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Abstract

The origins and chronology of linking research and action are complex and cannot be attributed to any single discipline or any part of the world. People within and outside academe have linked research and action. In this introductory article, we begin by briefly tracing the methodological background to linking research and action, focusing particularly on action research, participatory research, and feminist research in order to situate the research presented in this monograph issue of *Current Sociology*. We then provide an outline of the articles that showcase through specific case studies *how* sociologists link research and practice in diverse contexts including health, culture, education, labor, migration, violence against women, and polling. We end by commenting that linking research and action has important implications for knowledge creation, distribution, shifting power relations for achieving social change, and, ultimately, challenging social structures for social justice.

Keywords

Action research, knowledge hierarchy, pedagogy, policy, practice, social justice

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Sociologists have been interested in generating research that affects social transformation for over a century. Even when the disciplinary boundaries had not been clearly etched, and the roles of researchers and thinkers not delineated in the ways we understand them today, intellectuals and activists have challenged class formation, racism, gendering, and colonization, and attempted to link their conceptualization to practice (for writers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries see, among others, the writings and practices of Jane Addams, 1896; WEB Du Bois, 1903; Rabindranath Tagore, 1921). Social movements in different parts of the world have also challenged a variety of discriminations. Such movements not only raised consciousness about marginalization and, on occasion, successfully changed policies; they also created and enhanced the space for scholarship by and about the hitherto marginalized. Not surprisingly, a range of concepts and methodologies have emerged and re-emerged at different points in time, commanding our energies and passions, as sociologists have focused on 'new' social issues in their quest to build a more just world. Thus, especially over the last few decades, we have become familiar with templates for linking research more directly to practice such as action research, participatory research, and feminist research. We have also witnessed the power of theoretical frameworks and perspectives, such as intersectionality and public sociology that extend the foci and reach of sociology beyond academia (Burawoy, 2005; Collins, 1990; Patel, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 1999).

This special issue of *Current Sociology* is situated in the larger body of research that seeks to inform practice, policy, and pedagogy, and build collaborations with the objective of promoting social justice. We showcase *how* sociologists link research to practice within social contexts where the local, national, and global intersect. The authors focus on locales such as Australia, Ghana, Iran, India, and the US. They write about diverse sites: of neighborhoods in cities, state government agencies, educational institutions, national societies, and the United Nations. The methods they use draw upon a variety of action-oriented research methodologies. Their substantive themes include culture, education, health, labor, migration, and violence against women. The authors seek not only to *develop knowledge* that is more directly useful to the communities of people they seek to address, but they show how to *link existing knowledge to practice*. Collectively, they provide insights on the connection between theory and practice; the nature of participation and collaboration; and the ways to challenge unequal power relationships.

These articles are written against a backdrop of contemporary forces of globalization which continue to reshape issues around migration, violence, labor, health, and education at the local, national, and global levels. Such transformation necessitates our rethinking and reframing of concepts such as 'local contexts,' communities, national societies, and other units, that we earlier assumed were geographically contained. The contemporary phase of globalization – with its array of fast and effective means of long distance travel and communication, multiple types of media (including web-based media), rapid circulation of images and discourses especially in English, and the creation of global financial and security regimes and markets – has introduced new structures of intersecting 'local' and 'global' – i.e. glocal – dynamics. For instance, governments *and* non-governmental organizations that draw upon knowledge structures and discourses that can be diametrically opposed depending on their glocal lineage and networks, jointly shape critical institutions such as the United Nations. Within nation-states, activist *and*

scholarly groups often draw upon their local transnational networks and discourses to shape policy and practice. The present articles reflect the authors' acute awareness of these intersections of global–national–local levels, especially the intersecting power hierarchies that shape the specific social issues they describe in this volume.

