

# 2

## WHAT IS CRITICAL PARTICIPATORY INQUIRY?

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

#### By the end of this chapter, you will better understand

- How CPI is an epistemological stance, not a method or methodology.
- The messiness and flexibility of the CPI process.
- Major critiques of CPI.
- How CPI can play a role in advancing the people's knowledge for liberation and transformation in this historical moment.

### FOCUS ACTIVITY 2.1: THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF RESEARCH

Before you start reading this chapter, consider the following questions. You may answer them to yourself or record your answers and thoughts in your researcher journal:

1. What is research for?
2. Who is research for?
3. What is the difference between inquiry and research?

In every one of the research methodology courses we teach, we start by delving deep into ourselves, our positionalities (as we discussed in Chapter 1), and what our relationship is to the practice of research and to those with whom we will engage. By the second or third week of classes, inevitably, one or two or more students will ask something like, “I know that reflexivity is important and all, but I’m really interested in adding tools to my toolbox. How do I *do* this type of research?” We completely understand. However, without this reflexive work as grounding, those “tools in your toolbox” may be used incorrectly, or you may not be aware of some of the tools at your disposal.

In Chapter 1, we took a deep dive into the concepts of positionality and reflexivity to better understand who we are in relation to critical participatory inquiry (CPI). The goal of this chapter is to now move to what CPI actually is and what it is not. We will also begin to introduce the why and how of it all. This will set us up for future chapters that get into all those tools (methods) in your methodological toolbox.

## CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

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As you discovered in Chapter 1, CPI grew out of a decentralized, multinational movement to rethink what research is and is for (i.e., to transform rather than just document or explain the status quo). In other words, CPI embraces a new paradigm about research which claims that knowledge creation cannot be separated from the identities of the researcher(s) and participants and the unique contexts in which it occurs. Here, we will clarify some foundational concepts that drove the development of this movement and continue to guide the CPI process.

### Method vs. Methodology vs. Stance

You may have learned about research in terms of the scientific method, a standardized procedure leading neatly from a well-defined question to a hypothesis, an experiment designed to test the accuracy of the hypothesis and, ultimately, to a conclusion that either proves or disproves the hypothesis. CPI, however, is not a tidy set of steps or techniques; in fact, it is not a **method** at all in the traditional sense. We argue that it is not even a **methodology**, a broader approach or philosophy about research that guides the selection of a method and design of procedures. In contrast, CPI is an epistemology or a stance toward knowledge that influences a researcher's choices about how to enact it and what the desired outcome is. This stance is characterized by the goal of transforming attitudes, behaviors, or even entire systems.

### Emancipation

As we discussed in Chapter 1, CPI is rooted in emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 1970), which challenges dominant paradigms about knowledge and research. Originators interrogated the positivist assumption that "truth" is "a cumulative, linear complex of confirmed rules and absolute laws" (Fals-Borda, 2001, p. 28), recognizing that "science is socially constructed" and interpreted. Participatory epistemology claims that research has "democratic potential" at the grassroots level and thus needs to be *democratized* or opened up to the ordinary citizen (Appadurai, 2006, p. 167). In fact, Fals-Borda (2001) calls for a new scientific paradigm that privileges the knowledge of "the rebel, the heretical, the indigenous, and the common folk" (p. 28).

This can look like neighborhood council members debating a proposal to build a new shopping center, or students working alongside their instructor to co-construct a classroom agreement. This stance declares that community members, often individuals who have been historically pushed to the margins of society or who have been mistreated or violated by the

research process itself, are experts on their worlds and must be meaningfully included in decisions that affect them. In other words, those closest to an issue know it best because of their lived experience, or *vivencia*, to use the original term in Spanish from Orlando Fals-Borda (Fals-Borda, 1987; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Ochocka et al., 2010).

As a result, “ordinary people” can and should be included as co-creators of knowledge and retain ownership of this knowledge. In fact, Arjun Appadurai (2006), an Indian American anthropologist, asserts that everyone has a *right* to research and that it should not be thought of as a “high-end, technical activity” (p. 167) requiring advanced formal education but as “the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet” (p. 167).

Higher education in most countries across the world today is dominated by two competing interests: the ideal of a democratic learning environment and the neoliberal, capitalist ideology of market competition, with students positioned as consumers purchasing credentials to gain access to the job market (Giroux, 2002; Mirra & Rodgers, 2016). In the neoliberal university, the goal is sometimes seen as efficiently training a workforce rather than developing human beings to contribute to building a more just, equitable society, and knowledge becomes a commodity to be owned rather than a public good to be created. This ideology trickles down to PK–12 schooling, which features ever-narrowing definitions of knowledge and success evaluated by standardized assessments and enforced by accountability measures. Beyond concerns about critical thinking, these approaches to schooling divorce learning from real-world contexts and punish marginalized communities for their presumed failures to measure up. This logic presumes that success is based on merit but fails to recognize inequity in access to learning and measurement tools that are intentionally created to maintain the status quo and power structures that reproduce injustice.

Before moving on to the concept of resistance, it is important to extend the notion of emancipatory research to that of abolition. Abolitionism, with its origins in the movement to end slavery around the world and later the prison-industrial complex in the United States, has found a natural place in education and research. As noted by Mariam Kaba (2021), abolitionism is not simply about deconstruction; it is an intentional practice of critiquing harmful and violent practices with the aim to collectively imagine and create something new. Abolition, then, is a generative process that requires collective responsibility and accountability, rather than “delegating it to a third party—one that has been built to hide away social and political failures” (p. 4), such as prisons, harmful and violent educational practices (e.g., high-stakes testing, gendered-racialized disciplinary actions), and even, relating specifically to the research process, institutional review boards. Rather, an abolitionist theory toward research is one that resists the habit of solely critiquing and deconstructing, and one that imagines how researchers and communities can push beyond the traditional researcher-researched hierarchy to collectively imagine how relationships and respect are ingrained in research. In practice, this can be considered across the entire research process: the ways in which researchers and communities negotiate how data are collected, analyzed, written, and shared; reducing harm and violence by objecting to the use of race and ethnicity in defining research problem statements; forming partnerships based on reciprocity; and openly discussing monetary or in-kind compensation when community

knowledge and expertise are shared. Based on Kaba's (2021) definitions of abolitionist theory and practice, then, abolitionist approaches to research must be rooted in transformative forms of justice, seeking to co-create processes that reduce harm and violence in research while imagining new futures based on relationality, respect, responsibility, and resistance.

