



# Participatory Research and Theoretical Lenses

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Pranee Liamputtong and Zoe Sanipreeya Rice

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## Abstract

Participatory research (PR) refers to a distinction ideology of social research and social life, what Orlando Fals Borda coins as *vivência* (human forms of social life). PR has its close association with social transformation in the Third World. The foundations of PR lie in liberation theology and neo-Marxist approaches to community development (in Latin America), as well as liberal origins in human rights activism (in Asia). PR is distinctive from traditional research in three ways. It embraces community-based investigation of social issues, shared ownership of research programs, and community action. PR embraces the socially constructed nature of knowledge. PR is based on some theoretical traditions including, but not limited to, critical pedagogy and feminism that advocate a strong desire for the elimination of social inequalities in societies. However, like any other research

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P. Liamputtong (✉)  
College of Health Sciences, VinUniversity, Hanoi, Vietnam  
e-mail: [pranee.l@vinuni.edu.vn](mailto:pranee.l@vinuni.edu.vn)

Z. S. Rice  
Camberwell, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [rice.zoe@gmail.com](mailto:rice.zoe@gmail.com)

approach, PR is also situated within some theoretical lenses that can explain the intrinsic experience in specific contexts. This chapter discusses salient theoretical frameworks that can be adopted in participatory research. In particular, it will focus on traditional theories including critical pedagogy, experiential knowledge, and feminism. It will also include discussions of some contemporary theories that PR practitioners can draw on in their research including decolonizing methodology, cultural humility, and healing methodology. It is argued that these contemporary theories are crucial at the time of crisis encountered in the world at present.

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**Keywords**

Participatory research · Theoretical lens · Critical pedagogy · Experiential knowledge · Feminist methodology · Decolonizing methodology · Kaupapa Māori research · Cultural humility · Healing methodology

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## 1 Introduction

Engaged theory informs practice and is informed by it. To create this feedback loop, however, the specificity of theory in relation to practice must be acknowledged. Theory and practice must be constructed as *ongoing activities and conversations* that remain distinct even as they interact and overlap. (Chevalier and Buckles 2019, p. 39)

Participatory research (PR) refers to a distinction ideology of social research and social life, what Orlando Fals Borda (1991) coins as *vivencia* (human forms of social life). PR has its close association with social transformation in the Third World. The foundations of PR lie in liberation theology and neo-Marxist approaches to community development (in Latin America), as well as liberal origins in human rights activism (in Asia). PR is distinctive from traditional research in three ways. It embraces community-based investigation of social issues, shared ownership of research programs, and community action (Kemmis et al. 2014). Methodologically speaking, Fals Borda (1991, p. 3), who turns PR into a coherent school of practice in social sciences, defines PR quite succinctly as an “experiential methodology [which] implies the acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct power, or countervailing power, for the poor, oppressed and exploited groups and social classes – the grassroots – and for their authentic organizations and movement.”

Most participatory research (PR) can be accredited to one of two classical wisdoms (Wallerstein et al. 2017). The first wisdom is the “collaborative utilization-focused research” that aims for systems improvement. This type of PR is also referred to as the “Northern tradition.” The second wisdom is the “Southern tradition” (Hall et al. 2015). This tradition produces “emancipatory research” that interrogates “the historical colonizing practices of research and political domination of knowledge by the elites” (Wallerstein et al. 2017, p. 2). Both wisdoms contain four aspects of committed quality including coconstructing knowledge, framing long-term partnerships, organizing impact-oriented outcomes, and attaining high-quality research (Wallerstein et al. 2017). These two classical wisdoms have been adopted in various research projects and situated within diverse theoretical lenses in the health and social sciences.

