

# **Participatory Video and Reflexivity**

The Experiences of Eight Adult Learners

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## **Abstract**

Participatory video is generally referred to as a process in which participants work together to create a video about their common experiences as a way of inquiring into challenges in their lives. While media activists, policy makers, and academics have used various techniques of participatory video to bring about change in participants' lives, participatory video, as a research tool, has yet to be studied. I explore its methodological complexity based on a participatory video project I conducted with eight adults for 11 weeks on a topic they chose. Building on John Fiske's cultural studies framework, I analyze the process of the project, the participants' experiences, and my own experience in the project. In doing so, I test and suggest a method of analyzing participatory video. The notion of reflexivity is central to my analysis. A typical understanding of reflexivity, however, is problematic to participatory research because it focuses on researchers, disregarding the important role participants' reflexivity also plays in the process of inquiry. Hence, I argue that it is crucial to understand participants' reflexivity. My thesis is based on this argument. The purpose of the thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of participatory video vis-à-vis the notion of reflexivity and vice versa.

In my findings I emphasize three aspects of participatory video: (1) Participatory video can bring to light grassroots experiences. However it may overlook unequal power distribution among participants. Hence, I argue that researchers may need to intervene actively in the process of making the video, and yet act cautiously in order to prompt the participants to reflect on their assumptions more deeply and to safeguard against silencing marginalized voices; (2) Participatory video can allow participants to experience incidental, social, and critical learning. Based on this observation, I call for attention to the potential of participatory video as a tool for adult learning; and (3) The researcher's positionality matters in conducting participatory video. It can interfere with the process of knowledge construction and influence the participants' experiences with projects. The thesis sheds light on the concept of positionality in the study of participatory video.

## Résumé

La vidéo participative (*participatory video*) est une méthodologie dans laquelle des participants produisent une vidéo sur eux-mêmes pour analyser les problèmes de leurs vies et en chercher des solutions. Divers groupes, des journalistes aux décideurs, et même dans le milieu académique, utilisent des techniques variables de vidéo participative. Toutefois, la vidéo participative, comme méthode de recherche, doit être plus explorée pour en construire une connaissance plus fine qui puisse favoriser ses applications. J'explore la complexité méthodologique de la vidéo participative en analysant un projet que j'ai conduit avec huit adultes pendant 11 semaines sur un sujet choisi par les participants. En me basant sur le cadre analytique que John Fiske a proposé pour le domaine des études culturelles, j'analyse le processus du projet, les expériences des participants, et mon expérience. Ce faisant, je teste et suggère une méthode pour analyser la vidéo participative. La notion de réflexion est importante dans mon analyse. Elle, cependant, est typiquement discutée de la part des chercheurs, jetant le rôle de la réflexion des participants que joue dans le processus d'enquête participative. J'insiste sur l'importance d'entendre leur réflexion. Ma thèse est basée sur cet argument. L'objet de la thèse est d'acquérir une compréhension plus profonde par rapport à la notion de réflexion, ou vice versa.

Sur cette base, je souligne trois aspects de la vidéo participative.

Premièrement, la vidéo participative peut donner à voir les expériences des gens tout en faisant fi de la répartition inégale de pouvoir entre participants. Par conséquent, je soutiens que les chercheurs doivent intervenir activement dans le processus de production de la vidéo, tout en agissant avec prudence afin d'inciter les participants à réfléchir profondément sur leurs hypothèses et de permettre aux voix marginalisées de s'exprimer. Deuxièmement, la vidéo participative peut permettre aux participants de faire des apprentissages induits (au niveau de la connaissance de soi, par exemple), sociaux (dans l'interaction avec les autres), et critique (prendre conscience de sa capacité à résoudre ses problèmes). Dérivée de cette observation, j'insiste sur le potentiel de la vidéo participative comme outil d'apprentissage des adultes. Finalement, je considère que l'espace positionnel du chercheur est important dans la

conduite de la vidéo participative. Il peut interférer avec celui des participants et influencer le processus de la construction des connaissances. Mes résultats mettent en lumière le concept de l'espace positionnel dans l'étude de la vidéo participative.



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# Introduction 1

*By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.*  
(Benjamin, 1936/1968, p. 236)

Imagine a group of people creating a video together to describe their lives, joys and sorrows, hopes and agonies, captured through their reflexive eyes. Each shot may look ordinary. But watch it again, trying to see it through the creators' eyes and listening to their voices. Images appear. Sounds flow. The video may reveal intricacies disguised by ordinary experiences. It can capture that which is eroded by the monopoly of words. Such video production can enable people to participate in the production of knowledge by solidifying the link between academic research and everyday life. This is what I think of as the essence of participatory video. My thesis teases out the complexity of participatory video by analyzing the process of one particular project with the intent of contributing to the development of participatory video as a research tool.

My study builds on the work of Shirley White (2003a), who argued that participatory video can educate and empower the disenfranchised by allowing them to tell their stories through the medium of video. With this foundation, I define participatory video as a process in which project participants create a video about themselves or their concerns as a way of inquiring into problems in their lives and seeking solutions to the problems. Similarly, Jackie Shaw and Clive Robertson (1997) described participatory video as a “group-based activity that develops participants’

abilities by involving them in using video equipment creatively, to record themselves and the world around them, and to produce their own videos” (p. 1), while Nick Lunch and Chris Lunch (2006) defined it as a “set of techniques to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film” (p. 10). Over the past couple of decades, there has been a growing interest in participatory video among media activists, policy makers, and educators; recently, a wide range of scholars also have paid greater attention to the potential of participatory video for intervening in people’s lives in order to bring about social change through research (Mitchell, 2011; Mitchell, de Lange, & Milne, 2012; Pink, 2007). Vivian Chávez et al. (2004) argued that participatory video could enhance community-based research by “bringing credibility to the content of what is said, enabling community members to speak out and have their message heard” (p. 397). Furthermore, the proximity of video to our everyday lives, as suggested in Norman Denzin’s (2003) concept of a cinematic society,<sup>1</sup> can make participatory video an even more appealing method for qualitative research in contemporary contexts. And yet, participatory video is still under-theorized. Concerning this, White (2003a) stated:

Not only are there few definitive concepts but there is remarkable absence of any well-formulated theories to undergird the participatory video practices. While projects have been routinely evaluated, the lessons learned and understandings that have resulted have not led to significant theoretic work on the part of academics or other development professionals. (p. 24)

Despite this, participatory video is not totally new in social science research. As I will examine in this chapter, participatory video has evolved on the margins of mainstream qualitative research for over four decades. Much delayed theoretical development of participatory video may have to do with the fact that visual data remains secondary to written texts (Harper, 2005) and that the camera has been used mainly for objectivist

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<sup>1</sup> Denzin (2003) saw a cinematic society as a characteristic of contemporary western society, saturated with images and cinematic apparatuses. I discuss this more in Chapter 2.

observation, as opposed to constructivist analysis (Emmison, 2004). Moreover, when participatory video was discussed, it was predominantly treated either in a celebratory way (Low, Brushwood Rose, Salvio, & Palacio, 2012) or in an idealistic way that emphasized only possibility and potential (Shaw, 2012). These approaches may have limited the development of a critical knowledge of participatory video. For the development of the knowledge, I think that, as Wendy Luttrell (2010) argued, researchers need to make the process of participatory video research clearer. My thesis responds to this need.

## **Background**

My interest in participatory video as a research topic originates from my experiences of organizing a video production course (*Video-Telling Workshop*) for graduates of the Odyssey Project dating back to 2008. The Odyssey Project is a Chicago-based Bard College Clemente Course. The Clemente Course is a non-traditional adult education program that was founded by Earl Shorris (1936-2012) in New York City in 1995 to help disenfranchised adults get out of poverty by taking courses in the humanities. Since its inception in 2000, the Odyssey Project has offered free yearlong college-level courses to economically disadvantaged adults in the Chicago area with the conviction that “engagement with the humanities can offer individuals a way out of poverty by fostering habits of sustained reflection and skills of communication and critical thinking” (Odyssey Project, n.d.). Students obtain college course credits through Bard College at New York and are supported with transportation, books, onsite childcare, and access to college counseling. Early in 2008, I met the director of the Odyssey Project, Amy Thomas Elder, while working at the University of Chicago as a multimedia specialist for linguistic research and language instruction. I told Amy that I was interested in teaching video production to Odyssey Project graduates. Through the course, I hoped to allow them to reflect on

their lives and to voice their views on critical issues in their everyday lives in order to bring about progressive social change. Amy agreed to let me offer a course.<sup>2</sup>

I was given the opportunity to use the facilities and equipment of the University of Chicago to teach the course. In the summer of 2008, I offered the course to 11 students (10 women and one man, ranging in age between their 20s and 60s) for six weeks. There were weekly group sessions for approximately three hours at a time. The students created five short group documentary videos. The topics for the videos, chosen by the students, included democracy, education, and community resistance to privatization of community space. At the end of the course, the students and I showed the videos to our families and friends in a community-based screening event and discussed the topic of each video. Although, at that time, the course was only ad hoc, the students' lively engagement and positive feedback motivated me to reorganize it the following year. With generous support from the University of Chicago, I was able to teach the course in 2009. Some of the students that year talked about their experiences as follows:

*I loved the film and I wanted to make a film, but I couldn't believe I could do it. The workshop basically said to me I could do this.* (Female participant in her early 30s)

*African American classmates were talking about their experiences. I knew a lot of African Americans, but I never went that deep into their personal stories and I ignored them. But I think it is important to know and see the personal.* (Male participant in his 20s)

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<sup>2</sup> Since the mid-1990s, I have been involved in video production academically and professionally and dedicated myself to media education for both children and adults. Because my job at the University of Chicago included video production, I had access to the production equipment to offer the course.

*I learned that actually there are lots of things to give and a lot to say to the people. So this is definitely something that after the workshop I am going to get into.* (Female participant in her 20s)

*It [the video course] actually has me looking into how I can organize my ideas and my creativity and put into a film or video format. So it actually was really pushing.* (Male participant in his 30s)

During the course in 2009, a contentious debate on racism broke out among the students while discussing video topics. It seemed that the issues of racism touched some of the students more than the others and prompted them to speak about personal experiences openly and emotionally. Some students were uncomfortable with the situation. To moderate the situation, I opened a conversation to talk about individual feelings and assumptions. This eventually enabled us to build trust among ourselves and move forward to work together as a group. Through this experience, I saw the potential of the course for participatory research not only because the videos created by the students presented many fascinating ideas about their lives, but also because the course prompted the students to talk about issues important to their lives and to seek solutions spontaneously. However, participatory video might not have occurred to me as my thesis topic unless I had been introduced to it as a research method. In a methodology course I took in the winter of 2009,<sup>3</sup> I not only learned that video production could be a useful research method, but also perceived that my video production course itself could be developed for community-based participatory research. This led me to choosing participatory video as my thesis topic.

While working on the thesis, I have continued to teach the video production course for Odyssey Project graduates and added a research component into the course in order to gain a deeper understanding of participatory video. In 2010, a group of participants and I questioned education for children and together created a nine-minute

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<sup>3</sup> The course was titled *Textual Approaches to Research* and taught by Professor Claudia Mitchell in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University.

documentary video, titled *Do Our Children Lean Critical Thinking Skills at School?* (Yang, 2011). In 2011, another group of participants and I investigated the problems of health care in the United States and created two short documentary videos, titled *Rx for Health Care* and *Health Care: I Thought I Was Covered. What Happened?* (Yang et al., 2012). These independent research projects were extremely informative to my thesis.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Evolution of Participatory Video**

In this section, I examine the history of participatory video in four areas of study. First, I trace the foundation of participatory video in two radical documentary filmmaking movements—the Kino-Eye movement in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle [New Society] program in Canada in the 1960s. Second, I review participatory video in the context of visual studies. In the early 1900s, visual methods were predominantly used to provide evidence for positivist analysis, as exemplified in observational cinema (Banks, 2007; Holm, 2008; Pink, 2003; Stanczak, 2007; Winston, 1998). However, visual scholars with a constructivist outlook have challenged this positivist stance since the 1960s. I examine some of the important projects specifically related to participatory video. Third, I study participatory video in the context of development studies.<sup>5</sup> Participatory video used in this context has brought to the fore its interventionist model of today. Two generative projects—the Fogo Island Project, carried out in Newfoundland, Canada in the late 1960s, and *Rural Women's Problems*, a participatory video created by a group of women in India in the 1980s—are my focus. Lastly, I examine the discourse of social media, which pays great attention to interactive digital media and online

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<sup>4</sup> These videos can be viewed on the website (<https://sites.google.com/site/videotelling>), which I created to archive materials and disseminate videos produced in the video production course.

<sup>5</sup> What I mean by development studies here is an interdisciplinary branch of the social sciences that addresses issues of relevance to poverty, political instabilities, social inequalities, and policy, especially in developing countries, with a strong emphasis on intervention.



participation. Its interests overlap with participatory video, as expressed in such notions as *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 2009) or the *Do-It-Yourself* (DIY) *movement* (Knobel & Lankshear, 2010). However, there remain subtle distinctions between the discourses of participatory video and social media. I highlight some of them to underline the principles of participatory video that I propose in the thesis.

### **Radical Documentary Filmmaking**

As early as the 1920s, filmmaker Dziga Vertov believed that the camera could revolutionize the way we see the world. He wrote: “I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it” (Vertov, 1923/1984, p. 17). His enthusiasm for the camera led him to develop what has come to be called the Kino-Eye movement. This movement was inspired by the worker correspondent movement in Soviet journalism in the 1920s, which urged readers to participate in the production of newspapers by sending letters of their daily experiences to the press. Similar to this, Vertov organized cinema-worker correspondent groups for the Kino-Eye movement and urged the people to participate in creating documentary films by gathering news, recording, making decisions on distributions, and so forth (Hicks, 2007). Aiming at raising social consciousness through filmmaking, Vertov (1924/1984) wrote:

We engage directly in the study of the phenomena of life that surround us. We hold the ability to show and elucidate life as it is, considerably higher than the occasionally diverting doll games that people call theater, cinema, etc. (p. 47)

Vertov rejected filmmaking as art for the sake of art. In this vein, he refused the idea of single authorship. Instead he tried to:

create an army of cine-observers and cine-correspondents with the aim of moving away from the authorship from a single person to mass authorship, with the aim of organising a montage vision—not an accidental but a necessary

and sufficient overview of the world every few hours. (Vertov, as cite in Hicks, 2007, pp. 17-18)

The public authorship of art was at the heart of the Kino-Eye movement (Benjamin, 1936/1968). In this movement, as seen in Vertov's film *Kino-Eye*, produced in 1924, film subjects were also filmmakers. They showed their everyday lives in the films they participated in making. In this respect, David Gillespie (2003) commented that Vertov combined his political perspective with his artistic sense and standpoint on cinematic authorship in order to "create a utopian vision of the new city through the medium of the camera" (p. 107). Filmmaking in the Kino-Eye movement was political in that it aimed to bring out people's voices and to change society. Although this bottom-up approach to filmmaking came to an end within a decade due to state interference and lack of funding (Gillespie, 2003; Hicks, 2007), the concept of public authorship and the practice of collective filmmaking resonate with the principles of participatory video of today.

Some decades later, in 1967, an innovative approach to documentary filmmaking similar to the Kino-Eye movement was developed by a group of filmmakers in the National Film Board of Canada to engender social change through documentary film production. This came to be known as the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program. Michael Baker, Thomas Waugh, and Ezra Winton (2010) described the background of this program as:

Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle (CFC/SN) was an ambitious initiative that brought together the unlikely partners of government bureaucrats, documentary filmmakers, community activists, and 'ordinary' citizens. The program was launched in 1967 by the NFB [National Film Board of Canada] and several other government agencies with the primary goal of addressing poverty in Canada through the production and dissemination of documentary cinema. (p. 4)

The Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program aimed at participatory filmmaking by bringing together relevant stakeholders to film projects to address social issues. Brian Rusted (2010) stated, “Video made this [participatory filmmaking] possible and the impact of portable video technology was decisive” (p. 227). The documentary video *NFB Pioneers: Challenge for Change* (National Film Board of Canada, 2009) suggested that the economic feasibility and technological simplicity of video lent ground to the advent of participatory filmmaking. In this regard, Bonnie Klein, a National Film Board filmmaker at the time, stated in the video that participatory transition was “rational and organic” (National Film Board of Canada, 2009). Undoubtedly, the advent of portable video production technology was essential to the transition. However, I do not think that the technology itself brought about the practice of participatory filmmaking. The technology made participatory video affordable at most. As seen in the Kino-Eye movement, the idea of participatory filmmaking existed long before the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program was initiated. What the filmmakers of the program did was to capitalize on video technology in order to put participatory filmmaking into practice. The new technology was simply a necessary ground for the beginning of participatory video. As suggested in the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program, participatory filmmaking was the consequence of a social act that some filmmakers carried out purposefully to utilize technology for social change.

The film *VTR St-Jacques* (Klein, 1969) demonstrates this idea. It is one of the early projects produced by the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program. It was created in the late 1960s in St-Jacques, an economically disadvantaged neighbourhood in Montreal, Canada. The citizens’ committee of the neighbourhood tried to involve people in the committee in dealing with poverty and enhancing social welfare. The filmmaker brought video production equipment to the committee and trained its members how to use it. In the very beginning of *VTR St-Jacques*, a narrator asks a question as a voice-over of images of the St. Jacques neighbourhood: “What could happen if people had the technology of communications in their own hands?” The filmmaker intended to explore the potential of participatory filmmaking in helping the committee promote their activities. In subsequent scenes, committee members learn

video production skills and interview people in their community on issues about social welfare. Then, they watch the video footage together and discuss the issues described in the footage. *VTR St-Jacques* documents the process of this participatory filmmaking. It ends with a scene in which the committee shows the video they created to community members and encourages them to join the committee. With regard to *VTR St-Jacques*, Dorothy Hénaut and Bonnie Klein (1969/2010) wrote:

The videotape recording (VTR) project in St-Jacques is an attempt to extend to its logical conclusion the conviction that people should participate in shaping their own lives, which means among other things directing and manipulating the tools of modern communication necessary to gaining and exercising that participation. (pp. 24-25)

*VTR St-Jacques* illustrates the practice of participatory video without naming it. Furthermore, it suggests some of the tensions that occupy the current debate on participatory video. At the end of the film, we hear the voice-over of a man and a woman:

*Man*: I think it's all very well to be here. But it's only a machine.

*Woman*: Right. The committee has different methods. VTR is just one of them.

*Man*: It's very expensive, too.

*Woman*: It helps us make a contact with people who otherwise couldn't be reached.

*Man*: Yes, but what's important is to follow it up to work face to face with people.

In the film the narrators present some of the limitations and possibilities of participatory video. They highlight that it can be a great communication tool for reaching out to a wide audience. However, video alone may not bring about social change. It has to be used synergistically along with other methods to reach the goal.

What stands out strongly in *VTR St-Jacques* is that participatory filmmaking was born out of a conscious social act with the filmmaker's conviction about the potential of such filmmaking for bringing about social change. I emphasize this because, as I discuss later in this chapter, new digital technologies or social media alone may not precipitate participatory culture or democratic use of media. New technologies may only provide a necessary means for realizing the potential. At times, they can be even exploitative, as seen in numerous cases of cyber-bullying. For example, Judy Davidson's (2012) study on *sexting*—a form of communication that involves sending and receiving sexual content through mobile phone text messages—indicates that new technologies influence girls and boys differently and can intensify sexism among them. If girls send and receive many sexts, they could be labeled as a slut, but for boys, the more the better. The number of incidents of sexting is considered a trophy to them. Where is participatory culture in this scene? Davidson's study suggests that the liberatory potential of new technologies may not be activated without conscious interventions in the use of the technologies.

