

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE

Carey Ann Jackson
Department of Psychology
University of Natal
Pietermaritzburg

Hilda Van Vlaenderen
Department of Psychology
Rhodes University
Grahamstown

1. INTRODUCTION.

South Africa is currently going through a process of transformation. In this process policy making is a major concern of those who are responsible to steer the country through the period of change into a satisfactory new socio- economic order. Although the principles of democracy, non racism and non sexism have been widely accepted as the foundation for the new South Africa, these concepts need to be operationalised into specific policies in the various fields of government. In order to do this, research is required at all levels of society, ranging from grassroots groups to national structures.

The authors argue the inherently political nature of scientific research, meaning that scientific knowledge is an important tool in maintaining or shifting the balance of power. As Carasco (1983: 2) puts it: "Research, as a channel of inquiry and investigation with the potential to generate powerful knowledge and information, can be either liberating or repressive. It can lead to either decisive socio-political action on the part of an entire community or to the exclusion or manipulation of that community by an 'informed' minority".

It is further argued that the producers of what is considered scientific knowledge have predominantly been white, middle class, male and that they have used that knowledge to preserve the rights of their own group in society as well as to institutionalise a continued oppression of others, namely working class, black or female. The traditional, "male stream" research paradigm has maintained and reinforced the subordinate position of women in society.

A Feminist Research paradigm will be presented as an alternative paradigm that contributes to the liberation of women and that allows for conducting non sexist, non racist research.

Subsequently a Participatory Research paradigm will be introduced. The authors believe that Participatory Research provides a methodology appropriate for library grassroots research. Participatory Research will then be submitted to a Feminist Research critique with the aim of developing a gender sensitive Participatory Research approach.

2. THE TRADITIONAL "MALE STREAM" PARADIGM OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE.

A paradigm is a world view, a general perspective, a constellation of theories, methods and procedures which share central values and themes. It provides a conceptual framework for making sense of the social world (Maguire, 1987: 10).

Research paradigms are based upon different sets of assumptions about the nature of society, and upon different epistemologies. Epistemologies are theories of knowledge which answer questions about who can be a "knower", what kinds of things can be known, what legitimises knowledge and who can use knowledge (Harding, 1987: 3). Epistemologies inform methodologies, which are theories of how research does and should proceed.

The view of society adhered to by the dominant, also called traditional, orthodox, mainstream or male stream paradigm of scientific knowledge is one of maintaining social order, cohesion and consensus. The aim of research is to discover "what is". It is assumed that the social world exists as a system of distinct observable variables, independent of the knower. Research generates laws and theories which are used to expand power and control over people and the environment, and which assume universality (Stanley, 1990: 26-27).

Traditional research is grounded in positivism. It is shaped by three underlying assumptions. First, the origins of scientific research are deemed irrelevant to the goodness of the results. Second, a particular topic of research is randomly chosen. Third, justification of a research study exists in the hypothesis testing of the research procedure, and nowhere else. The main virtues of scientific research lies in its method of hypothesis testing and not in philosophical and political arguments regarding the worth or implications of such research for society (Harding, 1987: 183).

Male stream methodology requires a distancing of the researcher from the research object (Harding, 1987). This distance is vital for male stream scientific thought as an invisible anonymous voice of authority, with the power to discredit and suppress the views of the "researched" (Weed, 1989). The researcher has complete control over the research process and with it the power to determine unilaterally the focus, method, interpretation and use of the research. There is no dialogue between researcher and "researched" on these matters and there is no accountability (Ellis, 1983: 6).

Traditional social science researchers constitute a predominantly male intellectual elite, which applies its own language (jargon) and methods. Most importantly they have

access to, and are in control of a body of knowledge which gives them power over "those ordinary people", the subjects of their research. Male stream psychology dictates that women objectify themselves, devalue their emotional lives and displace their motivations for furthering knowledge claims about women (Hill-Collins, 1991).

3. A FEMINIST RESEARCH PARADIGM.

Feminist social scientists provide a critique of the mainstream paradigm. They argue that social science must provide room for multiple perspectives about the relation of person to self, between persons, and between persons and society. Social science must focus on by whom the tools of social science are used and for which purpose (Unger, 1987).