Theoretically speaking, PR embraces the socially constructed nature of knowledge (Hamelin Brabant et al. 2007). PR is based on some theoretical traditions including, but not limited to, critical pedagogy and feminism that advocate a strong desire for the elimination of social inequalities in societies (Wallerstein et al. 2017; Loignon et al. 2020). However, like any other research approach, PR is also situated within some theoretical lenses that can explain the intrinsic experience in specific contexts (Chevalier and Buckles 2019). As Chevalier and Buckles (2019, p. 41) suggest, researchers need to pay attention to diverse theories, traditional and contemporary, that can “intermesh and shed light on human history.”

This chapter discusses salient theoretical frameworks that can be adopted in participatory research. In particular, it focuses on traditional theories including critical pedagogy, experiential knowledge, and feminism. It also includes discussions of some contemporary theories that PR practitioners can draw on in their research including decolonizing methodology, cultural humility, and healing methodology. It is argued that these contemporary theories are crucial at the time of crisis that is encountered in the world at present.

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## 2 Critical Pedagogy

Historically, PR is situated within the critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire (1970, 2000) that promotes the forming of “conscientization” (critical consciousness) among people who have been oppressed. In his book *“Pedagogy of the Oppressed,”* Freire (1970, 2000) suggests that people link their learning and knowing through a continuous series of actions and reflection. This will assist them to acquire a “critical awareness” about the world in which they reside. In criticizing general practices in education, Freire contends that most educational activities keep the learner’s passive and uncritical; they do not challenge inequalities in the lives of the learners. They fail to help the learners to question the circumstance they are forced to live in. Freire’s theoretical lens has transformed the research relation from “communities as *objects of study* to community members *participating in the inquiry*” (Wallerstein et al. 2017, p. 3, original emphasis).

Freire strongly encourages individuals to realize that, as humans, they are fundamentally responsible for making, and transforming, their own situations and realities (Wallerstein et al. 2017). Freire also encourages oppressed people to explore how their meanings and experiences have worked, or could work differently, in diverse social and political contexts. Essentially, Freire posits that these activities would assist oppressed people to have more control of their lives and to use them to change the economic, material, and ideological conditions of their realities. Freire’s literacy programs are constructed so that oppressed people’s “conscientization” could be cultivated. He encourages oppressed people to “engage in ‘praxis’ or ‘critical reflection’” which are inextricably linked to the political movement in the real world (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2008, p. 379). Through conscientization and praxis, people are able to improve the conditions of their situations. Freire coins this as “human agency.” To Freire, the human agency would be powerful enough to make it possible for people to change their own selves and their situations for the better. To

possess such agency, Freire argues, people need to “emerge from their unconscious engagements with the world, reflect on them, and work to change them” (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2008, p. 379). Within Freirean pedagogies, the process of emancipation could only be done with the collective effort of oppressed people, and this could be achieved through the power of dialogue (talks and discussion). Dialogue, for Freire, also refers to collective action and reflection. Precisely, this is what PR is all about.

In PR projects, people have an opportunity to take an active part in the research dialogue from the commencement of the project to the end. They are able to pinpoint the local issues that need to be improved. They have an active say in the development of research questions, what research methods are appropriate for local people, who will take part in the project, and how will the information be used and disseminated. This series of dialogue offers empowerment and chances to improve the situation of their lives and their communities (Higginbottom and Liamputtong 2015; Wallerstein et al. 2017; Liamputtong 2020).

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### 3 Experiential Knowing

Experiential knowing is the fundamental form of knowing in what Heron and Reason (2008) have coined as “extended epistemology” that includes experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical knowing. In their everyday lives, individuals use these four forms of knowing and engage with them in diverse ways. Individuals cultivate their knowing through direct experience. They voice it through expressive imageries, such as stories, the arts, and performances. They make sense of it through propositions that are meaningful to them and then use it for their actions in their lives. These four forms of knowing are the essential bedrock for participatory research (Liamputtong 2014).

