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This article is a reflection on the nature of participatory feminist research in general, and the issue of self-disclosure to participants of a research project in particular. The author struggles with the ethical and practical implications of sharing her own experiences of violence with a group of Spanish-speaking immigrant women in Toronto, Ontario who have experienced domestic abuse.

L'article est une reflexion sur la participation dans la recherche feministe en general et sur le probleme de l'autorevelation par les participant/es dans le cadre d'un projet particulier, L'auteure se debat avec les implications ethiques et pratiques de partager ses propres experiences de violence avec un groupe d'immigrantes hispanophones, victimes de violence domestique, a Toronto (Ontario).

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> But unfortunately, as we know, research that admits to working for women (and thus to being political), which demands conscious subjectivity and which acknowledge (women's) feelings, emotions and intuitions is not taken seriously in academic circles ... (Duelli Klein 1983, p. 96)

It has been important for me, while reflecting on the process of my doctoral research and my role as researcher, to re-read the early writing on feminist research. More than anything, this early writing supports one underlying premise of feminist research: that it is dynamic and continuously evolving. In reading and reflecting, I have felt less isolated with my own frustrations that I have encountered in my research. Shulamit Reinharz (1992, p. 194) notes that in feminist research, learning must occur on three levels: the person, the problem and the method. My learning has certainly occurred on all levels and this paper addresses in particular the third level, while demonstrating how the learning on the other two levels are interrelated.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to reflectively describe a feminist participatory research project with Spanish-speaking immigrant women in Toronto who had experienced domestic abuse; and second, to analyze one particular challenge that arose during the research process, the issue of self-disclosure in feminist participatory research. The first part of this paper will begin with a brief overview of relevant feminist and participatory research literature. I will then describe the research process in some detail, focussing on the challenge of self-disclosure. In the second part, this challenge will be analyzed and some conclusions, albeit tentative, drawn. With each question answered, more need to be asked.

I. Feminist and Participatory Action Research

The ultimate goal of feminist research is the emancipation of women and the creation of a just world for everyone (Mies, 1982; Deles and Santiago, 1984, Acker et al., 1983). Feminist research emerged from the women's liberation movement of 1960s. The movement legitimized the questions of female scholars and provided the catalyst to challenge male bias in research. By the early 1980s, critics had begun to demand that feminist research move beyond theorizing to be able to utilize genuinely participatory practices which have the potential to liberate and empower those involved (Mies, 1983).

Margrit Eichler provides a minimal definition of feminist research in her book, Feminist Methodology:

> Feminist scholarship is oriented towards the improvement of the status of women and is undertaken by scholars who define themselves as feminists. Hence it is engaged rather than supposedly value-neutral research--which is one of the sources of the debate with respect to its methodology--and it is carried out within the context of a community of scholars who in some manner take note of and respond to each others' work. (1997, p. 10)

And in her book on feminist research, Feminist Methods in Social Research, Reinharz (1992) points out that feminism is a perspective rather than a research method and that feminists use many research methods. As such, feminist research will be politically motivated research that aspires to produce learning that is useful for women, makes women visible, and facilitates the potential for change while causing minimal harm to participants (DeVault, 1996, pp. 32, 33).

As feminism is change-oriented by definition, one could argue that all feminist research has some action component. Reinharz (1992, p. 180) identifies five different types of feminist research with this action component: action research, collaborative or participatory research, prevalence or needs assessment, evaluation, and demystification. Feminist participatory research, the subject of this paper, has evolved out of participatory research, which is defined by Patricia Maguire as:

> a method of social investigation of problems, involving participation of oppressed and ordinary people in problem posing and solving. It is an education process for the researcher and participants, who analyze the structural causes of named problems through collective discussion and interaction. Finally, it is a way for researchers and oppressed people to join in solidarity to take collective action, both short and long term, for radical social change. Locally determined and

controlled action is a planned consequence of inquiry. (Maguire, 1987, p. 29)

Maguire developed principles for feminist participatory research by comparing the underlying principles of feminist research and traditional participatory research and building on her own doctoral research. Maguire's work, Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach (1987), remains the standard reference. However, despite its strengths, it does not take into account much of the recent scholarship in these two areas. Other recent texts on participatory action research, with the exception of individual chapters (Morawski, 1997; Maguire, 2000), are not intended to truly integrate feminist and participatory research action approaches and theory (Park et al., 1993; Reason and Bradbury, 2000).

Having focussed on participatory action research literature in preparation for this project, it became evident to me that there are significant gaps between theory and practice in these fields. A current book proposal (Brydon-Miller et al., 2002) is intended to bridge these gaps and respond to challenges such as self-disclosure, the one this paper will address.

There is a significant body of literature from psychology, social work, sociology and other disciplines that examine the role of violence in feminist research (for example, Kelly, 1989; Agger, 1992; Horsman, 1999; Haskell and Randall, 1998). There is little written, however, about the issue of violence and self-disclosure in the particular research context of feminist participatory research. My discussion in the second part of this paper will draw from multi-disciplinary feminist research literature.

Background to the Research

As I began my doctoral studies, I knew a fair amount about the problem that I hoped to investigate because of my professional and personal work and study. The problem focussed on addressing the legal needs of immigrant women who had experienced domestic abuse. Trained as a lawyer, but frustrated with the limitations presented by the traditional adversarial, individual case-based legal system, I had long sought alternatives. I had worked in different countries in Latin America in education and human rights and back in Canada, I had worked for many years with refugees and immigrants from that region on legal and settlement issues.