Feminist researchers share many aspects of their critique of mainstream research with other movements such as post modernism, hermeneutics, interpretive studies, the Participatory Research movement and many others. Gergen (1988: 36) argues that all of these recently developed paradigmatic critiques have abandoned the presumption of objective knowledge and have moved towards the development of a social epistemology, or an epistemological standpoint from which knowledge claims are viewed as constituents of social interchange. Gergen further poses that within this new paradigm knowledge claims may be viewed as forms of discourse, and since discourse is inherently social we may look to social processes for an understanding of how knowledge claims are justified. Lastly, because knowledge claims are constitutive of social life they should properly be opened to evaluation by the full range of discursive communities.

Within this social epistemology framework, Feminist Research focuses specifically on the role of a feminist discursive community and on forms and topics of research that will further the feminist cause (liberation of women).

3.1 Different strands of Feminist Research.

As indicated by the diversity of feminist nomenclature in the literature, there are many different approaches to feminism. These include amongst others, black feminism, socialist feminism, liberal feminism, individualistic feminism, post modern feminism, anti-racist feminism, marxist feminism and feminist relativism. These labels are used by different authors to cover different concepts.

For the purpose of this paper, which deals specifically with Feminist Research, we will use three broad strands of feminist critique both in relation to research topics and processes. Harding (1987) identifies the following three approaches:

The first approach, called the feminist *empiricist approach*, identifies biases and distortions in research based on incorrect method. The claim is that models that ignore or devalue women's perspectives or experiences are inadequate in their own terms and can be corrected. Topics on women can be added and methods improved. Empiricist feminists advocate a stricter adherence to the empiricist rules of method. They maintain that inadequacies of the traditional structures of knowledge may be overcome if increasing numbers of variables (including gender) are taken into account, a systematically expanded array of hypotheses is subjected to test, value biases are obliterated, and so on (Harding (1986). The focus of critique here is methodology, while epistemology is not questioned.

Since the empiricist approach argues that Feminist Research should not address epistemology (and by implication power issues), it in fact continues to work within a traditional "male" paradigm and is according to the Feminist Research paradigm adopted in this paper not considered real Feminist Research.

The second strand of feminist critique goes beyond discussing the exclusion of women's experience from dominant knowledge paradigms to emphasise how these experiences are different. Women's experiences are taken as primary in their own terms, rather than as a resource to amend existing models.

Radical feminism can be included in this strand. Millet (1977) in her work **Sexual politics** explains radical feminism as a theory of sexual politics. By politics she means a power relationship with one group of people (males) dominating another group (females). This sexual domination leads to a societal structure called patriarchy. According to Millet (1977) all historical societies have been patriarchies and although patriarchy can exhibit a great variety of forms, in all such forms avenues of power are in male hands. Millet (1977) further argues that sexual politics obtains consent through the socialisation of both sexes in accordance with the required temperament, role and status. This is complemented by the notion of a sex-role involving codes of conduct appropriate to each sex. Patriarchal religion, popular attitudes, and science assume that the psycho-social distinctions between men and women rest on biological differences.

Millet (1977) argues that patriarchy's chief institution is the family. The main contribution of the family to the support of patriarchy is its socialisation of the young according to patriarchal norms.

The basic claim of radical feminists is that women constitute an oppressed class. Consequently they have to deny that women merely take on the class structure of their husbands and fathers. The sexual class division of society is more important in determining the general character of society than class divisions based on property ownership and control.

The third strand of feminist critique of research builds on the second one, but challenges the unitary female experience and poses that such a model reproduces structures of cultural and class imperialism and hetero-sexism within feminist theory.

Postmodernist feminism, which can be located in this third approach, criticises the second strand of feminist critique for applying typical "male thinking" in seeking the "one, true, feminist story of reality" build on patriarchy. Post modernist feminists believe that feminism is many and not one, because women are many and not one. Post modernism feminism attempts to unify feminist thought through allowing openness, plurality, diversity and difference (Tong, 1989: 219).

Post modernist feminists argue that unification of all women is neither feasible nor desirable. It is not feasible because women's experiences differ across class, racial and cultural lines. Erica Burman (1990) argues that all women simultaneously have a class, race and gender position. Class, gender and race all have structural significance in a society which is differentiated by social class, patriarchy and racism. Analysis of the

impact of each of these structural features is important for the understanding of individuals in social context. It is however, impossible for individuals to separate their experiences neatly into those which result from their social class position, those which are the consequence of their race and those which result from gender. People are multiply positioned (Henriques et al, 1984) but they do not experience that multiplicity as fragmentary. Burman (1990) adds that women who are black or working class, will not necessarily have different views from people who do not fit those categories. What is meant here, is that the complexity of individuals' social positions necessarily affects their experiences and thus needs to be taken into account and theorised.