The origins and chronology of linking research and action are complex and cannot be attributed to any single discipline or any one part of the world. Linking research and action has been used both within and outside of academe. However, in this introduction we begin by briefly tracing the methodological background to the research described here, focusing particularly on action research, participatory research and feminist research in order to situate the research presented in this special issue. Following this, we provide an outline of the articles. We end by commenting on the significance of linking research to action across arenas. We show that linking research and action has important implications for knowledge creation, distribution, shifting power relations for achieving social change, and, ultimately, challenging existing social structures to attain social justice.

Linking research to action

Over the last few decades, there has been an increasing awareness of and growing commitment to research that can challenge traditional restrictions on knowledge construction, and bridge research and activism. Consequently, this has brought about a similar awareness of and commitment to the need for engaging in collaborative community building for meaningful pedagogy, policy, and practice toward social transformation. There are various labels applied to such participatory and action-oriented research (Acker et al., 1991; Argyris, 1996; Barber, 2006; Bargal, 2006, 2008; Blumer et al., 2007; Byrne-Jimenez and Orr, 2007; Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2006; Cutler and Hayward, 2007; Dick, 2004; Fawcett et al., 1995; Gatenby and Humphries, 2000; Hatch et al., 1993; Katsui and Koistinen, 2008; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Pinto et al., 2007; Rahman, 1991; Small and Uttal, 2005; Stoecker, 2009). These include action research, action-oriented research, community-based participatory research, collaborative action research, feminist participatory research, feminist action research, and some forms of public sociology. There is also considerable variation on what constitutes knowledge production, action, levels of participation, types of collaboration, and effective practice. Overall, these diverse research practices have produced sociologies that, as Clawson et al. have described, 'engage with diverse publics, reaching beyond the university, to enter into dialogs with these publics. . . . The project of this sociology – played out in engagement with the labor movement, neighborhood associations, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups, and much else – is to make visible the invisible, to make the private public' (Clawson et al., 2007: 5).

While there is no definitive history to the origins of 'action research,' many writers do trace this to Kurt Lewin, who coined the term and first elaborated on the model of action research in his article on 'action research and minority problems' to address intergroup relations in some American communities. With its emphasis on combining theory and practice, his work has influenced the fields of action research and community-based research. Since Lewin's (1946/1948, 1947) early writings on the subject, numerous

articles have been published that discuss action research, some including case studies (Alvarez, 1998; Atweh et al., 1998; Bach and Weinzimmer, 2011; Bargal et al., 1992; Berg and Eikeland, 2008; Cassell and Johnson, 2006; Coghlan and Shani, 2005; Dickens and Watkins, 1999; Dimitriadis and Weis, 2001; Edelson and Bible, 1999; Eden and Huxhum, 1996; Elden and Chrisholm, 1993; Fine et al., 2000; Gaventa, 1993; Giachello et al., 2003; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Hattam et al., 2009; Peters and Robinson, 1984; Sussman and Evered, 1978). Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury's *Handbook of Action Research* (2001) provides an excellent framework on some of the various practices of action research. In their introduction, they provide a working definition of action research as 'a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.' Historically there has been some division between participatory research and action research. While the former placed greater emphasis on the importance of grassroots participation and critical analysis, the latter paid more attention to action outcomes and relatively less to participatory processes (Brown and Tandon, 1983; Stoecker, 2009). Community-based research (CBR) has also been influenced by the work of Kurt Lewin. However CBR was also greatly influenced by the third world development movement of the 1960s. Stoecker notes that the practice of participatory research from India, Africa, and South America and the work of popular education practitioners such as Paulo Freire and Rajesh Tandon had considerable influence on community-based research across the world (Brown and Tandon 1983; Freire, 1970; Stoecker, 2002, 2009).