## Resistance

Although CPI extends far beyond the realm of education, one of its primary goals is to resist these narrow definitions of knowledge, and its potential is perhaps best illustrated by work with youth. For example, the Council of Youth Research<sup>1</sup>, a YPAR collective of Los Angeles high school students, pushes back against representations of their school as “a dropout factory” through media production and other forms of civic engagement (Garcia et al., 2015). Youth researchers have presented their findings at Los Angeles City Hall and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting, disrupting the typical delineation between researcher and researched. Mirra and Rogers's (2016) study of U.S. university faculty who engaged in YPAR revealed that they saw it as a way to build youth's skills both for succeeding in formal schooling and critiquing power structures governing education. In other words, it offers a way to both work within existing systems and work to change them. In Guatemala, Giovanni has worked alongside nonprofit staff and Indigenous community members to explore how community co-researchers would recommend improving systems of justice and memorialization, given the episodes of violence that community members witnessed and experienced during the country's internal armed conflict as well as current socioeconomic manifestations of systemic oppression. As a knowledge democratization project, this work starts with known methods (i.e., those that co-researchers already use in their daily lives) rather than assuming that Giovanni, as the researcher, should immediately train others. Community co-researchers have used methods known to them (e.g., sharing circles), as well as other collaborative methods that Giovanni has facilitated (e.g., democratic card sorting, Ripples of Change). We describe and provide examples of these methods in later chapters, but for now, it is important to note that the purpose of this work is to counter deficit stories by showcasing community knowledge and resiliency.

By creating knowledge about their lives and the forces that constrain them, individuals can then assert their rights to economic, social, and racial justice (Appadurai, 2006), wielding this knowledge as “creative and transforming leverage” for meaningful community change and sociopolitical action (Fals-Borda, 1991, p. 4). Participating in research is connected to “the social and cultural capacity to plan, hope, desire, and achieve socially valuable goals” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 176). This is especially true for those most marginalized by today's global socioeconomic and political hierarchies who have the most to gain by claiming their rights to knowledge and knowledge creation (Appadurai, 2006).

## Humanism

A CPI stance also asserts that research needs to be holistic, infusing science with “a moral conscience” that brings together reason and personal ethics or “head and heart” for a “balanced handling of the ideal and the possible” (Fals-Borda, 2001, p. 29). Take, for example,

a CPI project by C. Susanna Caxaj (2015), where communities across Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala shared their stories of how mining operations affected their health and livelihoods, as well exchanging their strategies of resistance toward a multinational corporation. As Caxaj worked alongside a Maya Mam community in Guatemala, community co-researchers proposed holding a community-led tribunal—much like those held in international criminal courts—where they could share personal *testimonios*, highlighting how mining operations often led to health issues, ranging from the psychological and emotional to physical. During this tribunal, “jury members” throughout the Americas listened to these testimonies and found the mining corporation to be guilty of not only contributing to health issues but also to environmental and human rights violations. While this tribunal and the verdict received widespread coverage, it should be noted how Caxaj and community co-researchers addressed the moral conscience as conceptualized by Fals-Borda. For instance, before beginning the tribunal, Maya Mam spiritual leaders decolonized the room, arranging chairs in a circle, rather than what was considered to be a more colonial orientation of chairs organized in straight lines and connoting some sort of hierarchy of importance. Community leaders then prepared an altar in the middle of this circle and performed a ceremony. As Caxaj (2015) notes, this led the health tribunal to be “grounded in a Maya Mam place of meaning” (p. 5). Here, we can see even how the preparation of our collaborative activities, and how we share power and meaning with co-researchers, can lead us to better balance the ideal and the possible (Box 2.1).

### **BOX 2.1: PUSHING BACK AGAINST DEFICIT REPRESENTATIONS OF REFUGEE YOUTH**

In designing her PhD dissertation research with Syrian young adults under temporary protection in Turkey, Melissa felt strongly that she needed to balance protecting participants (and herself) from potential negative repercussions while resisting deficit representations of refugees that dominate scholarly literature and public discourse worldwide. She selected an ethnographic design infused with CPI epistemology, which Smyth and McInerney (2013) call “advocacy ethnography.” Instead of focusing on the barriers to higher education that refugees face, she used questionnaires, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) to collect rich, multimodal, multilingual data about how participants have overcome challenges—learning Turkish, passing entrance exams, navigating unfamiliar systems, covering living expenses—in their own words. Through narrative analysis methods, she crafted portraits that highlight the personal characteristics, strategies, and supports which enable academic success within an unstable, adverse environment; the portraits can be shared through social media to challenge misconceptions and misrepresentations of refugees in Turkey and beyond. This design was intended to account for the constraints of the sociopolitical context, which precludes criticism of government policies and institutions, while centering the knowledge and experiences of a marginalized group.

## THE CPI PROCESS

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At this point, you might be thinking, “That’s all well and good, but how do you *do* it?” Although you might wish for a flow chart with a clear timeline, like other forms of research sometimes offer, CPI is a fluid, messy cycle of planning, action, observation, reflection, and responsive adjustments based on preliminary findings—or hunches, even mistakes (Fals-Borda, 1987; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; McTaggart et al., 2017). Like the epistemology underlying it, the CPI process challenges dominant research paradigms by approaching knowledge creation as a collaborative, democratic, action-focused inquiry practice distinct from the scientific method or other traditional, rigid methods. It is **dialogical**, meaning it depends on two-way communication, which requires an equal relationship between those who would traditionally play the roles of researcher and researched.

Who is involved in this process? In contrast with traditional approaches to research, CPI involves both internal and external “agents of change” (Fals-Borda, 1987, 1991), typically university researchers or practitioners and community members. These change agents “contribute their own knowledge, techniques and experiences to the transformation process” (Fals-Borda, 1987, p. 332), combining insider and outsider forms of knowledge (i.e., practical and academic) to produce “a much more accurate and correct picture of the reality that is being transformed.” For example, outside researchers with formal training in data collection methods might provide guidance on developing a survey about childcare options in a low-income urban neighborhood, but insider researchers from the community should be the ones determining the relevant questions, conducting the survey, and analyzing the data.

### Mutual Recognition

This collaboration, usually between individuals with very different positions in the sociopolitical hierarchy—think of an undocumented Latina single mother and a White, male, tenured professor working together in the project mentioned above—often results in tension or awkwardness. Fine and Torre (2004) apply Pratt’s (1991) concept of *contact zones* to describe these interactions between people with very different cultural backgrounds, personal identities, and socioeconomic status, which requires explicit negotiation of power relationships within the research collective. They present this as an advantage of CPI, enabling the creation of knowledge that none of the co-researchers could have accomplished on their own. The goal is to move from an us/them mentality to a one of a team working together toward the same goal(s). Based on their work with youth, Call-Cummings and Dennis (2019) introduce the term “entangled self-assertion” to describe this kind of inquiry-oriented participation as “a collective reclaiming of power and dignity” (para. 39).

