Epilogue:
Claiming a Critical Public Social Science—
Reconceptualizing and Redeploying Research

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Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2001) began *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* with the following statement:

> The word itself, "research", is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. (p. 1)

Many of us who have engaged in qualitative[1] and other diverse forms of research have also demonstrated some awareness that although we support research in multiple different forms, we also realize that research as a construct is a power-oriented, Western cultural practice. Using quantitative and qualitative, experimental and ethnographic methodologies (just to name a few), scholars, in the name of research, have labeled, physically/mentally harmed, stereotyped, and stolen from groups of people and individuals all around the world. With this recognition, a range of academic work has called for a critical social science (Popkewitz, 1990), a postimperial science (Lather, 1998), and indigenous research agendas (Tuhiwai Smith, 2001). Furthermore, at least to some extent, research as a problematic construct has been and is recognized in many of the fields and epistemological perspectives that are considered at least related to postmodern challenges to truth orientations—cultural studies, postcolonial/subaltern studies, gender studies, race/ethnic studies or naturalistic inquiry, critical inquiry, and postmodern feminist critique. This awareness has led many to question their own research practices, to work with "those" who have traditionally been labeled "research subjects" as partners with equal voice in the research process, and to even determine that particular forms of research (that are the most likely to create power for

the researcher) will no longer be acceptable. Scholars practicing qualitative, and related diverse methodologies, have attempted to incorporate these understandings into not only their own research practices but also publications and graduate courses focusing on research methods. Some academic fields (e.g., education) have been highly influenced by these perspectives; others (e.g., business) have not. More often than not, however, the analysis of research as imperialist construct has been addressed only marginally because those who respect research diversity have more immediately needed to engage in work that would increase acceptance of diverse research epistemologies, designs, methods, and interpretations of results. Broad-based conversations concerning research as imperialist construct have either not been considered or have been recognized as too dangerous in a time in which the acceptance of research diversity was only beginning to be possible. Overall, analysis of research as imperialist construct and reconceptualizations that address this problem are still required.

Furthermore, although appearing to be accepted by at least a reasonable number of researchers in academic environments, qualitative research and other diverse methodologies have never reached the point of acceptance as equal to dominant, experimental, and quantitative methodologies. At best, the methods have been embraced as additional techniques for data collection; challenges to truth-oriented results have continued to be labeled as the so-called evil cultural relativism by large numbers of researchers and entirely rejected within some fields. Much of the qualitative work that has been accepted can, at least on the surface, be made to fit into dominant, Western forms of scientific representation such as data collection, reports, dissertations, and reasoned verification. Diverse research perspectives, methodologies, and products that through their very existence, embody direct challenges to dominant perspectives, such as arts-based research (Allen, 1995; Barone, 2000; Eisner, 1997) or *testimonio* (Franco, 1988, as cited in Pratt, 2001), have not been recognized by most scholars and have not always been accepted even by qualitative researchers who stand for diversity.

We have previously stated that qualitative research is well established and will not disappear, a perspective that we continue to maintain. However, this description of the acceptance of qualitative and other diverse research perspectives and methodologies would give the impression that a path is being constructed (however slowly) toward full recognition of diverse forms of research in the scholarly community—the thinking may be, if given enough time, we could progress toward full acceptance of research diversity and even engage in continued analysis and reconceptualization of the construct of research as a Western structure of power. However, we must be aware that these gains may just be illusions, visions that actually misrepresent the shifts that are occurring in conceptualizations of research purposes and methodologies. Those of us in education in the United States have been reminded of this possibility with the recent passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

and the National Research Council (2002) report, both government actions that narrowly define educational research that will receive funding and be considered of quality. Although this redeployment of resources is obvious to those of us who respect diversity in educational environments and in society at large, many in the general public do not seem aware of the limitations that the narrowing of discourses in research will place on all members of society. Even researchers from fields within education that are dominated by quantitative methodologies and scholars outside of education are not expressing great concerns to their colleagues in the research community regarding the narrowing of research discourses. We believe that these education-based actions are just some examples among many that would narrow research perspectives and discredit those who stand for research diversity in general. Furthermore, because the United States has played a major role in the construction of research beliefs and practices around the world, we are also concerned that this narrowing of understandings and perspectives could influence all research everywhere.