3.2 Features of Feminist Research.

Regardless of the differences between the second and third strands of feminist critique, some broad common features of Feminist Research can be identified. This does however not imply that a specific feminist methodology and specific methods and techniques for Feminist Research will be proposed. As Burman (in press) argues, there is no intrinsically feminist method or methodology. Rather, how feminist a piece of research is must be evaluated in relation to its purposes or goals and what it seeks to achieve (Burman, in press).

Feminist Research rejects the traditional opposition structuring research, between theory and method and theory and practice. Within a feminist framework, these opposition are seen as necessarily and inevitably intertwined, united through the connections between the purposes, conduct and outcome of the research. Feminist Research is a theory that connects experience and action. What makes Feminist Research feminist is a challenge to the scientism that refuses to address the relations between knowledge (and knowledge generating practices) and power (Burman:in press). A method cannot be feminist as such, because it merely specifies a technique or a set of practices which can be performed in a feminist or anti feminist way.

Liz Stanley (1990: 23) argues that feminism needs to be present in the research process in positive ways in the form of feminist epistemological principles:

- * "In the intellectual autobiography of researchers; therefore
- * In how to manage the differing realities and understandings of researchers and the researched; and thus
- * In emotion as a research experience
- * In a specific type of researcher-researched relationship
- * In the complex question of power in research and writing."

Reflexivity.

Feminist researchers attempt to understand the meanings given to social interactions by those involved. The focus is on understanding how human interaction produces rules governing social life, rather than to discover universal laws of human interaction. Critical inquiry by the researcher, involving a combination of self reflection and historical analysis of inequitable systems produces critical knowledge. Fonow and Cook (1991: 2) stress the importance of reflexivity in the feminist paradigm, defining it as a tendency to reflect upon, examine critically and explore analytically the nature of the research process.

Normative contexts such as cultural and historical settings for social actions are deemed vital in Feminist Research (Meyer, 1988). The material context in which

research participants exist provide a firm basis upon which actions and interpretations of groups and individuals can be imposed and as a baseline against which the partiality of research questions can be checked.

One of the ways in which reflexivity is employed is in consciousness raising (Freire, 1970), a process of increasing political and self awareness. It implies that consciousness (the becoming aware) of oppression can lead to a creative insight of the relations between person and self, person and society. Previously hidden phenomena which are apprehended as a contradiction can lead to an emotional catharsis, an academic insight, an increased politicisation and corresponding activism (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 3).

According to Fonow and Cook (1991: 4) reflexivity is also enhanced within the feminist paradigm through collaboration between women researchers. She believes that feminist collaboration will bring about a more thorough intellectual analysis, a novel approach to framing questions to deal with the gendered context of research.

Affective components of research.

Feminist Research lends legitimacy to subjective experiences in research processes (Meyer, 1988). Subjective experiences are a criterion against which existing theories can be tried out and as a factor which influences data gathering.

Harding (1987:9) argues that the beliefs and behaviour of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of the research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence. Introducing this "subjective" element into the analysis in fact increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the "objectivism" which hides this kind of evidence from the public.

Feminist scholars believe that emotional intimacy, or reciprocity between research participants enhances the quality of information as a result of mutual disclosure.

Relation between researcher and participants in the research.

The relation between researcher and the participants is and must be one of participation in a common cause, one of liberation. Feminist researchers avoid imposing their definitions of reality on those participating in the research. The intention is to minimize the tendency in all research to transform those participating in the research into objects of scrutiny and manipulation. Rather a condition should be created in which the object of research enters into the process as an active subject (Acker, 1991: 136).

Methodologically this implies a search for research techniques which take account of and record everyday processes and which reduce the isolation between research participants (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 7). Typically, qualitative research methods are regarded as more suitable for analysis within the Feminist Research paradigm than quantitative. According to Fonow and Cook (1991) they do not break living connections in the way that quantitative research methods do.

Activism.

The Feminist Research paradigm is based on a view of society that aims at transforming social systems, analyzing structural conflicts and dismantling domination.

It aims at exposing the mechanisms for producing, maintaining and legitimising domination. Research should be action oriented, informative, empowering and liberating.