In Chile, I had the opportunity to work with professionals (educators, social workers and lawyers) who fostered a vision of alternative lawyering using popular education that was and continues to be inspiring (Rojas, 1988). Having rejected, both in theory and in practice, the dominant model of lawyering, I became interested in the use of education and information in the delivery of legal services to marginalized individuals and groups. I argued that the "new poverty law scholarship" fails to acknowledge the emancipatory potential of critical education, such as popular and feminist education. Critical education could serve as an alternative to the individual casework that currently dominates both the private bar model and the legal clinic model of delivering legal services in Ontario and elsewhere (see Eagly, 1998; McDonald, 2000).

I first worked at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples in Toronto in the mid- 1980s during high school. In the early 1990s, I worked there as a law student and finally, several years later, as a board member. Their Women's Program provides lay counselling and information to Spanish-speaking immigrant women who have experienced domestic abuse. The legal needs of these women are immense, but the Legal Clinic, because of the structure and limitations in legal aid funding in Ontario, does not provide any family or criminal law services. The staff of the Women's Program have not been trained to address these legal needs and, in many instances, the needs of their clients are partially met or not met at all.

The Spanish-speaking community in Toronto, estimated by the Hispanic Development Council at approximately 150,000, is diverse in terms of country of origin and background. While statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence in the community are not available, the problem is a serious one. In 1997, the Women's Program served 500 new clients. Having a history of involvement and some understanding of the unaddressed needs of the program's clients, I sought their participation from the beginning.

Regarding methodology, three convictions led to the choice of feminist participatory research. First of all, I and the staff of the Women's Program were committed to the principles of participation and challenging the hierarchy implicit in the positivist researcher/participant relationship, wherein the researcher is the sole producer of knowledge. It was and remains critical to me that I use an approach to knowledge production that encompasses democratic and interactive relationships. This is of particular importance because of the area in which I work--the law. The law affects all of us and yet remains mystifying and inaccessible to so many. Having personally experienced the hierarchy and professional hegemony in the lawyer/client relationship (Alfieri, 1991), I wanted a research methodology that would challenge this relationship.

Second, I knew that I rejected the notion that we, as human beings, are objective and that there is one view of reality. Both feminist and participatory research challenge the pretense of objectivity. Maguire (1987) argues that this challenge requires reconsidering the necessity of a detached, distant relationship between researcher and researched.

Finally, it was essential for the Women's Program, for the women, and for me that "something" come out of the research--some action, some change for them.

The Research Process

Throughout the development of the techniques used and the research process itself, ideas and feedback from the staff of the Women's Program were incorporated into the process. For example, the program was instrumental in the selection of participants and the design of research techniques that would address the women's needs.

My understanding of the legal needs of the women which was developed through my work and research provided some preliminary direction for the research problem (McDonald, 1998, 2000). The staff and I spent several meetings discussing and refining the problem from their perspective and that of their clients. The women themselves were not consulted directly in the definition process. It could be argued that as a result, file initial phase of participatory research was not truly participatory. When undertaking research in a university setting, doctoral dissertations, funding applications and ethical reviews require clear, concise objectives in a proposal form. Further, I was restricted from beginning to work with the women until the university ethical review had been completed. The consultation process for the definition of the problem, which was required for the university, was therefore limited to the staff who certainly spoke on behalf of their clients and clearly expressed their needs. The women were not consulted at this very, early stage.

The objectives for my doctoral research were narrowly defined:

1) to identify the legal education and information needs of Spanish-speaking immigrant women who have experienced domestic abuse; and

2) to determine how best to address these needs with consideration for particular factors which could impede learning: the social location of the women, pedagogy, the role of the legal profession, and the impact of trauma on learning.

The methodology chosen would facilitate the participation of file women in the design of solutions to their needs. The goal was that this participation would also assist in helping them understand the dynamics of power and control so often present in the conceptualization and delivery of social and legal services. The answers to these questions would be used by the women to develop and implement a program to address their needs in the second phase of the project. This second, action phase, the most participatory aspect of the project, would not form part of my doctoral dissertation and is hot discussed in this paper.

Drawing upon my work in Chile with low-income single mothers (McDonald, 1998), the staff and I conceptualized the research process as one that would move from individual (meaning one-to-one, researcher and participant) to collective (meaning the group of participants, staff and researcher) interaction and data collection. The process would also incorporate the necessary elements of participatory research--investigation, education, and action.

Individual interaction and data collection was a starting point for three reasons. The first reason was to enable me to fully understand the particularities of each woman's experiences, and we believed that rime and individual attention was necessary to accomplish this (sec Schneider, 1992). The second reason was to begin to develop a relationship of trust with each participant. In spite of my connection to the Women's Program, I still believe that I was seen as an outsider, mostly because I am a white, Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking and Canadian-born. As Maguire found in her research with battered women, initial individual dialogue was essential to build trust. The third reason was to have a one-on-one opportunity to fully explain the research process to each woman from an educational perspective and give her the opportunity to think about the stages to tome. My experience in Chile had shown me that when not accustomed to providing feedback, women may be hesitant to speak about their own ideas or might devalue them. The individual interview would help prepare her for coming together with the other women, and help her trust her ideas and the problem-solving that we could do. A semi-structured interview would allow me the opportunity to explain the research process, determine what role the woman wished to play, and respond to any questions that arose. Thus, this technique could fulfil the investigation and education components of feminist participatory research.

Originally, I had suggested to the staff of the Women's Program that a focus group would provide the collective setting for the women which could facilitate problem-solving. They were unanimous in their thinking that the women would not likely attend a two hour focus group, and suggested instead a longer group session that could be incorporated into a "get-away" or a retreat from the city and could provide time for the women to develop trust amongst themselves as they got to know one another. As a result, funding was requested and granted for such a retreat.