This process of reclaiming power can be tricky, complicated, messy, and confusing. Often, especially as people who are comfortable in our spaces and identities of relative power, we are pushed into positions and spaces of reflexive discomfort where we may, perhaps for the first time, come to see ourselves as colonizers of knowledge, complicit perpetrators of violence, or blissfully ignorant racists. Yet, it is within these contact zones that we form relationships of trust

and respect and that we learn about our mutual implication in the work of social transformation. That is, we can better understand how our lives, experiences, and futures are tied up with one another. Paulo Freire (1970) framed this mutual implication as a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed that must be broken from both sides in order to move toward social change. CPI enacts this through inquiry.

## REFLEXIVITY QUESTION

Have you ever been a part of a contact zone? How did it feel? How did you respond to the experience physically, emotionally, or otherwise?

In order for this relationship of mutual implication to work, members of an inquiry collective need to explicitly—and often repeatedly—redefine the traditional, asymmetrical roles in research of subject (active researcher) and object (passive/submissive “sample”) into an equitable, democratic subject–subject relationship (Fals-Borda, 1987). Fals-Borda (1991) declares that this type of participation is a democratic, altruistic core value “rooted in cultural traditions of the common people and in their real history” (p. 5) but damaged by “conquests, violence and all kinds of foreign invasions.” In other words, CPI requires the decolonization of relationships and the creation of sustainable local practices that can continue without dependence on external “experts” (Fals-Borda, 1991). This is messy, hard work that requires flexibility and ongoing negotiation of roles (Call-Cummings, Hauber-Özer et al., 2019; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005); it demands genuine commitment from all involved and long-term engagement (Fals-Borda, 1991, p. 4).

Considering the idea of **animators**—those who can breathe life into a CPI project—helps us to unpack the concept of sustainability more concretely. Sustainability, however, is a tricky concept, as it is more than simply ensuring a project can continue or obtain external funding. As Deeb-Sossa (2019) notes, the responsible inquirer should be warned that sustainability is difficult, as building trust and comradery with communities is necessary before we can start to think about sustainability. As Sri Lankan economist and participatory researcher Sirisena Tilakaratna (1991) described, sustainability does not happen by chance; there are several vital interrelated factors:

1. the emergence of a group of internal animators,
2. the practice of self-review by people’s organizations,
3. the ability to move from micro groups to larger groupings, and finally
4. an expansion of the action agenda to move toward a total/comprehensive development effort.

In Box 2.2, we will cover these factors through a classic example by Muhammad Anisur Rahman.

## BOX 2.2: SEEKING SUSTAINABILITY WITHOUT OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

Through an example of a community development project in the 1970s that sought to mitigate the socioeconomic risks of drought in Senegal, Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) describes a process where a group of internal animators (Sustainability Factor 1) emerged and engaged with an outside expert working on a donor-sponsored project. These internal animators already had their own questions based on reviewing and evaluating their own experiences and challenges (Factor 2). Through collaboration with an external animator, they systematized this process of self-review and formed their first subcommittee for collective action. As their surveys and analysis continued, other villages in the zone of Bamba-Thialene heard about their work, which led to intervillage reflection sessions and the formation of fifteen other subcommittees (Factor 3). These subcommittees consolidated and created a Committee for Development Action. Through this organization, the committee was able to develop curriculum to train more internal animators, continue reflection sessions, self-finance activities, and obtain external funding. The last factor in Tilakaratna's list was also achieved, which meant the committee began forming what was considered a comprehensive development effort—or one that took a systemic view of issues, activities, and outcomes—rather than solely looking at the most immediate problem.

### Participation

What counts as participation? In an essay published by UNICEF in 1992, Hart defines participation as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (p. 5). This corresponds to the redefinition of knowledge or expertise, which in CPI epistemology comes from everyday lived experiences of ordinary people rather than from the ivory tower.

This redefinition of participation becomes more complex in work with children. Because of the inherent power differences between adults and children in most societies, children’s views are not typically taken into account in decision making (Call-Cummings, Hauber-Özer et al., 2019; Dennis & Huf, 2016; Hart, 1992; Mayall, 2000). In research, children are seen as unreliable, so methods and analysis are tightly controlled by adult researchers (Hart, 1992). However, Hart asserts that children have a right to voice their opinions and need to learn active citizenship from an early age, which will increase both motivation for involvement and competence.

In practical terms, participation occurs along a continuum from symbolic involvement to initiation of the project and full engagement in decision making. There are various useful models of participation which represent the levels of participation as steps on a ladder: Arnstein’s (1969, 2019) model for adults comes from the discipline of urban planning and community development while Hart’s (1992), which is built on Arnstein’s, was created for an international development context. We present them here side by side; note the similarities and differences between the levels of participation for adults and children.



Hart (1992) notes that the highest level of participation is not always necessary or appropriate, and that children might choose different levels of involvement. We have found this to be true with participants and co-researchers of all ages, as we recognize the need to respect that everyone has other interests, priorities, and responsibilities. Participation might also look different depending on the circumstances. For example, refugees working in a factory in Turkey without work permits might choose not to present their findings about unsafe working conditions to local government due to potential repercussions and might instead ask a university-based researcher to do so on their behalf. At the same time, we want to underscore that many people who have been routinely excluded from knowledge creation processes, have had their own knowledges extracted, colonized, or erased, or have been treated as less than, may choose a form of nonparticipation out of habit. Recognizing and addressing this is tricky and can only be understood through respectful, relational dialogue. This is why building relationships of trust is so important, and we will get into that in a later chapter. For now, the important thing is that participants, or co-researchers, should be the ones to determine their level of responsibility and should not be shut out of or tokenistically included in decision making (Box 2.3).

### BOX 2.3: CLARIFYING LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

In order to clarify the different levels of participation, here we offer a few scenarios for you to consider. Read each scenario and assign the corresponding number from Table 2.1. After you have assigned a number, think about how you might adjust the scenario, based on CPI epistemology, to allow for greater, more equitable participation. You may consider debriefing with a colleague or peer.

Scenario 1: A young adult with intellectual disabilities advocates for a work placement program through his public high school in Pennsylvania.

Scenario 2: Indigenous community members receive funding from a local nonprofit organization to create public works of art to commemorate those who “disappeared” during the Maya genocide.

Scenario 3: White parents in a gentrifying London neighborhood create an arts program and a fundraising group outside of the school-supported parent-teacher association.

Scenario 4: Black Lives Matter activists get police arrested and charged with murder for killing unarmed Black people.

Scenario 5: Community members organize in partnership with local university professors in Kampala, Uganda, to create a faith-based nonprofit organization to address unmet healthcare and educational needs for orphaned children, get funding, and establish a successful health center and private school.

Scenario 6: A local hospital conducts focus groups with former cancer patients and their family members to better understand patient care.