Feminist social science epistemology constructs goals of inquiry which provide women with explanations of social problems that they want and need (Harding, 1987). Feminist epistemology is rooted in the everyday experiences of women and invokes the concrete experiences of women in selecting topics for investigation and methodologies used. Feminist epistemology defines women as agents and not as victims of knowledge. Women are defined as knowers, as what can be known and as creators of how knowledge can be known. Women's experiences are considered as significant indicators of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested (Hill-Collins, 1991).

Recognition of the importance of using women's experiences as resources for social analysis obviously has implications for the social structures of education, journals, institutions, funding agencies. It should be women who reveal what women's experiences are. Therefore women should have an equal say in the design and administration of the institutions where knowledge is produced and distributed. (Harding 1987:11).

3.3. Strategies for implementation of Feminist Research paradigm.

Although, Feminist Research does not have a methodology as such, Jayaratne and Stewart (1991: 101-103) provide the following guidelines for Feminist Research:

- * The selection of a research topic should be determined by its potential help to women's lives.
- * The choice of research methods should be both appropriate for the kind of questions asked and the information needed, whilst it should also permit answers persuasive to a particular audience.
- * Whenever possible research designs should combine quantitative and qualitative methods.
- * When interpreting results, we should ask what different interpretations, always consistent with the findings, might imply for change in women's lives.
- * A research process should include a political analysis.
- * Researchers should actively participate in the dissemination and use of research results.

4. PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH.

4.1 Definition.

Participatory Research has alternatively been defined as a paradigm, an approach, a method, a technique and an activism. For the purposes of this paper Participatory

Research is described as a research paradigm that provides an epistemology as well as concrete guidelines and methods for research. It is believed that Participatory Research has the potential to blend with the feminist paradigm simultaneously providing it with operational guidelines for research.

Participatory Research as a research approach is based on the premise that knowledge is an important basis of power and control (Maguire, 1987: 35) and that knowledge is currently almost exclusively monopolised by a small dominant minority, while the majority of ordinary people are not considered knowledgeable and capable of knowing their own reality. Participatory Research assumes that this minority derives its power from its control over both process and products of knowledge creation and uses that power to maintain a societal status quo. Dominant groups have the power to shape scientific as well as what is considered, "common knowledge".

Hall (quoted in Maguire, 1987: 39) accurately captures the "mission statement" of Participatory Research when he writes:

"Participatory Research proposes returning to ordinary people the power to participate in knowledge creation, the power that results from such participation and the power to utilise knowledge. A deep and abiding belief in people's capacity to grow, change and create underlies this democratisation of research. Participatory Research assumes that returning the power of knowledge production and the use to ordinary and oppressed people will contribute to the creation of a more accurate and critical reflection of social reality, the liberation of human creative potential, and to the mobilisation of human resources to solve social problems."

"Participatory Research does not only aim at interpreting social reality and democratising knowledge production, but at radically changing power relations. Participatory Research can be defined as a three pronged process involving: (i) investigating problems, with the full participation of the oppressed and ordinary people in problem posing and solving, (ii) an educational process for the researcher and the participants who analyze the structural causes of problems through collective discussion and interaction, (iii) a way for researchers and oppressed people to join in solidarity to take collective action, both short and long term for radical social change" (Hall, quoted in Maguire, 1978: 29).

Participatory Research as an approach questions the relationship between the purpose and the consequences of social science, between the researcher and the participants, between the creation of knowledge and the use of that knowledge to transform the social situation, and the notions of objectivity and subjectivity (Ellis, 1983: 7).

Participatory Research should be seen as a tool to facilitate a greater participation of people in their process of change. That change takes place in three forms:

- * A development of critical consciousness of both researcher and participants
- * An improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process

- A transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships

4.2 Steps in the Participatory Research process.

The Participatory Research process is flexible and highly adaptable to its context, however, it typically includes the following sequence.

The Participatory Research process commences with the researcher building up relationships in and identifying the context of the research community/group, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative aspect includes understandings of socio-economic, demographic, geographic and political data (Le Boterf, 1983). Collecting this data helps to place the participant group within a regional and national perspective. The qualitative perspective includes beginning to understand the meaning people give to their experience of that reality and the variety of meanings that exist in that group. (Maguire, 1987). It is important throughout the research process that the research relies on the capacity and legitimacy of local community organisations (Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993) and that the researcher is accountable to the participants.