This larger group session, which we called a taller, or workshop, fulfilled all three components of feminist participatory research--investigation, education and action. The retreat and the workshop together incorporated the needs of the women in many ways: the need to develop trust amongst each other, the staff, and with me, the researcher; the practical needs of child care, transportation and food costs; the need to get away from the city and routine; the need for the women to have ownership of the process and participate in as many aspects of the learning as possible; and the need for an open and comfortable atmosphere in order to talk, learn, and share experiences and ideas with one another. The workshop would incorporate learning activities, as well as the brainstorming often found in focus groups. The "workshop" does not exist in the literature as a distinct feminist research technique, although Jennifer Horsman (1999) has used it in some of her recent research, but the use of this technique demonstrates the dynamic nature of feminist research. In developing this technique, we were being responsive to the needs of the participants in the project to ensure that they would be positively affected by the process. From the evaluation of the retreat and workshop, the women heartily endorsed both and suggested more such intensive approaches to learning.

The project received funding in the spring of 1999, but a delay from the ethical review committee meant delays in receipt of the funding. It also meant that my supervisor would be away for the period of most of my data collection. While we had initially scheduled regular contact meetings to discuss the progress of the interviewing, none of these occurred.

The majority of the women I interviewed were clients or known to the staff of the Women's Program. The criteria for participation was that the women would be Spanish-speaking immigrants who had experienced abuse in an intimate relationship. We used a broad definition of abuse to include verbal, economic, physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse. The ethics committee required that the consent form include two limitations on the confidentiality we could ensure the participants. The first limitation was that I would be required to report previously undisclosed child abuse and the second concerned the lack of legal immigration status in Canada. I explained to the women that if immigration authorities subpoenaed the interview data, I would be required to give it to them. Accordingly, all of the women who participated had legal immigration status in Canada and no issues arose around child abuse that would have required me to breach confidentiality.

The staff themselves made the initial contact with the women and as a result, my credibility was established from the outset through my connection with the Women's Program. As such, when I first contacted the women, they knew who I was and what the project was about. I spoke in Spanish unless they requested that I speak English. In many ways, I bridged the gap between academe and/or the legal profession and their realities which, while diverse, also included lower levels of education and certainly lack of access to the legal system. As an Anglo and certainly with my white skin, English skills and my university degrees, I believe that I represented privilege. Yet I also spoke, while far from perfectly, their language. By not speaking it perfectly and having my own insecurities with it, the women and I could empathize with each other over the barriers that language tan create. I also am a woman who dresses casually, not as a professional might, and I arrived at their home on my bike. I had lived or travelled in some of their home countries and we would talk about towns and people. We talked about people we knew here as well through English as a Second Language classes, the legal system, or other services.

Before beginning my interviews, I had made a conscious decision that I would limit the personal information I disclosed to the women. I believed that this project was not about "me" and that I did hot want to bias the data any more than I might. I did not discuss this decision with my supervisor or any of my colleagues. So I told the women that I was a lawyer who was not currently practising, that I had worked and travelled in Latin America and learned to speak Spanish there, and that I was now doing my doctorate in the area of education and the law.

With a great blow from behind, I was pushed from the sidewalk into the street. The pickpocket was running and someone was running after him; others were at my side to help me up. I tasted blood and my own tears. Guatemala, July 1991 (1)

In all, I contacted 21 women and conducted a total of 14 interviews. Unfortunately, my grandmother passed away the first week of July and I took several days to attend her funeral in upstate New York. The staff and I had planned to meet during this time to discuss the retreat, but I had to cancel this meeting. When I returned, there remained just over two weeks to organize the retreat and conduct the remaining interviews.

These two weeks were extremely busy.

I, in collaboration with my professor and the staff, had prepared an interview guide, but it was the women who shaped these conversations. They told me about themselves, asking questions where I sought clarity or more detail. Some had trouble talking about themselves at first, so I would ask them simple background questions and none had trouble talking once they had started. It is important to remember that it is through the interview that we can access people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words.

I asked [one man] for help in a halting, strained sort of fashion. He told me that he had to go back to work and shaking his head, he sauntered off. I had to sit down, faint from the heat and the loss of blood from my head wounds. My white shirt was wet from my blood and my hands, face, legs were muddied, bruised from the repeated blows of the revolver. I then curled up by the side of the road, to hide away for a bit ... to think what to do. Guatemala, July 1990

My goal had been to complete each interview and immediately transcribe it. This would have afforded me the opportunity to review the data thoroughly and the transcripts could have played a role at the workshop. I was able to do this for the first three interviews, but due to a lack of time it was not possible to do it for the rest. Indeed, just trying to complete the interviews before the retreat required all my energies.

The issue of providing information and assistance to my participants was an area addressed by the ethics review committee prior to receiving approval for the project. Webb (1984) also addresses this issue in her work. When my professor and I revised our ethics protocol, we were required to provide detailed information on how we would deal with any traumatization that might occur for the women during or after the interview. I had counselling training so felt that I could conduct the interviews and recognize when and if the women might need support or counselling and legal information. With the exception of two of the women, each had immediate access to a counsellor at the Women's Program. During the interviews, outward signs of distress were minimal.

Many asked me legal questions because (I believe) I was approachable and available, but most often I would refrain from answering. While a member of the bar, I am not insured to practice and my own knowledge in the area of family law, never having practised it, is limited at best. It would have been professionally irresponsible of me to address their concerns. I explained this to the women and in most cases I was able to give them a phone number, but the reality is that the information they were seeking is not always accessible. Sometimes this questioning occurred after the tape recorder had been turned off. More than anything, I believe the questions and my limited responses highlighted the very nature of my research--the vast and unmet legal information and education needs of the women.