Action-oriented research usually depends on interpretive rather than positivist epistemological roots (e.g. Small and Uttal, 2005). The information gathered is not assumed to be independent of the time, place, and people in that site; the objective is to address specific situations instead of generalizing across cases and contexts. Reflexivity and flexible research designs are considered to be de rigueur for improving the validity and credibility of the research. Thus, methodologically, such studies require flexible research designs and reflexivity on the part of the researcher to tap into the diverse font of knowledge of researchers and their community partners. The sheer volume of books, journals articles, and conferences devoted to participatory and action-oriented research is indicative of its importance and likely to be used in more flexible ways and for many more purposes in the future (Arieli et al., 2009; Byrdon-Miller et al., 2003; Dick, 2004, 2006, 2009; Frisby et al., 2009; Greenwood and Levin, 2000, 2007; Israel et al., 1998; McTaggart, 1997; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2003; Miskovic and Hoop, 2006; Reason and Bradbury, 2001, 2008; Stoecker, 2009; Stringer, 2007).

The global rise of feminist movements and a voluminous body of literature by scholars around the world, especially over the last four decades (see Bose and Kim, 2009 for a recent summary of scholarship from different regions of the world), have promoted another significant stream of research, including feminist action-oriented research. While there is broad agreement that the experiences of the marginalized need to be brought to the center of research, so that the meanings and research categories are not simply a

reflection of those in power, *feminist* action shows particular emphases based on its grounding in feminism. Feminist scholars have challenged the theories and methods developed on the basis of men's lives and social lives in public spheres, and they have shown that focusing on communities in gender-neutral ways makes women and their experiences invisible or secondary to that of men. Feminist research has challenged basic conceptualizations such as the separation of the spheres of public and private, the nature of the individual, objective research, definitions of women and men, work and family, violence, sexuality, gender, bodies, states, and developed powerful theories of power, privilege, and marginalization that show the intersections of gender with other structures of oppression (e.g. Abraham, 1995; Abraham et al., 2010; Abraham T, 2002; Agarwal, 1985; Awekotuku, 1991; Blay, 1985; Boserup, 1970; Bulbeck, 1998; Chakravarti, 1994; Collins, 1990; Connell, 1995; Ferree, 1990; Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1993; Imam et al., 1997; Kannabiran et al., 2010; Mohanty, 1988, 2004; Ong, 1996; Oyewumi, 1997; Purkayastha, 2010; Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky, 2006; Yu-Ning, 1992; Yuval-Davis, 2006).¹

Both feminist methodologies and action-oriented research have challenged positivistic epistemologies which hold that the way we conduct research and produce knowledge must be objective and value free to be credible. In addition, feminist methodologies have revealed the gendered epistemological roots of knowledge production. Standpoint epistemology, for instance, insists that all knowledge is constructed in specific locales by people – women and men – who are socially located differently within intersecting axes of domination (e.g. Bulbeck, 1998; Collins, 2000; DeVault, 1999; Harding, 1991; Oyewumi, 1997; Smith, 1987). The researcher and the researched are not easily separable; indeed feminist researchers have insisted on researchers revealing the relationship between the knower, the known, and the relationship between them. Feminist researchers use a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, but the objectives of such research is to reveal embedded power, the ways in which the intersections of gender/race/caste/class/ethnicity/sexuality/nation/citizenships/ability/age produce and sustain inequalities, including inequalities among women (e.g. Abraham, 1998, 2000, 2005; Abraham et al., 2010; Alexander and Mohanty, 1997; Bulbeck, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991; Datar, 1993; Gluck and Patai, 1991; Imam et al., 1997; Mohanty, 1988; Narayan and Purkayastha, 2009; Purkayastha, 2005; Sangari and Vaid, 1989) and use this knowledge to promote the economic, social, and political statuses of women.

Within the broader stream of feminist research, feminist action-oriented research, with its strong participatory component and transformative intentions, has made significant contributions to challenging patriarchy and intersecting systems of oppression to change power structures and relations as well as empower individuals and communities seeking social justice and social change in a variety of arenas such as violence against women, development projects, labor rights, and property rights (e.g. Abraham, 2000; Ampofo et al., 2004; Brydon-Miller et al., 2004; Guijt and Shah, 1998; Hemment, 2004; Lykes and Coquillon, 2006; Maguire, 1987; Maguire and Berge, 2009; Maney and Abraham, 2008/2009; Mies, 1991; Ng et al., 1995; Purkayastha et al., 2003; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Reid, 2004; Reid et al., 2006; Rezai-Rashti, 1995; Sarmiento, 2003; Sullivan et al., 2005; Wang et al., 1996; Weiner, 2004; Williams and Lykes, 2003).