As we discuss in an earlier article in this issue, "Qualitative Research, Power, and the Radical Right," in the United States, a range of conservative right-wing religious groups, people who would support patriarchy, and business leaders were not happy with the gains made by marginalized groups (e.g., people of color, women, gays/lesbians) or with federal regulations such as those passed to protect the environment during the 1960s (Berry, 1997). Some in these groups joined together to counter the gains made in civil rights and social protections, mounting a backlash that has become increasingly influential during the past 30 years in constructing public opinion, in legislation, and even within the research community. Focused attempts to create a more conservative media, judiciary, and academia have included leadership workshops beginning with undergraduate students, funding for graduate study, the creation of think tanks that would both replace and reinvent universities as sites of knowledge construction, and funding of publications that attempt to legitimate a narrowing of values and beliefs in society in general and in various fields such as higher education specifically (Covington, 1998; Faludi, 1991; Stefancic & Delgado, 1996). These attempts have included the financial and professional support of conservative authors throughout their entire careers as well as the publication and strategic dissemination of content in ways that create an illusion, both to the public and to legislators, that new cutting-edge knowledge is being discovered that should change the way we look at the world. This "new knowledge" tends to support Euro-American patriarchal, Christian values and privileges White male history and people who would support that history. In addition, much of the conservative work demonizes and attempts to intellectually discredit individuals and groups who express concerns that the imposition of one set of values on everyone is oppressive, unjust, and contradicts democratic ideals. (For examples of this conservative work, see Bloom, 1987; D'Souza, 1991, 2002; Ellis, 1997; Kimball,

1990; Kors & Silvergate, 1998; Murray, 2003; Sommers, 1994). These discourses have been antifeminist and monocultural as well as controlling of "Others" and embedded with belief structures that would limit intellectual, cultural, and overall human possibilities. The shifts have been toward the reinscription of patriarchy and hyper-capitalist, numerical interpretations of the world; the discourse reconfigurations are well funded with resources deployed to support the agendas.

Qualitative perspectives and other forms of research diversity do not contribute to this reinscription. Therefore, as scholars, we could have most likely predicted that research methodologies that would include diverse, multiple views of the world, would come under attack. We are now experiencing this assault from a variety of locations—in the attack on diverse forms of research in academia—in legislative mandates that interpret research narrowly and redeploy resources to support only particular epistemological perspectives—in public discourses that discredit diversity, university professors, and the range of others who challenge the power of narrow contemporary perspectives.

We believe that now is the time in which we as scholars, and as human beings who respect and appreciate diversity, must engage in a very public reconceptualization and reclaiming of research as construct. Much of this work has begun in the form of publications and scholarly ideas that have been shared by qualitative researchers with each other in academia for many years, but often the ideas have gone no further than the academic community. At this dangerous point in our history, a critical social science is called for that reconceptualizes research by addressing the power that is inherent within the research construct as well as other constructs, discourses, and even imaginaries (Barone, 2003) that dominate societal actions, perceptions, and beliefs. The ontological and epistemological goals of research as construct and the resultant questions that are investigated should be reexamined, reconceived, and renamed. Finally, qualitative researchers can construct this critical public social science by laying claim to conceptualizations of rigor and quality that are reflexive, public, and critically focused on liberatory possibilities.

Reconceptualizing the Research Construct: Acknowledging Power

In the academic community, many have considered and discussed the need to rethink what is meant by research for quite some time. Challenges to truth orientations and notions of generalizability have been well developed from a variety of locations and perspectives, whether constructivist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), poststructural/critical (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1978), feminist (Haraway, 1989; Harding, 1998), queer theory (Butler, 1990, 1993), postcolonial/tri-continental (Gandhi, 1998; Perez, 1999; Said, 1978, 1996;

Spivak, 1999; Young, 2001), or other challenges to Enlightenment/modernist truth orientations that are often associated with the postmodern (Lyotard, 1984). This work has been well disseminated within the margins of particular academic fields, has provided perspectives from which generalizable research as construct has been examined, and has revealed positions of power and oppression that have been produced from within beliefs that truth is "discovered" and human progress enhanced. However, beyond this diverse group of qualitative researchers, the research community in general does not exhibit familiarity with epistemological perspectives and methodologies that do not fit into traditional quantitative descriptive, inferential, and/or experimental designs; many have either not become aware of, refused to consider, or even attempted to counter diverse epistemological perspectives. Furthermore, the public has learned to accept research either simplistically without question or as scientific "mumbo jumbo" that must always be ignored. We have already suggested that increased institutional, curricular, and dissemination strategies are needed, as well as the construction of a public/civic discourse strategy that includes the search for extensive public outlets so that everyone has the opportunity to be exposed to and understand the possibilities for qualitative research (see Lincoln & Cannella, this issue).