I was the principal organizer for the retreat, despite attempts to delegate tasks. This occurred for several reasons: lack of time and delegation, my responsibility for the funds and for the contract for the use of the farm where we held the retreat, and a lack of participation from the Women's Program.

This process, both the interviews and the organization of the retreat, was too rushed. The lack of time caused a number of problems. First of all, I did not take care of myself. I felt incredibly stressed trying to get the interviews done and I quickly became incredibly tired, both physically and emotionally.

Not only was the pace too hectic, but the painful stories of violence and abuse also caused me to react. During the interviews, I maintained a connection by clearing my mind of all intrusive thoughts and focussing my energies on each woman and the interview with her. I would often just listen and remain silent. My response would be to say, "I'm sorry." It seemed appropriate because I was so very sorry. Once I left the interview, however, I found myself disconnecting as I reverted to old coping techniques that I have used in the past: focussing on my body and food, always being busy and placing unreasonable demands on myself, and not permitting myself time to reflect or think. As I noticed this disconnection happening, I believed that this distancing was in fact my survival technique. I had to be efficient. I did not have time to reflect. I could not become emotionally engaged with the women or the stories I was hearing because I did not have the time. I did not have the time to feel their pain or the pain it might trigger in me.

Reinharz (1992, pp. 34-35) discusses how the ethic of commitment held by feminist researchers exposes them to stress. Having worked with many individuals who have experienced violence and loss, I believe that I was prepared for much of, but not all, the pain that the women told me about. I do not believe, however, that I had the social support from other researchers and colleagues that I needed at the time. In part, this was because I did not ask for it, believing that I did not have the time, but also because not talking about what was occurring was part of my survival technique. Yet I also felt alone because my supervisor and several colleagues (both graduate students and not) were away at this time. I was also not taking classes and the student group that provides me with regular support was not meeting over the summer months. As a result of this experience, when I have talked about my research to others, I consistently emphasize the importance of having support throughout the process.

I kicked him, at first in anger, but his response was to press a knife to my throat. Feeling the blade, I felt my body go slack and inside I just felt tired, so tired of this ... this assault on my sanity. Chile, August 1993

I met with the staff a few days before the retreat to discuss various arrangements. I had asked for feedback on a number of issues, particularly my language usage on some of the activities planned for the workshop. Though they gave me important feedback concerning the children and other logistics, they had not received my faxes outlining the workshop, and after briefly looking at the copy I had brought, could only say that I must be flexible to the women's needs.

At that meeting, I began to understand the challenges of ensuring and maintaining enough participation by all parties in a project to foster a sense of ownership for all those involved. When I first approached the Women's Program, they agreed that the project would be important for them to better understand and, hence, address some of their clients' needs and certainly some of the problems they encounter with the legal system. They also made it clear that they, the staff, are service providers. They must attend to the daily needs of their clients and would not have time to spend

planning or searching for funds. Having worked at the centre in a variety of capacities, I was well aware of the incredible demands made on staff time. It was agreed at the outset (though never in a formal, written contract) that I would provide leadership, and participation from all staff would be expected, but only to the extent possible. As a result, throughout the process of co-ordinating this project I tried to maintain a balance between seeking and incorporating their participation at all stages, while not demanding too much of their time. One of the limitations of participatory research is that it is so resource intensive (Maguire, 1987). My own time and energy was being exhausted. I believed that I could not ask that the staff exhaust their time and energy as well, and so I remained the organizer and leader throughout this beginning phase of the project.

Participatory research calls for leadership. This leadership will often come from the initiating researcher, known as the "external catalytic agent" (Smith, 1997, p. 236). Peter Park et al. note that the researcher must also be an organizer and mobilizer (1993, p. 10). As well, the researcher must be an educator. In reflecting on her attempts at participatory research, Maguire (1993, p. 161) discusses how the juggling of these roles can be difficult and consuming and that attempts to shift control and transfer leadership are not always successful. During this beginning phase of the project, because I was the initiator, everyone saw it as "my project" and not "our project." Most participatory research projects start with the researcher's commitment (not the participants' or the organization's) to an alternative approach to research. This was certainly true in this case. In our first meetings, the staff of the Women's Program had criticized researchers and the universities who have studied them and their clients and then left. So they were certainly receptive to a different approach, but I still provided the impetus and the leadership.

The day of the retreat, we all arrived at the farm in the late morning. The women, children and staff came on a bus and I followed with food and other supplies. It felt good to sec these women and their children. I had met them only once before, but as we embraced, I felt like we were old friends. A few rules were set for the children: no swimming in the pond without your mother and this is our house and the other one belongs to the caretakers. Responsibility for meals was divided up. We spent that day swimming and playing.

Before dinner, we relaxed together. The children were left to run around. They were noisy and rambunctious. I, being the one ultimately responsible on this trip, worried that an accident might occur. The vigilence of the individual mothers varied considerably. The mothers with the youngest children were wonderfully attentive. Among those with older children, it ranged. As a group, we had agreed that the mothers would be responsible for their own children, except during the workshop, when we would have childcare. Yet I ended up stepping in to suggest games for them, read to them, play with them or just supervise them. In doing so, I reinforced my role as leader, organizer, authority figure. I was also prevented from joining the women and getting to know them, or letting them get to know me as anyone but the authority figure, while they were having some wonderful conversations together as a group.

