

**Activist research: Collaborative, community based, and decolonizing work**

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**Text:**

*“critically intervene in a way that challenges and changes” bell hooks*

bell hooks (1990) has eloquently argued that the place in the margins is a place of freedom, where it a space for “radical openness”. This place of freedom is a place for activism and advocacy. Activism from the margins is something that racialized and gendered groups in the academy live and work with on an ongoing basis. Couture (2017) engages us in thinking about being an “activist-researcher”, as many scholars become more involved in social justice work, being politicised in our academic and personal lives. My own research focus is to address inequality, racism, oppression and colonization. To engage in research that is activism means working with community collectives and the tangible realities of the racism, oppression and colonial hegemony that these communities face. In my recent work, this has meant working with Indigenous communities in suicide prevention, and multiracial communities in collaborative engaged research. Consistent with feminist research, this research is intended to work to grapple with the issues and engage in transformation.

As a researcher working in Indigenous communities, and suicide prevention in particular, I have witnessed evidence of a dismaying reductionist approach that describes prevention work in terms such as: “lacks rigorous evaluation and randomized controlled trials”. This kind of language reveals an approach that is inconsistent with community and collaborative based work. This language evokes the activist-researcher to speak out and challenge the epistemological approaches to funding and resources.

In this paper, I argue that research can be an act of activism. Drawing from my work with marginalized populations, I am continuously challenged to question the boundaries of academic work, what counts as reporting and what counts as research. My current scholarship calls on myself to be a working activist researcher, whereby I am working with our research team to create spaces for voice and openness (hooks, 1984) while consistent with our research aims. This requires addressing the tensions of insider-outsider politics and ethical challenges of where research agendas can sometimes attempt to over-ride the importance of collaborators and co-

researchers. Moreover, the work as activists requires researchers to challenge the dominant hegemonic discourses of funders and organizations that have the power to support or dismiss the meaningful work that is done. Often the academy becomes complicit in this discourse when evaluating research and scholarship.

Over time, the activist researcher has evolved with activism with community collaborators. Thus, this paper will describe my research, research team, the challenges, and the approaches to activism that I have been required to take. The research has become a pivotal point for us to take action towards changing views of worthiness, evidence, and scholarship.

**Question from the call:** What does it mean to be an activist-researcher engaged in research with community, and challenging traditional scholarly boundaries?

**Key words:** voice, openness, community, struggle, activist-researchers

## **References**

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