Negotiating participation is by no means easy. In reflecting on a recent school-based photo-voice project with middle school English language learners that we assisted with, Meagan and Melissa realized that the university-based team running the project had not asked the youth

for their input on the focus of the study (see Call-Cummings, Hauber-Özer et al., 2019, 2020). We also encountered tensions throughout the project because of the mismatch between our epistemological commitments to sharing power and the hierarchical structures and curricular requirements of the school, to which the project conformed to a certain degree. CPI should challenge, not acquiesce to, power structures that govern schooling, but is it ethical to encourage children—some of whom were undocumented immigrants—to speak out? To push a teacher to veer from the state-mandated learning outcomes? We will examine ethics as an ongoing practice in Chapter 3, but you can see that this relates to the basic building blocks of CPI.

## REFLEXIVITY QUESTION

When might different approaches to participation be appropriate? What are some reasons that high levels of involvement might not be ideal or practical in a given situation?

### Shared Ownership

We have seen firsthand how participation has been coopted in the international aid and development industry. The term *participation* is often used, but critiques have emerged that little time and few resources are actually devoted to it—even though communities often see it as a necessary component for a development project (Anderson et al., 2012). Without sufficient time or proper resourcing, though, it is easy to see how the term simply becomes a way for institutions to appear like they are doing the hard work of learning and creating new knowledge *with* communities. However, it cannot really be seen as authentic participation (Fals-Borda, 1991) if we are simply writing about participatory projects in funding proposals and assuming that community members will flock to join our sponsored project when we arrive without ever having met us or heard about our plans. This process needs to take into account the realities of local situations and power structures in communities and those brought in by nongovernmental organizations, official state actors, university research teams, and other outside entities.

We also need to think about the negative implications that participation can bring, such as the time it can take away from community members earning a livelihood (or that they may need to work in addition to their normal hours). This is a particular concern if they are not compensated for their role in participatory projects. Additionally, there are ethical considerations as we think about practical engagement, such as *who* to involve from the community and *how* throughout the participatory inquiry process, from recruitment and selection to data collection and analysis. And, to further complicate this, we need to consider the assumption that participation leads to authentic understanding of community concerns and demands. For example, in a review of women's participation in development projects around the world, Cornwall (2003) shows how "voice" does not necessarily translate to influence when decisions are made by male community leaders. For participation to occur, researchers must share ownership and control over each step of the process with those traditionally positioned as objects of research. This democratic, dialogical inquiry practice

comprises community members identifying an area of concern, developing research questions, designing data collection methods, analyzing data, and deciding on how, where, and with whom to share findings (Cahill, 2007; Kilroy, 2011; Pittaway et al., 2010). That is to say, this process happens *with* community members, not *for* them (Freire, 1970). This requires long-term engagement in the community, understanding of local conditions, trust building, numerous formal and informal meetings with co-researchers, ongoing negotiation of goals, research design, and procedures, and discussion of findings (Dodson & Schmalzbauer, 2005; Kilroy, 2011). As an example, Wagaman and Sanchez (2017) speak to their experiences working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identifying young adults, and how sharing ownership and control is not only a negotiation of power but also requires co-researchers to share the burden of vulnerability as they navigate the CPI process. Community members are equal partners—co-researchers—in this inquiry process with university-based researchers or practitioners.

In our own CPI experiences, we have seen how this type of engagement, or partnership, looks different in various contexts and with various people. Also, participation may look different at different times. For example, recall from the introduction that Meagan was a co-researcher on a CPI project with high school students and their teacher in a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse suburban area outside of Washington D.C. For the first year of their work together, the research team held formal meetings inside the students' school every week. Time was allotted for various projects, and in between meetings, Meagan and the teacher co-researcher would correspond via email. In the second year of the project, the group had developed stronger relationships, so conversations and planning started happening between meetings and in much more informal ways. The research collective created a group chat to be able to carry on conversations on their phones and in ways that were much more authentic for the student co-researchers involved. In addition, a few of the students that had been leaders in the collective took on fewer research responsibilities because they had other work and school commitments. Other students took more visible leadership roles and began making data collection and analysis decisions. This simple example shows that as group dynamics and needs evolve, so will levels, types, and modes of participation (Box 2.4).

### BOX 2.4: ANALYZING PARTICIPATION

Choose one of the case studies in the Appendix and consider the following questions:

1. How were the research focus and questions chosen?
2. Who designed the data collection methods? Who carried them out?
3. Who analyzed the data and how?
4. Who decided how findings would be shared? Whose name was included on any resulting publications?

Let's pause here to consider a crucial point: Who knows more about a local issue? A person who comes from the outside to study it, or a person who has a lifetime of experience with it? The person who has lived and breathed this issue their whole life might take it for granted, or think

it is normal or even useful. It takes a democratic, dialogic inquiry partnership to leverage both insider and outsider sets of expertise and knowledge to learn something new and transform reality into something better. With a little planning and meaningful participation, community members become co-researchers with equal power over the process and ownership of the knowledge created (Ponic et al., 2010).

For example, consider a major budget grocery chain looking for a location to build a new store in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (U.S.). The grocery chain's needs analysis identifies a low-income residential area known as a food desert because grocery stores are few and far between, and many residents rely on corner stores, which carry mostly overpriced, shelf-stable foods full of sugar and preservatives. Management finds a commercial lot in a shopping center on a major street bordering the neighborhood and begins construction. The store stocks lots of affordable fresh fruits and vegetables, even more "exotic" items like plantains and papayas that would be in demand in this primarily Hispanic, Black Caribbean, and Southeast Asian neighborhood. After the grand opening, the store manager notices that many customers are White and that taxis start hanging around in the parking lot, picking up customers of Color with large purchases of mostly non-perishable frozen and canned foods. What's going on?

You might have guessed that the store is inaccessible by foot and public transit to local residential areas, so residents have to stock up when they can get transportation while White customers drive in from nearby lower middle-class neighborhoods to take advantage of the good prices. Buying fresh produce is not practical for local residents in this situation, and consumption habits are based largely on what has been available at corner stores. If the grocery chain's needs analysis had engaged local community participants, they likely would have recommended building the store inside the neighborhood where they could frequently stop by. They might have suggested partnering with the neighborhood's public library, adult education classes, houses of worship, and business association to create a public awareness campaign—or even hiring local residents to teach a cooking class focused on making traditional Puerto Rican, Dominican, Haitian, Palestinian, and Cambodian foods with ingredients available at the new store. The neighborhood mosque might have organized weekly carpools to the store following Friday afternoon prayers. Meaningful solutions to local problems require local expertise, but they often benefit from outside perspectives too.