The authors in this collection have drawn upon feminist research – along with racism theories (e.g. Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, 2008), post-colonial theories (e.g. Nandy, 1994; Patel, 2006), queer theories (e.g. Sedgwick, 1990), Marxist theories (e.g. Prashad, 2007) – to discuss ways of linking research with practice. For instance, feminist scholars questioning the public–private divide had shaped how violence against women is understood as an outcome – not simply of deviant individuals – but of intersecting ideologies, interactions, and institutional arrangements (e.g. Abraham, 2000; Ferree, 1990). Similarly, feminist understandings of women’s empowerment now encompass a range of indicators that go well beyond foci on individuals to measure resources as part of the preconditions of empowerment; agency as an aspect of process; and achievements as a measure of outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). Feminist research challenges ‘the naturalness of existing inequalities and the inevitability of social problems’ (Sprague, 2005). They have provided conceptual tools and tools of action for examining the social injustices, tools to frame arguments to support demands for transformative change and help to develop strategies that can be drawn to address diverse competing experiences, unequal power, and privileges (Bunch, 1987; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984; Mies, 1979; Mohanty, 2004). Feminist theories provide frameworks to draw upon to examine some of the sources and consequences of gender inequalities, that otherwise can be overlooked at the local, national, or global levels (Frisby et al., 2009). Feminist conceptualization and methodologies are then translated by researchers to the specific arenas in which they seek to affect change, including, but not limited to the contexts of families, work and the economy, health, education, migration, violence, law, and government policies.

This collection, which emphasizes the *how* of linking research to action, is based on these multi-stranded action-oriented approaches. We, the editors of this special issue, envision a sociology that is pertinent to the social groups that we work with and we hope that such research will lead to social action. As sociologists engaged in action-oriented research, the authors in this collection advocate for sociological research that is not top-driven but is more grassroots, inclusive, and participatory. We emphasize that knowledge is not just for the sake of knowledge of ‘objective facts’ from which we are ‘detached observers,’ but this knowledge is for social justice and social change. While drawing upon case studies, the authors in this volume go beyond communities as their foci of practice, and extend to organizational sites such as universities, state agencies, disciplines, and international policy-making bodies. The authors use existing research *and* extend the conceptual boundaries to address the challenges they face. Thus this collection also reveals how these sociologists have addressed hierarchical knowledge structures as they have linked research to practice.

Linking research to action and questions of knowledge hierarchies

Even though the purpose of action-oriented research is to break down the hierarchies between the knowledge and practices of researchers as experts and their partners in research, this endeavor is replete with challenges. Action-oriented research and feminist research has long indicated the contradictions faced in the production, construction, and

use of knowledge (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997; Ong, 1996; Oyewumi, 1997). Whose knowledge counts? How are different types of knowledge represented? Whose knowledge is institutionalized in ways that lead to the present inequalities? Is the language of research adequate for reflecting the nature of social realities? Abu-Lughod (2000), Ampofo et al. (2004), Blay (1985), Patel (2009) and Purkayastha and Subramaniam (2004), among others, have also pointed out that knowledge hierarchies are a key contributor to the social hierarchies between the global North and South. A division exists between knowledge in English (which is repeatedly read and cited so that social realities come to be defined in terms of this language's imaginations) and other languages. For instance, scholarship highlighting women's experiences from Africa, East and South Asia, and Latin America has been a major endeavor. Yet, such non-English scholarship *of the South* rarely appears to contribute to theories developed in the North. Most often, concepts developed in Southern contexts – and published in English – are not used to expand the boundaries of 'universal' theories developed with reference to social conditions typical in Northern countries. Such knowledge hierarchies are not addressed by asking scholars to write about the marginalized groups of their countries; the experiences of the marginalized could continue to remain invisible. Significant differences within groups further complicate questions of marginalized voices and privileged voices at different analytical levels of research as well as practice (Merry, 2006; Patel, 2009; Purkayastha et al., 2003).