Until its end in 1980, the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program produced over 200 films and videos similar to *VTR St-Jacques* (Baker et al., 2010). *Encounter at Kwacha House, Halifax* (Tasker, 1967), for instance, depicts young black people's debate on racism. *You are on Indian Land* (Ransen, 1969) delivers First Nations voices on their altercations with the police. The Fogo Island Project, as I mentioned above, also became part of the program. As such, the filmmakers took their cameras to areas neglected by mainstream media and strived to bring people's voices to light. The Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program enabled a great number of people to participate in the processes of filmmaking and to voice their concerns. It seems that the conceptual framework of participatory video was established in the late 1960s. Therefore, I regard the program as an incubator for forging contemporary participatory video practices.

## **Visual Studies**

In visual studies, two important precursors to participatory video are the ethnographic film *Chronicle of a Summer* (Dauman, Rouch, & Morin, 1960) and the

Navajo Project (Worth & Adair, 1972/1997). *Chronicle of a Summer* is an urban ethnographic film produced in France in 1960. It describes several working class Parisians' lives with an innovative approach to ethnographic filmmaking, *cinéma vérité*, a term coined by the film directors. In contrast to observational cinema, this approach emphasizes interaction between filmmakers and film subjects and sees the camera as a *provocateur* that prompts subjects to deeply reflect on their lives and reveal inner emotions (Barnouw, 1983). Such intimate and active use of the camera is related to the advent of lightweight cameras. However, most filmmakers did not envision what to do with the new cameras then. Canadian filmmaker Michel Brault, in contrast, was experimenting with hand-held filming techniques and using lightweight cameras on his own. Visual anthropologist Jean Rouch, who wanted to create *Chronicle of a Summer* in the style of *cinéma vérité*, invited Brault to come to France. This film was the outcome of collaboration between Rouch, who intended to produce a participatory ethnographic film, and Brault, who experimented with an unconventional filming technique (Bouchard, 2009). It challenged observational cinema, a dominant style of ethnographic film then, and thus revolutionized ethnographic filmmaking practice. Rouch (2003) saw the potential of filmmaking for participatory research. As he put it:

What is the result for those who were surveyed? Nothing. There is no feedback from the disruption the anthropologist has created. The subjects will not read the survey. With a camera, there can be a far more fruitful result. The film can be shown to the subjects. Then they are able to discuss and have access to what has happened to them. They can have reflection even if the film is bad, for however incompetent the film may be, there will be the stimulation of the image you give of them and the chance for them to view themselves from a distance, up there on the screen. Such a distortion changes everything. (p. 220)

At the end of the film, the subjects of the film *Chronicle of a Summer* view the film together and critique their cinematic representations. In doing so, they participate in

the process of filmmaking indirectly. In this regard, Edgar Morin (2003) wrote, “[Rouch and I] gave the characters the chance to speak” (p. 259). The idea of *the chance to speak* is indeed critical to participatory video. However, a significant difference between cinema vérité and participatory video lies in that the latter aims to help film subjects create their films and make directorial decisions while the previous aims to allow subjects to comment on their representations in a professionally made film. Thus, although Rouch and Morin showed how ethnographic films could be made in a more participatory and ethical way, the principle of participatory video, entrusting the camera to film subjects, did not fully emerge in the film *Chronicle of a Summer*.

Several years after the film *Chronicle of a Summer* was produced in France, a groundbreaking experiment was unleashed in the Navajo Nation in the United States in 1966. Communication scholar Sol Worth and cultural anthropologist John Adair entrusted cameras to youth of the Navajo Nation, which occupies an area in the states of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico in the United States. After a week of training on the use of the camera, the participants were invited to make a film about anything they liked, and each of them created a 10 to 20 minute long silent film about their cultural and environmental surroundings (Worth & Adair, 1972/1997). Concerning the purpose of this project, Worth and Adair wrote, “One of the aims of our research was to develop a method for collecting, analyzing, and comparing how various groups and cultures structured their world when making a film about it” (p. 228). They concluded that, “This method does help to reveal culture as determined and organized by the people within that culture” (p. 253). Reading the title of Worth and Adair’s (1972/1997) book, *Through Navajo Eyes*, I had the impression that the project intended to bring out the Navajo culture through the participants’ perspectives. But it did not. Worth and Adair’s primary concern was about whether film-mediated communication is universal in disclosing culture. They chose Navajo youth to test out this thesis. The Navajo Project was grounded in “intellectual objectives devoted to gaining knowledge of how film communication worked and how cultures might differ with respect to visual expression” (R. Chalfen, personal communication, February 8, 2011). As Richard Chalfen (1997) pointed out, the Navajo Project was, in effect, an anthropological study of visual communication rather than a visual anthropological

study. Moreover, although Navajos filmed themselves in the project, they were little involved in discussing research topics and analyzing data. Simply put, the participants performed the role of filmmakers whereas it was the researchers themselves who observed and analyzed the filmmaking process. Thus, the project may not be called *participatory* research per se. Nevertheless, by advocating for the potential of filmmaking to define culture from the perspective of the people within the culture, it showed what could be done when the camera is handed over to participants (Pink, 2007).

Worth and Adair (1972/1997) defined the *bio-documentary technique* as an approach in which project participants determine how to represent themselves cinematically. This technique is very often used in participatory video projects. Donna Barnes, Susan Taylor-Brown, and Lori Wiener (1997), for instance, handed over the camera to HIV-positive mothers so that each of them could record video messages for her children. The aim was to encourage the women to take on self-representations as mothers. As Sarah Pink (2001) argued, an advantage of this approach is that it brings about the “spontaneity and vividness of an uninterrupted stream of information from the individual” (p. 13). Similarly, Geraldine Bloustien (2003) used the bio-documentary technique in a more comprehensive way in her ethnographic study working with 15-year old aboriginal girls in Australia. She entrusted the video camera to each girl so that the participants could record their daily activities in various places and express their individual experiences. In this way, the researcher gave the participants an “authoritative voice” (Bloustien & Baker, 2003, p. 72) to speak for themselves. Barnes, Taylor-Brown, and Wiener’s and Bloustien’s projects suggest that the camera can be used to enable participants to construct their own representations; this may reduce power differentials between the researcher and participants and foster collaborative research. Despite this potential, a sense of collectivity among participants did not seem evident in these projects, as I understand them. Collectivity, however, is essential in community-based participatory research because, as Nina Wallerstein and Bonnie Duran (2008) argued, it aims to bring a direct impact on research participants by addressing their common problems as a group.



## Development Studies

The field of development studies often emphasizes collectivity in studies on poverty, violence, power disparities, social inequalities, policy, and so forth (e.g., Abah, Okwori, & Alubo, 2009; Flower & McConville, 2009; Frost & Jones, 1998; Johansson, 2006; Tegan, Konie & Goodsmith, 2007; Wheeler, 2009; White, 2003). A pivotal example of participatory video that highlights collectivity is the Fogo Island Project (Lunch & Lunch, 2006; White, 2003a). Communication scholar Don Snowden and filmmaker Colin Low initiated the project in 1967 in Fogo Island<sup>6</sup> when the residents were forced to leave their homes due to economic hardship. Snowden had thought that poverty meant not only economic deprivation but also lack of information and organization and the inability to communicate with one another. Hence, he intended to promote communication among the island residents through filmmaking in order to bring about social change (Quarry, 1994; as cited in Don Snowden Program, n.d.). He went to Fogo Island with Low, who was then the director of the National Film Board of Canada, to discuss a film project with the island residents' committee. Low described the development of the film project in the documentary video *NFB Pioneers: Challenge for Change* (National Film Board of Canada, 2009): In order to build trust with the residents, Low told them, "I guarantee that I will run it [film] for you, before anyone else, and your family . . . if you don't like it, we will burn it." This broke the ice and the residents became more interested in participating in the project.

Once trust was built, people began to freely talk about problems they faced. The films that were produced were shown to the local government. Their responses were then shown back to the residents. The continuous process of filming and screening provoked communication among the residents. As a result, the residents were able to form a cooperative, *United Maritime Fisheries*, with help from Ministry of Fisheries, to control their business (Corneil, 2012). This cooperative remains strong even today in the name of *Fogo Island Co-operative Society*. The members of the Society introduce it as:

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<sup>6</sup> Fogo Island is a small fishing village in Newfoundland, the easternmost province of Canada, adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1967, we had to make a life-altering decision on Fogo Island. Leave our beloved island home and resettle on the mainland of Newfoundland and Labrador, or stay and find a way to make it on our own. We stayed and we made it our own. To ensure our survival, we turned to what we knew best for hundreds of years...the sea. (<http://www.fogoislandcoop.com>, ¶ 1)

As Low recalled (National Film Board of Canada, 2009), the cooperative made 30 million dollars in 2008. The approach to collective filmmaking is referred to as the *Fogo Process*. As Marit Corneil (2012) has highlighted, the participatory nature of filmmaking explored in the Fogo Island Project continues to inspire many participatory video practitioners and researchers throughout the world.

K. Sadanandan Nair and Shirley White's (2003) experimental research project gives more prominence than the Fogo Island Project to the potential of participatory video for provoking bottom-up participatory communication. Their research was carried out with economically disenfranchised women in rural areas of India in the mid-1980s in order to inquire into the potential of video as a communication tool for producing indigenous knowledge and for empowering women. In the first phase of the research, the researchers created a documentary video, titled *Trapped*, based on the data gathered in 23 different villages. They showed the video to several women to confirm its authenticity and to incorporate their comments for further editing. In the second phase, the researchers took up a participatory model. They first showed some video images of rural women to a group of women in a village in order to instigate their involvement in investigating community problems. As a result, five women committed to the project and created a 15-minute documentary video, titled *Rural Women's Problems*. Comparing this film with *Trapped*, Nair and White (2003) stated:

Beneath the outward appearances of their 'hard life and abusive life space' they have a bond of dignity. They do not want to be perceived as downtrodden and they value the daily aspects of their lives, even though difficult at times. This pride shows through in the participatory tape they produced. *Trapped* was a 'poor me' story, while *Rural Women's Problems* was an 'I am Me' story.

When women could tell their own story, they carefully portrayed the reality of their daily life, without pity or apology. (p. 211)

This suggests that participatory video can enable bottom-up participatory communication by allowing people to deliver their experiences and problems from their own stance collectively. This potential has been indeed central to more recent development projects. For instance, Sara Kindon (2003) incorporated participatory video in her geographic study so that her participants, a group of Maaori people in New Zealand, could share knowledge among themselves. Kindon, the participants, and a freelance videographer organized a video research group to interview people and record community activities and historical sites. Through this process, Kindon asserted, the participants were able to share knowledge by communicating with one another and to use this knowledge for the development of their community. Similarly, projects by Oga Abah, Jenkeri Okwori, and Ogoh Alubo (2009) and by Joanna Wheeler (2009), which addressed community violence in Northern Nigeria and Brazil respectively, indicate that video can play an important role in provoking communication among people about communal problems that they may otherwise hesitate to talk about. These recent projects show that participatory video has potential for bringing about change in people's lives by prompting them to talk about problems they may have and to seek solutions collectively.

## **Social Media**

As I mentioned earlier, participatory video is related to the discourse of social media. Social media is generally referred to as media used for interactive communication and considered a vehicle to Web 2.0, which indicates an Internet phenomenon characterized by user interactivity, participation, and creation or recreation of Internet content. Wiki is one example of social media. It allows users to create or edit the content of web pages through a simple text editor provided within its website. Wikipedia is the most well known of this kind. Run by a nonprofit foundation, it is estimated as one of the 10 most visited sites on the Internet. Since its inception in 2000, it has become available in more than 270 languages (Slater, 2011).

Another wiki, Wikileaks caught public attention in 2010 with its online anti-secrecy activities that release important news and information to the public. It sparked controversies around the world. Whereas political bodies, in particular, of Washington, vehemently opposed these activities, others thought that Wikileaks contributed to sharing information and encouraging transparency in politics. Besides the expansion of Wiki-families, the growth of social network sites has been phenomenal. Created in 2004, Facebook had 901 million monthly active users in March 2012; approximately 80 percent of the users were outside Canada and the United States (Facebook, n.d.). This unprecedented social phenomenon prompted *Time Magazine* to select Mark Zuckerberg (b. 1984), a founder of Facebook, as the most influential person of the year 2010. The critically acclaimed film *The Social Network* (Fincher et al., 2010), which depicted the story of the founders of Facebook, suggests the ubiquitous influence of this site on contemporary people's lives.

Noting the explosion of user-generated data and interactivity on the Internet, Henry Jenkins (2009) defined contemporary culture as participatory, represented by “relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices” (p. xi). However, he rightly pointed out that participatory culture is not mature yet because of unequal access to participation, lack of social contexts in youth activities, and ethical challenges. Therefore, he called for pedagogical intervention to cultivate the participatory use of digital technologies among youth (see also Coire, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jenkin's arguments resonate with the growing popularity of such notions as New Literacies and the multimodality of literacy. Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2006) referred to New Literacies as the multiplicity of literacy caused by the rise of digital-electronic technologies. These technologies, they argued, affect the ways of sending and receiving texts, which are “seamlessly multimodal rather than distinct process for distinct modes (text, image, sound)” (p. 25). They perceived that texts are often constructed and exchanged through the combinations of text, image, and sound. Hence, Lankshear and Knobel suggested that the character of literacy has changed and that New Literacies should pay attention to the multimodality of texts that people are exposed to. They also argued that New Literacies are often more participatory,

In sharp contrast, some scholars have criticized the nature of participation that has been highlighted in the literature concerned with social media. John Downing (2010), for instance, argued that the discourse of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, is obsessively focused on *connection* on the Internet and too often ignores the content, or what people really talk about, when they participate in each site. Andrew Keen (2007) attributed the proliferation of social media to the death of a culture characterized by precision in information. Furthermore, he argued, the wisdom of the crowd which is assumed to be delivered by interactive media is, in fact, full of unverified facts; participation in social media is compelled by Internet giants, such as Google, YouTube, and Craigslist, which need participation for their businesses. In a similar vein, David Buckingham (2009) remarked that participation is commercially driven. He argued that there is little evidence that consumers exercise collective power and crowd intelligence through online activities. In this light, he succinctly wrote, “Activity should not be confused with agency” (p. 43).

Nevertheless, the expansion of videos that people create and share through social media is a salient testimony to increased media production activities among them. With the introduction of more affordable video equipment, amateur video production is ever expanding to various age groups and even influences professional film production (Orgeron & Orgeron, 2007). This growing popularity may be related to the increase of user-generated content sites, namely YouTube, which was created in 2005 under the slogan “Broadcast yourself.” However, most amateur videos are characterized by superficial personal documentations, such as everyday activities, sceneries, and travels (Loui et al., 2007). Videos on YouTube do not seem far from this trend. Thus, despite increased activities, these videos do little to support the potential of social media for participatory culture and democracy. As Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009) pointed out, YouTube may represent at most a period of “increased turbulence” (p. 14) in which media technology massively drifts over society. Surely, new technologies open up possibilities for participation and communication among people, and some people use social media for that purpose.

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collaborative, and distributed than conventional literacies and reflect different mindsets forged by new technologies.

Indymedia.org, for instance, brings together independent media activists and organizations throughout the world to share stories behind mainstream media. The majority of online activities, however, are not characterized by the same quality of participation. They are typically limited to uploading media individually without collective action, such as participating in grassroots-based communication or discussion. Therefore, despite gaining the position of media producer, the majority of participants in social media sites still remain individual users or consumers who can fill the online space offered to them. Precisely because of this, Sarah Lewis, Roy Pea, and Joseph Rosen (2010) argued for the development of participatory media applications to harness the potential of participatory media for social interaction, writing:

Circulating a commodity does not make meaning; people need to be able to create together, to generate narrative, to share contesting ideas. The power of social media for learning lies not in its ability to offer individual expression anytime anywhere so much as in its yet-to-be-realized potential to foster collaborations, on a scale and in tighter time cycles than ever seen before. (pp. 357-358)

This is aligned with the view of participatory video that I explore in this thesis. I see participatory video as a process of intervening in people's daily lives in order to prompt them to share knowledge and organize collective action. Interestingly, however, the bulk of discussion about participatory media—including participatory video—has been focused on youth. Adults are largely missing in the discourse of participatory media. This may reflect the fact that education is generally centered on children, as implied in the literature of New Literacies. While it is crucial to educate youth to develop participatory culture through the use of media, I think that it is equally important to enable adults to gain new media skills in order to become active members of participatory culture. My thesis attempts to address this gap, placing adults at the center of participatory video practice.

## Framing the Thesis

The thesis is grounded in the theoretical framework of participatory research. While the notion of participatory research is no longer new in the social sciences, its concept is yet fluid and often confused with similar terms, notably, action research and participatory action research. In this section, I explore the concept of participatory research and define my approach to it in order to lay a basis for my discussion. I then delineate my research paradigm to indicate my philosophical stance on research.

### Defining Participatory Research

Participatory research has gained growing recognition as a mode of inquiry among social science researchers (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 2005, 2008; Stoecker, 1999). Yet, there seems to be little consensus on what constitutes participatory research. There exist multiple terms, such as community-based research, participatory rural appraisal, emancipatory praxis, and participatory learning and action, which overlap with one another (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Jordan, 2009). *Participatory action research* and *action research* are often used interchangeably with *participatory research*. Historically, however, the origins of the terms are distinct from each other. A more solid development of participatory research may have been delayed by a lack of understanding the differences among these approaches. At times this lack can also cause participatory research projects to be judged unfairly in the framework of action research.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, journal editors who reviewed one of my manuscripts defined my project as PAR (participatory action research) despite the fact that I used the term *participatory research* in the manuscript. Then, they argued that the “iterative process of action, research, change, re-research,” which is essential to PAR, was not evident in my manuscript. This prompted me to ask some questions: Why did the editors use the term PAR despite the fact that I defined my project as participatory research? In any case, is the iterative process a necessary condition for participatory action research? Is it possible to bring about change in all types of participatory action research? I wonder whether the editors’ criticism was based on the perspective of action research, which often emphasizes iterative processes within research. It is for this reason that I review the concepts of participatory research, action research, and participatory action research, and clarify my approach to participatory research.

Shawna Mercer et al. (2008) defined participatory research as “systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education and of taking action or effecting change” (p. 409). Although the definition came out in the context of community-based participatory research in public health, it represents well what I think participatory research is. The term *participatory research*, however, originates from the context of adult education in the early 1970s. Adult education scholar Marja-Liisa Swantz began to use the term to refer to a new research trend focused on scholarly activism that allows adults to identify their educational needs through active participation in the process of inquiry (Hall, 1975; Park, 1992). Later, some scholars preferred to use the term *participatory action research*, as opposed to participatory research, to emphasize participatory research tied with grassroots *action* (Fals-Borda, 1991a; Rahman, 1985). But the difference between the two terms is slight. In many cases, the choice of one term over the other seems to be a matter of preference rather than anything conceptual.