Ownership is closely related to participation. Take another look at Table 2.1 and consider which levels of participation might lead to community members feeling more ownership of the project. Building trust and determining priorities with communities are essential for ownership and success of the project. For example, Kilroy (2011) traces the limited success of reintegration programs for ex-combatants in Sierra Leone to a lack of ownership in the development process. Salsberg et al. (2017) identify aspects that helped to shift ownership of a diabetes prevention project in an Indigenous community in Quebec, Canada, from university to community partners: strong leadership from both groups, "refreshing and stimulating" outside ideas, alignment of project and stakeholder goals, and trust building (p. 338). Sprague et al. (2019) assert that bidirectional trust and communication in participatory health research can lead to increased

		<b>Adults (Arnstein, 1969)</b>	<b>Children (Hart, 1992)</b>
Participation	8	Citizen control: community members taking complete decision-making power over an initiative (e.g., a school or non-profit board)	Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults: adults offering insights and guidance based on children's ideas; more common among youth/teenagers
	7	Delegated power: citizens getting dominant decision-making power over a specific issue or program, either through delegation from above or organizing and getting funding to start an initiative	Child-initiated and directed: children deciding on a project and taking action; happens commonly in play
	6	Partnership: community members taking actual decision-making power, usually due to an existing power base	Adult initiated, shared decisions with children: even though the project is conceived by adults, engaging children in making decisions; purposely including voices that may typically be ignored, like those with disabilities
	5	Placation: including community representatives on committees/boards in an advisory role with little power; powerholders still make decisions or have the majority of the votes	Consulted and informed: informing children fully about the project and genuinely consulting them for their ideas
	4	Consultation: collecting community members' views with no guarantee that they will impact decision making and little chance of meaningful change (e.g., opinion surveys, community meetings)	Assigned but informed: while adults initiated the project, ensuring that involved children understand the purpose of the project and their involvement, have a meaningful role, and willingly participate
Nonparticipation	3	Informing: teaching community members about their "rights, responsibilities, and options" (p. 27), often later in the process and without opportunities for feedback or negotiation (e.g., informational meetings, pamphlets)	Tokenism: including children in surface way without a choice of subject or style; assuming them to represent other children's opinions
	2	Therapy: attempting to "cure" community members of their problems by imposing majority values instead of changing oppressive conditions	Decoration: using children to support a cause without claiming participation (e.g., photos in fundraising materials)
	1	Manipulation: inviting community members as representatives on committees/boards to get their support or "educate" them; presenting the illusion of participation as a PR strategy	Manipulation: inviting children to represent a cause without truly understanding it or their ability to understand being recognized; children being consulted but not given feedback or included in discussion/analysis of their ideas

ownership of interventions, improved programming, and reduced marginalization of individuals with stigmatized health conditions such as HIV.

## REFLEXIVITY QUESTION

Think about experiences you have had in your own life. How have you seen insiders and outsiders, or community members and outside experts, partner in an equitable, respectful way, to share ownership of a knowledge creation process?

Ownership of an inquiry process is closely tied to decision making. As we have described, this starts with lived experience. Internal and external change agents (Fals-Borda, 1987) engage in mutual education: in other words, community members and researchers learn from each other about the issue of concern and possibilities for transformation (Lind, 2008; Mirra & Rogers, 2016; Ochocka et al., 2010). Consider what would have gone differently in the budget grocery store example if the business would have first taken the time for mutual education.

## Humility

In PAR, CBPR, and AR literature, we have seen that community members are often afforded the opportunity to participate in designing and carrying out data collection, drawing on their intimate knowledge of the context and issues being investigated and their networks. It is less common, but we argue crucial, for community co-researchers to have a meaningful role in analyzing data, developing findings, and sharing research. Often, this is because analysis is seen as a highly technical or specialized skill reserved for those who have been trained “properly.” This view is in total and complete contrast to CPI’s epistemological stance that experience is expertise. It is our view that everyone conducts data analysis everyday—whether we call it analysis or not. We are constantly making meaning out of our experiences. As we open our eyes in the morning (or whenever we wake up given our varied circumstances), we cast our eyes around the room, perhaps listening for sounds to indicate who else is awake, who has already gone to work, who has left for school, and what children are doing. We instantly make decisions for our own actions based on the analysis we have just conducted. Reserving the right to conduct data analysis for those who have some particular certification is to give in to—or uphold and reproduce—power dynamics that are both deeply entrenched and highly inequitable and unjust.

At the same time, we hesitate to teach analysis methods to community members to impart a kind of community certification to these co-researchers. This common approach is anchored in what Freire (1970) described as the banking model of education, whereby supposed knowers or experts deposit knowledge into non-experts, or community members, as if they are empty vessels, void of any useful knowledge. This type of practice runs the risk of reproducing an ontology and epistemology that deems a certain type of knowledge as superior and experiential knowledge as less valuable or valid. That said, balancing divergent knowledges and sets of

expertise can be tricky and requires careful thought. Fine and Torre (2004) make a good point in this regard: “As political theorist Nancy Fraser (1990) would argue, we believe it is disingenuous to invite co-researchers to the table without equipping them (and us) with shared skills, knowledge and language for full participation” (p. 19).

We would suggest that as you consider how you might approach this balance, you rely heavily on the “and us” in Fine and Torre’s point above; that is, that not only are “we” equipping “them” with requisite skills, knowledge, and language, but “they” are also equipping “us” so that we can better understand contextual factors as well as the ways in which they already engage in inquiry on a daily basis. At the same time, we urge you to remain vigilant and guard against any practices that instantiate an “us” and “them” mentality. The goal is to *share* ownership, *share* knowledge, *share* practices. To move toward a collaborative, collective “we” (Call-Cummings & Dennis, 2019). With all that said, when you review literature that claims a critical, participatory stance, we strongly encourage you not to take practices at face value. Really examine how a claimed CPI approach is being wielded. All too often we know that just because an author lays claim to one epistemology or another does not mean they (or we) actually live up to it.

We will offer a few examples to help clarify how critical participatory inquirers can live up to a CPI epistemology throughout the inquiry process. One of our favorite examples is from Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005), who engaged community members who had not taken part in data collection in a series of collaborative co-analysis focus groups. This process did not seek to confirm the accuracy of data, as in typical member checking procedures, but to interpret it based on community members’ intimate knowledge of the context and conditions. Another example comes from Pittaway et al. (2010), who describe their reciprocal approach to research that is responsive to participants’ priorities and needs at each stage, for example, providing training so refugee women could document human rights abuses and advocate for increased protection. In this approach, the participants made most decisions about how to share the findings, which can reduce researchers’ “outputs” but increase participant ownership (Pittaway et al., 2010). In another example, Gibbs et al. (2018) describe a large, multisite study examining the psychosocial impacts of bushfires in Victoria, Australia. The authors describe making repeated visits to each site to meet with community members and incorporating their comments and suggestions into the study design, research questions, survey contents, recruitment methods, analysis, and sharing findings. They note that while this multisite design precluded each community’s control over the process, it enabled researchers to build trust and gain deeper insights.