The articles in this special issue describe a variety of existing conceptual knowledge hierarchies. The authors describe the power of the existing formulations, and the process through which they attempted to bring other epistemological formulations and methods to address policy and practices such as violence against women or caste-based sexual division of labor. They describe the challenges of destabilizing current knowledge structures and the (often incomplete) process of social transformation. Overall, the articles provide insights on the connection between theory and practice; the nature of participation and collaboration; and of the ways to challenge unequal power relationships. While the articles share commonalities in addressing practice, their foci differ. The first two articles focus specifically on linking research to policies. The next three articles focus on practice but have implications for both policy and practice. The first of these three also shows the importance of developing conceptual frameworks for practice. The last two articles address the linkages between pedagogies and practices.

Yakin Ertürk and Bandana Purkayastha discuss how paradigm, praxis, and policy are interlinked in the conceptualization and implementation of procedures in the international agenda on addressing violence against women. The authors argue that despite decades of feminist research on violence against women, such research does not always shape policies on mitigating such violence. They focus on the work of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (SRVAW) and discuss the substantive challenges in linking feminist understandings of violence to the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. They show that even as feminist research developed sophisticated explanations of violence, and the demands to recognize such violence as a violation of women's human rights, the organizational separation of the office of SRVAW from the Human Rights offices, and, more importantly, the methods – indicators – and measures used to collect data on violence acted as

impediments to linking best research to policy and practice. Using the research that has shown violence against women exists as a continuum, traversing private and public arenas of social life, they discuss the role of states, international agencies, and due diligence standards needed to truly address effective policies and practices in ending violence against women. The experiences and insights that the authors of this article bring through their examination of the role of the SRVAW show how sociologists can help reframe the conceptualization of violence against women as a human rights issue, help develop more effective ways to measure violence against women, and contribute to developing policies and practices to end all forms of violence against women.

Margaret Hynes, a sociologist in public health, uses her experience in one state government agency to illustrate the ways that sociologists in non-academic settings, contribute in meaningful ways to social change. The subject of her discussion is the embedded conceptualizations of seemingly neutral data collection categories such as gender and race. Since the classification of people into these categories results in the development of databases that track health disparities, inform policy to address such disparities, and affect health outcomes, Hynes shows it is critically important to examine and improve the ways in which information about people get classified under these categories. Like Ertürk and Purkayastha, Hynes shows that even though there are more refined conceptualizations to measure gender and race, this knowledge does not always inform the indicators used in practice. Hynes's account shows how sociologists working in government can by themselves, and in collaboration with various partners, enhance data collection and reporting techniques that lead to policies that lead to better health and greater social equity. While her article focuses on a case in the US, Hynes's analysis offers ideas about processes that can be used in other sites. Even though the focus is on a local site, her conceptualizations of gender and race are drawn from an international body of literature on these subjects, linking local and global through a process of knowledge construction. Equally importantly, her article draws our attention to the issue of health disparities at the global level and the potential problems and prospects of linking research to practices that seek to alleviate health disparities locally, nationally, and globally.

Margaret Abraham and Gregory Maney move to a different site of sociological practice, that of organizations (NGOs) striving to develop ways – through community-based participatory action research – and examine the effects of globalization on local communities. They focus on the responses of locally powerful groups as the established power regimes are disrupted through globalization. One of the crucial effects of corporate globalization has been to stimulate newer levels of migration. Abraham and Maney discuss the gendered/racialized responses to the arrival of immigrant groups in specific communities in the US in the form of local contention called Not in My Backyard or NIMBY. They focus on two cases of NIMBYism where community organizations sought to create spaces and services for immigrants. Drawing upon the organized opposition to two groups – immigrant victims of violence who move to a newly established shelter and immigrant day laborers who come to an official hiring site – the article traces the ways in which community-based participatory action research can be used to develop ways to mitigate opposition to immigrant groups. This article offers a multidimensional analytical framework centered on the concept of boundary contention, and documents the

lessons learned from the encounters with organized oppositions. The authors point to the need for developing strategic practices that can assist organizations to begin to reverse the disempowering dynamics of symbolic, relational, and physical boundaries in glocal contexts.