Experiential knowing refers to knowing that individuals cultivate by recalling their experiences; things that they learn or acquire tacitly (e.g., how to ride a bicycle). It also means people’s perceptual experiences or understanding of things (such as what it is like to live in poverty or to give birth). The focus of experiential knowing is on situated and everyday existence as it unravels to the knowers, rather than the knowing that is imposed by outsiders (Liamputtong 2014).

Experiential knowing produces experiential knowledge (Heron and Reason 2008). Knowledge may be understood as the present existence of a continuing process of knowing. Knowledge here refers to the ingredients that represent the experiences of individuals. It includes knowledge of feelings and thinking. Experiential knowledge is knowledge that people hold through being familiar with such reality (e.g., what it is like to live with poverty). Individuals become acquainted with things, people, and places through feelings, senses, and bodily experiences. Thus, experiential knowledge is also referred to as “embodied knowledge” (Liamputtong 2014). It is embodied because it creates and depends on the specific circumstances of people’s lived experiences. It is the product of reciprocation of one’s body with the

world. Embodied knowledge is subjective and is instantaneously known to the knowers.

Participatory research (PR) is about creating spaces for communication (Liamputtong 2014). Rather than seclude people from their daily experiences, PR values ways of knowing about the world of others. In seeking to produce usefully and locally relevant knowledge that can respond to real-world problems, PR necessarily values the experiential knowing of local people. Simultaneously, PR aims to be a learning experience for inquiry participants. Establishing the direction of the research requires active and informed participation in the community. Thus, individuals are seen as active players within the research process, as opposed to passive citizens who have research performed on them, as is often the case in more orthodox research methods. Participants take an active role, preferably from the early stages of the project, and through this active, experiential involvement, they cultivate new knowledge and skills and hence have increased self-confidence. This process is professed to empower people and assist them to change their lived world (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2018; Abma et al. 2019; ► Chap. 25, “Participatory Research”).

Actively engaging in a process of learning helps people to realize what they know, and that their knowledge is valuable (Liamputtong 2014). This in turn empowers them to be able to take control of their situations more effectively. The production and/or articulation of experiential knowledge becomes legitimized through being publicly shared and socially heard. The collective knowledge or popular knowledge created serves to empower groups and communities to construct solutions for their shared burdens. Through participating in PR, people can come to understand themselves as experts in their own lived situations, thus heightening their confidence and self-belief as legitimate knowledge producers and users (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2018; Abma et al. 2019; ► Chap. 25, “Participatory Research”).

Within PR, there are different means through which people can cultivate their experiential knowing more richly. These include knowing through words, knowing through images, and knowing through the body. These ways of knowing also allow researchers to access their participants’ experiential knowing and knowledge meaningfully and respectfully. Action research often adopts communication strategies that have a hands-on nature. This is particularly so when the research involves vulnerable and marginalized groups. Many of the so-called unorthodox methods employed in participatory research are crucial if the researchers wish to allow people to participate fully. Examples of some of the means through which experiential knowing may be accessed include knowing through words or storytelling, knowing through arts-based forms and visual forms, and knowing through the body, embodiment, and performance (see ► Chap. 25, “Participatory Research”).

Experiential knowing is a foundation of the knowing cycle in participatory research. Building on experiential knowing, presentational knowing can be developed, which leads to propositional knowing and practical knowing. Experiential knowing is of deep and immediate relevance and significance in the lifeworld and can ultimately lead to emancipation, which in turn permits people to alter their conditions for the better (Liamputtong 2014).

## 4 Feminist Methodology

In feminist methodology, women and their concerns are the heart of investigation (Hesse-Biber 2014a, b, 2017; Leavy and Harris 2018; Olesen 2018). Feminist research is undertaken to be beneficial *for* women, not only *about* women. Feminist research aims at capturing the lived experience of women respectfully, and it “legitimizes women’s voices as sources of knowledge” (Campbell and Wasco 2000, p. 783; Gray 2018). In feminist methodology, the process of research is as important as its outcome (Hesse-Biber 2014a, b; Leavy and Harris 2018).