However, by playing with and taking care of their children, I was able to earn the trust of the women. Many of them thanked me for taking their children swimming, especially if they did not know how to swim, or being so good with them. It was also important for the children that they have one authority figure. They believed that the house was mine. I was the one in charge. Having this authority figure was very important and helped to maintain some order over the three days. Overall though, in spite of these positive aspects, I felt frustrated by the children and their need for someone--and it fell to me--to supervise them constantly. Ideally, this issue should have been raised with the group and we should have resolved it collectively.

We had a barbeque for dinner and I sent the children off on a scavenger hunt which kept them completely occupied. At this time, we, the women, really relaxed and started to build human pyramids. This was a wonderful moment during the retreat when we all were laughing and working together for this one simple goal--a human pyramid. The following morning, I picked up the childcare workers at the nearest bus station and returned to begin the workshop.

During the workshop, a variety of participatory activities were used to allow the women to design a legal education and information program to address their needs. Because I had interviewed each woman individually, I was familiar with her experiences and her individual needs. Without revealing any of that data, I structured the workshop to reflect those identified needs. Hence, we began with introductions and the opportunity to talk a little about ourselves and our expectations. We put together a group agreement that we agreed to use for the day based on respect, trust and confidentiality. I then led the women through an exercise designed to understand our differences and similarities, as well as privilege and discrimination. We then set out to identify barriers in accessing the legal system--both in theory and in practice. This educational component of participatory research can give participants a way to develop an understanding of social problems, their causes and ways to overcome them. After a break for lunch, we engaged in two more activities: to identify the women's legal information and education needs; and to design a program that would address these needs.

Throughout the day, the women were gradually taking on more responsibility for leading discussions in the smaller groups. I continued to facilitate the larger group activities and in doing so, reinforced my role as leader, coordinator, organizer, researcher. In all these roles, and as an Anglo woman with privilege, I felt like an outsider during much of the day.

Except for one moment.

This moment occurred during one of the small group discussions. We had divided into three small groups and were talking about the first time we had accessed the legal system. The legal system was defined previously by the group as lawyers, the courts, the police, or any of the agencies that support the legal system (Children's Aid, for example). I was in one group and a staff member was in each of the other two groups. Another woman was leading the discussion in my small group and I was not in a leadership role. Perhaps because of this, I felt I could participate as one of the women rather than as a facilitator. Perhaps it was also timing--I knew these women much better now. Perhaps I felt more comfortable with them.

The three other women had each talked about their first experience accessing the legal system and what barriers, if any, they had faced. When it was my turn, I told them how ...

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I walked around and around the police station, hands clenched, tears streaming down my face. My clothes were still wet
from the rain and I was shivering with cold, with fear, with shock. What seemed an eternity ago, I had found my
grandmother lying in her bed, covered with blood, killed by an intruder. I had given my statement to the police. My
knapsack with my house keys and address book was at the crime scene. My family was scattered in far off places and I was
desperately calling anyone I knew, only to hear answering machines on the other end. I was gripped by a fear, a fear so
strong that it was overwhelming me, a fear of being alone that night with nowhere to go and no one to keep me safe.
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In that moment of my telling, my self-disclosure, I no longer felt like an outsider--I was one of them. I felt the change. I could see the change in their eyes and they nodded their heads to show they understood what it was like in the police station. They murmured their sympathies: "Oh, tan terrible ... "(Oh, how terrible). One asked whether anyone had been caught and I replied no. I quickly moved on to talk about what I had needed most--support. (2)

At the time, our small group joined the others and all the groups reported. I once again became the facilitator as I recorded the various comments from the groups. When we broke up for lunch, I organized children and food. There was no moment to sit back and reflect on what had occurred and no moment to speak further to the other women. The rest of the day passed quickly. I drove the two childcare workers to the bus terminal, we dined, relaxed, and slept. The next morning after breakfast, free time and cleaning up, the bus arrived, good-byes were said, pictures taken, and we parted. Perhaps I did not find space for those moments on purpose. For in talking about myself, I had opened up my soul that is full of my own experiences with violence. Many of these wounds lie dormant, not completely healed. When triggered by external events, they can surface quickly and leave me feeling exposed, weakened, and out of control.

II. Reflections

My first thoughts in the hours after I returned to the city turned to my own self-disclosure and the change in dynamics of the small group it seemed to have produced. I began to think that I had made a vital mistake in my research. In not talking to the women about my own personal experiences with violence, I had remained disconnected from them. Therefore I had not truly challenged the hierarchy implicit in the researcher/participant relationship. I further criticized my research decision arguing that this lack of self-disclosure must have also affected their level of disclosure. In some of the interviews, the women had been very open with me, telling me about their experiences with abuse, even the sexual abuse. In others though, the women had been reserved, referring simply to "problems." I did not probe further when they chose to be vague about their relationships.

Yet as I reflected further, I reasoned that the women chose to be vague for many reasons. I was, I believed, an outsider. They did not know me at all before our first meeting. The introduction was made through their counsellor, but they did hot know me. Given that, it was very understandable that they would not want to detail the abuse in their lives to a stranger whom they had just met.

My first thoughts could not be sustained for long, since any challenge to the researcher/participant relationship cannot be based solely upon the researcher's own background or experiences or her disclosure of these experiences. The challenge is to break down the hierarchy implicit in the researcher/participant relationship, which is an underlying principle of feminist participatory research. In order to break down this hierarchy, there must be sufficient resources (time, energy, money), as well as the commitment, experience, understanding and empathy of the researcher(s). Empathy is a critical component of feminist participatory research. I believe that I am an empathetic person and that this is evident in my work. I believe I bring understanding and commitment and some resources to my research projects, though perhaps I lacked the experience to anticipate my own frustrations and difficulties around self-disclosure. It is important that I was consistent in my approach to each interview so that all the women heard the same information about me. And with experiences such as this from which to learn, I can only deepen my understanding of the complexities of feminist research and incorporate my own insights into future work.

