



***Critical Participatory Action Research: Commitments,
Accountabilities and Epistemic Justice***

Note taker: Casey Mears

Speakers:

- María Elena Torre, co-founder and director of The Public Science Project, [The Graduate Center, CUNY](#)
- Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor of Critical Psychology, Women's Studies, American Studies and Urban Education, [The Graduate Center, CUNY](#)
- Kate Mogulescu, Associate Professor of Clinical Law, [Brooklyn Law School](#)
- Sharon White-Harrigan, Executive Director, [The Women's Community Justice Association \(WCJA\)](#)

Moderator:

- Matthew Burnett, Policy Officer, [Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

Number of Participants: 94

Notes:

This session will take a deep dive into public science projects.

Morris Justice Project - Analysis of NYPD data

Survivors Justice Project - Document and animate Domestic Survivors

Justice act - Women who are incarcerated - impacted by justice system

Michelle Fine:

- Let's all acknowledge that we stand on stolen land
- critical participatory Action research
 - Knowledge is widely distributed but legitimacy is not
 - There is knowledge and wisdom that is held by those in the community who are impacted by injustice
 - Those who have the privilege to work alongside those impacted should acknowledge and understand their knowledge
 - Honor wisdom cultivated on the ground, behind bars in marginalized communities
 - When we bring together research collectives, we pool our knowledge, but privilege perspective of those most impacted
 - When we engage in critical par. We refuse downstream analyses
 - Never assume that where the problems appear is where they are caused (W.E.B. Dubois)
 - Research teams tend to be comprised of very differently situated folks.
 - We work hard to craft analyses that acknowledge intersections
 - New knowledge come from clashing perspectives
 - Hold ourselves accountable to communities in struggle

Maria Torre

- Morris Justice Project
 - Project started in 2011
 - Response to outrageous time in NYC
 - NYPD was using excessive stop question and frisk (broken windows policing)
 - Broken windows - theory that if you address small crimes (loitering, trespassing) you can prevent larger crimes
 - Very flawed social science
 - Used in minority heavy communities

- Young people of color telling stories about very aggressive interactions with the NYPD
- Group of Mothers in a legal case against city trying to demonstrate racial injustice in the city - fed up with police harassing their sons
- Launched an open meeting at the library - in the Bronx
 - Neighborhood with heavy police presence
 - Was a vibrant community, but less so as police presence increased
- Who is the “We”
 - Researches, folks from the neighborhood, Mothers and sons, young people in the area, shopkeepers, elders
 - Think about who would be important in developing the research process
- Who is the community? What is the “Neighborhood”?
 - 42 Blocks area
- Purpose:
 - Speak back to the NYPD
 - Dispute that their aggression was necessary to keep city safe
 - Wanted to engage community where people are living
 - The neighborhood as a whole, even those who don't know one another
 - Wanted to speak to those who weren't being policed in the same way
- Participatory Survey Design:
 - Knowledge sharing
 - Police dept data
 - Personal experiences
 - Music
 - Focus groups with other community members
 - Wanted to show collateral consequences of the policies
 - Lost time at work
 - Family members who need to watch children etc.

- Brought survey questions to community members, lawyers, etc and realized their initial survey would not work on street corner
- Worried that there would be critiques about the sample not being random enough - made sure to divide the neighborhood and stand on one corner all day trying to catch every single person coming in and out of a building etc.
 - Wound up with fairly representative sample of the neighborhood
- Didn't want the survey to mimic other studies done in the past
 - “No research about us without us”
- Folks took the survey very seriously
 - Offered folks a round trip metro card and some would return it once they took the survey because they felt they were doing something good for their community and wanted the information to be given to the mayor
- Analysis was always done together - People thrived on putting out their ideas and being challenged
 - Conversations that provoked thinking
 - Debated among the group about some of the data
 - i.e. some felt safer with police around and others wanted full police abolition
- Sidewalk Science
 - Chalk phrases
 - “Why do I always fit the description”
 - “75 % of my neighbors have been stopped by the police”
 - Installations on the same corners where survey was handed out
 - Represented people right to engage in their community
 - Ask those who come to sidewalk “what makes the community safe?”

- Take photos and put them up in a “museum of community safety”
 - Important for people to see themselves in the data and see their experiences represented
- Project was born of outrage and urgent
 - First few years the products went to the lawyers who were fighting the aggressive policing policies
 - No academic writings for first few years
- T-shirts, videos, art installations (illuminator) using data - open letter to the NYPD
- At end of the project, NYC got a new mayor - Deblasio said in his campaign that he would end stop and frisk, however he installed a police commissioner who was an architect of the program - changed language from stop and frisk more to broken windows
 - Put up posters that said “this isn't broken windows it's our home”

Sharon White-Harrigan

- Survivors Justice Project
 - DDSJA
 - Law that gives judges discretion to shorten sentences/ offer alternative sentences of DV survivors convicted of crimes related to their abuse
 - Important because DV affects women in prison in staggering numbers
 - 75% of women in prison in NY have suffered IPV
 - 60% of women accused of killing someone close to them have been abused by the victim
 - Protects survivors who are criminalized for protecting themselves

Kate Mogulescu

- DDSJA law went into effect in 2019
 - Law allowed some give and flexibility to survivors in their sentencing
 - Law applies to almost all of serious offences in NYs penal code

- Law recognizes that DV is broader than intimate partner - extends to family and household members
- Law doesn't just apply to survivors criminalized for protecting themselves from a direct attack
 - Crimes committed (robbery, drugs) at the behest of abusers
- Survivors Justice Project
 - Started in early 2020
 - Centered work around who in prison may be eligible for resentencing and make sure they have resources to seek resentencing
 - Created a database of 487 cases
 - Take into account
 - What defines experience for those most impacted
 - What are the things we can and should do for these survivors
 - When COVID hit, pivoted to emergency clemency and medical parole applications to protect people in prison from COVID
 - Once COVID calmed down a bit, went back to list of 487 women and looked into ways to help them
 - Looked at who is reaching out for help under the law and who is not
 - Built resources for those inside who are going through the resentencing application process

Shared Resources:

- Slack Channel:
https://decolonizingjustice.slack.com/join/shared_invite/zt-j41huvtg-dQjFnejoXKKAnem3Nhd4FQ#/