However, we further propose that in addition to expanding institutional and public opportunities for information dissemination and idea exchange, both the academic and public discussions of research as construct must be taken further conceptually, methodologically, and in the creation of a research imaginary. The public has been bombarded with sound bite logic that simplistically labels others as incompetent teachers and researchers, as uncaring (for their children, the people they teach), even as evil "political activists" (evil and political, that is, if engaging in research that would change the dominant narrowed, monocultural discourse). There are characteristics of research as construct that many qualitative researchers have always recognized (in teaching and scholarly work) but have not attended to as reconstructions of higher education have shifted and narrowed and as public discourses regarding research have been created. For research diversity to survive the narrowing of discourses and the redeployment of resources, a critical social science must claim a dialogic public position of respect that addresses these intrinsic characteristics and strives to rethink and reconceptualize the ways that we define and conduct research.

First, research as construct was/is conceived and practiced as a political act that generates power for particular groups. In the creation of empire (Gandhi, 1998; Said, 1978; Tuhiwai Smith, 2001; Young, 2001), whether physical, economic, or contemporarily intellectual, research emerged and was legitimated in the form of information about the "Other" (e.g., the savage, ill, underdeveloped, disadvantaged, at risk, child, minority, poor, lower class, and so on) to be used by those in power (even if for the "betterment" of the Other). An "apolitical illusion" was and continues to be inscribed using

notions such as reality, universal truth, objectivity, and even salvation. Historically, one can point to circumstance after circumstance in which research questions were constructed and results strategically used to manipulate individuals and particular groups. Even research conceived with the best intentions represents particular agendas. Research has always been political and to varying degrees politicized, representing particular sets of beliefs about the world and excluding others (whether labeled hard or soft science, medicine or voodoo, research or opinion, researcher or participant). Furthermore, contemporary dominant discourses of research are so politicized that the public is beginning to accept the erroneous notion that particular groups of people inappropriately foster political beliefs through research and instruction (and so should be silenced) and that others are not political, just well intended, because their content and research is based on universal and objective truth and morality that is applicable to everyone. An excellent example of this politicization is the contemporary academic and public acceptance of testing as a measure of human learning and the purging of years of research and cultural perspectives that challenge the belief in such forms of human measurement. The public discussions of the 1970s that recognized the biases and limitations embedded within the conceptualization and practice of testing for human intelligence and learning have been silenced. Although we, of course, would avoid truth statements, at least in contemporary democratic conditions of modernity, research has been constructed as, and continues to be, political. A critical public social science would require extensive academic and public dialogue, debates, and complex discussions that recognize the political and power-oriented nature of research as construct. And yes, we believe that standing for a critical public social science is a political agenda—an agenda that is needed in a complex democracy (and world community) that would join the struggle for liberatory social transformations while always critiquing those transformations and the sites of power and oppression that would inevitably, but unpredictably, emerge.

Second, even research conceptualizations that would attempt to avoid the inequitable imposition of power cannot avoid the construction of oppressive states. Within attempts to create research that values and respects diversity, even methods like ethnography have at times been used in ways that are hierarchical, undemocratic, even voyeuristic (Cannella & Viruru, in press; Tobin & Davidson, 1990; Walkerdine, 1997). Foucault (1970) suggested that methods like ethnology rely on "the historical sovereignty—always restrained, but always present—of European thought" (p. 377) and are therefore appropriate only for ethnographies of the West (Bhabha, 1991; Young, 2001). The use of language itself to construct discourses of research is embedded within a history of domination (Spivak, 1988), especially when that language is Western and predominantly English (Seth, 1981). Postcolonial scholars have reminded us that the acquisition of such speech necessitates speaking against oneself (Gandhi, 1998). Even the notion of "voice" is a colonialist apparatus

not only because voice must be conferred, but because the existence of the construct is also implicated in imperialist creations of groups that are vocal and those that are silent—those whose voices have been fragmented, labeled inarticulate, and therefore must be modulated and even "heard" by those voices who have always been considered legitimate (Mohanty, 1991). Reconceptualizations and constructions of a critical public social science must, therefore, always engage in critique of the unnamed Western, imperialist intellectual scientific project and material conditions in which we are all now embedded. Furthermore, we recognize that the critique itself is obviously a Western notion—which implies that research conceptualizations must be turned upside down and inside out, while at the same time being used in a world that now privileges, and would refuse to eliminate, the research construct or its resultant practices.

A critical public social science would reconceptualize research (as construct) entirely, engaging in a struggle for liberatory social transformation while always considering the political power that is created and continually critiquing forms of politicization that would inevitably emerge. Critique of Western, imperial intellectual traditions would be foundational (to the point of erasure and decolonization whenever possible) while at the same time fostering the recognition that critique reinscribes. Furthermore, an awareness of contemporary complexities and sites of power would be considered essential as new, previously unheard, and marginalized imaginaries emerged. This reconceptualization would involve the renaming of ontological and epistemological perspectives and goals for research, as well as claiming a public recognition of research ethics, rigor, and quality.