For feminist research methodology, “research takes a position on social change, either explicitly social change or not” (Rossman and Rallis 2017, p. 49; Leavy and Harris 2018). Thus, to undertake feminist research is to witness resistance (Olesen 2018). It calls for research methodologies that respect lived experience and reflexivity (Mitchell et al. 2017). Feminist researchers strive to “strengthen connections” between researchers and participants. A unique feature of feminist research is a more caring research environment that is nonhierarchical (Hesse-Biber 2014a, b; Mitchell et al. 2017; Leavy and Harris 2018).

Feminist methodology embraces qualitative methods (see Olesen 2018), although contemporary feminist researchers promote both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Hesse-Biber 2014a, b; Leavy and Harris 2018). More often, feminist methodology employs familiar methods of data collection in qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, memory-work, narrative research, and particularly life and oral histories (Leavy and Harris 2018; Liamputtong 2020). However, feminist methodology tends to embrace and create more inclusive means of data collection (DeVault 2018). This encourages the use of methodologies that are more flexible and collaborative, like the participatory research (PR) approach, and in some circumstances more inclusive methods such as the photovoice method (see Wang 1999; López et al. 2005; DeVault 2018; Liebenberg 2018; Teti et al. 2019).

Feminism aims to transform exploitative aspects of social research as it focuses on enhancing the interests of marginalized people and proposing the transformation of an oppressive social system (Hesse-Biber 2014a, b; Leavy and Harris 2018). To guard against exploitation in the research relationship, feminist researchers attempt to create a process that will inherently empower the research participants. This can be achieved through active and direct involvement in the research process. Ideally, a full collaboration between the researchers and the participants or local communities should be undertaken so that power between the researchers and the participants can be shared and this will provide some intrinsic benefit for those who take part in the research, and this is what PR offers. According to Reid (2004), the principles of feminist PR include inclusion, participation, and action that will lead to social change. Fine and Torre (2019, p. 435) perceive feminist PR as “an epistemology—a theory of knowledge—that radically challenges who is an expert, what counts as knowledge and, therefore, by whom research questions and designs should be crafted.”

Feminist research promotes a model of collaboration and rejects the traditional researcher/participants divide (Renzetti 1997; Reid 2004; Fine and Torre 2019). According to the feminist methodology, self-disclosure, the establishment of

reciprocity, rapport, and trust, between the researchers and the researched enhances the success of a research process. Feminist methodology commits to giving voice to personal, everyday experiences of individuals, in particular those who are marginalized in society. Renzetti (1997) also points out that the attempt to see research as a collaborative endeavor has prompted feminist researchers to call for the use of the participatory approach in research (see also Maguire 1987; Reid 2004; dé Ishtar 2005; Singh et al. 2013; Chakma 2016; Chesnay 2016; Fine and Torre 2019; Sampson et al. 2020).

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## 5 Decolonizing Methodologies

Research has been alluded to as a colonizing product (Mutua and Swadener 2004; Connell 2011; Datta 2018; Gilroy et al. 2018; Vásquez-Fernández et al. 2018; Said 2019). Colonizing refers to a process where a foreign settlor creates a new colony in a new land, and over time, takes away the livelihood and suppresses the identities of many local peoples. This has resulted in significant loss of culture and ways of life impacting on the health and well-being of native people (Smith 2013; Keikelame and Swartz 2019; Said 2019).

Smith (2008, 2013) argues that through the denial of non-Western perspectives as “legitimate knowledge,” the colonial research traditions have made cultural knowledge silent (see also Gilroy et al. 2018; Kovach 2018; Said 2019). To redress this authority, the perspectives of Indigenous people must be embraced in the research process. Indigenous researchers have called for decolonizing methodologies to rectify the damage caused by the colonial authority. Vásquez-Fernández (2018, p. 741) contend that research, about or with Indigenous peoples, necessitates “Indigenous worldviews and concerns” are located at “the centre of the research by using decolonizing methodologies, methods, and theories to inform the research.”

