enter the yard, the numbers who do go to the yard have diminished. Tutoring, study groups, homework assistance in the yard dwindles. A seemingly remote policy has a profound impact on the college community. Outsiders would never have guessed.

PAR may indeed bend toward a kind of "strong objectivity," as Sandra Harding (1983) might say, because we pool our many partial truths toward

understanding the power of college in prison. But PAR also provides an interior legacy and power—within the prison—of respect for insider knowledge and recognition of inmate authority. This research project refuses to speak *for* but stretches to speak *with*. Inmate "subjects" are not exploited or edited by outsiders, but rather have become part of a hybrid team of women have worked together with deeply contradictory material to produce an analysis of rigor, policy, and respect.

So, to the question, "What's to be gained from PAR?" we answer that all research is collaborative and participatory, even though typically, respondents are given code names and rarely acknowledged as coauthors. More researchers must acknowledge the coconstruction of knowledge, and that material gathered from, with, and on any community—including a prison—constitutes a participatory process.

We believe that we have simply—and with enormous effort—recognized the profound influence of collaboration that is constitutive of research. Insiders *and* outsiders know much, and know much deeply. Between us there is a powerful coconstruction of critical knowledge about the effects of college on prison life. We consider participatory work simply an acknowledgment of the strength of our intellectual and action-based collaboration.

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