Nazanin Shahrokni focuses on the ways in which opinion polls in Iran were conducted during 'Reform' in Iran (1997–2005) and shows how the specific modes of interpretation of polls enable the formation and sustenance of different kinds of publics. Drawing on the case of the Ayandeh Polling Institute (API), Shahrokni traces the history of this institute against the monumental political changes in Iran. Thus research and scientific methods are set within the macro-historical processes within which the practice of polling is embedded; but the case reveals how the micro-level interactions impact the people whose opinions are gauged. She shows how opinion polling was utilized as a resistance strategy that contributed to the formation of a counter-public, which, in turn, served as the backbone of the reform movement. This article reveals significant contestation of research outcomes by states. The state situated API's polling within a global-level conflict between 'the West' and 'Iran' in challenging the local initiative to use the polls as a dynamic process to create informed opinions. Shahrokni argues that the meanings 'attached to polling practices vary across time and space and these different meanings create different dynamics between the pollsters and the publics.' Ultimately the methods can lead to the formation of 'different publics.' She emphasizes that it is important to pay attention to the micro-interactional processes if we are to truly understand and analyze the dynamics of public opinion polls.

Meena Gopal uses the ban, in 2005, on women dancing in the dance bars, in the state of Maharashtra, India, to explore the troubled links between caste, sexuality, and labor. Gopal critiques the 'challenges and prospects of linking research with practice' from a feminist perspective. Gopal's contention is that the process of inclusion of marginalized standpoints is contentious, and often fragmented and incomplete. While feminists have started to incorporate the voices of Dalits (low caste people) in their research, their research and practices have not fully engaged in a substantive dialog on the sexual labor of lower caste women. This is partly because feminists have understood sexual labor largely as sexual exploitation of women. Over the years this conceptualization has created divides among and between feminists and sex workers. Gopal, a member of the Forum Against Oppression of Women in Mumbai, draws upon historical sources – the biographical accounts of the laboring castes of the *Lavani* performers, the *Devadasi* women, and the women of the *Bedia* community – and contemporary conflicts to show the problems associated with concepts and classifications such as 'sex labor.' Through her study she underscores the changing sexuality of women, and of multiple understandings of sex labor in relation to historical developments. Many women dancers in the dance bars are like migrant workers who are forced into these working conditions due to economic reasons and Gopal shows how they negotiate their reinvented identities within the nexus of the family and society. She emphasizes the need to engage in a meaningful dialogue with these various groups of women across caste and class keeping in mind their multiple histories and diversities in order to create more inclusive, meaningful scholarship.

Cynthia Joseph focuses on academia to discuss the ways in which research on pedagogy is linked to practice. She identifies a trend that has resulted from rapid

globalization: a push to ‘internationalize’ college curricula. Using the case of Australia, Joseph discusses how this movement has been partly fostered by at least two major trends. First, in many countries there is a rapid shift from thinking of education as a public good – i.e. an enterprise that is important to the society and requires provisioning by governments – to thinking about education as a profitable field where consumer-students pay to generate profit for the educational institution. For profit educational corporations and not-for-profit educational institutions are both developing ways to transform education in ways that fit their purview. Second, internationalizing the curriculum also serves as a way to create a globally knowledgeable workforce. While Joseph focuses on Australia, her article is relevant for all countries that are undergoing such transformation. Joseph reflects on issues of knowledge and power in linking research to education practice. Whose knowledge is likely to count? Whose framework shapes the trend of internationalization? This focus on a ‘local’ institution serves as a way for understanding the influence of global – in this case neoliberal – trends on pedagogy.

Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Awo Mana Asiedu focus on popular music to show how research can be used to challenge misogynist lyrics and act as an impetus for change. Ampofo and Asiedu emphasize the critical role universities can play in the conscious production of knowledge that leads to social justice. In discussing their collaborative project, they demonstrate how feminist scholarship has the potential for transformation. They draw our attention to the interstitial areas where ideas about empowered women are still missing, even though scholars have researched and advocated for women for several decades. Using the example of their project, they advocate the crucial need to create similar projects to challenge and transform popular culture. Equally important, the authors reflect that while women-in-development literature and projects focus on economic and political empowerment, it is crucial to think of diverse pathways to empowerment, including addressing popular culture. Thus, the lessons from this project not only target popular cultural transformation; they act as advocacy for research foci as well.

What have we learned from these articles?

Theory through practice

The collection of articles presented in this volume speak to different issues as they offer suggestions for improving conceptualizations, pedagogy, and practice that transcend the specificities of their foci. We focus on three critical issues to summarize their significance, though the articles raise many other issues that are germane to understanding the ways sociologists link research to practice around the world.

First, the articles collectively address notions of communities and publics for whom they link research and practice. Since much of the action research has focused on partners and collaborators, and on specific communities, even when these are national communities, there is an – albeit unintended – impression about the link of action research to communities that are already identifiable. We do not argue against this idea. Indeed, all the authors show why community-, institution-, and public-focused work is important. However, the authors collectively also raise the question about the ways in which the research process creates community. It generates new configurations of

networks and structures which act as reflexive conduits for what is to be known, for whom, and how one should translate knowledge to practice. Altering what is to be known, and how one should alter practices based on this knowledge – especially the new indicators, or practices of data gathering and dissemination – brings less visible groups and their knowledge ‘to the table,’ in new configurations, to alter, in turn, power imbalances, and work toward achieving social justice and social change. For instance, if communities were earlier identified on the basis of gender binaries – i.e. as women’s worlds or men’s worlds – newer configurations can create communities based on a gender continuum, with men and women at two ends *and* all those who are in-between. If the understanding of ‘international’ was earlier based on the idea of separable countries, currently efforts to internationalize curricula through movements of people and knowledge, emphasize interconnected, *international*, geopolitical formulations, so that the idea of ‘local’ has to be understood as global–local or glocal.

Second, these articles are about marginalized groups. Since the conceptual framework of action-oriented research focuses on social justice, it is not surprising that the focus here is on the lives of women, racial, caste, and sexual minorities, immigrants, and people living in authoritarian regimes. The articles reveal that conceptually groups such as ‘women’ that appear to be homogeneous as foci of practice, are simultaneously diverse since they reflect the gender/race/caste/nation/sexuality power structures in which they are embedded at multiple levels. Thus the research and practice have to constantly situate the marginalized and speak to specific practices that address diversities. For instance, even as authors talk about human rights or cultural empowerment of women, they attempt to reflect the diversities documented through earlier research. They discuss the *new paths* they chart in linking research to practice *in their specific site*. The overarching message here is about sharing these insights across sites. A collective message of these articles, then, is that some of the research has to be linked to practice over and over again – in new configurations – and in different sites around the world for the purpose of social transformation and justice.