According to Keikelame and Swartz (2019, p. 1), a decolonizing research methodology refers to “an approach that is used to challenge the Eurocentric research methods that undermine the local knowledge and experiences of the marginalised population groups.” Decolonizing methodologies question “dominant modern methods of knowing” but at the same time emphasize “Indigenous identity and discourse” (Habashi 2005, p. 771; Datta 2018; Said 2019). These methodologies accept Indigenous standpoints, processes, and ways of learning and knowing (Smith 2013; Tuck and Yang 2014; Said 2019). They aim to create research that allows for Indigenous self-determination (Keane et al. 2017; Vásquez-Fernández et al. 2018; Said 2019; Webster et al. 2019). Kaomea (2004, p. 43) suggests that decolonizing research “should be about healing and empowerment. It should involve the return of dignity and the restoration of sovereignty, and it should ultimately bring formerly colonized communities one step further along the path to self-determination.”

Decolonizing methodologies are guided by the values, knowledge, and research of Indigenous people (Smith 2013; Kovach 2018; Datta 2018; Vásquez-Fernández et al. 2018; McPhail-Bell et al. 2019; Said 2019; Webster et al. 2019). Therefore, the methodologies can begin to address the suspicion and harm that previous research

has created in Indigenous communities. Decolonizing discourse assists in developing trust in the researcher and the researched relationship through respect, reciprocity, collaboration, and cooperation throughout the research (Brannelly 2016; Brannelly and Boulton 2017; Vásquez-Fernández et al. 2018; McPhail-Bell et al. 2019; Rix et al. 2019; Said 2019; Webster et al. 2019).

Thus, decolonizing methodologies attempt to change research practices that have damaged Indigenous communities in the past. Rather than accepting traditional scientific methodology, research application, from design to dissemination, the methodologies deconstruct research to reveal hidden biases (Gilroy et al. 2018). Decolonizing methodologies strive to empower Indigenous communities and respect their culture and traditions (Kovach 2018; Vásquez-Fernández et al. 2018; McPhail-Bell et al. 2019; Rix et al. 2019; Said 2019; Webster et al. 2019).

Methodologically speaking, traditional positivist research has often denied the agency of Indigenous (the colonized) populations. This has led to methodological resistance among decolonizing researchers. Instead, decolonizing researches advocate “interpretive strategies and skills fitted to the needs, languages, and traditions of their respective indigenous community. These strategies emphasize personal performance narratives and testimonies” (Denzin et al. 2008, p. 11). Thus, the use of qualitative research inquiry and more inclusive methods are promoted in decolonizing methodology (see Bartlett et al. 2007; Bishop 2008; Brooks et al. 2008; Smith 2008, 2013; Liamputtong 2010; MacDonald 2017; Keikelame and Swartz 2019). Importantly, community-based participatory research (CBPR) is an important approach within the framework of the decolonizing methodologies. The principle of CBPR makes likely that the research process and its outcomes will be more related to and beneficial for Indigenous individuals and communities. The research process and sequences also provide empowerment among those individuals involved (Higginbottom and Liamputtong 2015; Barnes 2018; Seehawer 2018; Vásquez-Fernández et al. 2018; Wilson 2019; ► Chap. 25, “Participatory Research”).

Decolonizing methodologies support the use of alternative and performative styles such as storytelling, narratives, music, drama, and arts “as vehicles of growing resistance to Western, neoconservative, and positivist paradigms” (Swadener and Mutua 2008, p. 41; Kovach 2018). According to Kovach (2018, p. 226), Indigenous researchers have used “storytelling, yarning, talk story, re-storying, re-membling, and conversation” in their Indigenous methodologies. Many innovative and creative research methods that have been adopted to strengthen decolonisation scholarship” include photovoice, visual methods, autoethnography, and participatory research approaches (Barnes 2018, p. 379).