Action research, in comparison, was born as an alternative to conventional survey-based research in order to generate practical knowledge especially in organizational research settings. Kurt Lewin (1946), who coined the term *action research*, described it as the process of spiral steps, each of which follows a linear procedure of planning, action, and finding results in collaboration with research participants. He argued that through numerous repetitions of the steps, researchers would obtain the best solution for the participants to use in practice. His approach has been widely adopted in business organizations to maximize their functions (Brown & Tandon, 1983). It was so influential, particularly in educational research, that *educational action research* has become a separate genre (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). At the same time, the notion of action research has also been used to refer to an emancipatory approach to research, which emphasizes production of practical knowledge to act upon social issues and to bring about social change. In this context, Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2008) regarded participation as the backbone of action research, writing, “Action research is participatory research, and all participatory research must be action research” (p. 4). In their definition, action research is almost identical to participatory research.



Participatory (action) research<sup>9</sup> is often described as a three-pronged activity that combines *social investigation* with *education* and *action* (Hall, 1984; Maguire, 2008). Influenced by critical theory, this paradigm sees knowledge as a source of power and underlines that research participants play a crucial role in producing counter-hegemonic knowledge by investigating their own experiences (Fals-Borda, 1991b; Park, 1993). Thus, education for participants is considered vital to the research, and critical reflection is seen as an essential research method. In addition, it is argued that people become empowered and can challenge the monopoly of the elite knowledge production system by creating their own knowledge (Fals-Borda, 1991a; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008; Swantz, 2008). Framing this research stream from a feminist perspective, Sara McClelland and Michelle Fine (2008) observed:

PAR [participatory action research] projects trouble traditional questions of power and hegemony; they queer the relationships between researcher and researched; they bridge social theory with critique and imagination; and they create products and actions to provoke a different tomorrow. PAR, by design, works as a release point to challenge and rearticulate the ‘common sense’ and re-vision ‘what could be’. (p. 254)

In contrast with Lewinian action research, participatory (action) research does not necessarily underscore the iterative process of action, research, and change. Instead, it draws greater attention to power either within the process of research or within the context of society (Cahill, 2007). Lewin, in fact, paid little attention to the politics of participation in the process of research. In his formula, participants—typically, organization leaders or professional staff—are still seen as clients to researchers. While researchers are assumed to provide participants with the best possible solutions through research, participants are merely *involved* in research by

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<sup>9</sup> As the terms *participatory research* and *participatory action research* are often used interchangeably, I use the term *participatory (action) research* to indicate them both together until I define my own stance on participatory research later in this section.

providing researchers with quick feedback to the action taken in the process of research (McTaggart, 1991).

Perspectives on action also differ. In the Lewinian tradition, action is defined as an experiment that can be repetitive and modifiable in each implementation and executable multiple times. This type of action may be the best fit for a small-scale inquiry used to improve organizational daily practices (Stringer, 1999). In participatory (action) research, on the contrary, action is not limited to experiment. It can mean grassroots-based social action. Participation in research itself is considered a critical part of social action because it is assumed that critical awareness gained through the participation can give rise to social action. As a way of engendering social action, feminist scholars, in particular, have emphasized that participatory (action) research should provide participants with opportunities to voice their experiences (Wang & Burris, 1997; Williams & Lykes, 2003). Critically, however, the connection between research participation and social action is not always evident in the literature (Reid & Frisby, 2008). There seems to be little ground to assume that voicing would systematically bring about social action. Precisely because of this, participatory (action) researchers often assume a double burden for accomplishing action and research together. This makes participatory (action) research prone to criticisms: It is criticized, at times, for not being able to accomplish action and, at other times, for lacking rigor in valid knowledge production (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

I think these criticisms may undermine what the researcher can do through each incident of participatory research. James Carey (1975) discussed how a group of sociologists, the Chicago School, related their work to society in the 1920s. Central to this group was the question of how best to apply sociological knowledge to solve practical problems such as racism or violence. Taking up a medical model, they were divided into two sub-groups. One group thought that they should influence policy makers, whereas the other argued that they should consult individuals or groups about the problems they had. According to Carey, they failed either way. The reason, he argued, was that sociology, unlike medicine, did not have institutional means to prescribe what to do in order to solve social problems; as a result, sociology became a science rather than a profession, and sociologists came to assume only limited

practitioner roles. Carey's historical analysis suggests that social action is indeed difficult to bring about through research. Even the Chicago School, which possessed ample research resources and even access to power to implement their knowledge, failed to solve social problems and to bring about change. Thus, I argue, the criticism of whether participatory (action) research brings about action and social change should be taken with caution.

I also argue that it is important to remain alert to the criticism that participatory (action) research has become assimilated into mainstream research and thus dissociated from people's lives. In this regard, Dip Kapoor (2009) distinguished two types of research—one conducted in university settings, which he called participatory academic research or *par*, and the other conducted within the context of social movements, which he identified as people's participatory action research or *PAR*. He argued that a *par* process is perhaps theoretically engaged but less flexible and more likely disconnected from people's lives than *PAR*. Steve Jordan (2009) discussed the issue of assimilation in a neoliberal context. He argued that participatory action research, which began as anti-colonial movement in the 1960s, became gradually and insidiously separated from its radical and political origins; while being institutionalized, it became co-opted by mainstream social science researchers, private consultants, government bodies, international development agencies, and non-government organizations. Jordan was particularly concerned about the neoliberal appropriation of participatory action research because he thought that it would only contribute to accumulating capital among neoliberal institutions, such as the World Bank, instead of empowering people. The ideology of neoliberalism is that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In this context, as Kapoor and Jordan (2009) pointed out, neoliberal approaches to participatory (action) research can disguise capitalist growth and justify the expansion of private business sectors while ignoring the root causes of poverty. As seen in the World Bank's (1996, 2006) publication *The Participation Sourcebook*, neoliberal empowerment is not so much about obtaining agency for social transformation as it is about developing small business. Criticizing participatory development of the World

Bank and other international organizations, Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (2001) made the point that participatory development was becoming a new tyranny that embodied potential for an unjustified exercise of power. Participatory projects conducted within the neoliberal framework may have been done in collaboration with local people. But think of who writes such publications as *Participation Sourcebook*. As Bjoern Nordtveit (2011) pointed out, they are technical experts trained within a neoliberal discourse. In this system, the poor remain poor in the name of freedom and empowerment. Therefore, I think it is important for researchers to delineate what counts as action in participatory (action) research.

I approach this from a practical stance. I see collaboration for producing knowledge as an incident of social action because it can potentially bring about change in people's lives. I do not think that enabling social action beyond a research setting can always be feasible in part because research is contingent on institutional structures based on time limitation, funding, and so forth (de Lange & Mitchell, 2012). More importantly, it is also because participants may opt not to act at certain moments, as Patricia Maguire (1987) pointed out:

While direct community action is an intended outcome of participatory research, people may also decide not to act at a particular point in time. The important point is that those involved in the production of knowledge are involved in the decision-making regarding its use and application to their everyday life. (p. 37)

In the context of participatory video, E-J Milne (2012) similarly argued:

For example, so-called nonparticipation in a project might not be because of generic apathy but, rather, may be an active form of participation—(non) participation. Investigation and written acknowledgement of what is actually occurring when people do not take part in projects is essential. This is because ignoring or dismissing those who fail to take part serves both to silence and to render absent potentially significant elements of a project. (p. 258)

Social action may be a hoped-for research outcome at best because it has to be grounded in participants' autonomous commitment to act. To be clear, I do not mean that researchers do not need to consider social action in designing research. I think they should by all means. What I want to stress here is that a grand-scale social action should not be the sole objective of participatory (action) research and that the research should not be judged by the fact that there was (no) such action. As White (2003b) suggested, it may be more viable and strategic for the researcher to aim to augment human capacity among participants through numerous mini participatory projects than to aim to bring about social action all at once through one big project; this sustained engagement would allow participants to feel a sense of accomplishment and assurance by succeeding in small projects. Furthermore, participants' critical feedback in each small project may enable the researcher to develop a better approach in following projects and to respond to the need of the participants' lives more adequately. In this way, each project can become more manageable, especially for graduate students and early career scholars. From this standpoint, I opt for the term *participatory research* to represent my research orientation. If action indicates people's participation in research, there is no need to use the words *participatory* and *action* together. It is redundant. If action refers to social action, especially at a large scale, it is more likely to be an outcome than the purpose of a research project. Thus, I use the term *participatory research* hereafter in lieu of *action research* or *participatory action research*.

### **A Research Paradigm for Studying Reflexivity in a Participatory Setting**

Howard Becker (1967) argued:

To have values or not to have values: the question is always with us. When sociologists undertake to study problems that have relevance to the world we live in, they find themselves caught in a crossfire . . . [but] the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on. (p. 239)

This suggests that all the means to make research value-free are false because every researcher inevitably brings his or her values to the research. Researchers choose what to ask and how to answer it according to the values they hold. Thus, the objectivity of inquiry is contingent on subjective values. Max Weber (1949) put it as follows:

The *objective* validity of all empirical knowledge rests exclusively upon the ordering of the given reality according to categories which are *subjective* in a specific sense, namely, in that they present the *presuppositions* of our knowledge and are based on the presupposition of the *value* of those *truths* which empirical knowledge alone is able to give us. (p. 110; italics in original)

Weber went on to argue that judging the validity of values is a “matter of *faith*” (p. 55). This implies that there is no universal, objective value; knowledge that is considered valuable is embedded in a culture that forges a specific faith. Hence, as Denzin (2010) pointed out, inquiry is always moral and political because knowledge produced through research may impact someone’s life with or without intention. As Robert Proctor (1988) showed, the research that German scientists conducted on race in the 1930s is one especially horrendous example of this. It was used to justify the Holocaust. More importantly, Zygmunt Bauman (2000) argued, the involvement of scientists in the Nazi empire was not innocent; some actively participated in creating and maintaining racial policy. Criticizing this, Bauman wrote, “At best, the cult of rationality, institutionalized as modern science, proved impotent to prevent the state from turning into organized crime; at worst, it proved instrumental in bringing the transformation about” (p.110). This reminds me of the pungent question Becker (1967) asked: *Whose side are we on?* This very question is aligned with C. Wright Mills’s (1959) call for sociological imagination, which he defined as the quality of mind to achieve “lucid summations of what is going on in the work and of what may be happening within themselves [social scientists]” (p. 5). Mills argued that only through sociological imagination, but not rigid methods nor theories, can social

scientists ask what *values* are supported or threatened, and in doing so, can address social issues properly.

These arguments, especially made by Weber and Mills, seem to be tied with the notion of *reflexivity*, an ever-recurring topic in the discourse of contemporary qualitative inquiry. Reflexivity is predominantly referred to as researchers' self-criticality on the impact of their subjectivity on research processes and outcomes. In the contemporary scene of qualitative research, researchers are increasingly conscious of reflexivity (Finlay, 2002). Instead of eliminating the impact of the researcher's subjectivity, they have emphasized the necessity for critical reflection on the self as a research instrument (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). In my view, critical reflection should be built into the framework of the ethics of research because, as Proctor (1988) and Bauman (2000) showed, research is inevitably value-laden and can have implications in some people's lives. Therefore, as Becker (1967) asked, I ask myself whose side I am on. This question forms the very basis of my inquiry.

Ontologically, though I acknowledge the existence of multiple realities, I reject the constructivist relativism that realities exist only in subjective minds (see Guba, 1990). Instead, drawing on John Heron and Peter Reason's (1997) paradigm of participatory inquiry and Joe Kincheloe's (2005) notion of critical constructivism, I see that individuals come to construct subjective realities by participating social reality, which is determined by institutions, ideologies, beliefs, and other modes of power. Also important to this process is reflexivity, by which I mean reflecting critically on one's lived experiences through interactions with other people. I think people do not simply come to know what reality is, but rather construct a new reality through reflexivity. Hence, constructing a reality with participants is key to research. As Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (2008) observed, I think research is not so much about explaining realities as "envisioning what the world can become" (p. 167).

This leads to my methodological framework. Here I draw on the work of John Gaventa (1991), who argued that participatory research is "not only *for* the people but is created *with* them and *by* them as well" (p. 131). I think that social research needs to be more participatory and collaborative, by which I mean that participants should bring their subjective experiences into the research and discuss them together to address

issues that are important to their lives. I do not argue that all research should be participatory. But I believe that research conducted with reference to critical theory has to be participatory to a great extent in order to shed light on the intricacy between power and ordinary experiences. I also believe that interactions and collaborations with participants allow the researcher to become more reflexive of her subjectivity and privileges. In order to facilitate people's participation in research, participatory research often uses less conventional research methods than pen-and-paper based practice (Hall, 1984). Among them, *photovoice*<sup>10</sup> might be the most well known. Alongside this, participatory video has increasingly been used in various contexts, as discussed earlier in this chapter. While photovoice and participatory video overlap in many ways, video can address certain issues that are difficult to express through single photos or even through poster-narratives (Mitchell, 2011). However, such visual or less conventional approaches are not the only methods used in participatory research projects. Conventional research methods, such as surveys and interviews, are used as well. I do not think that methods themselves distinguish participatory research from conventional research. In this light, Mary Brydon-Miller (1997) argued that what matters is who determines which methods to be used. I agree with her. At the same time, I believe it is also a researcher's responsibility to inform participants of what methods are available and how to use them in order to allow them to make informed decisions. With this background, I now turn to stating the questions that guided this thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> Photovoice is a research method in which participants use photography to document critical aspects of their daily lives for group discussion and often for seeking solutions to their common problems. It has drawn attention from a wide range of studies since Caroline Wang applied the method in China in the mid-1990s. She gave a simple still camera to each of 62 rural women to assess their needs for public health (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).



## Research Questions

The key question of my thesis is: *How can the notion of reflexivity deepen an understanding of participatory video, and simultaneously, how can the study of participatory video deepen an understanding of reflexivity?* Participatory research aims at engaging participants in constructing knowledge based on their subjective experiences. In this regard, Orlando Fals-Borda (1991b) defined participatory research as an experiential methodology, indicating that knowledge is produced from experiences. Participants' subjectivities are an important means for participatory research, for the outcome of participatory research is contingent on the processes in which participants come to clarify their subjective experiences. This suggests that there has to be more discussion on reflexivity centered on participants in participatory video. And yet, much of the discussion on reflexivity has placed the researcher at the center of knowledge production. At the same time, as I discussed in the very beginning of the chapter, it is also necessary that the researcher reflect upon her involvement in a participatory video project critically and make its processes transparent in order to develop theories of participatory video that can undergird practices. Within this context, I explore my key question with the following two sub-questions:

1. How does participatory video contribute to shaping participants' voices and experiences and affect knowledge construction when a group of adult learners who are socioeconomically disadvantaged generate a research topic by reflecting on their lived experiences and conduct research together?
2. How does reflexivity shed new light on the knowledge of participatory video when I, as the academic researcher, look back at my own involvement in a participatory video research project?

## Strategy of Inquiry

I explore the thesis topic, *the methodological complexity of participatory video with reference to reflexivity*, through one research project. By probing this project, I tease out some of the complexities of participatory video, and in so doing, attempt to advance knowledge and develop participatory video. Although my study does not follow the convention of case studies, it does use a case study as a scaffold for designing research by treating the project as an example. Hence I here examine the discourse of case studies to delineate the approach to research of the thesis. Emphasizing the advantages of case studies, Robert Stake (2005) wrote, “Case studies are of value in refining theory, suggesting complexities for further investigation as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability” (p. 460). Similarly, David Silverman (2010) argued that the researcher can “make a lot out of a little” (p. 137) by bringing about far-reaching implications from the trivial through good analysis. In what follow, I provide a synopsis of my study.

### Setting

I studied a participatory video research project that I set up and facilitated in Chicago for 11 weeks in June, July, and August in 2010 (which came out of my previous work described in the background of the thesis in this chapter). I set this boundary of time because I assumed that the period would give reasonable time to both the participants and me—for the participants to concentrate on the project and feel a sense of accomplishment as if taking a course over the summer, and for me to test how participatory video research may work without disrupting the participants’ individual lives too much.

### Participants

There were eight participants, one man and seven women, ranging in age from their 20s to their 60s. Seven of the participants were African Americans, and one of them was Caucasian. They were selected from the Odyssey Project graduates who had taken my video production course in 2008 and 2009. They were economically

disadvantaged adults living in an inner city with an interest in pursuing education in either formal or informal settings.

### **Topic**

It was the participants who chose the topic to study in the project. By taking a generative approach to selecting the topic, I intended to make the process of the project more participatory. The participants decided to look at the experiences of former Odyssey Project students with their programs and were particularly interested in discovering what obstacles non-graduating students might have faced while taking courses in order to help remove the obstacles.

### **My Approach to the Analysis**

As the project unfolded, I gathered first-hand information of its processes and outcomes in a “*naturally occurring* context” (Silverman, 2010, p. 125; italics in original). It does not mean, however, that I sat back as an unobtrusive observer. On the contrary, as I further describe below, I actively participated in the project as a facilitator. I also obtained data from the participants with regard to their perspectives on participatory video and experiences with the project. I analyze the project reflexively and interpret multiple sets of data hermeneutically. As suggested here, my thesis involves two layers of research: (a) the participatory video research project carried out with the participants; and (b) the analysis of the project. Although the outcomes of the project are noteworthy on their own and important for drawing conclusion, my focus in the thesis is not so much on the outcomes of the project as on the analysis of its process and the influence on the participants’ experiences. I explain my data sets and my approach to analysis in more detail in Chapter 3.

### **Situating Myself**

Because of the layers of research involved in my study, I assumed a double role. Inside the participatory video research project, I was an academic researcher and facilitator. I organized group meetings, introduced research methods, provided my

expertise in developing research questions and analyzing data, and offered technical support for video production and creating text materials along the project. In brief, I orchestrated the process of the project. And yet, it was not a laboratory experiment, but an exploratory study based on real life. Oddities and mishaps occurred during the course of the project. In the thesis, I pay particular attention to these moments.

In addition to the role as the academic researcher and facilitator, I also situated myself as a researcher and observer in order to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the project. I used participant observation techniques to maximize the opportunity to learn from the project by locating me in “part of a social setting” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 39). In this way, I intended to reduce the distance between the participants (as the observed) and me (as the observer) (Flick, 2011). Participant observation is fruitful especially for exploratory studies aiming at generating theoretical interpretations of phenomena little known to outsiders (Jorgensen, 1989). During my observation, I focused on the interactions among the participants as well as between them and me. I also paid attention to the ways in which the research proceeded and the ways in which the participants and I made decisions together and coped with differences and conflicts. When I look back at the process of the project, I also look at the participants and myself.

Taking on a critical constructivist stance, I acknowledge that I entered the research scene with an “interpretative frame of reference” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509) with the intent to develop participatory video as a means for validating the experiences and knowledge of the participants. As the project went on, it became evident that I assumed the role of an educator as much as the participants underlined the educational values of the project. This was not anticipated. I was prompted not only to be a researcher with scientific rigor but also to become a caring educator, who could pay attention to the circumstances that the individual participants faced in their private lives while participating in the project. I further reflect on the roles I played and the conflicting ideas and challenges I encountered during the course of the project in the penultimate chapter of the thesis.