Many thoughts continued to race around in my mind in the days and weeks following the retreat. My colleagues suggested that I write about the experience for myself, not as part of my dissertation. This reading, writing, and reflecting has been an invaluable experience as I have been able to explore self-disclosure and the implications for a feminist participatory researcher.

Analysis

Two decades ago, Ann Oakley argued for a new model for interviews that would be guided by an ethic of commitment and egalitarianism (Oakley, 1981). Intimacy and self-disclosure would be key features of this model. Feminist researchers who have worked with victims of violence have discussed the importance of developing trust between researcher and participants and the need for time for personal reflection (Agger, 1992; Kelly, 1989). Patti Lather suggests that the most effective emancipatory approaches include interactive interviews with self-disclosure, multiple interviews, group work, and negotiation of the interpretation of the data (1985, pp. 2324, as cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 185). This last approach would most certainly include the review of transcripts and could also include a review of, and the opportunity to provide comments on, the researcher's analysis. Most of her suggestions have been incorporated into this research process.

From a slightly different perspective, Webb (1984) addresses the issues of providing information and helping participants. She found that she had no choice but to invest her subjectivity in the research and develop intimacy with the women. This provided her with data that fully captured the depth and richness of their feelings and experiences. Reinharz notes that for many, self-disclosure is good feminist practice (1992, p. 32). She does not, unfortunately, elaborate on the reasons for this, though I would suggest that self-disclosure tan help foster trust, identification, and a more equal relationship. Maria Mies argues that we must integrate our "own experience of oppression and discrimination into the research process" (1983, p. 121). We need to take our own experiences as a place to start and use these experiences to guide us (p. 122). Many questions remain for me as how to incorporate these ideas into our research. My own experiences certainly guided me throughout the research process. This was evident in the attention I paid to the impact of trauma on learning, my empathy for their own experiences, and the attention paid to the details of the retreat.

Du Blois notes that, traditionally, the observer and the observed must not "contaminate" the other if the research is to be truly objective. Yet in feminist scholarship, it is assumed that "the knower and the known are of the same universe, that they are not separable" (1983, p. 111). Du Blois further notes that if the dichotomies of objectivity and subjectivity are maintained, these polarizations make experience and reality false. Renate Duelli Klein speaks of "intersubjectivity" or an interrelatedness among all participants--the researcher and the subjects (1983, p. 94). She suggests that this dialectical relationship between subject and object will permit the researcher to constantly compare her work with her own experiences as a woman and to share this with the researched, who will add their opinions to the research.

Mies also believes that "conscious partiality" is critical for feminist research (1983, p. 123). This is achieved through a partial identification with the research participant and is the opposite to being indifferent or disinterested. It is important that feminists identify with their participants, but I suggest that there are several levels of identification. "Conscious partiality" and Du Blois' ideas of being of the "same universe" represent a threshold level of identification, which must be a basic requirement for feminist research. I would see this as having a strong critical understanding

of the context, obtained through reading, studying, experience, and dialogue. I believe that I achieved this "conscious partiality" through my years of work, study, and reflection on women, Latin America, violence, law and learning and the many intersections.

Mutual identification occurs when the researcher identifies not only with the participant, but participants tan identify with the researcher. This might be obtained through full self-disclosure and represents a deeper level of identification, one that may not always be reached during the data collection. Indeed, it may not always be appropriate to reach that level. For example, social workers Bombyk, Bricker-Jenkins and Wedenoja (1985) dispute the idea of essential self-disclosure, that is, where a researcher must self-disclose during her interactions with her participants. Self-disclosure, as I noted earlier, is intended to create trust, identification and a more equal relationship, but it can have disadvantages. Wedenoja, who was a participant in the study conducted by Bombyk and Bricker-Jenkins, notes:

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She was giving me ... personal information as a way of equalizing the relationship and revealing herself as I had been
revealing myself, yet it seemed more out of her need to self-disclose rather than my need at that point to know about
her. At that early stage of the interview, I felt like I first needed time to establish myself within the role of
participant before moving towards more of an interactive sharing (1985, as cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 33).
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There is also the disadvantage or danger that out own experiences will bias the research process or results. Reinharz notes that:

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Researchers who self-disclose are reformulating the researcher's role in a way that maximizes engagement of the self but
also increases the researcher's vulnerability to criticism, both for what is revealed and for the very act of self-
disclosure (1992, p. 34).
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While Reinharz does not clarify to whom the researcher is vulnerable, I suggest that the vulnerability to criticism tan arise from participants, as in the study cited above (Bombyck, Bricker-Jenkins and Wedenoja, 1985), as well as from other researchers and funders. These concerns had influenced my initial decision not to talk about myself. In the short time of the initial interview, I wanted to learn about each woman and not impose my experiences on her. As it happened, later on when we all knew one another better, I felt it was appropriate to talk about one of my experiences with violence and the police.

While being vulnerable to critics is one concern, another vulnerability can arise. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise argue that the feminist researcher has an active and central role and must make herself "vulnerable" (1983, p. 196). For them, this does not mean that the researcher records "her innermost sensations and feelings" (1983, p. 197), rather that the interaction between researcher and participants must be included through the personal. While the authors do not clarify this, I understand this to be about opening up during the research process and staying connected with it on an emotional, as well as an intellectual level. These reflections on the interaction between the emotional and the intellectual should be included in the research process to enhance our learning.