It must be noted that decolonizing methodologies do not exclusively apply in contexts where the “geopolitical experience of colonization happened” (Swadener and Mutua 2008, p. 35). Indeed, they can also be applied with groups where “colonizing research approaches are deployed.” Decolonizing methodology applies to those who are non-Western, marginalized people such as those living in poverty and ethnic minority groups (Swadener and Mutua 2008). Theoretically, decolonizing methodology offers Indigenous cultural ways of researching for other researchers (Bartlett et al. 2007; see Gilroy et al. 2018; Seehawer 2018; Vásquez-Fernández et al. 2018; Rix et al. 2019).



## 6 Kaupapa Māori Research Methodology

Kaupapa Māori research methodology sits neatly within the framework of decolonizing methodologies. Kaupapa Māori research has emerged from a broader movement by Māoris to question the westernized frameworks of culture, knowledge, and research (Smith 2008, 2013; Walker et al. 2006; Bishop 2008; Carpenter and McMurchy-Pilkington 2008; Cram 2019). Kaupapa Māori research has been adopted as a form of resistance to positivist biomedical science as well as a methodological framework that emphasizes that research is initiated, managed, and undertaken by Māori, and the results are to benefit Māori people. Kaupapa Māori research aims to promote the self-determination of Māori people (Smith 2008, 2013; Walker et al. 2006; Bishop 2008; Lawton et al. 2013; Cram 2019; Wilson 2019).

Kaupapa Māori research is conceptualized as research by Māori, for Māori, and with Māori people (Walker et al. 2006; Bishop 2008). Kaupapa Māori research, Bishop (2008, p. 152) asserts, is “collectivistic and is oriented toward benefiting all the research participants and their collectively determined agendas, defining and acknowledging Māori aspirations for research, while developing and implementing Māori theoretical and methodological preferences and practices for research.” As a research strategy, kaupapa Māori research is concerned with “Māori ownership of knowledge” and acknowledges “the validity of Māori way of doing” (Walker et al. 2006, p. 333). It is argued that kaupapa Māori research can be seen as a methodological strategy, as well as “a form of resistance and agency” (Walker et al. 2006, p. 333; see also Bishop 2008; Smith 2013).

To Smith (2013), kaupapa Māori research aims for emancipation and empowerment. Hence, it can be seen as a “localized critical theory” that permits kaupapa Māori researchers to resist “dominant, racist, and westernized hegemonies” as well as to argue for “Māori to become more self-determining” (Walker et al. 2006, p. 333). Kaupapa Māori research is “based on the assumption that research that involves Māori peoples, as individuals or as communities, should set out to make a positive difference for the researched” (Smith 2013, p. 191).

Methodologically, the approaches adopted by kaupapa Māori research are similar to participatory research (PR), which has emerged “more or less deliberately as forms of resistance to conventional research practices that were perceived by particular kinds of participants as acts of colonization” (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, p. 345; see also Smith 2008, 2013). The emphasis of PR is on “self-emancipation” (Bishop 2008, p. 159). This is also the essence of kaupapa Māori research. Kaupapa Māori research provides a paradigm that offers “new ways of asking, seeing, and doing” (Walker et al. 2006, p. 342). It can remedy some of the past damages that have occurred to Māori people. Kaupapa Māori research has also helped the Māori people to restore their faith in research. Māoris have begun to have more trust in Māori researchers, and they can see that Kaupapa Māori research can result in beneficial outcomes for Māori people (Walker et al. 2006).

## 7 Cultural Humility

There are several contemporary frameworks that work well in PR projects. Cultural humility is one of these frameworks. The cultural humility concept arose from the social injustices that many marginalized people have experienced (Chávez 2018). It is an embodied approach and refers to the awareness of differences and power imbalances among people, “with the actions of being open, self-aware, egoless, flexible, exuding respect and supportive interactions, focusing on both self and other to formulate a tailored response” (Foronda 2020, p. 9). It is a practice that involves “critical self-reflection and lifelong learning” that leads to “mutually positive outcomes” (Foronda 2020, p. 9).