Third, the articles collectively reveal that a key part of linking research to practice is to address the existing hierarchies of knowledge. Whether it is to refine and redefine the due diligence measures for tracking violence against women internationally, advocating for the rights of day laborers or victims of violence, collecting opinion poll data, changing the boundaries of race and gender in health care data forms, bringing caste to the matrix of intersectionality, addressing misogynist lyrics, or challenging the different international curricula hierarchies, social justice oriented practice involves changing the existing knowledge structures. The hierarchy of knowledge structures continues to favor those expressed in English, published – and cited repeatedly – in the West, and inevitably this sets the stage for whose knowledge and lives count, whose experiences remain unexamined, who is the subject or producer of knowledge and on whose terms. Along with the global hierarchies a range of nationally and locally specific hierarchies coexist and intersect. So the process of questioning conceptualizations and measures is a process of questioning existing knowledge hierarchies in those sites. The process of disseminating certain kinds of knowledge – for instance raising consciousness about representations of women – is also part of this process of challenging taken-for-granted knowledge structures. These articles reveal the people – the administrators, the

academics, the government officials – who are actually doing the work of linking. Without sociologists at these diverse tables, these particular forms of knowledge would not be informing practice, or even fostering the development of new knowledge and strategies of practice.

Relatedly, the diverse styles and structures of articles in this special issue are intended to address the (often unintended) hierarchy of the styles of recording research. As editors we made a deliberate decision to feature the different ways in which people write about linking research to practice. The understandings of research – where it is conducted, by whom, and how it is disseminated and articulated – are embedded in very diverse socioeconomic-political-social contexts. It was therefore important for authors to write-their-style. The diversities of articulations are an important part of understanding the link between research and – our own – practice. At the same time, we remain acutely aware that writing in English has channeled us toward citing some authors and not others. Nonetheless, we hope, the articles provide blueprints and knowledge for practice that will continue to feature knowledge generated in other languages, and act as the bases of collaborations, across differences.

We hope the processes and analytical reflections presented here will enable shifts in knowledge production and dissemination so that the voices of those who are excluded can be included to improve the salience of sociological research locally and globally.

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Note

1. This is an incomplete list of significant scholars and scholarship at best, and is intended to simply provide a starting point for understanding the geographic and conceptual range of this scholarship.

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Résumé

Les origines et l'histoire du lien entre recherche et action sont complexes et ne sauraient relever d'une seule discipline ni région du globe. Universitaires et autres oeuvrent depuis longtemps à opérer le lien entre recherche et action. Cette introduction commence par retracer brièvement le contexte méthodologique du lien entre recherche et action, mettant l'accent sur la recherche action, la recherche action participative et la recherche féministe afin de mieux cadrer la recherche présentée dans ce volume. Nous donnons ensuite un aperçu du contenu des communications visant à montrer, à travers des

études de cas spécifiques, *comment* les sociologues relient recherche et pratique dans divers contextes tels que la santé, la culture, l'éducation, le travail, les migrations, la violence contre les femmes et les sondages. Nous concluons que le lien entre recherche et action a d'importantes répercussions sur la création et la dissémination du savoir, le déplacement des rapports de force au service d'un changement de société et, à terme, la remise en question des structures sociales dans un but de justice sociale.

Mots-clés

Hierarchie des savoirs, justice sociale, pédagogie, politique, pratique, recherche action

Resumen

Los orígenes y la cronología de la integración de la investigación con la acción son complejos y no se pueden atribuir ni a una única disciplina ni a una parte del mundo. Personas dentro y fuera del mundo académico han integrado la investigación con la acción. En este artículo de introducción, comenzamos trazando el trasfondo metodológico de esta integración de la investigación con la acción, centrándonos en concreto en la investigación aplicada, la investigación participativa y la investigación feminista con el fin de situar la investigación que se presenta en este volumen. Ofrecemos, asimismo, un resumen de los artículos que exponen a través de casos prácticos específicos, *cómo* los sociólogos integran la investigación con la práctica en diversos contextos entre los que se incluyen salud, cultura, educación, trabajo, migración, violencia contra las mujeres y encuestas. Finalizamos comentando que la integración entre la investigación y la acción conlleva importantes implicaciones para la creación del conocimiento, la distribución y la transformación de las relaciones de poder con el fin de lograr un cambio social y, en última instancia, desafiar las estructuras sociales para conseguir la justicia social.

Palabras clave

Investigación aplicada, jerarquía del conocimiento, justicia social, pedagogía, políticas, práctica