## Dialogue

As you can see, practitioners of CPI will not always do everything perfectly. That is, while we are experts in one way, we are likely not experts in every way. We may be awkward in our interactions. We may unintentionally create misunderstandings. We may make decisions only to realize that we should have included community members in the process. We will make mistakes; there is no way around it. But if we can anchor our CPI work in trust, openness, and dialogue, we will avoid many of the pitfalls that often beset us. This requires ongoing negotiation of collaborative relationships through humble dialogue. Note: the goal of such dialogue may not always be consensus. There may very well be disagreement and even conflict. In fact,

disagreement and conflict, in many instances, may signal strong, democratic participation. The goal of inquiry-oriented dialogue is not to minimize disagreement or discomfort, rather, it should be mutual education and understanding. I can understand you, your perspectives, and your experiences, even if or when I do not agree with you.

In one of Meagan's CPI projects, she worked with several of her extended family members to grapple with their own whiteness and their responsibilities as White women in the context of racial injustice in the United States. During a virtual discussion, one of her co-researcher family members indicated she wanted to be able to stand up in a nonconfrontational way to her neighbors who may say racist things or act in racist ways in passing. Meagan suggested that she engage by offering simple, humble counter-experiences: "You might say something like, 'Huh. Interesting. That hasn't been my experience.' Or 'I've never experienced it that way. Can you tell me more about your experience?'" This type of response encourages dialogue, communicates humility, and seeks for greater understanding. The goal of CPI is to facilitate the humble, open, democratic, dialogic communication and action most of us hope for in our everyday experiences and interactions.

### The Goal or Outcome

When we think about forms of CPI, like participatory action research, we often hear students ask about the type of action or impact that their research will result in. When we think about impact, of course, we tend to think at the highest levels. This does not mean your CPI project needs to result in some type of sweeping policy reform. The goal or outcome of each CPI project will differ, based on what co-researchers need and what they determine to be important. That said, it is important to talk about the goals of a project with all those involved. As you think reflexively about your own CPI project, here are a few questions to ask about the type of outcomes that might be of interest: Are co-researchers interested in some type of *personal* transformation, like being able to critically examine their own situations? Do co-researchers want to see a *social* transformation, like changing a discriminatory practice at a social service organization in their neighborhood? These questions bring up potential forms of action or impact, but each CPI project will differ when it comes to the particular kind of personal or social transformation.

Transformation is an important topic when it comes to CPI, but there is a lot in the scholarly literature where researchers assume that those engaged will be transformed or empowered. This is understandable, though, as the foundational works call for this type of inquiry to do just that: transform or empower (Fals-Borda, 1987; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1972). Consider *personal* transformation: critically examining one's situation. This is not typically the type of outcome that a participant may think about because it does not feel very tangible. However, we have seen through our own CPI projects that it is actually the most likely kind of transformation to take place and is often highly valued by research collectives and co-researchers. Being able to reflect and critically understand one's own social situation—for example, understanding an incidence of racism, or breaking down why a certain policy is discriminatory and how it affects you—is a type of change or action. As Freire (1970) notes, participants must first "unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation" (p. 54). We will talk more about this concept of praxis in Chapter 3, but at this moment, just remember that it is a cyclical process of reflection and action.



Moving from the *personal*, consider *social* transformation: changing a discriminatory practice or policy. How can a CPI project work toward other forms of change, even through advocacy or direct action? As Fine and Torre (2004) have demonstrated in their CPI project with women in prison, they have undertaken “policy-in-practice” analyses with co-researchers to dissect how certain social policies (e.g., parole practices, housing policies) affect who is imprisoned and how for long. In this project, the group not only produced reports but also met with government officials and collaborated with community-based organizations to conduct advocacy. Policy change—such as reforming the prison system in the United States—would, of course, take years and is not something one CPI project could accomplish, although it can be a contributing force. In other circumstances, policy changes can be tied directly to a CPI project’s goals. Take, for instance, the example mentioned in Chapter 1, where Arstein-Kerslake et al. (2019) were able to show the Australian Government that community legal centers were far more effective than courts when it came to ensuring that individuals with cognitive disabilities were properly assessed as being legally fit to stand trial.

As you can see, transformation can take many forms in a CPI project, but when it comes to pushing for action, we need to recall the role of the animator. In a CPI project, this requires internal and external animators (Fals Borda, 1991). Those internal to a particular struggle will bring their own knowledge and methods as well as expertise gained from living through experiences, practices, and policies, whereas others (such as academics and practitioners) may bring other types of knowledge, methods, and experiences. As we have discussed before, in order to be successful, the responsible inquirer needs to value all forms of knowledge and understand that *commitment* is another basic ingredient.

That said, transformation can often be seen as a loaded term in CPI. If you are conducting CPI, many scholars will ask what type of action you are seeking to create, or they just may assume that you and your co-researchers are experiencing high levels of cognitive transformation or critical consciousness. However, rather than seeing transformation as a given, we need to think about *what* action means and *how* it is achieved. When we assume it will happen, we run the risk of tokenizing co-researchers as marginalized individuals who need to be empowered.

The purpose of CPI is “investigating reality in order to transform it” (Fals Borda, 1979). The goal is to transform the conditions of participants’ lives, which often occurs in indirect ways “mediated through systems of influence” and in connection with social movements (Fals-Borda, 2001; McTaggart et al., 2017). The process itself can also be personally transformative or emancipatory for all involved (Fals-Borda, 1987; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1970). In fact, researchers often aim to effect change in “three [interconnected] things: practitioners’ practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practice” (McTaggart et al., 2017, p. 27) through “individual and collective self-transformation” (p. 28).

Individual transformation can be understood as the conscientization process that Freire (1970) described, developing critical consciousness of oppression and inequity through collectively investigating shared personal concerns (Cahill, 2007). In other words, investigating personal experiences and contexts can lead to awareness of how marginalized communities are perceived, represented, and exploited by outsiders (Cahill, 2007; Freire, 1970). This, in turn, can help individuals envision different pathways for themselves. Reflecting on her dissertation project with

young women of Color in New York City, Cahill (2007) adopts the feminist poststructuralist concept of subjectivity or “other possibilities of being in the world” (p. 269, citing Cameron & Gibson, 2005). Unlike a stable, defined notion of identity, subjectivity can be “multiple, contradictory, and in process” (Cahill, 2007, p. 269), continually shaped by experience, social and cultural practices, and, in this case, research. This echoes Freire’s (1970) assertion that we are “beings in the process of *becoming*” (p. 65). As Cahill (2007) demonstrates, this process of conscientization—confronting racism, discrimination, and dehumanization—can be fueled by anger but can also have a therapeutic quality as a way to make sense of experience and redefine oneself.