The second phase involves a collective identification of the problem to be researched. This exercise helps to build group ownership of information and demystifies the research process by involving people in deciding what to investigate, what questions to ask, how to gather information and how to organise and use information (PR Network, 1982:38). Participatory Research requires that the researcher be clear about where she chooses to stand regarding the daily struggle of the oppressed.

In phase three, appropriate tools and techniques to be used to investigate the identified research problem are decided upon jointly. With the use of these researcher and community collectively generate and produce knowledge, analyse and engage in critical reflection so as to understand the meaning of that knowledge in relation to their social reality, and decide on whether and/or how to act on the knowledge to transform their social reality. It is believed that collective analysis of a situation provides richer data than a one person expert opinion. Participatory Research relies on the knowledge and resources existing within the group of participants and tries to work within the framework of meaning of the people rather than the framework of meaning of the researcher.

The phase of data collection and analysis is alternated by educational inputs from the researcher, jointly planned actions and evaluations. Educational components aim at assisting participants in furthering their skills in collecting, analysing and utilising information. It aims to contribute to an increasingly critical understanding of social problems and strengthens belief in their abilities and resources to take action.

The Participatory Research process can be equated to a spiral motion in which phases of data collection, action, education are repeated in a complementary fashion towards a holistic positive change.

4.3 Techniques in Participatory Research.

Both traditional and innovative research methods and techniques are used in Participatory Research. The participants in the research process decide on the

appropriate method and technique for each particular situation at each stage in the process. Methods and techniques ought to be compatible with the local dynamics of the moment and should complement rather than replace indigenous forms of expression and problem solving (Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993).

Commonly used techniques and methods include (PR Network, 1982):

- * Self surveys, in which the participants, with the assistance of the researcher, compile and administer a questionnaire and analyse the data. The task of the researcher is to guide the process and to impart the necessary techniques of questionnaire compilation and data analysis as well as report writing.
- * Public meetings, in which all members of a constituency meet. These meetings serve to inform the whole constituency about the research in process and to obtain or maintain approval and support for the research project. It provides an opportunity for the whole group to contribute to the research design and to encourage people to become more involved in the research through taking part in focus groups, interviews or action programmes.
- * Small group discussions, which are used to identify and analyse problems as well as to plan action and evaluate. The researcher may act as a facilitator.
In working with small groups, the focus group, also called group depth interview, is often used. The focus group consist of a group of interacting individuals having a common interests and seeking information. The term focus implies that the interview is limited to a small number of issues. Focus group interviews generally involves 8 to 12 individuals who discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator who promotes interaction and assures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest. Focus groups are commonly used for the following:
 - * Obtaining general background information about a topic of interest.
 - * Stimulating new ideas and creative concepts.
 - * Diagnosing the potential for problems with a new program.
 - * Learning how people talk about a phenomenon of interest. This in turn may facilitate the design of self surveys and interview schedules.
 - * Interpreting previously obtained quantitative results.

- * Focus groups provide data that allow individuals to respond in their own words using their own categorisation and perceived association. They provide an opportunity to obtain large and rich amounts of data and the participatory researcher can obtain deeper levels of meaning, make important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression and meaning. Focus groups also enable participants to react and build upon each other's responses. (A detailed discussion on the use of focus groups can be found in the publication **Focus groups. Theory and Practice** by Stewart & Shamdasani (1990).
- * Educational camps, which are two (or more) day workshops with common living and eating arrangements away from the home base, which provide opportunities for intense analysis, reflection and learning away from daily pressures at home. Researchers may facilitate or take part as a learner. The camps aim at developing a feeling of solidarity amongst the participants through providing an extended period of joint learning and discussion. They also help to develop in the participants a commitment to involvement and action through an intensive learning experience.
- * Fact finding visits, in which groups interested in solving a problem may visit another area where a similar problem is being dealt with. Common problems and achievements between the two areas are discussed and lessons are learned. The groups can discover what can be achieved and what kind of political, social and economic obstacles need to be faced. Networking can be initiated between the two groups and both groupings can serve as a resource for each other.
- * Popular theatre, songs, dances and puppetry in which participants identify a problem and enact a skit or play on it in the presence of others. The performance is then discussed with the audience. The theatre is called popular because it attempts to involve the whole audience, it is kept rough and simple, and it operates on the principle that everyone can play a role. This technique aims at providing information and stimulates participation, analysis and reaction. As a collective expression and a communal activity it creates an environment for co-operative rather than individual thinking and action.
- * The collective production of audio visual means such as video and drawings, which are used as a form of expression other than words when participants are uncomfortable with words, or when words do not seem to advance the research process. It builds group spirit through shared work and it helps to develop a common understanding of the research

problem through collective planning, discussion and production. The produced audio-visual means can then be used to communicate the research issue to the greater constituency.

5. PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE.

Having identified the main features of the Feminist Research paradigm and those of Participatory Research, let us now consider how compatible they are, how gender-sensitive Participatory Research is. What follows is a feminist critique of Participatory Research.

5.1 Common features.

Looking at the epistemological foundation of both paradigms, similar discourses are apparent.

- * In both paradigms there is a call to return the production and control of knowledge to oppressed groups.
- * The framework of meaning of the participants in research replaces the oppressive framework of meaning of the researcher. Reality becomes a negotiated construct rather than an objective universal set of laws.
- * Research topics in both paradigms aim at conscientising as well as improving living conditions of those involved and changing the balances of forces within society. Research in both paradigms is inextricably linked to liberating action.
- * Both paradigms require a researcher - participants relationship radically different from the traditional scenario where the researcher is an unaccountable, distant, all powerful controlling agent of a process in which people are subjected to research.
- * Both paradigms are flexible and versatile in their choice of methods and techniques. Although qualitative techniques are often favoured over quantitative techniques, they both emphasise the importance of "how" data collection techniques and methods of analysis are used, rather than "what" kind of techniques are used. However Participatory Research, probably as a result of more frequent application, has developed more thoroughly operationalised research techniques and guidelines for the research process than the feminist paradigm. It is those procedures that are simultaneously a potential resource for Feminist Research as well as a threat to the principles of feminism. According to Hall, Gillette and Tandon (1982) Participatory Research, although it seeks to break the positivist monopoly on knowledge creation it is in danger of becoming yet one more

male monopoly in the knowledge industry.

5.2 Feminist critique of Participatory Research.

Despite commonalities in approach between Participatory Research and Feminist Research, several points of critique can be raised regarding Participatory Research. Although most of the points of critique are closely interlinked, they will be discussed under separate headings for purpose of clarity.

The need for a multifaceted analysis of oppression.

Participatory Research claims to focus on oppressed communities. Its analysis of oppression is, however, based on one facet of socio-economic life only, namely class struggle, thereby assuming that classes represent homogenous groups. This analysis essentially ignores gender oppression or any other type of oppression (Maguire, 1987).

The second strand of feminism or radical feminist approach (as discussed above) tends to fall into a similar trap as it tends to analyse oppression as the result of one facet of social life only, namely patriarchy.

If Participatory Research is to be feminist (according to the post modernist approach as discussed above) a more comprehensive and multifaceted socio-economic analysis of oppression is required. It is important to acknowledge that there are multiple layers of oppression and that these are found in the society at large as well as in the oppressed community participating in the research. Power dynamics within oppressed communities need to be analysed in order to obviate gendered power differentials.

Pragmatic approach.

Kassam (1980) in his paper "The issue of methodology in Participatory Research" identified that, although some authors have suggested historical materialism as the appropriate methodology for Participatory Research, it has often been criticised for lacking a true methodology and theoretical framework. Participatory Research embraces a wide range of research practices as well as different versions of political activism. Consequently Participatory Research has been labeled "pragmatic", "ad-hoc" or "eclectic" (Kassam: 1980).

The main contribution of Participatory Research has been problem solving through progressive social action at micro level (community or social group), while it has contributed little to theory formation.

Latapi (1988) explains this lack of theory building as follows: "The process of scientific knowledge requires synthesis, systemisation and accumulation. It is difficult, to say the least, that Participatory Research, carried out by a local group (facilitated by a researcher) on isolated concrete topics may reach the level of integration and synthesis required. In other words, Participatory Research may be suitable for reaching conclusions on local situations, but such conclusions require a further treatment in order to obtain broader validity and to develop into theory."

Feminist research, on the other hand, is underpinned by theoretical frameworks (which may differ according to the strand of feminism) and aims at theory building as well as at social action. In order for Participatory Research and Feminist Research to benefit from each other, it is important that Participatory Research develops a more clearly defined theoretical framework, which can then be evaluated for its suitability within a feminist approach.

Need for a broad social movement.

The "micro-level focus" of Participatory Research has contributed to its failure to build a broad socio-political movement that can make an impact at regional and national levels, which is, after all, a stated aim of Participatory Research. The achievements of Participatory Research are mainly localised and confined to the groups that have been involved in the research process.