## **Organizing the Thesis**

This thesis consists of eight chapters. In this first chapter I have offered an overview of the thesis, including its background, theoretical framework, research questions, and strategy of inquiry. In addition, I have examined a brief history of participatory video. In Chapter 2, I review the discourse of reflexivity and develop an argument for reflexivity that may be useful in conducting and analyzing participatory video. Based on this argument, I examine the literature of participatory video to explore ways in which participatory video can contribute to conducting reflexive research. Chapter 3 is primarily descriptive and lays the groundwork for my analysis and discussion that follow the chapter. I explain the way I set up the participatory video research project and introduce its individual participants. I then go over the project session by session and conclude the chapter by mapping out the data sets, discussing my analytical framework, and addressing the issues of trustworthiness and generalization in this type of research. In Chapter 4, I offer a debriefing of the process of the project. I first summarize the overall findings of the project presented by the participants themselves. I then focus on the final video that the participants and I created in the project and the process of the video making. I discuss contradictions, surprises, and difficulties that occurred during the process. I finally move away from the minute details of the process and discuss more broadly what difference the participatory approach taken in the project made to the project. I explore this issue by comparing the project with another project carried out on a similar topic in a less participatory way. Chapter 5 concerns the voice and reflexivity of the participants. I analyze what the participants had to say about and through participatory video. The focus of my discussion is on the way that participatory video provoked reflexivity among the participants and enabled them to bring out their voices. I then relate their accounts to the content of the final video and discuss whose voice predominates in the video. In Chapter 6, I shift the analysis to learning, which the participants commonly described as a main experience with the project. I also review negative experiences that some of the participants expressed and discuss what could be done to minimize such experiences. I finally analyze the sense of agency the participants exhibited in

talking about their experiences. In Chapter 7, I turn my gaze inwards on “me as the researcher” in the project by using the concept of positionality as defined in feminist scholarship. In the literature of participatory video, the discussion of the researcher’s positionality has tended to be cursory and rarely moved beyond the simple dichotomy between insider and outsider. I emphasize that the researcher’s positionality shaped by gender, race, class, and so forth influences the process of knowledge construction and participants’ experiences with participatory video. Thus, I call for attention to positionality in the study of participatory video.

To capitalize on the presence of online space for a wide distribution of the project, I have constructed a web page as a complementary text to the thesis. The video that the participants and I produced together can be viewed on the web page (<https://sites.google.com/site/videotelling/gallery/2010>).<sup>11</sup> Initially, I created the website to bring together the products of the video production courses I offered to former Odyssey Project students in one place in order to archive and disseminate the products at the same time. Anyone who has access to the Internet can view the videos that were created in the courses.

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<sup>11</sup> The website itself reflects a new Internet phenomenon. One can create a personal website with little or no knowledge of how to code web pages. There are several Internet companies that offer free web spaces and tools to build such websites. I chose Google because I could create a site easily by using my Google email account. Although I cannot take full control of the way the website looks, I can add new materials and maintain the site easily. Visual researchers may find such websites useful in disseminating research products to a wide audience. To make the final video available on the site, I uploaded the final video onto YouTube in a private viewing mode. This mode minimizes possible harm that public viewing might cause to video subjects unintentionally (hence, the final video is not searchable on YouTube). I then embedded the video on my web page. Embedding is a web technique, which allows audio, image, or video files to reside in one web server but to be accessed on multiple web pages.

# Reflexivity in and through Participatory Video 2

*Participatory video as a process is totally self-involving. I tape myself. I tape others. We tape each other. We watch alone. We watch together. We react to and think about what we see. We discuss and reflect. We share with others. It is a useful process. (White, 2003c, p. 63)*

As discussed in the previous chapter, reflexivity is considered a key concept of contemporary qualitative inquiry (Finlay, 2002). It is predominantly defined as a researcher's critical self-reflection on the impact of her subjectivity on the processes and outcomes of research. Researchers are required to critically reflect on the methods they choose, the roles they play, and the power relationships between participants and themselves in doing research. The idea of a researcher's subjectivity relates to the "Interpretative Turn" (Wasserfall, 1997, p. 151), in which interpretation is seen as a legitimate research method for social science research. In this paradigm, researchers see themselves as an instrument of research and are conscious of their subjective involvement in research (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Patton, 2002). Feminist scholarship, in particular, has drawn attention to reflexivity (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Mauthner, 2000; Riach, 2009; Wasserfall, 1997). Verta Taylor (1998), for instance, regarded reflexivity as one of the main features of feminist methodologies and defined it as a "source of insight" (p. 360). Ethnographic researchers have also increasingly emphasized the use of reflexivity in their work (e.g., Boylorn, 2011; Ellis, 2004, 2009; Hope Alkon, 2011; Newman, 2011). In the discourse of reflexivity, it is assumed that the researcher can not only add rigor to research but also render the research more ethical by practicing reflexivity (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Though I do regard reflexivity as important, the discourse of reflexivity seems a little problematic. First, it tells little about how the researcher can become critical. I

do not think that self-reflection on who they are, what they did, and why they did it necessarily makes research critical. Even if these questions were explicitly addressed, what difference would it make? Yet, such self-questioning often seems to be mistaken as reflexivity (Silverman, 2010). Reflexivity should not be confused with reflection. In this regard, Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson (2006) defined reflection as meditation whereas reflexivity concerns treating “the subject and object of an activity the same” (p. 66). They went on to argue that, “a reflexive scholar is one who applies to their own work the same critical stance, the same interrogative questions, and the same refusal to take things for granted as they do with their research data” (p. 66). As Kamler and Thomson argued, reflexivity should involve critical self-interrogation. Only then can reflexivity become a more essential method for qualitative social science inquiry. To do so, I think there has to be more information about how to be reflexive systematically. Second, one can reflect endlessly, but what is the purpose of the reflexivity and its outcome? I think that the predominant discourse of reflexivity may reinforce the researcher-centeredness of research by prodding the researcher to be more explicit about her subjectivity. Consequently, reflexivity may contribute to suppressing participants’ voices. This is particularly problematic in participatory research, in which participants are assumed to co-create knowledge with the researcher by using their own subjectivities. Hence, a key issue in participatory research has been how to bring out the participants’ subjectivities. But how can the prevailing notion of reflexivity contribute to this if the researcher focuses on her subjectivity?

In this chapter, I develop an argument for reflexivity that may contribute to conducting and analyzing participatory video research projects. In the first section, I look at the debates around reflexivity that I find useful to the purpose of my argument. In the second section, drawing on this literature review, I examine various participatory video projects and analyze some of the key features of participatory video that seem to be related to reflexivity. By drawing on this conceptual framework, I aim to shed light on the roles that participatory video can play in conducting reflexive research (and vice versa) in my thesis.



## **Is Reflexivity Good for Participatory Research?**

To address this question, I examine arguments for reflexivity. My discussion of the section is divided into four areas: (1) I review how reflexivity is conceptualized in the context of participatory research. Based on this review, I point to some of the important elements that seem to be undermined in the predominant discourse of reflexivity, but important in taking up participatory approaches; (2) as I develop my argument specifically for participatory video, I look at some of the debates on reflexivity in (participatory) visual studies; (3) I then focus on the ways in which the concept of voice has been dealt with in the literature of reflexivity; (4) I go on to examine a body of literature on interviewing related to reflexivity because I use the method in my approach to participatory video production. Finally, taking together these arguments, I respond to the title of the section.

### **Conceptualizing Reflexivity in Participatory Research**

The literature of participatory research defines reflexivity slightly differently from the dominant discourse of reflexivity. For instance:

Reflexivity is a process of co-construction of multifaceted and many-layered perspectives together with the participants involved. (Niemi, Heikkinen, & Kannas, 2010, p. 138)

[Reflexivity is concerned with] the effects of researchers on society and the nature of structural and spatial power relations between the researchers and the researched. Furthermore, we view reflexivity as not solely an individual endeavor, but rather as a collective relationship between all actors in the research process. (Cordner, Ciplet, Brown, & Morello-Frosch, 2012, p. 163)

Reflexivity in research involves reflection on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, and researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation. (Sultana,

2007, p. 376)

While the third approach to reflexivity is focused on a researcher's critical reflection, the others take into consideration the politics of perspectives. They call for an injection of participants' perspectives (or voices) in the processes of reflexivity. Attention to the collective relationship between participants and the researcher is also of note. These approaches to reflexivity suggest that the politics of voice and collective relationship are essential to the reflexivity of participatory research. It is because the researcher is not the only entity that conducts research; participants' subjective involvement in the process of inquiry and their articulation of their experiences are equally critical in the process of research. And yet, the literature on reflexivity has heavily focused on the researcher's self-reflection and paid significantly less attention to reflexivity from the participants' perspective. In the literature, for instance, reflexivity is seen as a task that the researcher needs to "manage the subjectivity of their work" (A. Holliday, 2007, p. 21), or as "the practice of actively locating oneself within the research process, including the representation stage" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008, p. 4). Or it is simply defined as the researcher's "explicit self-aware meta-analysis" (Finlay, 2002, p. 209). As such, too often, the researcher is described as the only actor in performing reflexivity or reflexive research. This, I think, has crippled the practice of reflexivity in the context of participatory research. As Marco Gemignani (2011) put it, "Whereas reflexivity is crucial to understanding the ways in which the researcher constructs the researched, much less has been written on the other direction of the research rapport: from the participants and subject matter to the investigator" (p. 705). Proportionally, hence, reflexivity among participants and the roles that it may play in doing research are largely absent in the literature of reflexivity.

I further look at the literature of reflexivity in the context of participatory research. Lai Fong Chiu (2006) categorized three types of reflexivity: the researcher's self-reflexivity (i.e., an awareness of hidden assumptions in the process of knowledge making), relational reflexivity (i.e., the researcher's ability to attend to power differentials between participants and herself and to collaborate with participants), and

collective reflexivity (i.e., promoting critical awareness among participants) (see also Nicholls, 2009). The third reflexivity is in line with the critical reflexivity that Kapoor and Jordan (2009) argued for. They argued that researchers should make efforts to turn research into a local resource with which participants or their community can protect their rights and resist adverse external forces. These arguments on reflexivity allow me to see reflexivity in a broad social context beyond research settings.

However, I see two shortcomings in the arguments. First, while it is implied that reflexivity is the researcher's *obligation*, knowledge of how to do reflexive research is not evident. Especially for doctoral students or early career scholars, participatory research itself can be a daunting task because it requires research skills that may not be taught in regular graduate courses. Practicing reflexivity in addition to managing participatory research can be challenging. Hence, there has to be more discussion on the means that the researcher can use to practice reflexivity more systematically, and the tools, if any, should be made available. Second, the arguments of reflexivity seem to echo the predominant discourse of reflexivity, where reflexivity is typically discussed in a researcher-centered tone. As I discussed earlier, this is at odds with the principle of participatory research that research participants, as participant (or inside) researchers, collaborate with the academic researcher to investigate their own problems. Despite this distinct approach to research, the discourse of participatory research has given little attention to the participants' reflexivity. I think that it should be made more prominent in discussing reflexivity in the context of participatory video.

### **Reflexivity in Visual Studies**

As my research involves video, I take a close look at the literature of reflexivity in visual studies. Visual researchers have been particularly attentive to reflexivity. Emphasizing the reflexivity of ethnographic film, Jay Ruby (2000) argued that researchers should "systematically and rigorously reveal their methods and themselves as the instrument of data generation" (p. 152). Specifically, Ruby pointed to *A Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929) and *Chronicle of a Summer* (Dauman, Rouch, & Morin, 1960) as exemplary reflexive films for the following reasons: In the former, the filmmaker reveals the process of filmmaking by altering shots between him and the

objects he recorded, whereas in the latter, the filmmakers not only reveal themselves discussing the film itself, but also included the scene where participants critiqued their representations in the film. Ruby stated that by deliberately showing the processes of filmmaking as such, the filmmakers made the films reflexive. In his view, reflexivity concerns the transparency of the process of knowledge production by using the machinery of filmmaking and cinematic techniques.

Reflexivity, however, does not have to be seen only as *how* the film is made, but also as *what* the film is about. Bill Nichols (1991) discussed the reflexivity of film from the perspective of viewing experience. He asserted that the reflexive film should heighten viewers' consciousness of their relations to the film and the reality represented in it. Historically, he explained, documentary filmmakers tried to achieve both formal and political reflexivity. Formal reflexivity emphasizes experimenting with cinematic apparatuses to dismantle taken-for-granted viewing conditions (as Ruby argued), whereas political reflexivity uses the technique of juxtaposing contradictory statements to raise consciousness among audiences, as shown in the film *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris, 1988), in which the filmmaker brings together conflicting views and testimonials on a murder case. Pointing to two different reflexive modes, Nichols argued, "Reflexivity, then, need not be purely formal; it can also be pointedly political" (p. 64). In the context of participatory video, I think both forms of reflexivity do exist, but differently from the context of professional films. Formal reflexivity is inherent in participatory video not because it employs experimenting with cinematic apparatuses—in fact, it is often made with conventional techniques, such as interviewing, observation, or drama—but because participants create visual representations of themselves or their community members. At the same time, participatory video is characterized with political reflexivity in that it intends to bring out participants' perspectives on their lives in order to raise consciousness among audiences.

Ruth Holliday (2000), however, took a critical stance on reflexivity. She wrote:

Reflexivity is the latest in a long line of (not specifically anthropological)

techniques aimed at ensuring the production of greater degrees of ‘truth’ . . . .

This technique aims to acknowledge the partiality of the researcher and thus the distance between representation and ‘reality’ in the researcher’s work (p. 506).

Holliday cast doubt on the usefulness of the prevailing notion of reflexivity. She supported her view with Trinh Minh-ha’s argument. In an interview with Nancy Chen (1994), Trinh contended: “How is reflexivity understood and materialized? If it reduced [*sic*] to a form of mere breast-beating or self-criticism for further improvement, it certainly does not lead us very far” (p. 440; as cited in Holliday, 2000, p. 507). Aligned with this, Holliday cautioned that reflexivity might be becoming a “mere buzz-word” (p. 507) because researchers try to legitimize the truth of research by drawing on the notion of reflexivity within a positivist framework. Refuting Holliday, Pink (2001) maintained that reflexivity was a key theme in the recent development of visual anthropology as a way of provoking participants’ reflections on their lives and allowing them to project their own images. Her argument brought to the fore a new perspective on reflexivity and shifted the agent of reflexivity from the researcher to participants. Pink’s argument, however, did not seem to respond directly to what Holliday argued against reflexivity because Holliday did not seem to reject the importance of participants’ reflections. In fact, I think that she embraced it with the video diary method she used in queer studies. By allowing each participant to construct self-images with a video camera, she aimed to elicit “mediated confession” from the participant (R. Holliday, 2007, p. 278). Despite the conflict in perspectives on reflexivity, what Holliday and Pink had in common seems to be looking at reflexivity from the participants’ standpoint. This view on reflexivity is significant to my thesis. Practically, participants’ reflexivity, as well as a researcher’s reflexivity, is represented through the notion of voice. The politics of voice is the focus of my next argument.

## Voice

Drawing on power differentials between the researcher and participants, Helen Callaway (1992) provided critical insight into reflexivity:

Often condemned as apolitical, reflexivity, on the contrary can be seen as opening the way to a more radical consciousness of self in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork and constructing knowledge. Other factors intersecting with gender—such as nationality, race, ethnicity, class, and age—also affect the anthropologist’s field interactions and textual strategies. Reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness. (p. 33; as cited in Hertz, 1996, p. 5)

Acknowledging issues of power, scholars—in particular, feminist scholars—have given rise to the importance of *voice* in their work. Rosanna Hertz (1996) explained the multiple dimensions of voice: “First there is the voice of the author. Second, there is the presentation of the voices of ones’ respondents within the text. A third dimension appears when the self is the subject of the inquiry” (pp. 6-7). While the third voice becomes more audible with an expansion of autoethnography (see Ellis, 2004), the other types of voice seem to be suppressed by all-knowing voices, as Lynn Butler-Kisber (2010) pointed out, in the “hegemonic dimensions of linear texts” (p. 21).<sup>12</sup> Some postmodern ethnographic researchers, in contrast, have championed the voice of the author. They argued that ethnographers should make their voices more prominent through disruptive writing, i.e., dismantling the textual coherence of a research report by injecting their personal standpoints; in doing so, researchers could make their positions and assumptions explicit and thus be engaged in reflexivity (see Macbeth, 2001). In this regard, Stephen Tylor (1986) stated:

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<sup>12</sup> Butler-Kisber (2010) argued that the researcher should make her and participants’ voices more prominent in the text in order to make research more ethical. She suggested that some forms of arts-based research offer more systematic ways of doing it than conventional research methods.

A post-modern ethnography is fragmentary because it cannot be otherwise. Life in the field itself is fragmentary, . . . It is not just that we cannot see the forest for the trees, but that we have come to feel that there are no forests where the trees are too far apart, just as patches make quilts only if the spaces between them are small enough. (pp. 131-132)

But how does such disruptive writing make researchers more critical of what they do? As George Marcus (1994) argued, writing has little to do with reflexivity because researchers choose how to write regardless of how they do research. I do think that disruptive writing, though it can bring out the researcher's voice more clearly, does not necessarily make research reflexive in the sense that it enables the researcher to look at the process of research critically. Then, how should reflexivity be dealt with? More critically, how can the voice of participants be brought to the fore in the context of research? Is there enough room to discuss this voice in the discourse of reflexivity? I examine these questions through Douglas Macbeth's (2001) survey of reflexivity. In his definition, reflexivity is a "deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself" (p. 35).<sup>13</sup> He identified three domains of reflexivity: positional, textual, and constitutive reflexivity. *Positional reflexivity*, he argued, dominates the discourse of reflexivity. It refers to a "self-referential analytic exercise" (p. 38), as often seen in autobiographical or confessional discourses. It "takes up the analysts' (uncertain) position and positioning in the world he or she studies and is often expressed with a vigilance for unseen, privileged, or, worse, exploitative relationships between analyst and the world" (p. 38). Hence, positional reflexivity is closely tied with a "critically disciplined subjectivity" (p. 39). In practice, however, Macbeth observed that positional reflexivity often centers on the representation exercise and thus tends to diminish into textual representation. Such representation, as I discussed above, is the

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<sup>13</sup> According to Macbeth (2001), reflexivity is a feature of postmodernism, which often problematizes meanings, values, and representations. In this context, Paul Sweetman (2003) argued that reflexivity is habitual and that one should be reflexive in order to conduct daily activities, such as work and leisure, in a post-modern society.

focus of *textual reflexivity*. According to Macbeth, it concerns the style of writing to disrupt “realist assurances about representation and textual coherence *into* the text” and often includes “the disruption of the text itself by various devices and experiments in textual display” (p. 43). The third category of reflexivity Macbeth identified was *constitutive reflexivity*. It refers to a routine in which people make sense of every day activities, as often argued by ethnomethodologists.<sup>14</sup> They see reflexivity neither as the researcher’s self-reflection nor as a methodological process, but as an ordinary means for making sense as “practical grammars of the social-constructive exercise”(Macbeth, 2001, p. 50). Reading the scholarly dialogue on reflexivity together, I wonder where and how reflexivity in participatory research can fit. Where can the politics of voice among research participants be discussed? There seems to be little room for this discussion in the discourse of reflexivity.

Voice matters in participatory research. Hall (1993) argued, “Participatory research fundamentally is about the right to speak” (p. xvii). Participatory research responds to the need for bringing out participants’ voices. To facilitate participatory processes in inquiry and help participants articulate experiences that word-based conventional research can hardly access, researchers have explored innovative methods using visual media and other arts-informed methods, such as photos, videos, plays, and performances (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Lykes, 1997; Stuckey, 2009). As noted in Chapter 1, *photovoice* might be the most well known among the methods. Focusing on visual methods, Luttrell (2010) argued, “The use of visual methods allows those who might otherwise go unnoticed to be recognised and afforded voice in the body politic” (p. 233). However, as she pointed out, how to use visual methods to assist participants in reflecting on their lives and bringing out their voices needs a more theoretical analysis and empirical studies. I think interviewing in combination with participatory video may be useful to provoking reflexivity among participants and highlighting their voices. Hence, I shift the focus of my discussion to interviews in the next section.