Cultural humility requires a change in the long-term outlook and behavior of a person (Masters et al. 2019). Engaging in cultural humility means having a knowledge of power imbalances between people and being respectful in every contact with others. This process requires, education, reflection, and effort, and it takes time to accomplish (Foronda et al. 2016). Recognizing cultural humility is achievable when “one is open, self-aware, humble, reflective, and supportive with others” (Foronda et al. 2016, p. 215).

Cultural humility was theorized by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia in medical science in 1998. Accordingly, cultural humility “incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing the power imbalances in the physician-patient dynamic, and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations” (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia 1998, p. 123). In healthcare, cultural humility assists in promoting empathy and mitigating unspoken bias among health care providers. It also helps the providers to acknowledge and respect the individuality of people. Importantly, cultural humility principle “puts emphasis on the provider’s need to connect instead of being an expert on the patient’s race, culture, or ethnicity” (Masters et al. 2019, p. 628).

Humility is “an elusive concept” that embraces ethical dimensions accentuated by spiritual traditions (Chávez 2018, p. 3). Paulo Freire, the founder of the participatory approach, was “a deeply spiritual” man who saw humility as “an act of solidarity” (Boyd 2012). Essentially, Freire’s solidarity was “a spiritual transformation that brings one into the identification and common struggle with those who have less power” (Chávez 2018, p. 3). Freire (1970, p. 79) acknowledged that “dialogue cannot exist without humility.” In participatory research (PR), the authentic dialogue and collaboration between partners to understand, address community-identified issues and research, cultural humility is a fundamental precondition (Chávez 2018, p. 3).

Cultural humility is “a rich multifaceted construct” that mirrors core dimensions of PR practice in research experiences (Chávez 2018, p. 1). Cultural humility has been developed into a central concept in PR as it underlines disparities, self-reflection, and dialogue that embody in PR projects. The principles that guide cultural humility echo those of PR and include the following:

- Constant learning and critical self-reflection
- Recognize and change power relationships

- Develop mutually beneficial collaborations
- Institutional answerability

Ross (2010, p. 317) suggests that “such a focus opens the possibility of resisting traditional roles and developing authentic partnerships where meaningful, community-driven change is possible.” Honest PR can motion cultural humility from idea to practice. PR that is situated within cultural humility theory can lead to organizational and policy changes that will result in social equity and justice in society (Chávez 2018).

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## 8 Healing Methodology

In the time of global uncertainty and crisis experienced now, “a methodology of the heart . . . that embraces an ethics of truth grounded in love, care, hope and forgiveness, is needed” (Denzin et al. 2008, p. 3). This is what the “healing methodology” can offer. Healing methodology is theorized by Dillard (2008, p. 286) who argues that the approach is essential ethics and methodology for working with Indigenous and African women. Healing methodology, accordingly, is “a form of struggle against domination.” The methodology is “consistent with the profound indigenous pedagogical tradition of excellence in the history of African people.” Healing methodology involves action; the researchers must “engage and change” situations with which they encounter in their research endeavors. Dillard (2008, p. 286) writes:

We must fundamentally transform what research is and whose knowledge and methodologies we privilege and engage. . . In this spirit, there must be a ‘letting go’ of knowledge, beliefs, and practices that dishonor the indigenous spiritual understandings that are present in African ascendant scholars, given our preparation and training in predominately Western, male, patriarchal, capitalist knowledge spaces and the manner in which our spiritual understandings are negated, marginalized, and degraded.

The essence of healing methodology is “spirituality and transformation” (Dillard 2008, p. 287). This methodology can work to counteract the negative attitudes of many African Americans toward research which was due to “abusive hegemonic structures that have characterized the methodologies and practice of research in the Western academy.”