Feminism has been more successful in reaching its aim of mobilising women worldwide and of building a broad feminist movement, despite the emergence of different strands and interpretations of the feminist cause.

Participatory Research should reflect on its methodology in order to enhance its capacity to make an impact beyond micro-level, an aim of both Participatory Research and feminism.

Individual versus group: Affective components of the research.

In Participatory Research the relationship between researcher and participant community (or group) is the focus of interaction. The researcher fulfils the task of catalyst and educator in a group process. While the methodology of group discussions, communal analysis and focus groups may provide rich knowledge which cannot be obtained through individualistic research techniques (such as interviews), and while group spirit may be beneficial for solidarity in activism, it does not provide space for the development of intimate, one-to-one relationships between researcher and participant in which individual subjective experiences can be considered and valued.

Participatory Research forces the group to adhere to a common vision and strategy. As Ramphel (1990) puts it "Participatory Research assumes the notion of common purpose and common good. The mere fact that people are thrown together by common calamity into a particular situation is assumed to create a bond that transcends all other considerations of personal interest. This is a romanticising of the notion of 'the people' or the 'community' and can be counter-productive to the process of organising for social change".

Participatory Research does not allow for the complex "multiple position" of individuals (in particular women who may be multiply oppressed through culture, class and gender) in society to be discovered and therefore hampers individual empowerment.

A further implication of the group approach in Participatory Research is the inevitably more superficial personal relationship between researcher and participants. This type of relationship does not allow for emotional intimacy which, feminists believe, could enhance the quality of information as a result of mutual disclosure.

Researcher and research participants.

In Participatory Research the relationship between researcher and participants is of a very specific nature. The research participants belong to the oppressed in terms of class struggle, while the researcher is mostly an educated/trained, middle class professional. This implies that in terms of the main issue of Participatory Research, namely class struggle, researcher and participants are in different camps. Despite the insistence of

the participatory researcher on developing a horizontal relationship with the group, in practice this is difficult to achieve. Suspicion of the researcher is often experienced in the initial stages and even after trust has been established, the professional researcher maintains a directive role that cannot be denied. The researcher has an overall understanding of the research process, he or she is more familiar with abstract thinking and is expected to assist the group and to provide the necessary tools. All this supports the existence of a certain superiority and entails the risk of paternalism and dependency (Latapi, 1988).

This type of relationship between researcher and participants is not conducive to the emergence of different perspectives of the research issue. The knowledge obtained from a Participatory Research process therefore, has the tendency to be stereotypical since it is the result of analyses based on the same type of research-research participant relationship.

The research question.

In Participatory Research the research question is identified by the community and relates predominantly to material living conditions. It is the task of the participatory researcher to translate this question into a socio-economic issue that relates to power dynamics in society. The type of research questions open to the participatory researcher are therefore limited to more practical issues and exclude a range of research issues that oppressed communities fail to or ignore to raise.

Feminist research covers a much broader range of potential research questions and researcher as well as research participants identify research topics. In order for Feminist research to adopt a Participatory Research approach it would need to adapt its methodology to enable the inclusion of a range of research questions beyond those related to "bread and butter" issues.

The research process.

Participatory Research has developed fairly well structured guidelines for its research process, starting with a communal identification of a research problem through to action and reflection. Feminist research, which is still in the process of developing a methodology can benefit from such guidelines in its research practice, however it should be aware of its limitations. The Participatory Research process can be criticised for employing androcentric practices, such as relying on indigenous concepts and local structures.

Indigenous concepts.

Participatory Research aims to be culturally sensitive and to rely on indigenous concepts and strategies. Acknowledged "public" culture however, is mainly man-made and controlled by men, and in most cultures women are oppressed. Their knowledge is considered less relevant to public community affairs. Therefore women and men differ in their concern about patterns and mechanisms of injustices. Men will not choose to research their own culturally accepted structures of oppression of women. It is important for Feminist Participatory Research to ensure that topics of research are identified by women and aim at improving the life of women.

Legitimacy of local organisations.

In its practical execution, Participatory Research, relies on the legitimacy of community organisations to access communities. Typically, research processes are

jointly planned by researcher and community leaders. These democratically elected leaders are predominantly male. Men usually have more time on hand to attend meetings and are culturally assigned to the more publicly visible tasks in the community. This has serious implications for the access of women not only for decision making about the research problem, but also about the methodology, control over the process and the benefits of the research. This practice is particularly insidious and disempowering for women since they are co-opted in a process controlled by men. Their forced participation makes separate mobilisation difficult.