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<sup>14</sup> Ethnomethodologists are generally interested in the ways in which people make sense of their daily activities (see Holstein & Gubrium, 2005).



## Interviews: Reflexivity in Practice

Stressing reflexivity in the qualitative interview, Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (2006) argued, “The heart of the qualitative interview requires much *reflexivity*, that is, sensitivity to the important ‘situational’ dynamics between the researcher and researched that can impact the creation of knowledge” (p. 135). Typically, however, the interview is understood as a means for extracting information from interviewees, and the interviewer is required to be neutral. Reflexivity, thus, is hardly regarded as an essential element of the interview in practice (Hsiung, 2008). In contrast, James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium (2004) brought about a distinct perspective on interviews with the concept of the *active interview*. They argued, “All interviews are active interviews” (p. 140) because it cannot be otherwise. They asserted that the interview is essentially an “interpersonal drama with a developing plot” (p. 149), where the interviewer and the interviewee participate in the process of making meanings. The authors argued that the active nature of the interview, however, is very often ignored. This view seems aligned with Denzin’s (2001) argument that the interview is not simply a method of gathering information, but should be seen as a process in which both interviewees and interviewers come to learn about themselves and society. He argued that we live in a “cinematic-interview society,” that is, “a society which knows itself through the reflective gaze of the cinematic apparatus” (p. 23). In reviewing various types of interviews in the structure of the cinematic-interview society, Denzin (2003) identified the reflexive interview as a type of interview in which the interviewer builds a dialogic relationship with the interviewee, discovers their commonalities, intervenes in each other’s lives, and uncovers the oppressive structures in their lives by listening to each other attentively. Through the reflexive interview, he argued, two people (the interviewer and the interviewee) can create a “tiny drama” (p. 147) in which they reconstruct the unique meanings of the experiences and ultimately dismantle the division between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Though democratic and participatory in principle, as Ping-Chun Hsiung (2008) pointed out, the reflexive interview seems far removed from the common practice of interviewing in qualitative research. Typically, the interviewer and the interviewee do

not participate in creating meanings of experiences equally. There remain power differentials between the two. In general, the interviewer (the researcher) has the power to select topics, extract parts from an interview, and to reconstruct the interview. To reduce the differentials, feminist scholars, in particular, have underpinned empathy. It is seen as a “part of the relational connection that would establish a less threatening environment and thus a worthwhile interview experience yielding quality participant responses” (Mallozzi, 2009, p. 1045). Empathy is considered not only necessary for developing a partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007), but also essential to producing rich data (Gemignani, 2011). It has been argued that, through empathy, the researcher may become more reflexive of her subjective involvement in research.

Not all scholars, however, emphasize empathy. Lene Tanggaard (2007), for example, criticized it because knowledge is produced not only through empathy but also through disagreement, contradictions, and conflicts. The author argued, “qualitative interviewing has to overcome a growing feminization where empathy and the ability to create comfortable human relations become the most important qualifications of the interviewer” (pp. 174-175). Although I do agree that the interviewer may not always need to concur with the interviewee, I do not agree that empathy is something to overcome. It seems that Tanggaard limited the notion of empathy to affirmation. I see empathy as the attitude that one wants to understand the other holistically. It may well include disagreement and conflicts. These frictions may allow the interviewer to enter a more critical reflection and to gain a better understanding of the interviewee. In my view, hence, empathy is a fundamental component of qualitative research.

In general, I agree with Holstein and Gubrium (2004) and Denzin (2003): The interview is the process in which the interviewer co-creates meanings with the interviewee. I also agree with feminist scholars: The interviewer needs to be reflexive and should develop empathy with the interviewee. Evidently, however, the interviewer and the interviewee enter the scene of an interview with distinct positions, assumptions, and purposes in most cases of qualitative inquiry. I do not think that these differences can be easily reduced even when empathy is developed fairly well

between the two. This leads to the following questions: Can participatory video contribute to conducting the reflexive interview? How does reflexivity play out when participants interview each other in a participatory setting? I discuss these issues in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Envisioning a Different Type of Reflexivity: Beyond Self-Scrutiny**

In this section, I have examined issues of reflexivity that seem relevant to participatory research. So, is reflexivity good for participatory research? My answer is yes. I agree with Farhana Sultana (2007), who argued that reflexivity can “open up the research to more complex and nuanced understandings of issues, where boundaries between process and content can get blurred” (p. 376). A problem is that the predominant discourse of reflexivity is filled with the demand for the researcher’s self-scrutiny on her subjective involvement in research. It is dominated by the researcher’s voice and introspection. This may risk reinforcing the researcher-centeredness of research. In principle, participatory research troubles the researcher-centeredness and prioritizes participants’ voices. To uphold the principles and bolster the strengths of participatory research, I think that we as researchers need to think of reflexivity differently with reference to the principles of participatory research. In this context, I underline three points to consider: First, the participants’ reflexivity should be made prominent. Second, there has to be more discussion about how to bring out participants’ voices more evidently. Third, interactions among participants and between the researcher and participants should be emphasized. As Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (1991) reminded us, reflexivity is not an inward activity. It is intrinsically outward and reciprocal. Without attention to the interactions, researchers may enter cycles of self-reflection on themselves and thus lose sight of what participants may contribute to research.

## **What Does Participatory Video Have to Do with Reflexivity?<sup>15</sup>**

So far I have analyzed the discourse of reflexivity and argued that interactions among participants and between the researcher and participants, participants' voices, and their reflexivity should be made more prominent in the discourse of reflexivity, especially in the context of participatory research. Within this background, I ask specifically: How does reflexivity play out in participatory video? Does participatory video foster reflexivity? What are the benefits of participatory video for reflexive research? While these are of course the questions that are part of my study as a whole, here I want to explore the ways in which reflexivity has been taken up in participatory video research in order to inform the project that I describe in the next chapter. To address those questions, I examine some of the features of participatory video that are seemingly useful in discussing reflexivity. Specifically, I point out six features of participatory video: (a) seeing one's self; (b) shared authorship; (c) intervention through recontextualization; (d) close rapports between filmmakers and film subjects; (e) close rapports between filmmakers and audiences; (f) and reflexive communication.

### **Seeing One's Self: Film Subjects-as-Filmmakers**

One of the defining features of participatory video is that it challenges the conventional binary division between filmmakers and film subjects and urges the latter to make films about themselves and to see themselves through the films. Thus, unlike observational cinema, which emphasizes unobtrusive observation, reflexivity is inherent in the process of filmmaking in participatory video. This process is well documented in writings about the project *Learning Together*, which was conducted in rural areas of South Africa in the context of HIV and AIDS (Moletsane, Mitchell, Smith, & Chisholm, 2008). In small groups, the participants—boys and girls, healthcare professionals, parents, and teachers—first brainstormed significant issues in their lives and made a list of the issues. Then, they identified one critical concern that

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<sup>15</sup> Part of the section appeared in Chapter 6 in *The Handbook of Participatory Video* (Milne, Mitchell, & de Lange, 2012). I was the single-author of the chapter.

they wanted to make a video about. Each group developed a storyboard and then carried out filming by using the technique of in-camera editing, in which shots are videotaped in the order in which they appear on the storyboard.<sup>16</sup> Participants in each group took turns acting and operating a camera to create their group videos. The process of video making and screening allowed the participants to “see themselves in action” (Mitchell & de Lange, 2011, p. 174) as filmmakers and also as film subjects.

What difference can be made when film subjects create their own films is further discussed in Nair and White’s (2003) experimental research project, which was examined in Chapter 1. Comparing two documentary videos—one created by researchers and the other created by participants—they concluded that the previous was a “poor me” story while the latter was an “I am Me” story describing the participants’ lives without pity (p. 211). As participants blur the boundaries between filmmakers and film subjects or combine the roles, they can reconstruct their experiences uniquely from their perspectives, thereby providing authentic data about themselves. Further, the reflexive approach to filmmaking—in the sense that film subjects create their own films—is intertwined with the reflexive way of looking, film subjects seeing themselves. This reflexivity troubles conventional research practice, in which researchers are filmmakers and participants are film subjects, by allowing both of them to look together. This way of looking contributes to destabilizing the unequal power relationship between researchers and participants (Kindon, 2003). Participatory video thereby can provoke reflexivity among both participants and researchers. Participants come to see their representations and reflect on problems they have, while researchers are prompted to reflect on their power relationships with participants by examining the participants’ problems through the participants’ eyes.

### **Shared Authorship**

In comparison with *collaborative video*, which is usually referred to as video produced collaboratively between researchers and participants, participatory video

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<sup>16</sup> The authors called this approach to video making a No-Editing-Required format. A benefit of this approach is that it does not require the process of extra editing. Upon completion of filming, the video can be screened immediately.

emphasizes that participants reconstruct their experiences with minimal instruction from researchers (Mitchell & de Lange, 2011). While both collaborative and participatory video open up possibility for shared authorship between researchers and participants, participatory video further shifts the focus of the authorship from researchers to participants, as it places participants at the center of production. However, I think, to achieve participant-centered shared authorship, the *minimal* instruction should not be interpreted dogmatically. Rather, it has to be seen as assisting participants in overcoming barriers to video production while reconstructing their daily lives in video. The minimal instruction, hence, can be a meticulous and thorough instruction.

In many cases of participatory video projects, the process of participatory filmmaking is more important than the product itself, especially when videos are created to explore participants' life experiences, provoke self-awareness, or build a community capacity through video production activities. In other cases, the product matters, especially if videos are created for advocacy purposes and aim to draw attention from outside viewers or decision makers. Then, leaving the entire production process to participants' hands may not be the best approach to participatory video because reformulating participants' experiences in a video format is not all that simple. This is the very reason why filmmaker Lars Johansson (2006) called for explicit collaboration between participants and professional filmmakers, arguing that camera operation by professionals would not make the video less participatory, but might be necessary to reach out to more people. As he noted:

Good shooting requires talent and lots of practice, and since we [professional filmmakers] want these stories to reach as many people as possible, we do most of the shooting ourselves. This does not make the process any less participatory. Authorship of a video clip does not lie with who holds the camera or sits at the keyboard, but with who directs the shooting and editing process. (Johansson, 2006, pp. 4-5)

Video is an accessible medium that participants can use to express their

experiences and ideas. At times, however, it can be challenging for participants with limited video production experience to cope with technical barriers inherent in video production while simultaneously being reflexive on their lives. Even if the process of filmmaking allowed the participants to be reflexive on their lives, the product might not properly represent what they really meant. Consequently, the participants might not be able to deliver the underlying meanings of their experiences to outside viewers or policy makers in a convincing way. Therefore, various degrees of collaboration among participants, researchers, and professional filmmakers need to be considered in order to facilitate reflexivity among participants in the process of filmmaking and to make their perspectives come across viewers outside the participant group. Such collaboration may also promote participants to equally partner with researchers and professional filmmakers and to take shared authorship of the video with them.

### **Intervention Through Recontextualization**

Calling for visual research as a tool for addressing problems in research participants' lives, Pink (2007) stated:

Often the film product itself is not the most important outcome of such projects. Rather, the collaborative and reflexive processes that interweave to produce the film create social interventions in their own right by generating new levels of self-awareness and identity amongst research participants. (p. 5)

The notion of reflexivity is important in interventionist research, which aims to engender change in participants' lives. In this approach to research, participants' reflexivity is critical because it is assumed that research can intervene in the participants' lives and bring about change only if they critically reflect upon their lives. In participatory video, such intervention typically takes place in the form of recontextualization of participants' ordinary experiences. In the context of linguistic studies, Per Linell (1998) defined recontextualization as the "dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context (the context being in reality a matrix or field of context) to another" (p. 154); it involves extrication of parts

from one context (either a text or discourse) and injection of the parts into another context. According to the author, recontextualization never transfers fixed meanings. Rather, it transforms them and creates new meanings. Thus, it is essentially “sense-making practices” (p. 155). Drawing on Linell’s concept, I define recontextualization in the context of participatory media as the practice in which participants reconstruct their experiences by using a medium and showing the experiences through the medium. In participatory video, the recontextualization of participants’ daily experiences not only affects viewers’ perceptions but also, more importantly, can provoke reflexivity among participants themselves, as they intervene in their own lives to re-create their daily experiences. This makes participatory video a type of interventionist media (Flahive & Cizek, 2009).

The recontextualization of daily experience is particularly important to feminist documentary filmmaking. Julia Lesage (1978) argued that it is necessary to describe women’s everyday experiences—such as childcare, domestic work, or women’s health—repeatedly in order to express women’s knowledge in their own language through non-hierarchical dialogue between filmmakers and film subjects. As she observed:

There is a knowledge that is already there about domestic life, but it has not necessarily been spoken in uncolonized, women-identified terms. Women’s art, especially the Feminist documentary films, like consciousness-raising groups, strive to find a new way of speaking about what we have collectively known to be really there in the domestic sphere and to wrest back our identity there in women’s terms. (Lesage, 1978, p. 517)

For Lesage, recontextualizing women’s ordinary experiences in filmmaking is in effect the process of searching for women’s voices that can articulate their experiences. Her approach to filmmaking, though not explicitly participatory, lends support to the concept of recontextualization in participatory video. Participatory video, in a sense, is a process of recontextualizing and naming participants’ ordinary experiences. A major difference from the feminist documentary filmmaking, which is typically carried out



by professional filmmakers, is that participants are more deeply involved in the whole process of video production—from conceptualization to viewing. This whole process can enhance reflexivity among participants before, during, and after video production by prompting them to see their experiences in each stage of filmmaking.

Katherine Carroll (2009) explored the feature of recontextualization explicitly to provoke reflexivity among participants in the context of clinical research. She recorded daily interactions among doctors, nurses, and patients and then played back the videos for the doctors and nurses to reflect on their practices and make improvements. The process of video making itself resembles observational cinema; however, as Carroll argued, by placing clinicians and their interpretations at the center of the screening process, this project induced the clinicians' active participation. By recontextualizing daily activities in video, this project prompted the clinicians to look back at their own practices from a fresh perspective and improve their medical practices through the reflexivity. In so doing, the videos intervened in the participants' daily routines and allowed them to experience learning in an informal setting. An example more directly related to participatory video is found in a video created by a youth group in the *Learning Together* project (Moletsane et al., 2008) discussed above in the section Seeing One's Self. The video, titled *Rape at School, Trust No One*, (90 seconds), describes in four shots an incident of rape by a male teacher seamlessly: He asks a female student to come back to the classroom after class, only to rape her. Later, the classroom door is open and the teacher leaves while the student, sobbing, picks up her papers scattered around the floor. What the participants recontextualized in this video is not necessarily a true incident, but rather their perception of power and gender violence in their daily lives. What seems more important than the truthfulness of the story is that by recontextualizing the perception, the participants had the opportunity to critically reflect upon the issues of power and gender violence and to share their views with others (Weber & Mitchell, 2007; Moletsane et al., 2009).

### **Close Rapport Between Filmmakers and Film Subjects**

The relationship between filmmakers and film subjects is important in participatory video because the subjects' feedback provokes filmmakers' reflexivity.

Earlier, I said that participants share the roles of filmmakers and film subjects among themselves in participatory video. But, unlike video diary (R. Holliday, 2007), in which individual filmmakers record their own images in private, participatory video is typically the process of recording each other rather than oneself. Thus, although filmmakers and film subjects are in the same group, they are not always identical. This is in effect beneficial to instigating filmmakers' reflexivity because film subjects may offer instant feedback on their visual representations to the filmmakers.

It is common, however, that participatory video includes film subjects who are not directly involved in the production process. They could be interviewees, for example. Then, how can their critique be accommodated in the process of participatory video? One way is to include the subjects in the primary audience. This is the reason why the film *Chronicle of a Summer* (Dauman, Rouch, & Morin, 1960) purposefully featured a scene in which the film subjects gathered together and critiqued their representations in the film—in other words, we, as viewers, see the subjects see themselves projected on the film. As I discussed in the previous chapter, although the ideas of entrusting the camera to participants and allowing them to take control of the process of film production did not fully emerge, *Chronicle of a Summer* drew sharp contrast with observational cinema, prevalent in ethnographic filmmaking in those days, and contributed to making the transition from observation to participation in ethnographic filmmaking. According to Rouch (1973/2003, 2003), his approach to filmmaking is more ethical than observational cinema and makes research participatory because it allows people to reflect and discuss their own representation in the film.

It is important for filmmakers to review films with film subjects who are not directly involved in the process of filmmaking because it makes the process more participatory and ethical. Co-reviewing is also important because the critique may prompt the filmmakers to reflect upon their taken-for-granted assumptions about the subjects. This is critical, especially when the subjects are considered more socially marginalized than the filmmakers in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, because the video camera can easily reproduce power imbalance embedded in our daily lives. In the first video production course that I offered to

Odyssey Project graduates, a group of the participants chose to talk about the importance of commitment to education and made a video featuring the life of a member of their cohort who completed her program despite her severely limited mobility. This video was well received by the audience in the screening event, which the participants' families and friends were invited to. The presence of the film subject at the event further inspired the audience. A couple of days later, however, she expressed anguish to the filmmakers, writing that the video emphasized her weakest part and that she did not want it to be shown elsewhere. It seems that the filmmakers regarded physical disability as an impediment to studying while the film subject did not see it this way. Thus, despite the empathetic standpoint inherent in the video, the film subject might have interpreted the story of her life only as a *poor me* story, as Nair and White (2003) pointed out, because she thought that the film failed to show her strengths. These conflicting views, which were not evident in the production process, became obvious when the subject viewed the video. Although the filmmakers created the video in concert with their subject, an invisible tension seemed to remain during the process of filmmaking. Only when the subject critiqued her representation in the final video, the two different perspectives were brought to light more clearly. Without the critique from the subject, this film could have contributed to accentuating a dominant view on the disabled (Yang, 2008).

Certainly, this project could have been more ethical if the video had been shown to the subject first in private. Then the conflict between the filmmakers and the subject could have been avoided to a degree, and they could have had more fruitful discussion on their perspectives, along the lines of how filmmaker Colin Low approached residents to begin a film project in Fogo Island (see Chapter 1). The film subjects' commentary about the representations of themselves may further filmmakers' awareness of their assumptions and perspectives, thus contributing to enhancing reflexivity.

### **Close Rapport Between Filmmakers and Audiences**

Similarly, the relationships between filmmakers and their audiences are essential to the reflexive process of participatory video. Not all participatory videos

have an audience outside the participant groups. Those created for internal capacity building among participants or within their community, for example, place little emphasis on external audiences (Kendon, 2003). Participants themselves may be the only intended audiences. Many videos, however, tend to have an external audience in mind, though these can be abstract, such as policy makers, stakeholders, and so forth. Whether internal or external, the existence of a designated audience seems to stimulate participants' involvement in the process of filmmaking and further their reflexivity because it prompts participants to sharpen the way to present their stories (Chalfen, Sherman, & Rich, 2010).