Renaming Ontological and
Epistemological Perspectives and Goals

As we have already mentioned, much of the rethinking of ontological and epistemological purposes of research has begun in a variety of fields. Certainly the various challenges to a "will to truth" represent this reconceptualizing and should obviously continue. We would simply point to the need for placing at the forefront these already developed epistemological perspectives and furthering the dialogue with constructions that would be negotiated, multivocal, and lead to critical public activism. Research would not be assumed to be neutral but rather value laden and political. The perspectives would even challenge the assumption that we have the right to do research and would engage in such conversations both academically and publicly (Tuhiwai Smith, 2001). Notions of rescue and prophecy (Popkewitz, 1996; Viswasnaran, 1994) would give way to reflexivity and humility. Research questions and purposes would undergo transformation. For example, rather than a research that is dominated by attempts to determine indi-

vidual and group characteristics, our public discourses could focus on how society produces forms of exclusion and how that exclusion can be countered, how domination is inscribed and coded, ways to foster and support decolonial, local and community research agendas, and negotiated research actions that transform the academic and public imaginary. Questions like the following would at least partially dominate our discourses:

> *How is resistance to research placed at the center? How do we continually contest our research practices while at the same time continuing to conduct research?*
>
> *How is collaboration constructed in the research community and with the public? How do we foster its emergence (a) without denying difference and (b) without perpetuating the status quo or forced consensus?*
>
> *How do we challenge the positions of privilege that are created by our unconscious ways of functioning that are Western, logical, defined as sophisticated or rigorous, or scientific (however broadly defined)?*
>
> *How do we pursue social justice without imposing our (predetermined) notions of emancipation and our definitions of liberatory transformations?*
>
> *How do we construct notions of research that do not imply inference (even when inference is not our intent)? How can we question "knowing" itself as a purpose of research? Are there other questions that we should be asking rather than "What do we know (or experience)?"*
>
> *How do we create continued challenges to our modernist need for legitimation?*
>
> *How can our research methods provide avenues for people to choose how they wish to be represented? How can we develop/use ways of conceptualizing, defining, and representing data that may not fit traditional literacy/language-oriented forms of representation?*
>
> *How do we work to construct a dialogue with the public that would inform, listen to, and negotiate constructions of research without generating a discourse that becomes the new exclusionary grand narrative? How does this public discourse remain open to ambiguity, uncertainty, and multiple possibilities? How do we critique the power relations generated by our research and always question what we think we know?*
>
> *How do we take critical actions for transformation that do not impose liberatory truth orientations on others?* (Demas, 2003)

Ethics, Rigor, and Quality:
Reclaiming and Reconfiguring the Conversation

Finally, this critical public social science would reclaim and reconfigure the academic and public discourses on quality by placing ethics, public transparency, and intellectual diversity at the forefront. Conceptualizations of rigor would be unrecognizably transformed to include the continued use of reflexive critical ethics, open and constant public communication with negotiated, multivocal critical activism, and the appreciation of and support for intellectual diversity in ways that create a more inclusive community. This new "rigor" would require recognition of the micro- and macro-political context surrounding the particular inquiry and a willingness to engage in cri-

tique and transformative action. No longer would we speak of issues of validity or reliability. Rather, reflexive ethics, public communication, contextual (sometimes even historical) knowledge, and critical actions would represent quality. Our research epistemologies, methodologies, and judgments of quality would be socially transformed for purposes of critical liberation. Although many existing methods would be used, research would no longer be the same, and the public would understand that transformation.

DANGEROUS DISCOURSES
CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

We are aware that this framework can very well be critiqued as itself constructing a new grand narrative, and we absolutely welcome and agree with that perspective. However, we do believe that at this point in history, qualitative researchers must become extensively and publicly involved in the creation of our own discourses far beyond our own academic community. Reconceptualizations, multiple public conversations, and public actions are immediately needed. Most of us already recognize that need. The authors in the "Dangerous Discourses" special issues of *Qualitative Inquiry* have certainly demonstrated that need. We invite readers to join us in the academic and public conversations and in taking actions toward the creation of a "critical public social science."

NOTE

1. In this discussion, we use *qualitative* research to imply openness to diverse ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives that are not basically included in positivist/postpositivist positions. We recognize that "quantitative" versus "qualitative" terminologies do create a false dichotomy and that qualitative methods have been/can be used from within positivist, truth orientations. However, we would ask the reader, for ease in this discussion, to recognize that many qualitative researchers are not positivist and that qualitative terminologies and challenges to truth and generalizability have been used to construct and support environments that appreciate and foster research diversity in general.

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