The identification with our participants has the value of enhanced learning, but it also carries the disadvantage of the pain that comes from identifying with people (Reinharz, 1992, p. 234). The interaction of "feelings and facts" (Duelli Klein, 1983, p. 95) is essential to truly understand women's experiences, but there must also be an understanding of how being vulnerable can affect you and tan destabilize you and your work. Many professionals end up retreating behind their cloak of professionalism because the strong emotions can impair their ability to advocate for and support their clients. Colleagues have spoken to me of the emotional drain that working in certain areas, such as domestic violence, can have on one's personal and professional well-being. One poverty law theorist (Margulies, 1995) argues that because domestic violence requires "affective lawyering" (lawyering that requires emotional engagement and hence is resource intensive), this area of law is generally not part of poverty law practices.

In feminist participatory research, where leadership and the demands of time, commitment and energy are critical, it is important to understand what tan happen when and if the vulnerabilities take over. It is within this particular research context, that the issue of self-disclosure becomes such a challenge. As I noted in the beginning pages, it can be argued that all feminist research is action-oriented and, as a result, this challenge is inherent in all feminist research. While the learnings of feminist researchers on self-disclosure have provided insight, feminist participatory research calls for exceptional commitments of time, energy and involvement. These insights must be adapted to the unique demands of feminist participatory research.

Furthering My Learning

Years later, I understand what happened during my own experiences with violence and what happens to me when I am overwhelmed with pain and feeling out of control as I have felt many times in my life. The first was in Guatemala in 1990, while travelling on my own, I was beaten and robbed by a man with a gun. I lost all my identification and money and my self-confidence. My language skills disappeared as I lay in the community hospital terrified of the volunteer who sewed up my head wounds. I spent days with immigration authorities, trying to get out of the country, and not understanding why they would not give me an exit visa. I spent days with the police feeling shamed and blamed for what had happened. I spent days with American Express agents arguing for my travellers' cheques. Twice more, in Guatemala in 1991, and in Chile in 1993, I was robbed by men with some degree of physical violence. And in 1994, in a safe neighbourhood in Toronto, I found my grandmother after she had been raped and murdered in her bed by an intruder while she was taking an afternoon nap.

These experiences differed from the experiences of the women who participated in this research; I experienced violence from strangers, not from my partner. Also, even when I could not speak the language as well as I wished, I had some resources behind me as I dealt with the police or immigration authorities.

I believe that trauma, such as the trauma of assault or abuse, impacts the learning process and the potential for productive learning. It can impact the learning adversely in that it is more difficult to focus and more difficult to retain information. It tan also make one hesitant to participate or disclose. I was told this in various ways by different women in the interviews. I also have experienced that overwhelming sensation of being out of control and not being able to concentrate, focus, or learn. For me, one who has always loved learning and the formal or informal ways of learning, this had a devastating impact on me. For me, the pain has slowed me down and caused me to lose confidence in my abilities. I believe now that I made my decision not to disclose my own experiences with violence based upon a subconscious understanding of the risk of being drawn intimately into their pain and how I might react.

The Next Phase

A month after the retreat, women received two copies of their transcript and were given the opportunity to make changes and provide feedback. Women also received photographs from the retreat and notes taken at the retreat. A follow-up meeting/dinner with the women and their children took place in the fall of 1999. We talked about the retreat and workshop and their learnings, looked (and laughed) at pictures, reviewed a project report and discussed ways to further facilitate their participation in the development of their ideas.

The objectives of the first phase of the project were to assess the needs and determine possible ways in which to address the needs of the women. In the second phase, several of the women became more involved in the project as we all worked to develop their ideas. The following summer they completed a course, entitled The Community Leadership Program, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, in order to develop their leadership skills and take on increasing control of the project. They call themselves the Derecho a Saber/Right to Know group.

By the fall, the women had connected with another woman's organization, METRAC, and had developed and implemented a series of legal workshops on different topics in Spanish (sec McDonald with Cross, 2001). As the project moved ahead, the challenges inherent in this aspect--the action--of feminist participatory research became increasingly apparent (Maguire, 1987). In particular, the shift in power dynamics as the women moved from being dependent upon the staff of the Women's Program to help them find solutions, to creating their own solutions without the staff, became a site of contention. As well, the immense amount of time, energy, and other resources required continued to create tensions.

Some Not So Final Thoughts

Patricia Maguire developed a feminist participatory research framework based on her participatory research project with a multicultural group of battered women in Gallup, New Mexico (1987, pp. 200-208). This framework, as informed by my experiences and those of my participants, helped define and guide the research process and of course, the results. This framework marks the beginning, for more guidance is needed in the area of self-disclosure, which relates directly to the role of the researcher in feminist participatory research.

The role of the researcher, who also becomes an educator, activist, and organizer during the research process, is critical to the potential of feminist participatory research. This role obviously places great demands on the researcher, but most authors (for example, Maguire, 1987, 1993; Park et al., 1993) are silent as to the contradictions inherent in these demands with a feminist framework of research.

While the problem ideally comes from the community, more often the community is approached by the researcher, as with this project. I certainly responded to the demands for leadership and played many roles as a researcher, educator, and organizer. For a feminist researcher who brings care, commitment and complete immersion to the project, these demands can prove to be overwhelming. The result is a persistent tension within the researcher about fulfilling commitments to the project and caring for her own needs.