One problem, however, is that participants do not always have a clear idea of who their potential audiences are. I saw this in a project that I conducted with six Odyssey Project alumni, consisting of three Latinas, one Latino, and two African American women, ranging in age from their 20s to their 40s. They inquired into the problems of the healthcare system in the United States for five weeks. First, they were divided into two smaller groups. Then, each group developed specific research questions and interviewed each other and their neighbours, including a doctor and a nurse. The participants' endeavours gave rise to two short documentary videos representing their concerns about the healthcare system and their solutions to its problems. When these videos were shown to the participants' families and friends and the staff of the Odyssey Project at the end of the project, I asked the participants and the audience who else should see the videos. Other than someone casually mentioning the Tea Party (a conservative political community in the United States since 2009), surprisingly, there was no answer. This silence somewhat contradicted what the participants described as the purpose for participation in the project. One of the participants wrote: "to educate myself about the Health Reform and transmit a positive message to communities" (female in her 20s). Another wrote: "to create consciousness and awareness about the underground health crisis" (female in her 30s). As suggested in these statements, the participants wanted to have the videos shown to others but did not have a clear idea of a designated audience.

This example suggests that it should not be taken for granted that participants can easily identify a target audience even if they are eager to voice their concerns,

because they may have little information on where they can voice themselves. What is more, as the Fogo Island Project suggested, lacking bottom-up communication tools in society may systematically hinder them from finding their audiences. Therefore, it may be useful for the researcher to help participants identify their audience(s) by informing them of a list of possible audiences and to provoke discussions on how to reach them. Once participants identify their audience(s), they may become more engaged in the process of participatory video and be able to express their ideas more clearly. Knowing the audience can increase participants' reflexivity. In this regard, Chalfen et al. (2010) noted:

Patients [participants] are especially enthusiastic about engaging in participatory media research when they sense a concerned audience awaits their tele-presence. Participants develop an altruistic spirit and tone based on knowing that 'my' knowledge, often grounded in 'my' personal life experience, is important and valuable to others. (p. 209)

### **Reflexive Communication**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the reflexive interview refers to a reciprocal and collaborative interview, in which "two speakers enter into a dialogic relationship with one another" (Denzin, 2003, p. 147) to co-construct their unique experience and its meaning by listening to each other attentively. Although the reflexive interview is not common across all participatory video projects, it does feature in many and, as such, warrants discussion here. The reflexive interview breaks the division between interviewer and interviewee and the unequal power relationship between them. The Fogo Island Project is a good example of the use of the reflexive interview. The filmmakers created two communication channels. First, they enabled a group of residents and the local government to "talk together" (Don Snowden Program, n.d., ¶5) by interviewing residents about the problems they were experiencing, filming the government's perspective in response to the residents', and then showing this response to the residents. Second, the filmmakers provoked communication among island residents themselves by screening the film 35 times

throughout the island to reach over 3,000 people in the island (Don Snowden Program, n.d.). Through this process, the island residents began to communicate with one another about their living conditions and to seek solutions to the problems together. Since the residents did not create the film, this project may not be seen as participatory. However, their active participation was so critical to this project that the film project could not have been carried out without it. The filmmakers incited the participation by enabling the residents who did not see each other face-to-face to engage in reflexive dialogue through the camera. In so doing, they allowed the residents to look back at their individual problems and to understand them as a common experience.

Reflexive communication may not always be as explicit as it is in this example. Nonetheless, I do think a form of reflexive communication is inherent in many participatory video projects, as participants talk to one another to discuss their experiences and construct their meanings collectively. Through the process of reflexive communication, participants can provoke reflexivity with one another.

### **Summary of Chapter**

In this chapter, I examined arguments around reflexivity in qualitative inquiry in general and in visual studies and participatory research in specific. As is so often the case in reviewing various bodies of literature, I have raised more questions than I have answered. In so doing, I have attempted to show how questions about reflexivity serve to frame my fieldwork. The literature suggests that reflexivity has predominantly been discussed from the researcher's perspective. There has yet to be more discussion on reflexivity from the participants' perspective. Similarly, participants' voices and their interactions with the researcher and among themselves need to be made more prominent in the discourse of reflexivity. Lacking these elements, reflexivity may risk accentuating the researcher's voice even more. This conflicts with the principles of participatory research. Thus, I argued for looking at reflexivity from the participants' perspective and taking into consideration the notions of voice and interaction in discussing reflexivity.

In the second half of the chapter, I focused on participatory video to discuss its potential for promoting reflexive research. The six features of participatory video outlined in this section suggest that participatory video can effectively provoke reflexivity among participants and also from the researcher. Participatory video allows participants to look back at their experiences in relation to others and in a broader social context, to confirm or disconfirm their beliefs and assumptions, and to engage in reflexive communication with others. All these may prompt the researcher to negotiate with participants in conducting research and presenting research outcomes. In this way, the researcher can become more reflexive on the influence of her subjectivity on the research. Drawing on the notion of reflexivity framed in this chapter, I describe the process of carrying out my thesis project in the next chapter.





# The Project 3

*It is like building a book. We started from an empty page, and it's been written in every sentence. (Participant)*

In this chapter, I describe the process of the participatory video research project conducted with eight participants. My research approach is similar to the Navajo Project (Worth & Adair, 1972/1997) that I discussed in Chapter 1 in that I experimented with a research method in a participatory setting. However, unlike Worth and Adair, I did not put myself in the backseat as an unobtrusive observer. On the contrary, as I noted in Chapter 1, I played an active role in facilitating the participatory project by interacting with the participants, leading discussions, and informing them of how to analyze data. In the chapter, by highlighting some of the important steps of the research process, I aim to provide a thick description of the project so that readers can have an opportunity to experience the project vicariously and thus to critically engage in it. In the first section of the chapter, I introduce the Odyssey Project (see also <http://www.prairie.org/odysseyproject>) and explain the process of recruiting the research participants. In the middle section, the research process is described session by session for 11 weeks. In the final section, I explain my approach to the analysis of the project. I describe my data sets and my analytical framework, and also address how I handle trustworthiness and generalization. For clarification, please note that, throughout my thesis, the term *participant* is referred to a person who I recruited to conduct research together. Wherever further illumination is necessary, I describe them also as *participant researchers* in order to emphasize their role as researchers in the participatory project, as opposed to their role as participants in my thesis. To ensure distinction, I refer to *interviewees* or *respondents* as those whom the participants interviewed or approached for surveys.

## Context

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Odyssey Project is a Bard College Clemente Course located in Chicago. It offers low-income adults a free college-credited course in the humanities at three sites in the North-side, the South-side, and the West-side for two evenings per week over a period of eight months. This course is often referred to as the Odyssey Project or OP. In 2002, the second-year course, *Bridge Course*, was added for first-year course graduates. Students who take the courses do not necessarily hold a high school diploma. And yet, those who complete their courses can receive college credits via Bard College in New York.<sup>17</sup> The Odyssey Project provides students with free tuition, textbooks, and transportation fares. On-site childcare is also available for students in the first-year course. The Illinois Humanities Council, located in downtown Chicago, oversees the operation of the Odyssey Project. According to the Odyssey Project record, the average graduation rate of the first-year course over the past decade was approximately 61 percent.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the Odyssey Project has grown steadily. In recent years, approximately 15 students have graduated from each site (A. Thomas Elder, personal communication, May 31, 2011). In 2006, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign adopted the model of the Odyssey Project to create a new Odyssey Project on campus and have provided adults in the area with a similar educational opportunity.

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<sup>17</sup> For instance, Star, one of the participants, obtained her GED (General Education Development) credential, which is regarded as equivalent to high school diploma, in 2008 after having completed her second-year program. Currently, she continues to take college courses in order to enter a Master's program in social work, as she shared in the first meeting of the project.

<sup>18</sup> It is the average of the official graduation rates between 2000 and 2010, reviewed by Lori, one of the participants. The graduation rate is calculated on the basis of the number of students who remained in the fourth week of the course every year because a significant number of students tend to withdraw within the first three weeks and then the attendance becomes relatively stable from the fourth week. Thus, the graduation rates would be significantly lower if the number of students who were initially enrolled in the program were taken into consideration (A. Thomas Elder, personal communication, August 19, 2010). At the time of reviewing the Odyssey Project record, the graduate rate of the West-side site was not available, and hence, excluded in the calculation.

## Participants

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I recruited participants from the people who had completed the first-year course of the Odyssey Project and taken my video production course in 2008 and 2009. There are some reasons why I targeted the small population. Most of all, I wanted to explore my thesis topic with a group of socioeconomically disadvantaged adults who strived to improve their living conditions, as I aimed to study the deployment of participatory video as a means for helping them change the conditions. The Odyssey Project student population was a good match for this criterion. In addition, I had easy access to the population because of my pre-existing relationship with the Odyssey Project. Of course I could have recruited participants from the entire population of Odyssey students, but preferred limiting the scope to the small target population primarily because of a time factor. Although 11 weeks would require much commitment from individual participants, it might not be long enough for them to learn to conduct research. I thought adding the component of learning video production skills into the period would make the process of research even more difficult. To capitalize on the set time for research, I needed a group of people who were already familiar with video production, especially the way I approached it.

In early March 2010, I informally contacted via email 21 former students who were in my video production course (*Video-Telling Workshop*) in 2008 and 2009 to see whether I would draw a fair number of participants from this population. In this email, I announced that I was forming a research group as part of my thesis. I gave a rough timeframe (weekly or bi-weekly meetings for three months) for the project and emphasized that they would choose a research topic and conduct research by reflecting on their lives, creating a group video, and analyzing it together. Several people responded to my call. Two of them (Lori and Star) replied almost immediately after I sent the message out. Then I applied for research ethics approval and subsequently received approval. In early June 2010, eight participants and I formed a research team to conduct the project. Each participant is introduced here.<sup>19</sup> Dana, Katrina, Lori, Nia,

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<sup>19</sup> One participant did not want to reveal her name, and another did not specify, so I chose pseudonyms for them.

and Star had taken the video production course in 2008; Afrika, James, and Latrice, in 2009. Ages are only approximate. Furthermore, I did not conduct a formal interview with each participant. Thus, the information I provide below in the columns of *Interests* and *Motivation* is drawn from group discussions and my casual interactions with the individuals. I put motivations in parentheses if a participant did not explicitly mention any.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Interests</b>	<b>Motivations</b>
Dana	F	60s	African American (AA)	Teaching children in after-school programs.	(To be involved in group activities and learn more about video.)
Katrina	F	50s	AA	Engaging in critical conversation and learning.	She wanted to take the video production course. I recommended she participate in the research project.
Lori	F	50s	Caucasian	Creative writing, and arts.	Because of her fond memory of the video production course she took in 2008.
Nia	F	30s	AA	Photography, video production, and arts.	(She had shown her genuine interest in video production and photography.)
Star	F	40s	AA	Entering a Master's program in social work.	(To engage in critical conversations and video production. She used her vacation days to participate in this project.)
Afrika	F	30s	AA	Social justice and learning.	To have a learning opportunity.
James	M	30s	AA	Social justice and video production.	To create a video.
Latrice	F	20s	AA	Radio and video production. Seeking an internship in a public radio station.	(To learn more about video production for her career advancement and to meet other Odyssey Project graduates.)

Table 3.1. Introduction to the participants

As indicated in Table 3.1, the participants were, in general, very conscious of social issues and liked to learn new things and engage in critical conversations. These might have been the fundamental motivations for all the participants. Probably the participants decided to join the project because they remembered the experience taking the video production course as fun and useful and wanted to increase their knowledge through the research project. In contrast, the idea of doing research did not seem to strike them, as I understand them. Interestingly, though, the number of female participants is not proportional to the gender ratio in the video production courses. In 2008, there was only one man out of 11 students who completed the video production course. In 2009, however, half the students were male. And yet, there was only one male participant in the project. Perhaps this indicates that the female students in the courses enjoyed the process of filmmaking more than the male students; the female students liked the participatory environment that I created; or it may be because of my sex as the instructor. I am not sure. Nevertheless, there seems a correlation among gender and participation in the project. I reflect more on this issue in Chapter 7.

### **Equipment and Funds**

I borrowed four consumer-type video cameras (Canon ZR960 miniDV Camcorder) from the Education Library at McGill University. For video editing, I rented four Mac laptop computers from the Center for the Study of Languages at University of Chicago. Additionally, I purchased four tripods, one hand-held microphone, and two clip-on microphones. All the equipment was kept in the Illinois Humanities Council and made available for the participants to check out whenever they needed, except the laptop computers. Per request from the University of Chicago for security reasons, I kept the computers in the Illinois Humanities Councils. I allocated \$1,000 to cover the costs of the project. They included the plan for printing a final research report, buying drinks and snacks for group meetings, and offering the individual participants nominal remunerations for their participation in the project. Each participant received two remunerations, the sum of which ranged between \$50 and \$100, contingent on attendance and personal circumstance. I also hired Lizzie, a former Odyssey Project tutor and current administrator at the University of Chicago, to

facilitate a group evaluation, which took place on the second last week of the project. She was one of the few people recommended by Amy, Director of the Odyssey Project, as the facilitator of the evaluation. I paid Lizzie \$35. The funds for this project were made available through a McGill Mobility Award, which subsidizes graduate students' research and study abroad. I shared the budget information with the participants at the beginning of the project. During the course of research, Amy subsidized transportation fares to the participants.

### **Process**

As I noted in Chapter 1, the project took place over a period of three months, June, July, and August in 2010. During this period, the participants and I had 11 group sessions for approximately three hours at a time and also spent extra hours writing session minutes, preparing surveys, contacting interviewees, conducting interviews, analyzing data, editing videos, and preparing a final presentation. On the penultimate week, I organized a group evaluation and invited Amy to the evaluation to incorporate her view on the project in my analysis. Lizzie, the facilitator of the evaluation, led the discussion by asking series of questions to the participants. The questions were focused on their individual experiences and views on participatory research and video.<sup>20</sup> I invited Lizzie to facilitate the evaluation for two reasons: First, it was to prompt the participants to further reflect upon and articulate their perspectives by answering questions proposed by an outsider. Second, I wanted to obtain critical insight into the project from a person who was not involved in it and yet familiar with the Odyssey Project.

During the 11-week period, the participants and I maintained to write session minutes to keep track of the progress of the project and reviewed them in the following sessions. Separate from the session minutes, I kept my journal. I jotted down our

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<sup>20</sup> Two days before the evaluation, I met Lizzie to give her an overview of the project and the purpose of the evaluation. I was particularly interested in the participants' experiences working on the project and their perspectives on participatory video research. More discussion is in Chapter 5.

conversations and my observations in my field notebook (*condensed account*) and typed it up in my computer on the same day with my own reflection (*expanded account*) (Spradley, 1980). The following session summary largely drew on the session minutes and my field notes. Table 3.2 briefly introduces each session.

Session	Activities
1	Introducing the concept of participatory research; sharing personal stories; a preliminary discussion on the topic of the research project.
2	Reviewing the research consent form; developing research questions; discussing interview techniques.
3	Refreshing video production techniques; debate on research methods.
4	Finalizing an online survey questionnaire; conducting internal group discussion as a form of focus group among the participants.
5	Reviewing the proposal for the participatory research; viewing the first interview.
6	Conducting mini evaluations to address the problem of interviewing; viewing more interviews; mailing the survey questionnaire to recent former Odyssey Project students who withdrew from their programs.
7	Analyzing video interviews; discussing the research report on the Odyssey Project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to compare with our project.
8	Analyzing and discussing survey data; viewing an interview conducted with a former student who withdrew from her program.
9	Conducting a group evaluation; viewing the last interview conducted with a former student who withdrew from her program.
10	Preparing the presentation; viewing and critiquing the video created together.
11	Presenting the research findings and the video to approximately 30 people, who were former students, faculty, and administrators of the Odyssey Project and their families

Table 3.2. An overview of the sessions

## Session 1: Introduction to Participatory Research

Shortly before this session, I mailed to each participant a binder, *Research Notebook*, which included the schedule of the project, an article written by Budd Hall (1984) about the principles of participatory research, a book chapter by Jennifer Mason (1996a) on interviewing, forms to be used in analyzing video data (see Chapter 4), and a questionnaire for individual reflection (see Chapter 5). The participants were asked to read Hall's article and write a page-long reflection essay on what was the most important to them and what had influenced it.

All the participants except Afrika and James attended this session. First, I reminded the participants of the purpose of the project. Then, we discussed the concept of participatory research approximately for an hour. The participants were enthusiastic about participatory research and drew particular attention to the notions of *insiders* and *outsiders*. They argued that insiders could generate more in-depth knowledge because they are familiar with their living conditions and are able to bring their personal experiences directly into research. Some participants underlined that participatory research would give a voice to research subjects and potentially change the lives of both researchers and participants by influencing each other.

After a short break, we shared autobiographies prepared by each of us. This activity was designed to select a research topic out of the shared experiences among the participants. I talked about my immigration story and doctoral studies. Dana, Star, and Katrina talked about their unfulfilled educations and the influence of the Odyssey Project on their lives. Latrice talked about difficulties in pursuing education and maintaining good relationships with her family at the same time, as her family tended to discourage her from educating herself. Nia expressed her frustration in her current life. Lori, in contrast, talked about her happy marriage. Sharing these stories, though different, was so compassionate that we felt much closer to one another. However, it left little time to develop a research topic. We only agreed to conduct evaluative research on the Odyssey Project. I thought the activity of sharing autobiographies was not helpful to choosing the research topic because the participants, who had a common experience with the Odyssey Project, could have come up with the topic without the activity. But the participants seemed to perceive it differently. Dana, for instance,



wrote later in her reflection essay, “The most challenging part of the project was coming up with a subject and questions starting from scratch.” It seems that the activity allowed the participants to acquire the sense of becoming a researcher. Finally, because we ran out of time, I briefly overviewed the Research Consent Form (see Appendix I), and the participants took one copy to their homes to read through.

## **Session 2: Developing Research Questions**

Star seemed to be unsure about what was written in the consent form. She requested to read the consent form together. In reading it line by line with the participants, I realized that the form did not speak for itself although I thought I had explained most of its content in the previous session. While reading it aloud, I was able to give the participants the chance to ask questions for further clarification and to elucidate the objectives of my thesis. After obtaining a signed copy from each participant, I returned a duplicate to each. Then, I asked the participants to volunteer for extra tasks. Lori, James, and Star volunteered to edit the final video. Nia and Katrina volunteered to edit a research report. Afrika and Dana chose to chair one of the remaining sessions and write session minutes. Latrice came late and did not select any.

Then, we continued to brainstorm in order to develop our research topic. Thanks to Lori, who had summarized a list of topics from the previous session, we were able to have a more efficient discussion than in the previous session. The participants drew attention to the graduation rate of the first-year Odyssey Project course. The main question was why so many students drop out of their programs despite the support they receive, such as tuition, textbooks, transportation fares, and on-site childcare, while other students, like themselves, remain engaged in the Odyssey Project even years after graduation. We decided to explore the reasons for engagement and disengagement among former Odyssey Project students by investigating their experiences. Then we aimed to discover what obstacles hindered students’ engagement in order to help remove them and ultimately improve first-year graduation rates (see the full research proposal in Appendix II).

