

Chapter 1

Pluriversal Readings of Emancipatory Engagements

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This volume brings together pluriversal readings of emancipatory approaches to community and other reflexive engagements. In so doing, the book recognises the confluences between critical peace psychology and other critically derived psychologies. For instance, the chapter by Siew Fang Law and Jose Ramos is placed at the peace psychology–community psychology interface; Anthony Naidoo, Conrad Zygmunt and Shaun Philips draw on ecopsychology; and Sindi Gordon invokes cultural studies, critical thought and psychodynamic theory in her elucidation of creative life writing as emancipatory. As an intersected collection of chapters on emancipatory engagements, the volume evokes what Pelias (2004) terms the “methodology of the heart”, that is, the authors—conscious of the epistemic pitfalls inherent to detached expert formulaic pronouncements—are present in their work as embodied activist writers and reflexive analysts. Through their respective probing voices, the authors of these chapters occupy the interdiscursive realm of meaning and experience that interrogates what it means to engage in emancipatory work and build compassionate critical connections, while accompanying the subaltern through moments of destabilising dominant discourses and inscribing generative spaces. All of the

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contributors, without exception, locate themselves within their respective texts; they are sensitive to the traps of the narcissistic researcher-writer and yet astutely aware of the significance of positioning themselves as engaged subjects, immersed in the messiness and complexities of community and other reflexive engagements.

In the opening chapter, Sindi Gordon, drawing from critical social thought, psychodynamics and cultural studies, reflects on participatory creative writing as a conjunctural moment of engagement where self, family, community and society interface. She offers us textured insights into “what happens when writers enter into a creative relationship with their life stories”. For Gordon, creative life writing as liberatory engagement is a journey of self-discovery that is multiple and embodied. David Fryer, assuming a Foucauldian perspective, follows on from Gordon to present academic writing as an engaged form of resistance and liberation. The Gordon and Fryer chapters are embodied performances of writing to both resist and liberate. The authors illustrate the complexities and obscurities inherent to writing as an unconventional methodology of engagement, and inscribe the practices of writing that they consider in their respective chapters as emancipatory engagement.

Several chapters construct community engagement as a transformative process of participatory knowledge co-creation. These chapters compose methodologies that support emancipation, redraw power boundaries, and encourage a sense of belonging and connections within and across geographical and sociological communities and larger environments. The chapters offer situated accounts of community engagement. The work of Yeshim Iqbal and Rezarta Bilali in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, including Burundi, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo, focuses on community radio education-entertainment campaigns as community engagement, and highlights the influences of context in forging participatory relations for social change. The chapter by Sandy Lazarus, Naiema Taliep and Anthony Naidoo considers community asset mapping as inherent to liberatory engagement. Together with the case study by Siew Fang Law and Jose Ramos on the Maribyrnong Maker Map, these authors represent voices that resist neo-liberal forms of knowledge-making, and demonstrate collaborative forms of action inquiry that draw on cross-disciplinary traditions. The authors of these two chapters offer methodologies for building connections, critical knowledge traditions, and grounded approaches to knowledge construction. Resonant with the ideals of community groundedness and cross-disciplinary enquiry, the work of Anthony Naidoo, Conrad Zygmunt and Shaun Philips is framed by concepts inherent to community psychology, adventure programming and ecopsychology. Through the lens of a community-based participatory research framework, Naidoo and his associates showcase the liberation capacities of a wilderness-based intervention.