Returning for a moment to Meagan’s CPI project, we can see how this process of becoming—or conscientization—can sometimes play out for mutual understanding. Meagan invited her extended family members who identified as women to participate with her in a dialogue group that would be focused on race and anti-racism. Their idea was to dig into the history of structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism in the United States and talk through their responsibilities as White women in social movements for racial justice. After their first meeting, which turned out to be a difficult, awkward, and uncomfortable conversation about the roots of racism, Meagan started to feel uneasiness in the pit of her stomach, wondering if the group was doomed because the work of growing into anti-racism was perhaps too hard. As she grappled with these thoughts, she reached out to her cousin, who shared similar life experiences and political views. Her cousin suggested that at the next meeting they start with a round of “re-introductions about who we are and why we are doing this work.” At the next meeting, each person in attendance re-introduced themselves. They had assumed they knew each other—there were mothers and daughters, cousins who were best friends, sisters and sisters-in-law—but they soon realized they had been operating for years on a level of blissful ignorance and superficial understandings of the others’ lived experiences. Inviting those simple re-introductions made a difference in being able to reach toward mutual understanding and education.

This simple experience can illustrate that CPI is deeply personal and almost necessitates a redefinition—or reintroduction—of oneself, to oneself. We started thinking through this concept of positionality in Chapter 1, considering questions like *Who am I?* and *Why am I here?* We would add that, perhaps after engaging oneself in a process of explicit self-re-introduction, critical participatory inquirers also find ways to enact this with co-researchers to interrupt the assumptions we make, the understandings we think we already have, and the misunderstandings we are sure to come across. Allowing each person in the inquiry collective to take their own path of becoming is a necessary and crucial component of the CPI process that is anchored in CPI’s holistic, relational epistemology that puts a premium on emotional or spiritual development and interconnectedness. In addition, CPI collectives must also allow for, even invite, individual members of the group to be unsure about who they are, to be unable to articulate their reasons for participation, and to evolve and change. Remaining open to the many possibilities of being and becoming allows the process to be freeing—or emancipatory—to those involved in it.

This process is often referred to as empowerment, but this word has problematic connotations of powerless people being given power by those who have it. In addition, it takes for granted, or neglects to question, how those who supposedly have power received it in the first place (most often they or we benefitted from the oppression of those who we now seek to “empower”). In light of her CPI work, Meagan defines critical empowerment as “the process

of gaining control over knowledge creation as well as the process of coming to see one's own authentically created knowledge as valuable and useful to society" (Call-Cummings, 2018, p. 400). Through CPI, participants can discover the power that they already have and use it to challenge marginalization and injustice (Call-Cummings & James, 2015). This is also true for the university-based researcher or practitioner. Kennedy (2018), for example, presents a model of personal transformation experienced by adult YPAR facilitators, moving from feeling overwhelmed to practicing critical self-reflection, releasing expectations, learning to share power with youth, establishing a collective identity, and gaining a new approach to work with youth.

Individual awareness can then propel collective transformation. That is, the personal becomes political (Cahill, 2007; citing Fine et al., 2001; hooks, 1995). This often takes the form of concrete local action to increase understanding, challenge injustice, and change conditions in the community or its institutions by and for those most directly affected. This "revolutionary" action through "countervailing power" (Fals-Borda, 1987, p. 6) can take different forms. Erel et al. (2017), for example, describe the use of participatory theater methods<sup>2</sup> (see Chapter 7) with low-income migrant mothers in London to articulate and develop shared understandings of their experiences with marginalization and public discourse that defines them as drains on social welfare and "threats to social and cultural cohesion" (p. 303). Through the theater workshops, the mothers developed strategies to deal with social problems, like being refused a doctor's appointment, and gained confidence for taking action in real-life situations. Another example comes from The Mestizo Arts & Activism collective in Salt Lake City, Utah (U.S.). This project demonstrates the potential of arts-based critical participatory inquiry with undocumented Latinx youth in the western United States to build solidarity, expose racialized, xenophobic social exclusion and labor exploitation, challenge public perceptions, and resist increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies (Cahill et al., 2019; Quijada Cerecer et al., 2013).

Participatory action can also take on a political dimension as it "moves from the micro to the macro level" (Fals-Borda, 1987, p. 334). External partners might, for example, link local community members to regional, national, or even international movements working on a similar issue (Fals-Borda, 1991). Thus, CPI is intended to mobilize grassroots movements for justice and equity (Fals-Borda, 1991) (Box 2.5).

### **BOX 2.5: MOVING FROM MICRO TO MACRO WITH KAQCHIKEL MAYA COMMUNITIES IN GUATEMALA**

In his work in Guatemala, Giovanni has taken an explicit political stance, exploring the micro- and macro-level, as well as how exploitations create barriers to participation (Dazzo, 2020). For instance, at the micro-level, he found that while community members were interested and willing to participate in collaborative data collection and analysis sessions, some participants were quite unfamiliar with the idea. During lunch one day, an Indigenous co-researcher, Carmencita, stated, "When you are asked to participate, but no one has ever asked you before, you're afraid." This example highlights how inquirers must

see participatory action as a philosophy at the micro-level, noting how inquiry can confront barriers to participation and self-realization, and promote empowerment through sustained dialogue. At the macro-level, he has also thought about how this work can translate to a larger scale. Through working with community members and nonprofit staff, there has been an element of activating others in the process. These animators have breathed life into the project, coordinating and conducting their own data gathering and analysis activities without his facilitation. This has been an exciting part of the work, seeing how small collaborative moments can multiply and turn into a larger movement. However, as we mentioned above, sustainability is something that needs to be fostered rather than assumed.

Despite its perceived potential for transformation, CPI is not a panacea to the pitfalls of traditional research. Particularly in hierarchical, institutional settings like schools, hospitals, multinational organizations, and governments, CPI requires “explicit, collaborative, critical, and continuous exploration of power dynamics and relationships” (Call-Cummings, Dennis et al., 2019, p. 410). In addition to not being a panacea, it is also, in our experience, not a choice. Rather, it is a way of life that is rooted in our convictions and is connected to who we are and who we want to be. As Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) remind us “at this challenging moment that a rather permanent existential choice is made when one decides to live and work with PAR” (p. 29). This is not a blueprint for research but a way of life, “an ethical stand,” and a persistent commitment toward the “an overall, structural transformation of society and culture” (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 29).