After break, I led a discussion on interviewing based on Mason's (1996a) book chapter (14 pages), which I had chosen for its comprehensiveness. However, in contrast with Hall's article, this chapter failed to capture the participants' attention because, I think, it was written specifically for academic researchers. Although Lori said she had enjoyed reading it, the book chapter did not appeal to most participants. There were few questions. As the discussion was unproductive, we finished it quickly. Then, I distributed copies of the Interview Guide and the Interview Consent Form (see Appendix III and IV),<sup>21</sup> which I had prepared, and discussed them with the participants. I suggested that each participant interview two people to make the process of data analysis manageable. Star, however, was not convinced of the reliability of the interview method, arguing that the total number of interviews would not be sufficient to find out why so many students drop out of their programs. Hence, she suggested conducting a survey in addition to interviews. She agreed to come up with a survey questionnaire by the following session for further discussion.

### **Session 3: Video-Recording Techniques and Debate on Research Methods**

This optional session was intended to help the participants refresh their memories of video-recording techniques. Lori, Dana, Katrina, and Star attended it. I demonstrated camera operation. Then, they practiced interviewing each other with and without a microphone to compare the quality of the recorded sound. After this hands-on practice, Katrina raised the question, "Who would benefit from our research project?"<sup>22</sup> She argued, "Interviewees would not benefit from their participation. Then why would they participate?" Provoked by her question, Lori contended, "We cannot generalize from the interviews. We only get testimonials at best." Responding

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<sup>21</sup> The Interview Guide was designed to inform the participants of general protocol involving interviews, which includes the process of obtaining informed consent and topics to avoid in interviewing. The Interview Consent Form was written for the participants to use in conducting interviews. I discuss more on the Form in Chapter 7.

<sup>22</sup> In my thesis, I often quote the conversations that took place during the sessions. Evidently, however, I did not record everything. Based on my memory and field notes, my account is made as truthful as possible to provide the essence of each conversation.

to Lori, Dana argued, “We are not trying to generalize all the students’ experiences. That’s not the purpose. What we need to do is to listen closely to some of the students who failed to complete their programs despite their will. We want to help them complete their programs.” I agreed with her. Nonetheless, Star and Lori seemed to feel strongly about the need for surveys. Out of this discussion, we considered adding two more methods into the research project: a survey and an internal group discussion. Through an online survey, we hoped to assess former Odyssey Project students’ experiences as broadly as possible, regardless of their graduation statuses. Through the internal group discussion, similar to a focus group method, we intended to discuss the participants’ own experiences to find out reasons for engagement in the Odyssey Project. The interview method was reserved for investigating reasons for disengagement among former students who did not graduate from the first-year Odyssey Project course. They were set as the target population for the interviews. Then, Star argued that some students dropped out of the second-year course, but with different reasons. Thus we considered interviewing them as the secondary target population for comparison.<sup>23</sup> As half the participants did not attend the session, we decided to talk more about these research methods in the following session.

#### **Session 4: Survey Questionnaire and Internal Group Discussion**

James and Lori were absent with and without a notice, respectively. Dana was supposed to lead this session, but this turned out to be somewhat problematic. She came late, which gave little time for her and me to go over the topics of the session together. She read the minutes of the previous session, which I had prepared. While she read the research methods section to the group, I could not help but interrupt to

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<sup>23</sup> In retrospect, I wonder whether I should have drawn the participants’ attention only to the primary target population in order to keep the project focused. After all, the research was intended to help this population. However, I did not feel like limiting what the participants hoped to achieve through the project. Hence, I included the secondary target population in our discussion.

clarify the content and to ensure every participant's agreement.<sup>24</sup> By sharing the chair position with the participants, I intended to offer them a different type of experience and to contribute to destabilizing power differentials between the participants and me. However, the implementation was not practical because, I think, the participants were not sure what they, as a chair, needed to do. Lacking this vision, compounded by lack of conversation with me, seemed to render the plan for co-chairing unpractical.<sup>25</sup>

After reviewing the minutes, I came to lead the session quite naturally. We began to develop the survey questionnaire based on a draft Star had prepared (see Extract 3.1).

1. Has the Odyssey Project influenced your life? Yes or No

\*If you answered yes, please elaborate on in what way has the OP influenced your life.

2. Is the OP class structure conducive to participation? Yes or No

\*Please elaborate on your answer.

3. Referring back to the OP's mission: The Odyssey Project is founded on the premise to make people free, and it proceeds on the conviction that engagement with the humanities can offer individuals a way out of poverty by fostering habits of sustained reflection and skills of communication and critical thinking; Do you as a former or current student of the OP feel free in any way as a result of your participation in the project? Yes or No

\*Please elaborate on your answer.

Extract 3.1

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<sup>24</sup> After the session was over, I asked Dana about her experience chairing the session. She said it was easier than she thought. Then I asked whether I interrupted too much. She answered no.

<sup>25</sup> What this suggests to me is that power cannot be shared simply by offering a participant the position as a researcher. To dismantle power differentials between the researcher and participants, I think, there has to be education for participants so that they can develop skills and knowledge to conduct research with confidence.

Concerning the second question, Katrina asked, “What is the ‘structure’? It should be different from the classroom. I liked the OP course, but I didn’t like the classroom.” Afrika asked, “Where was it?” Katrina answered, “37<sup>th</sup> street.” Afrika nodded, seemingly agreeing on the issue. So, we changed the word *structure* to *instruction* and modified the question to: *Did the OP class instruction encourage you to learn more?* We added a separate question: *Was there anything you did not like in taking the OP course?* Then, Nia said, “How about asking what their biggest challenge was? This question is more personal. The other ones are more institutional. Some people have challenges outside the Odyssey Project while taking courses.” Lastly, Star suggested asking whether the respondent would want to be interviewed. The process of modifying the questionnaire was constructive. Seemingly, we were all happy (see Appendix V for the full questionnaire). After the session, Star, Dana, and I remained to complete the questionnaire. Upon Amy’s recommendation, we created an online survey page on the Survey Monkey website. Amy soon solicited responses from all the former Odyssey Project students on the records by sending them an email.<sup>26</sup>

In the second half of the session, we conducted an internal group discussion (focus group). The participants broke into two smaller groups to have a more intimate discussion of their experiences and reasons for engagement in the Odyssey Project. Half an hour later, they came back to the original group to summarize their discussions. I took notes of each summary on the board. Then we began to theorize the experiences by discussing each one’s experience, finding significant statements in each group discussion, and grouping similar statements across the groups, as John Creswell (2007) suggested for phenomenological studies. Dana claimed, “The bottom line is validation!” Inspired by her comment, we arranged the reasons for engagement from the most fundamental (bottom) to the most critical (top) in a triangle diagram

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<sup>26</sup> Taking into consideration the yearly graduate rates, the estimate number of addressees could be approximately 1,000. However, the exact number is not known because the director of the Odyssey Project sent out the email message directly from the system she used and furthermore many email addresses were likely to be outdated.

(see Figure 3.1 below): The participants commonly said that they were engaged in the Odyssey Project because it provided them with a learning opportunity they had been deprived of, validated their beliefs, helped them develop critical thinking skills, and encouraged them to change their lives; they felt interconnected by meeting people who similarly experienced and continued to gain knowledge from the Odyssey Project even after graduation. The participants were excited about building the diagram. While some were nodding and smiling, others were articulating words. This analytical process was joyful. After this session, Star had a big smile on her face and said, “We finally did something instead of just talking!” Later she drew a diagram similar to Figure 3.1 and sent it to me via email. I immediately circulated it among all the participants.

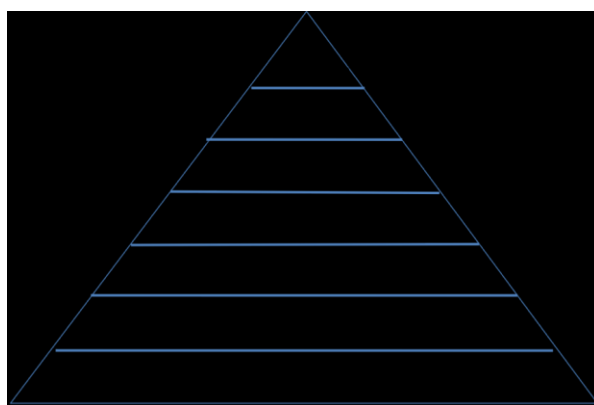


Figure 3.1. The reasons for engagement

In wrapping up the session, we decided to do the following: Each participant would conduct two semi-structured interviews for approximately between 30 and 60 minutes per interview in locations convenient for interviewees; one interviewee to be chosen from the primary target population (former students who did not graduate from their first-year programs) and the other, from either the primary or the secondary target population (former students who did not graduate from their second-year programs). I suggested convenience sampling, based on the assumption that the participants knew people from the target population. I assumed so particularly because some participants talked in detail about students who had dropped out of the Odyssey Project. Then, I handed out copies of a book chapter by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) on the in-depth

interview (26 pages) to discuss in the next session. I chose the chapter because it seemed to be read more easily than the book chapter by Mason (1996a).

### **Session 5: Research Proposal and the First Interview**

The beginning of this session was delayed for half an hour because the majority of the participants did not come on time. Lori was still absent without a notice. Meanwhile, Nia completed the research proposal after she and I had discussed its format and content several times. She had sent me the final copy one day before the session, and I distributed duplicates among the participants. While reviewing the proposal, Nia walked in to the room. Star immediately praised her, “It looks very professional.” The other participants also mentioned that the proposal was very thoughtful. It seemed that the proposal enabled the participants to see the research project as more tangible than before and to conceive of a concrete goal and direction.

We watched the first interview (15 minutes), conducted by Star. Initially, I asked the participants to analyze individual interviews and edit the videos before presenting them to the research team, based on the assumption that each interview would be too long to watch in a group session. But Star could not, because the interview was conducted immediately before the session. Thus we watched the entire interview. It was not too long to watch anyway. Her interviewee was her supervisor, Shilanda. She said in the video that she had withdrawn from her second-year program because she began a new job, which caused a schedule conflict; nonetheless, she continued to take online college courses because the first-year Odyssey Project course gave her the confidence that she could take the courses. After screening the video, I asked Star about her experience with the interview. She pointed out two things: First, she said, “I forgot to turn on the power of the external microphone. So I had to conduct the same interview twice.”<sup>27</sup> Second, she had difficulty in finding

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<sup>27</sup> I think that this is a common mistake among amateur videographers. To obtain a reasonably good sound quality without making the same mistake, researchers could use cameras that have a high-quality internal microphone. But this type of camera tends to be expensive. If this option is not feasible, researchers may use an internal microphone and add subtitles, or help participants use an external microphone with caution. The bottom line is that the selection of microphones is an important technical

interviewees. She said, “One of my interviewees didn’t show up, so I wasn’t able to interview her . . . we probably need to interview whoever wants to be interviewed, regardless of whether they didn’t finish the first year course or the second.” Contrary to the impression that I had received from the participants, they seemed to maintain little contact with former students who dropped out of their programs. So, I suggested that, if necessary, each participant ask Amy to obtain contact information of those students and then make some phone calls to find potential interviewees.



Figure 3.2. A still photo from the interview between Shilanda and Star (right)

Lastly, I led a discussion on the in-depth interview based on the book chapter distributed in the previous session. But the chapter also failed to capture the participants’ attention. Perhaps they could not have time to read it or did not find it interesting to read it. Thus, I called it a day earlier than usual. Instead, we decided to have an extra session in the following week to review more interviews. We also decided to begin group sessions half an hour later to address the ongoing problem of delayed start. Once the session was over, I approached Latrice to chat with her because she often seemed to be distracted. She said, “I was late because I had to go to the court. I am in a custody battle. My daughter’s father wants to get her. I will hear a court decision in 30 days.” This explains why she seemed to be distracted.

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issue to consider in conducting participatory video projects, especially if sound is important.



## **Session 6: Mini Evaluation and More Interviews**

Because this session was set up ad hoc, Star was not able to make it because of her work schedule. Dana was absent because of illness. Katrina came early and said to me, “Setting up an interview was extremely difficult. My interviewee canceled the appointment in the last minute.” Lori came in at that moment and described her experience: “The other day, I bumped into one of my cohort in a supermarket and asked for an interview. But she became furious all of sudden and left.” This person, according to Lori, used to think of the Odyssey Project as a white professors’ crusade rescuing black students and thus did not like the Odyssey Project. Lori continued to mention, “She didn’t like me either because I am white. She generally didn’t like white skin.” I asked her whether Nia, for instance, could interview her then. Lori, however, did not even know her name. Furthermore, to my surprise, and contrary to the enthusiasm she had shown at the beginning of the project, she no longer wanted to interview anyone. She did not explain why, but her face suggested that interviewing was annoying her. Perhaps her health and reduced mobility interfered with her enthusiasm. She said she would edit video instead.

To address unexpected difficulty in finding interviewees, I called for a mini evaluation. I asked the participants, “Why is it difficult to interview former students who dropped out? Is it because of a camera?” Lori responded somewhat casually, “People are just busy.” When she said that, I assumed that potential interviewees were too busy to be interviewed. But I wonder whether she meant the participant researchers were busy. I am not sure. In any case, finding interviewees seemed to be much more difficult than I had imagined. So, we set up some rules and strategies in approaching interviewees: If the video camera deterred potential interviewees, we would assure them that the video would not be seen outside the research team or that we would not use the camera at all. This was, at least, the main point of the mini evaluation that I remembered. Interestingly, however, Katrina recalled it somewhat differently. She wrote in the session minutes as:

We also discussed how to approach possible interviewees. One way of doing this is to let them know that we are trying to understand the experience of OP

[Odyssey Project] participants and some challenges they may have faced while in the program. *Our research will hopefully enhance the OP experience for future students.* Also, the participation of the interviewees will inform us of changes that may be needed in the OP that will *help or encourage the interviewees to come back and finish the OP.* However, if their experiences were extremely negative and they never want to return, this information would still be helpful to our research. We would like to know if they could not get along with a certain type of instructors or students; if the classes were held too far away; if they found class work too hard; or if there was simply too much work for them to handle along with their other responsibilities. These interviews are only to make the OP a better and helpful for everyone that attends. What is important is to hear their voice. (Katrina, from the minutes, Extract 3.2; italics in original)

Deeply reflective, this writing was the result of Katrina's tenacious efforts. Some days after this session, I emailed her to remind her of the task of writing the session minutes and wrote that we would work together once she had written a draft. She wrote me:

Dear Kay,

Thanks for the reminder. I will send my notes to you tomorrow (Aug. 4) for review. You are so helpful and you take the fear out of making mistakes.

Sincerely,

Katrina

(Extract 3.3)

She sent me a draft via email two days later. We discussed the draft over the phone. Because the concept of email attachment was alien to her, we wrote drafts in the body of email to exchange them. In my comment, I asked her to think about what

interviewees would gain out of being interviewed.<sup>28</sup> The final version of the minutes indicates that she thought this through to the extent that she came to elucidate the goal of the research from her own perspective.

After the mini evaluation, I distributed copies of the evaluation research report written by James Kilgore (2010) on the Odyssey Project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In 2006, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign began an Odyssey Project after the model of the one in Chicago. The purpose of Kilgore's project was to address the problem of graduation and to study the influence of the Odyssey Project on former students. The focus of the project was very similar to ours. Hence, by comparing these two projects, I wanted to allow the participants to take a more critical look at the problem we were investigating. While reviewing the report, James noted that Kilgore's project obtained very few responses from former students when the researcher tried to reach out to them via email. Then he pointed out, "Because of the great digital divide among Odyssey students, many students do not have regular access to the Internet and some do not use email at all." Hence, he suggested conducting a snail mail survey. Agreeing with this, we decided to send snail mail to the target population to reach out to them more actively. I asked James, "Could you work on the mail survey?" But he turned his face away, hesitating to give a direct answer. I said, "Perhaps your son can help with stuffing." He nodded, but without giving a definite answer.

Finally, we watched three interviews conducted by Afrika and James collaboratively. None of the interviewees, however, were selected from the primary target population. One withdrew from his second-year program because of personal issues, and the others completed their second-year programs. They talked about some of their experiences with the Odyssey Project, most of which were very positive. I wondered why Afrika and James had chosen these interviewees. More problematically, the interviews were so short that I could not gain a deeper understanding of each interviewee's experience. The duration of each interview was

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<sup>28</sup> It was Katrina who raised this question. In Session 3, she argued that interviewees might not gain from being interviewed. I wanted her to think of her question in writing the minutes.

between 8 and 10 minutes. Surprisingly, however, the short duration seemed to bother the participants least. The interviews provoked much debate among them. While some argued that no matter what the obstacle might be, completion of the program ultimately depends on personal tenacity, others refuted. After the discussion, I asked Afrika and James why the interviews were so short. James responded, “Because I didn’t want to have too much to edit. I just wanted to have the parts that I would need.” In the video production course he took in 2009, he had hours of interview materials for a five-minute documentary video and spent a long time editing them. Due to this experience, he might have decided to keep the interviews short. More fundamentally, I think that Afrika and James might not have felt the need for in-depth interviews because they knew their interviewees so well and shared experience with the interviewees to a great extent. Then, why did Afrika and James choose them to interview? I discuss this issue in Chapter 4.

After the session ended, Lori and Nia, but not James, remained to prepare the snail mail survey with me. They wrote a cover letter and formatted the online survey questionnaire for a paper version. Due to limited time, we decided to send out the mail only to the students who had not graduated for the past two years. A pre-paid returning envelope with a 7-day turn-around time was enclosed in each mailing. The next day, Nia sent out the total of 42 letters. A couple of days later, I telephoned Latrice to assist her in participating in the project. Then, I learned that she was not only dealing with her custody battle, but also faced severe economic hardship, living with food stamps (\$300 per month). I promised to provide her with transportation fares and a small subsidy. The following day, I discussed her situation with Amy. She made bus fare cards available to all the participants and contacted Riza, the Odyssey Project student support specialist, to help Latrice with the custody litigation.

### **Session 7: Video Analysis**

While I was putting out a dozen donuts and tea bags on the table as usual before this session began, Latrice came in early. In a smile, she said, “Thank you Kay. I really appreciate your call. That morning I returned a digital camera I had recently bought. When I gave it up, you called me. I felt I was saved because I gave up the

camera.” I was not sure about whether I deserved her compliment. I gave her a check and bus fare cards. Soon, Star and Lori arrived, and I gave them the first installment of their remunerations as well. Although I had planned to remunerate the participants all at once at the end of this project, I decided to pay them partially as encouragement. With a big smile, Star said, “Thank you Kay! This is additional.” We shared the fruit and the sandwiches that Lori and Star had brought. Meanwhile, Katrina, Dana, and Nia telephoned me: Katrina had to stay home for an urgent house chore. Dana said that she had gone to the emergency room at the hospital but would not drop out of the project. Nia said that the snail mail had been sent out, but that she could not come. Afrika was absent. James came with his son. I also gave him a check.

The participants and I discussed more about the evaluation research on the Odyssey Project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, paying particular attention to the research findings and the way the researcher structured the report in order to conceive of our own research report. Kilgore’s (2010) report ended with a *Discussion* section and not a *Conclusion* section. Noting this, Star became somewhat perplexed and asked me, “Won’t we have a conclusion? Won’t we have an answer to our research question?” In part of my mind, I was not really sure whether our project would bring about a direct answer to our research question because our research was significantly lacking the voices of the former students who had withdrawn from their first-year programs. Yet, the research was still in progress. Moreover, I did not want to discourage Star. So, I answered her, “We will have an answer. Perhaps we can make some suggestions to the Odyssey.” Also, looking at the graduation rates Kilgore provided in the report, we came to wonder about the exact graduation rate of the Odyssey Project in Chicago. Lori volunteered to look into this.

