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Thank you, Caroline

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Abstract

I offer a book review of Caroline Lenette's new book called *Participatory Action Research: Ethics and Decolonization* in which I focus on the ethical and justice dimensions that I believe we, in our research worlds, need to give greater consideration to and inclusion in our research design, conduct, and publishing practices.

Keywords

Participatory Action Research, ethics, decolonization, research as daily practice

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Thank you, Caroline

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I offer a book review of Caroline Lenette's new book called *Participatory Action Research: Ethics and Decolonization* in which I focus on the ethical and justice dimensions that I believe we, in our research worlds, need to give greater consideration to and inclusion in our research design, conduct, and publishing practices.

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It was the subtitle, *Ethics and Decolonization*, that drew me to this book. After the last TQR conference, Ron Chenail, Dan Wulff, and I (Co-Editors-in-Chief of TQR) along with Adam Rosenthal (Managing Editor and Community Director of TQR) got together to talk about the future of *The Qualitative Report*. From that meeting I had volunteered to ask my editorial team (a small group of TQR editors and reviewers) about their thoughts regarding the directions they saw qualitative inquiry moving in and what preferences they had for the direction that TQR might take. My editorial team consisted of three White women from the US, all at different points in their academic career trajectories, and me, a White retired academic from western Canada. It was not a formal set of interviews and analysis, but a very telling conversation, one I would say built on the principles of Research As Daily Practice (see St. George et al., 2015). They each said, and I agreed, that ethics beyond Institutional Review Board approvals was a huge issue because of the connection to social justice issues. Each in their own way said that researchers needed to attend to who was being studied, in what ways, and how those cooperating in studies need to be the beneficiaries within and from those studies. Furthermore, we all felt strongly that the research should have a social purpose directed toward betterment and change. This went beyond just “doing no harm” but actively reaching out to make a difference through our research projects. And all of this needed to be reflected in our published reports and teaching of qualitative research. We did not speak of decolonizing by name, but it seems to me that the substance of our conversation was headed in that direction.

Therefore, when I was asked to review Caroline Lenette's (2022) book, *Participatory Action Research: Ethics and Decolonization*, I jumped at the chance to get it and read it. The conversation with my editorial team was stimulating, and while I had some ideas of how this might be done in our world of conducting qualitative inquiry and publishing, I was not exactly sure of all the intricacies of making this shift and oftentimes I was uncertain about phrasing ideas, concepts, and practices. But Caroline's book came to the rescue—it was almost as if she had been listening in on the conversations with my editorial team, and perhaps she was, in spirit. Her chapter titles alone began to answer my questions, not that they told me what to do exactly, but what to consider keeping close and making sure to honor the complexity. Now that I reflect further, I realize that she accomplished her purpose with me, a purpose she stated early:

Rather than merely providing step-by-step explications of PAR as a methodology, my approach is to outline a framework for participatory research by drawing attention to topics such as research for change, social justice, positionality, privilege, intersectionality, cultural safety, decolonization, and the politics of research. My aim is to highlight the key characteristics of ethical participatory research so that readers can reflect on their own practices and identify what needs improving. (p. 12)

She did this by pulling together a variety of literature, sharing her own questions, practices, and refinements, and by offering illustrative exemplars from her invited women colleague contributors.

Do you need to know more about decolonizing practices? Then consult Chapter 2, “Why Decolonize? Participatory Action Research’s Origins, Decolonial Research, and Intersectionality.” You will learn more about Indigenous and Black PAR as well as decolonial intersectionality. Warning! It will be hard to put down your highlighter. I have highlighted, check marked, and starred this line from Caroline’s work: “Decolonial practices should frame and drive research rather than being made to fit western-based knowledge systems” (p. 25). *Note the very different starting point.*

Chapter 4’s subtitle, “Co-production and Mess” (see pages 61-63) was most informative for me because the prefix, co-, and term, co-researchers, are so often thrown into the mix without a full accounting of what they mean. So, I greatly appreciated it when Caroline wrote, “co-production has become a buzzword to legitimize existing—and at times harmful—practices that are in fact nonparticipatory” (p. 62).

I will admit that I have an enormous number of highlighted segments across the pages of Chapter 5, but then teaching ethics always gave me headaches and stomach aches. My greatest worry was (and still is) about “doing the right thing” (p. 79) which I have never found easy; still I cannot shake the fear of having missed something important. That fear seems to harken back to feeling vulnerability (for all involved), being misunderstood, or producing something without value. I think Caroline can relate.

I love it when we make new connections just by doing what is part of our regular and daily living. Just recently I took part in the Taos Institute 2022 Gathering themed *Unfolding Dialogues: Relation Resources for Global Good* (see <https://www.taosinstitute.net/>). I hosted a plenary called Research in Multiple Worlds and my guests from Uganda, South Africa, and Australia all pointed to Indigenous illustrations of decolonizing our practices to include and benefit more of the world. There is not time to delve into all the possible ways this could be done, but luckily, I can refer you to Caroline Lenette’s new book for answers and a generative, generous, and meaningful “push” to alter our research decision-making and practices. This book now occupies front-row-centered-space on my bookshelf for easy retrieval. Thank you, Caroline.

References

- Lenette, C. (2022). *Participatory action research: Ethics and decolonization*. Oxford.
- St. George, S., Wulff, D., & Tomm, K. (2015). Research as daily practice. *Journal of Systemic Therapies, 34*(2), 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jsyt.2015.34.2.3>

Author Note

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