Greater participation and leadership from more of the team members might have reduced some of this tension. Yet given the demands placed on the staff of the Women's Program from their jobs, and the newness of the project, there did seem to be a need for concentration of leadership. The necessary concentration of leadership in one or a few people seemed contradictory to the principles of feminist participatory research throughout the early stages of the project.

I believe that strong, centralized leadership is necessary at the beginning of such a project where leadership capacity is not yet identified or developed and it is important to acknowledge this. Until the transfer of control of the project to the participants and community is complete, demands continue to be placed upon the initiator of the project, most often the principal researcher. The literature on feminist participatory research is silent about this issue (see Maguire, 1993) and this silence does a disservice to those contemplating or embarking on a feminist participatory research project. With some transfer of control, the contradictions are not as stark.

This tension appears not only in the area of leadership, but also in the area of self-disclosure. Reinharz notes that for many, self-disclosure is good feminist practice (1992, p. 32). Stating that self-disclosure is good feminist practice is, I believe, a dangerous generalization. Self-disclosure is intended to create trust, identification and a more equal relationship. The identification with our participants has the value of enhanced learning, but it also carries the disadvantage of the pain that comes from identifying with people (Reinharz, 1992, p. 234). Further, self-disclosure cannot achieve trust, identification and a more equal relationship on its own. In feminist participatory research, where leadership and the demands of time, commitment and energy are critical, it is important to understand what can happen when and if the vulnerabilities take over. Because of these demands, this may be one methodology where the benefits of self-disclosure must be weighed carefully.

Self-disclosure poses challenges when the research topic is emotionally charged, such as in this study. Yet it would never be part of certain methodologies, such as that used in the statistically random sampling for the Statistics Canada 1993 Violence Against Women Survey. This study involved close-ended questionnaires to capture quantitative data. Nor does it appear to pose such challenges for feminist researchers Lori Haskell and Melanie Randall (1998) in their random sample survey of women and their experiences with violence.

Self-disclosure poses challenges in feminist research where commitment, empathy, and involvement are required, regardless of the specific techniques used. So one must be aware of both the topic and the research methodology if self-disclosure is to be part of the process. In sum, self-disclosure may be useful, but practice without flexibility or sensitivity to the responses of the participants does not reflect good feminist research. As always, feminist research must be responsive to the context and with self-disclosure, timing will be critical.

Challenging the traditional hierarchy in the researcher/participant relationship requires sufficient resources (time, energy, money), as well as the commitment, experience, understanding and empathy of the researcher/s. The researcher should have a full understanding of the implications of self-disclosure (opening herself up to the vulnerability of pain) for herself prior to commencing the research. This issue should be re-visited often throughout the process.

Feminist participatory research was the methodology chosen for this project because of its goal of action, the challenge to the researcher/participant hierarchy, and the importance of collective inquiry. At the end of this first phase of the project, which has included little action as a result of the investigation, the value of the methodology is apparent. Feminist participatory research was valuable for this project because of: the goals of investigation, education, and action; the collective and collaborative nature of the inquiry which required the development of a specific technique, the workshop; and working with the community. There were a number of aspects of the methodology that did not work for

this project in this first phase: the contradictions of a university/community partnership whereby funding, leadership, and work were concentrated in the university and there was no direct participation from the women in the defining stages of the project; the length of time involved to ensure transfer of control and some resulting action; and the demands made on the researcher.

This paper has focused on the issue of self-disclosure in the context of feminist participatory research. In order to address this challenge and some of these limitations noted above, I would add four principles to Maguire's framework (1987, pp. 200-208):

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1) While self-disclosure may be good feminist research practice, the researcher should have a thorough understanding of
the implications of self-disclosure prior to beginning any feminist research project and exercise flexibility throughout.
2) Attention must be paid to ensure that the appropriate support (emotional, logistical and other forms) is available at
all phases of feminist participatory research, and indeed any feminist research. 3) Participants must have a thorough
understanding of the demands made on the researcher who will assume many roles, but particularly a leadership role, and
on other participants prior to and throughout any feminist participatory research project. 4) Attention should be paid to
understanding the leadership involved, different styles of leadership and the transfer of control of the project to the
participants and the community prior to the beginning of any project.
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A number of questions remain for me. Would revealing my own experiences with violence have altered the level of trust during the interview, and so have prompted the women to disclose more themselves? Would I have been seen differently by them--less of an outsider and more as one of them? Would this have affected the results? Of more importance, how would it have affected the process? Would I have felt too "vulnerable" (Stanley and Wise, 1983, p. 196)? Du Blois argues that, "it is harder when we question ourselves about our own honesty, responsibility and sanity in our work" (1983, pp. 112-113). I have not questioned my honesty or responsibility or sanity. I have questioned how I, as a feminist researcher, allowed myself to connect and enter into my research, that was in so many ways intensely personal and passionate. Our doubts and the questions that are raised by our work as feminist researchers are natural and can contribute to our own process of understanding our work. That moment of self-disclosure showed me how the boundaries between researcher and participants can be crossed and connections made. This has forced me to explore the powerful implications of connection. I know that trust and connection are more complicated than the single factor of disclosure. As well, safety, space, and the moment to disclose are as valid concerns for the researcher as they are for the participant. As the next phase of the research continues, I feel enriched by the challenges that have passed and eager to embrace those that await.

Notes

(1.) A number of my own experiences with violence came back to me quite vividly as I was undertaking the research. I have chosen to insert them as interruptions throughout this paper as this literary technique best illustrates how jarring, confusing and interrupting they were during the research process.

(2.) The short description of this incident is exactly how it occurred in that it happened and we all moved on. Again, I have chosen not to provide more detail in my writing because the lack of detail is far more telling about the event.

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