In other compelling chapters, Christopher Sonn, Pilar Kasat and Amy Quayle, situated in Australia, and Puleng Segalo and Michelle Fine, writing as Africa-centred engaged researchers, bring a nuanced focus to the creative arts as a methodological resource that enables community engagement as forms of emancipatory knowledge-making and sociopolitical solidarity. Sonn and his co-authors offer us a theoretically grounded and indigenous situated analysis of community arts and cultural development. The contribution by Segalo and Fine provides a colourful analysis of the “power of embodied sharing through embroideries as a form of artistic expression”. Also in the tradition of critical creative methodology, Deanne Bell describes how oral

history may contest methods that fabricate engagement as a mere rational-empirical process and, in contrast, facilitate community engagement that breaks silences, reconstructs social memories, and generate forms of social awakening that movingly support social transformation. Assuming a similar critical thrust, Nick Malherbe and Brittany Everitt-Penhale elucidate the liberatory nature and capacity of participant-led film-making. Representing insightful voices, Malherbe and Everitt-Penhale guide readers through the intricate processes inherent to participant-led film-making: processes that enable youth to resist socially imposed limits to their agency and social power, and creatively engage in action, reflexivity and criticality through multimodal language. Continuing with the idea of engagement as messy, contradictory and complex, Ursula Lau, Shahnaaz Suffla and Lesego Bertha Kgatitswe skillfully describe how the processes of group storytelling may both enhance sense of agency, voice and mutual recognition, and yet trigger community chasms and dividing othering processes. Lau and her colleagues offer thought-provoking commentary on the tensions and dilemmas accompanying the community-engaged researcher's imperative to validate struggle and pain on the one hand, and stimulate agentic possibilities for hope and change on the other in community settings characterised by structural violence. Building on some of the aforementioned themes, the chapter by Nick Malherbe, Shahnaaz Suffla, Mohamed Seedat and Umesh Bawa considers Photovoice "as a praxis of epistemic correction and agency within contexts of dominant knowledge claims". The authors adeptly employ an instance of epistemic disruption within an Africa-centred case illustration to reflexively analyse the liberatory performances and limits of Photovoice methodology. The contributions of these six chapters show how rearticulating stories of oppression, pain, loss, agency, generativity and hope opens up spaces for creative and emancipatory forms of social engagement.

In the last chapter of the volume, Garth Stevens offers a complex meta-analysis of community engagement. Drawing on his work on the Apartheid Archive Project and recognising archives as sites of contestation, Stevens shifts our conceptualisations of community engagement. For Stevens, community engagement as critical psychosocial mnemonics is in part a disruption of assumed understandings of the world, a dislocation of the grand narratives of history, and the inscription of ordinary peoples' experiences of oppression. The chapter constructs critical community engagement as subversion of prevailing hierarchical power relations and assertion of epistemic justice, namely inventing spaces in which the subaltern may insert their stories and narratives of oppression and hope.

A comprehensive reading of this volume and its pluriversal voices embodies enactments of generative-disruptive community engagement, and the spirit of social justice oriented scholarship. The contributors seek to disrupt orthodox, received and presumed knowledges, encouraging us as readers to reconstitute—generatively—the boundaries, horizons and scope of what we have come to cognise as community engagement. Across the chapters, the contributors invite readers to disobey and rearrange conformist and formulaic notions of community engagement; the contributors move us to consider engagement as more than instrumental action.

Engagement as action is exemplified as professional exchanges between "communities in need" on the one hand, and activists, consultants, university-based researchers or NGO-based workers on the other hand. The denotation of engage-

ment as action produces a binary between reflexivity and action, assuming a linear logic (see Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans, 2010), and tends to obscure the fabricated exercise of power in both the discourses and the practices of community engagement (see Cooke & Kothari, 2004; Kothari, 2004). Resisting orthodox notions, the contributors to this volume echo Seedat's (2012) reading of community engagement as an animated, fluctuating, messy and intricate process of praxis, that is sculpted and resculpted by inspired social forces, knowledge traditions, emancipatory philosophical thought, and social actor persuasions that are dialectically interlocking. Read together, the authors assume praxis as comprising imagination, innovation, critical reflexivity and emancipatory action, and a site for the formation of community relationships. This volume succeeds in imprinting community engagement as praxis that is messy, situated and dynamic, and that evokes the methodology of the heart (see Pelias, 2004; Seedat, 2012).

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