## CRITIQUES OF CPI

While we are committed to a critical, participatory inquiry stance, we do want to acknowledge that CPI is not without critique. Because CPI by design engages marginalized and oppressed people in documenting and transforming the conditions of oppression, it carries significant risks for these participants. In such situations, researchers’ goals of leveling power relationships with participants may conflict with their ethical and moral obligation to protect vulnerable populations (Call-Cummings et al., 2020). In addition, we are also aware that asking people who have been pushed to the margins of society to take ownership of a process that works toward the dismantling of that oppression is patently unfair. We are hopeful that as you learn more about CPI you will work against this possibility and engage both those who experience oppression as well as those who perpetrate it in the transformation process. We often fall into both roles simultaneously. Remaining cognizant of our ever-evolving positionalities can help us maintain a reflexive stance and push back on this possibility.

In addition, we also note a potential for CPI to expose already vulnerable individuals and groups to greater risk, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. For example, in their work with “poor mothers,” Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) address logistical and ethical complications of participatory inquiry with marginalized people, particularly the role of silence as a

strategy for coping with unjust authority. They note the difficulty of “seeking to build knowledge with people who live the conditions under study without disrupting their ways of protecting themselves and their families” (p. 952). Melissa’s dissertation (Box 2.1) is another example of taking structural constraints into consideration in work with marginalized participants.

Visual participatory methods such as photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997; see Chapter 7 in this volume) and digital storytelling (Greene et al., 2018; Gubrium et al., 2014) are often touted as empowering because of their potential to facilitate expression/voice and self-representation (e.g., Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Harper, 2016, 2017; Marquez-Zenkov et al., 2007; Wang & Burris, 1994), but they also present ethical dilemmas about privacy and confidentiality (Burlles & Thomas, 2014; Hannes & Parylo, 2014; Hauber-Özer & Call-Cummings, 2020; Teti, 2019; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). This is particularly true for marginalized groups; for example, breach of confidentiality in CPI with undocumented migrants or refugees could lead to deportation (Pittaway et al., 2010; Sahay et al., 2016; Tuck & Del Vecchio, 2018).

There are also concerns around the tensions and difficulties of sharing power in research with children, especially children of Color who are already experiencing complex and layered oppressions (Call-Cummings et al., 2020). Particularly in contexts like schools, where hierarchy is rigid and power dynamics often unquestioned, we have seen a greater need for reflexivity as we negotiate roles (Call-Cummings, 2017). Take, for example, Meagan’s experience during her dissertation work. She was engaging in CPI with a group of undocumented Latinx high school students in rural USA. They had clearly articulated to Meagan the ways in which they experienced oppression through practices of silencing at their school and within their local community through formal policies and informal practices. They did not feel comfortable conducting one-on-one interviews with their White teachers or school administrators, so they asked Meagan to do those interviews because she was less vulnerable to risk than they were. Of course, this choice did not fix the vulnerabilities they felt. As they displayed pictures and accompanying narratives of their lives in their school library, they were exposed to the reactions of other students, teachers, community members, and policymakers. They could have experienced increased levels of bullying, greater disciplinary actions, or other subtler responses to their self-exposure. It is of vital concern to remain aware of and be open about how CPI can expose those who are already vulnerable.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have provided numerous examples of what CPI is and how it can take shape in varied contexts. We have emphasized how everyone involved in CPI should seek to share ownership and responsibility in the process, and we have also offered a few words of caution related to the potential for CPI to re-oppress and expose those who are already vulnerable.

In 1991, Fals-Borda and Rahman urged scholars, practitioners, educators, and activists to recognize the ongoing and even increased need for PAR compared to its emergence in 1970. As they stated, “the world is still passing through the same era of confusion and conflict in which PAR was born” (p. 30). Half a century after the approach developed in the slums of Brazil, we are experiencing a dizzying level of conflict, violence, displacement, division, and suffering and a

widening gap between the powerful and the oppressed. We urge you to commit to this way of life and to seek out your roles in advancing the people's knowledge for liberation and transformation.

## RECOMMENDED PRACTICE 2.1: ANIMATORS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Think back to Tilakaratna's (1991) description of sustainability and the four interrelated factors:

(1) the emergence of a group of internal animators, (2) practice of self-review by people's organizations, (3) the ability to move from micro groups to larger groupings, and finally (4) an expansion of the action agenda to move toward a total/comprehensive development effort. Think about these interrelated factors in relation to your own CPI project. Consider these questions (and consult co-researchers if your collective is already established): Who are internal animators and how might they emerge? How could you and your co-researchers enact the practice of self-review? How would your collective move from micro to macro groupings? How might your agenda for action adapt or expand? Write out your responses or create a conceptual map that plots out these actors and factors. Considering these from the beginning provides an opportunity to think through sustainability and how your engagement and partnerships can move toward this goal.

### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Rather than a research method or methodology, CPI is an epistemology or stance toward knowledge and knowledge creation that guides choices about research procedures and goals.
- This epistemology values the experiences of ordinary and marginalized people as expertise, which contrasts with dominant ideas about research and higher education.
- CPI involves internal and external agents of change who work together to produce an accurate picture of the issue of concern and to work for change. This often requires negotiation of roles and power relations between people with very different backgrounds and experiences.
- Participation can be seen along a spectrum from manipulative or tokenistic inclusion of community members to full decision-making power and leadership.
- Genuinely sharing ownership with community members throughout the inquiry process is crucial but difficult, requiring long-term engagement, understanding of the local context, trust building, and ongoing discussion.
- CPI's transformative goal can take many forms, from increased personal awareness to social and political change.

- There are many important critiques of CPI, including the potential to expose participants to risk and tensions related to institutional and interpersonal power relations, which require careful consideration.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Journal about the idea of expertise. What do you have expertise about, and how did you gain that knowledge (experience, formal education, informal learning from a family member, etc.)? How have your ideas about expertise started to change, if at all, after reading this chapter?
2. Think of a problem in your community that would not typically be a subject for traditional research (like the scenarios above). Brainstorm how you might approach documenting and trying to solve it using CPI. Which internal and external agents of change might be involved? What challenges (e.g., roles, ethical dilemmas, structural constraints) might you face along the way? What kind of information would you gather? What steps might you take to try to develop and implement solutions?
3. In a pair or small group, choose a current or recent activist movement (e.g., racial justice, women's reproductive rights, or climate change) and analyze the approach taken. In what ways does it resemble CPI? Where would it fall on the ladder of participation? Does the affected population seem to have ownership of the process, or is participation tokenistic or even manipulative? How are roles and decisions negotiated? How could a CPI approach be beneficial? Present your ideas to the class and gather their feedback.

### KEY TERMS

animators  
dialogical

method  
methodology

### ENDNOTES

1. <https://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/projects/the-council-of-youth-research>
2. You can watch sample scenes from this project at <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/migrant-mothers/participatory-theatre/>