Considering the engrained sexism of most cultures and societies, it is believed that Feminist Participatory Research needs to be conducted by a women researcher, in order for women's needs, experiences and frameworks of meaning to be acknowledged and understood. For similar reasons Participatory Research has been most successful in projects conducted by women researchers with women only groups (Carasco, 1983; Ellis, 1983; Maguire, 1987).

6. CONCLUSION.

Both the Feminist and Participatory Research radically rejected the mainstream scientific research paradigm. At a theoretical epistemological level both alternative paradigms promote similar principles. However, operationalised, the methodology and procedures of Participatory Research are open to feminist critique. If these can be identified and rectified we believe that Participatory Research can contribute to an effective methodology for Feminist Research.

REFERENCES.

Acker, J et al (1991) Objectivity and truth: Problems in doing Feminist Research, in Fonow, M M & Cook, J A (eds) **Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Burman, E (in press) Feminist research, in Banister, P, Burman, E, Parker, I, Taylor, M & Tindall, C **Qualitative methods in psychology**. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Burman, E (ed) (1990) **Feminists and psychological practice**. London: Sage Publications.

Carasco, B (1983) **Participatory research: A means towards collective community action**. The Hague: Research methodology workshop report, 4-6 July.

Ellis, P (1983) **Participatory research: An integral part of the development process**. Bahamas: Adult education association seminar report, 25 April-3 May.

Freire, P (1970) **The pedagogy of the oppressed**. New York: Herder and Herder.

Fonow, M M & Cook, J A (1991) Back to the future: A look at the second wave of feminist epistemology and methodology, in Fonow, M M & Cook, J A (eds) **Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Gergen, K (1988) *Feminist critique of science and the challenge of social epistemology*, in Gergen, M M (ed) **Feminist thought and the structure of knowledge**. New York: University Press.
- Hall, B, Gillette, A & Tandon, R (eds) (1982) **Creating knowledge: A monopoly?: Participatory Research in development**. Toronto: Participatory Research Network Publication.
- Harding, S (1986) **The science question in feminism**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Harding, S (1987) **Feminism and methodology**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Henriques, J, Hollway, W, Urwin, C, Venn, C & Walkerdine, V (1984) **Changing the subject: Psychology, and social regulation and subjectivity**. London: Methuen.
- Hill-Collins, P (1991) **Black feminist thought - knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment: Perspectives on gender**. Vol II. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.
- Jayarathne, T E & Stewart A J (1991) Quantitative and qualitative methods in the social sciences, in Fonow, M M & Cook, J A (eds) **Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kassam, Y (1980) The issue of methodology in participatory research, in Dubell, F, Erasmie, T & De Vries, J (eds) **Research for the people - research by the people**. Linköping University: Department of Education.
- Latapi, P (1988) Participatory research: A new paradigm? **Alberta Journal of Educational Research**, 34(3), 310-319.
- Le Boterf, G (1983) Reformulating participatory research. **Assignment Children**, 63/63, 167-192.
- Maguire, P (1987) **Doing participatory research: A feminist approach**. Massachusetts: Centre for International Education.
- Meyer, J (1988) Feminist thought and social psychology, in Gergen, M M (ed) **Feminist thought and the structure of knowledge**. New York: University Press.
- Millet, K (1977) **Sexual politics**. London: Virago.
- PR Network (1982) **An introduction to Participatory Research**. New Delhi: International Council for Adult Education.
- Ramphela, M (1990) Participatory research: Myths and realities. **Social Dynamics**, 16(2), 1-15.
- Stanley, L (ed) (1990) **Feminist praxis: Research, theory and epistemology in feminist sociology**. London: Routledge.

Stewart, D W & Shamdasani, P N (1990) **Focus groups: Theory and Practice**. London: Sage Publications.

Tong, R (1989) **Feminist thought: A comprehensive introduction**. London: Unwin Hyman.

Unger, R K (1988) Psychological, feminist and personal epistemology: Transcending contradiction, in Gergen, M M (ed) **Feminist thought and the structure of knowledge**. New York: University Press.

Van Vlaenderen, H & Nkwinti, G (1993) Participatory research as a tool for community development. **Development Southern Africa**, 10(2), 211-228.

Weed, E (1989) **Coming to terms: Feminism, theory, politics**. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.