Healing methodology encompasses the principles of: “unconditional love, compassion, reciprocity, ritual and gratitude” (Dillard 2008, p. 287). Dillard (2008, p. 287) also refers to these principles as “methodologies of the spirit.” These components are proposed as “a way to honor Indigenous African cultural and knowledge production and as an activist practice designed to acknowledge and embrace spirituality in the process of all of us becoming more fully human in and through the process of research.” The first three principles are essentially relevant to PR research involving Indigenous and marginalized ethnic communities.

Love is the first principle of healing methodology. Too often, as bell hooks (2000, p. 287) tells us, researchers do not consider love as the wisdom which can produce “reciprocal (and thus more just) sites of inquiry.” Love as knowledge will allow the practice “of looking and listening deeply.” Thus, the researchers will “know what to do and what not to do in order to serve others in the process of research.” Love also includes carefully seeking an understanding of “the needs, aspiration, and suffering of the ones you love” (Hanh 1998, p. 4). Deeply understanding the humanity of research participants is “a necessary prerequisite for qualitative work in the spirit” (Dillard 2008, p. 287).

The second principle of healing methodology is to embrace compassion. According to Dillard (2008, p. 288), compassion is about “the intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering through our research work.” It is “a form of struggle against dehumanizing contexts and conditions.” Compassion as a methodology requires the researchers to “relieve communities of their suffering through the process of activist research.” It means that the researchers must have serious and ongoing concerns for the research participants and want to bring benefits to them through their research. As researchers, Dillard (2008, p. 288) contends, “we must be culturally and historically knowledgeable about and aware of suffering, but retain our clarity, calmness, our voices and our strength so that we can, through our practice, help to transform the situation and ourselves.”

Seeking reciprocity is the third principle of healing methodology. Within this principle, the researchers must have their “intention and capacity to see human beings as equal, shedding all discrimination and prejudice and removing the boundaries between ourselves and others” (Dillard 2008, p. 288). If the researchers continue to perceive themselves as “researchers” and the researched as the “others,” or if they continue to see their own research agenda as more crucial than the needs and concerns of the research participants, they “cannot be in loving, compassionate, or reciprocal relationships with others” (Dillard 2008, p. 288; see also McGregor and Marker 2018; Sylvester et al. 2020).

Healing methodology (love, compassion, and reciprocity) allows to see research participants as human beings, and this will have a profound impact on our ways of researching with marginalized people in PR projects (Chilisa 2012). It is the methodology of the heart (Pelias 2004) that researchers should embrace when working with vulnerable people.

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## 9 Conclusion and Future Directions

Like poetry, abstract propositions are strange because they come from distant places. They speak to other possible worlds and are committed to voyages of the mind. (Chevalier and Buckles 2019, p. 39)

This chapter has discussed several historical and contemporary theoretical lenses within which participatory research can be situated. A theoretical framework is essential in social research methodology as it helps to frame the methods that researchers will use in their research (Liamputtong 2020). The theory offers

researchers innovative ideas on how they should go about in their research enterprise. Theoretical lenses are essential for PR practitioners as PR has diverse practices and works with diverse peoples. Researchers need to carefully scrutinize which theoretical framework would work better with the people who take part in their research. A PR project should be situated within a theoretical lens that can explain the inherence understanding in particular contexts of the research (Chevalier and Buckles 2019).

Mahayana Buddhism teaches about practical wisdom *upaya-kaushalya*, a Sanskrit phrase symbolizing “skills or cleverness in means.” As PR practitioners, researchers may adopt any theory and method that suits the circumstance and “potentialities in life” that can lead to “the benefit of all sentient beings” (Chevalier and Buckles 2019, p. 45). This is so crucial for the present vulnerable world. Chevalier and Buckles (2019, p. 45) say this succinctly: “As with all things that are good, skills in means must be welcomed for what they are, fleeting moments in a world that is forever perfectible.”

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