After this discussion, we began to analyze the interview data. The participants who had conducted interviews analyzed them on paper (I discuss this process in detail in Chapter 4). Based on these individual analyses, I led a comprehensive analysis as we did for the focus group in Session 4. Then, we constructed three common themes that came out across the four interviews conducted thus far:

- Learning philosophy influenced students' lives.
- Students felt belonging in the class.
- Students appreciated the teaching method, which connects the curriculum with students' lives.

(Extract 3.4)

This analysis, however, did not explain the reasons why some students drop out of their programs. Nevertheless, it demonstrated to the participants how video data could be analyzed and translated into words. More importantly, it made it clear to the participants that we had to interview former students who had withdrawn from their programs in order to understand their experiences, as graduates could hardly speak for them no matter how well interviews were conducted.

### **Session 8: Survey Analysis and an Interview with a Non-graduate Student**

One day before the session, Star and I had an extra meeting to conduct a preliminary analysis of the survey data. There were 35 online survey responses. Three of them were from former students who did not complete their first-year programs. There were three mail responses while a few envelopes were returned because of unknown recipients. Star and I divided the responses between graduates and non-graduates of the first-year course and began to read the responses in each group, paying greater attention to the latter. Star's reflection on her experience was critical to the process of interpreting the data. Often, I asked questions and she answered my questions. During this process, I typed our interpretation on my laptop simultaneously and drew conclusion of the interpretation with Star.<sup>29</sup> Later I compiled the interpretation and the survey data in one document to distribute to all the participants for further discussion.

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<sup>29</sup> We made three points in our conclusion: (a) For many students, commuting was one of the biggest challenges they faced; (b) Childcare added more difficulty to some students and often led them to drop out of their programs; (c) Attending classes was essential to graduation.

I began the session by drawing the “roadmap” (Figure 3.3) of our research on a whiteboard and summarizing the data sources and tasks that needed to be fulfilled in order to help the participants envision the progress of the project and make connections among the research components. Then I distributed the compiled survey document. Because of the low response rate of the survey, it was nearly impossible to read the data statistically. Thus, as Star and I did before, the participants and I read the individual responses from former students who had withdrawn from their programs and tried to understand the person’s experiences holistically. Latrice and Nia agreed to look further into the survey data and write a one-page long summary together.

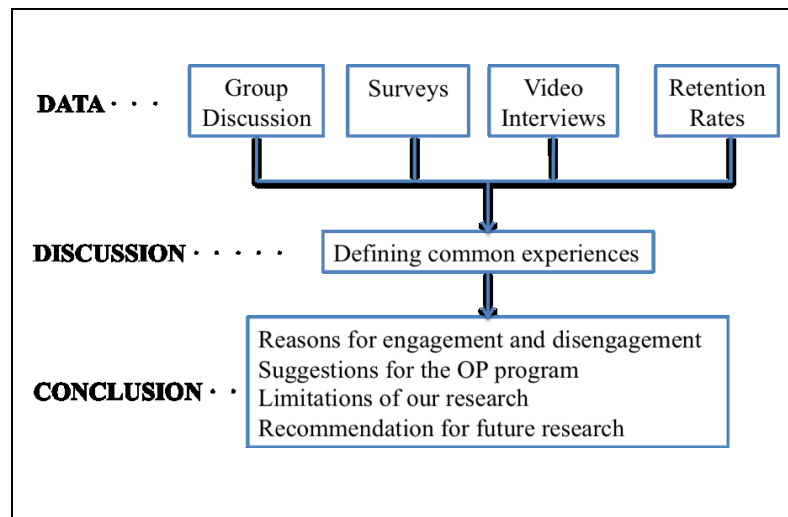


Figure 3.3. Roadmap

After break, we watched an interview (12 minutes) conducted by Latrice. In the video, Jennifer, a 19-year old single parent with a two-year old child, says that she could not help but withdraw from her first-year program because it was too difficult for her to travel with her child on cold nights. This was the first interview with a former non-graduated student. The way in which Latrice came to do this interview is of note. Immediately after Session 7, I called Latrice to give her a list of the contact information of six students who had not completed the first-year course in the year

2009-10. Latrice was able to set up the interview without difficulty after a few telephone calls.<sup>30</sup>

In wrapping up the session, I asked the participants whether they were ready for a group evaluation, which was initially scheduled for the next session, although our research was still in progress. They agreed. I asked them to write a one-page long reflection essay with reference to the five questions I had provided in order to prepare for the evaluation.<sup>31</sup> I also asked Afrika whether she would be interested in writing a draft of our research report with me. I asked her purposefully in order to encourage her to participate in the project more actively than she had been doing. Although she maintained a strong advocacy for students who had dropped out their programs and seemed to be very interested in the research topic, her participation in the project had not been significant. In addition, because she mentioned her genuine interest in writing, I thought she might like the task of writing the draft. She agreed, though somewhat reluctantly. I told her that we would work together via email.

### **Session 9: Group Evaluation and the Last Interview**

Dana finally came back. All the participants, except James, were present. In the first section of this session, we had a group evaluation with Amy<sup>32</sup> and Lizzie for approximately an hour and a half. I recorded the audio of the evaluation on my laptop

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<sup>30</sup> This made me wonder whether we had unintentionally left out a number of potential interviewees because we did not have the right strategy to reach out to them. I discuss this issue further in Chapter 4.

<sup>31</sup> I asked mainly about their experiences with the project and perspectives on participatory research and video. I explain the questionnaire and discuss how the participants responded to it in great detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>32</sup> Some may argue that Amy's presence could have deterred the participants from criticizing the Odyssey Project honestly because criticism could be seen as challenging her authority. I disagree. First of all, the reason why I invited Amy to the evaluation was not to discuss the Odyssey Project with her, but to gain her insight into the research project. The debate on the Odyssey Project took place only spontaneously while evaluating the project. Even with that, Amy's presence was not counterproductive. Rather, it was even fruitful for seeking solutions to the research problem. Further, it increased the chance to translate the knowledge produced in the project into action.



and transcribed it later for analysis. Lizzie led the evaluation process by asking the participants about their experiences doing the research and perspectives on participatory research and video. At the very beginning of the group evaluation, Lizzie asked the participants, “Do you think that the research was successful at gaining answers?” Responding to her question, Latrice dominated the conversation for a while, which, to my surprise, contrasted her somewhat passive participation thus far. She said:

At the time when I was in the OP (Odyssey Project), I had my child. Once I had a baby, I really wanted to finish. It was time where I came to the OP when she was a couple of months and I was breastfeeding. So, it got really rough and when I couldn’t come, . . . I just couldn’t make it. So, I found the person that I interviewed, she had a two-year old also. And she is 19. And one of the things that stuck out most about her not being able to complete the OP was, in fact, that it was far for her to travel with her child. So her main issue was taking care of her daughter with no support, so it made it tough for her to complete the OP project. So, that gave me an insight, you know, being related when it came to the issue, so. (Latrice, Extract 3.5)

In her account, she first reflected on her experience with the Odyssey Project and then talked about her interviewee, who had issues similar to her own. She went on to say:

When I was in OP (Odyssey Project), it was nothing about class that I didn’t like. I loved their structure, their teaching and everything. . . . It was just struggles with having a newborn and traveling in a cold weather at that time. So, when I was with the person that I interviewed, she made the statement. She said she loved everything about the OP. There was nothing that she wanted to change about it except for, maybe, the fact that it was so far away. . . . That was like one of the main things, you know, transportation. When I had my daughter, it was rough traveling that late with my newborn and breast-feeding, really, really cold, so. It was extremely insightful for me because everything

she said, OK, I can relate to all of these. (Latrice, Extract 3.6)

Pointing to the issues of commuting and childcare that both her interviewee and she faced, Latrice argued:

That [the interview] let me know that there are people who are interested in learning about philosophy and they want to have the opportunity. But they do live really far away. So, that is really important. Like I said, I live in Roseland (a neighbourhood of Chicago located in the South Side), too. But both of us are willing to travel way to the South site. If some kind of compromise could be made on that part, if they could consider having the OP further south—37<sup>th</sup> is not really south, not that far south—or carpool or something that would make it easier for people in Roseland or somewhere further in the city south areas, then, they would make it. (Latrice, Extract 3.7)

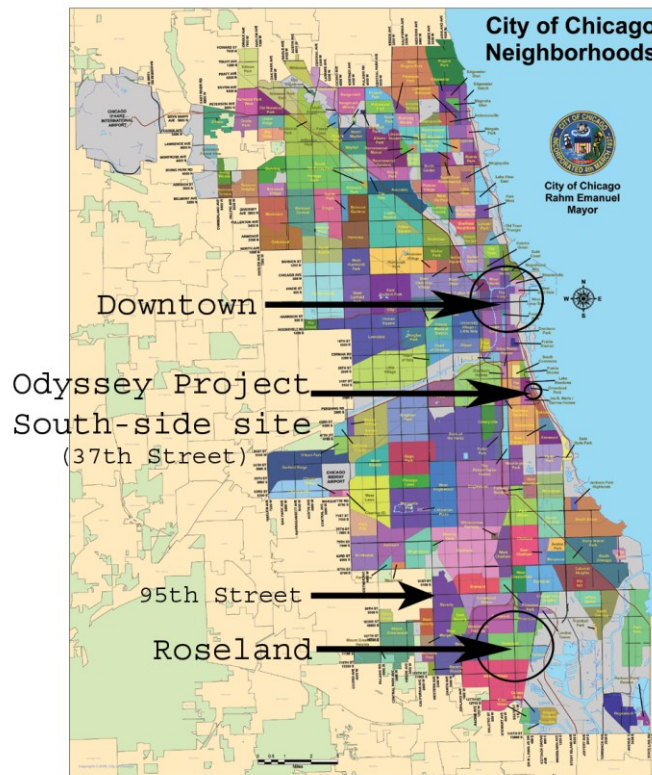


Figure 3.4. A map of Chicago neighbourhoods (source: City of Chicago website)

The interview seemed to enable Latrice to voice herself. Unlike the other participants, she was an honorary graduate. Although she did not meet the requirements for graduation, she was given a graduation certificate because of her hard work. Yet, until she conducted the interview, she was not able to speak for herself. By bringing to light her own experience along with the video interview, Latrice made an irrefutable case that explained why some students were not able to complete their programs. Her argument was so strong that it prompted the research team to debate the issue of the location of the South-side site of the Odyssey Project. Here is an excerpt:

**Katrina:** . . . As far as location, there may be lack of interests among young people. . . .

**Dana:** Younger people need to put some more efforts . . . The OP (Odyssey Project) introduces materials you have never heard of. If you want to go to a nightclub, you go there whatever the time is.

**Nia:** I can see some people are sick or sometimes you are single mothers. It may be just not the right time.

**Latrice:** Are we saying that because you have a child this opportunity shouldn't be open to you?

**Star:** We should go back to the research project. We are here to find out why some are so engaged and why some are disengaged, and then to find out some answers to what we can do to help these situations instead of talking about our opinions about what is and what isn't. I mean, personal opinions about what you think this is and what you think that was the reason of why. That should not be here today.

**Nia:** I was against single mothers' stance or young people's because . . . I was actually very young when I did the OP. But I did notice the person who we interviewed had a really good idea that daytime class would help. I think that

if there are enough people in Roseland and the Odyssey has the resources and the funds, they should offer classes in further south, because I thought that the Odyssey was not really on the South Side. They are on the North Side and they have been on the West Side. They haven't really been on the South Side. 37<sup>th</sup>, [all the participants were chuckling] it is not really south. That may be really helpful. It may not be Roseland to end up. Just the best facility they find in further south would be helpful.

**Amy:** May I ask you which street may be qualified as really south?

**Nia:** A little further.

**Amy:** 79?

**Afrika:** 79 to 95 . . . 79<sup>th</sup> around.

**Amy:** I get the further South the better in order to be considered south.

**Latrice:** 79 to 95.

**Dana:** 95<sup>th</sup> is really good. There is a library and a convenient transportation nearby.

**Star:** 63<sup>rd</sup> street, too.

**Dana:** I am looking at 79<sup>th</sup>. But there is no facility what so ever.

**Nia:** Yes, 95<sup>th</sup> is really good. It is easier to get to and there is support. I don't think people find too much on 79<sup>th</sup> street.

(Extract 3.8)

Subdued by Star's pungent comment, the heated debate among the participants was dramatically transformed into a more constructive conversation due to Amy's intervention. In the previous sessions, some participants stressed that the location was important, but no one could articulate an alternative to the current location. When we began to think of a new location, the participants who did not think of the location as a crucial factor for completion—namely Katrina and Dana—also came to agree that the

location of the South-side site was indeed too far from many students' homes. The participants suggested moving the site from 37<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> street for the South-side site.<sup>33</sup>

When the evaluation was over, the participants and I reviewed the summary of the focus group that Katrina had written and then viewed the final interview (15 minutes) conducted by Nia and Lori: Shemecia, the interviewee, a 27-year old student and single parent of a newborn baby, withdrew from her first-year program because it was difficult for her to take care of her child while attending her classes in the evening. How Nia and Lori found Shemecia is of note. Shemecia responded to the snail mail we had sent out and stated that she was willing to talk more about her experience in person. It was Star's idea to include in the survey the question whether respondents wished to talk in person. Without the inclusion, this interview would have been lost. I summarize the interview data in Table 3.3.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Graduation Status</b>	<b>Reasons for withdrawal</b>
Shilanda	F	40s	African American (AA)	Withdrew from the second-year course	A schedule conflict
John	M	40s	AA	Withdrew from the second-year course	Personal reason
Sheila	F	40s	AA	Completed the second-year course	NA
E-J	F	60s	AA	Completed the second-year course	NA
Jennifer	F	19	AA	Withdrew from the first-year course	Childcare
Shemecia	F	27	AA	Withdrew from the first-year course	Childcare

Table 3.3. An overview of the interview data set

<sup>33</sup> In Chicago, the street number increases from downtown to the South Side of Chicago. 37<sup>th</sup> street, where the South-side site was located, is in the South Side. Yet, it is relatively close to downtown. 95<sup>th</sup> street is further south and near Roseland and other areas where the majority of low-income African American residents live in the city of Chicago (see Figure 3.4)

Finally, we discussed how to present our research outcomes in the next week. Because Afrika was not able to prepare a draft of the report, we decided that the participants would break into smaller groups and that each group would take charge of presenting each set of data—focus group, surveys, and video—and overarching experiences among former Odyssey Project students. Then, I began to discuss the overarching experiences with the participants. But the discussion was not effective. Katrina and Dana had to leave for personal reasons; Afrika and Latrice began to pack their personal belongings to leave; Lori left to ask Amy about Odyssey Project graduation data. Only Nia and Star seemed to be attentive. Because of this unusual bustling, I ended the session early. Star agreed to develop the themes of the experiences with me via email.

When this session was over, Nia asked me, “Kay, can we look at the surveys together? I couldn’t do it myself. I couldn’t hold Latrice.” We began to read the compiled document on the survey that Star and I had prepared before Session 8. First, we drew a table similar to the one below (Table 3.4) to classify the data. Of 35 online survey respondents, 12 were graduates from both the first-year and second-year program; 20 were graduates only from the first-year program; 3 did not complete the first-year program. Of 42 snail mail surveys sent out to former students who had dropped out, 3 were returned and 4 were forwarded back due to unknown recipients. Hence, there were 6 responses from the target population. Once we divided the survey responses in this way, Nia claimed, “I needed this structure! Now it [the data] makes sense to me. I often have difficulty in figuring out structures.” We went on to review each response. While interpreting it, I asked her questions for clarification. As in the case of the preliminary analysis with Star, Nia’s personal experience was essential to interpreting the survey data. While I helped her structure the data, Nia made meanings out of the handful of the data with the insight that only insiders could provide. I discuss this further in Chapter 4

Survey mode	First-year course		
	Non-graduates	Second-year course	
		Non-graduates	Graduates
Online	3	20	12
Snail mail	3	—	

Table 3.4. Survey responses

### Session 10: Preparation for Presentation

One day before the presentation, most participants came to this impromptu session. We all seemed to be slightly nervous but excited about the presentation. We first determined the order of the presentation. Then, the participants broke into smaller groups. Lori and James continued to edit the video. They showed the rough cut to the rest of us and then moved on to fine editing. Dana and Teri<sup>34</sup> joined Star to elaborate on the themes of the overarching experiences among former Odyssey Project students. They sat in front of a computer and typed their discussions. Nia and Latrice were discussing the survey results. Despite the efforts that we made for the presentation, it seemed that completion of the research report, which was one of the goals of the project set at the beginning of the project, was unlikely in the near future. In addition, because I had to come back to Montreal in September, I suggested that we complete the report in December when I came back to Chicago and that we communicate via email to complete small sections meanwhile. The participants agreed.

### Session 11: Presentation

The presentation took place at the Illinois Humanities Council in front of approximately 30 attendees from Odyssey Project graduates, staff, faculty, and their family members. Amy and Lizzie also attended the presentation. Only Katrina among the participants was not able to attend because of a schedule conflict. Each participant

<sup>34</sup> Teri is an Odyssey Project graduate. She could not participate in the project because of her job. Nonetheless, she came to Sessions 10 and 11 to support us.

brought some food to share. After I introduced the research project and overviewed its goals and processes, Dana presented the summary of the internal group discussion (focus group). Despite her absence in multiple sessions, she presented it so well. It was as if she were presenting her own story. In a sense, it was indeed her own story as she investigated her own life to produce the knowledge. Next, the final video, titled *Ready, Set, Engage!* (10 minutes and 38 seconds) was screened. Then, Nia presented the analysis of the survey data. In her presentation, she brought to the fore the contrasting experiences between graduates and non-graduates. Finally, Star addressed the overarching experiences among former Odyssey students that came out of the project (see Chapter 4 for in depth description and discussion of the presentation). Some days later, Lizzie wrote me via email:

There seemed to me to be some very strong analysis, particularly in the way presenters culled through the data to identify different themes that the data brought up. This made me rethink that last point about aligning data with existing opinions verses interpreting the data—I think there was a strong effort at interpretation, and maybe it just took (as it does for most people) the process of preparing for the presentation to get people really processing the data that way. (Lizzie, Extract 3.9)

After the presentation, Amy, who attended the very first session, gave me a written comment on the project:

I was impressed by the degree of sophistication with which the group reflected upon their own experience, and I saw how their own self-understanding changed from the beginning to the end of the project as they moved from a primarily self-referential narrative to a much broader understanding of the process and outcomes of education in the humanities. (Amy, Extract 3.10)

Meanwhile, I converted the final video *Ready, Set, Engage* into a DVD and made copies available each participant researcher, interviewees, Amy, and my supervisors.



## Follow-up

In December 2010, I returned to Chicago. Although I had continued to contact the participants to complete the report, Katrina was the only one who was able to work further with me. We completed the introduction, research problem, and methods sections. Before arriving in Chicago, I had set up a group meeting by consulting with the participants. But only a few participants, such as Star, Katrina, and Nia, responded. Yet, Katrina emailed me that she would not be able to make it because of her work schedule. No one came to the meeting. Perhaps it might have to do with my trip being around Christmas. Yet, I was able to meet Nia another day. We edited the draft Katrina had written. As of the time of writing this thesis, the report is still incomplete. On the one hand, I regret that it is not complete. On the other hand, I realize that the report itself may not be as important to the participants as it is to me. What seems more important to them is to point to some of the problems that students who had dropped out may have and to make some suggestions to the Odyssey Project, which, in effect, they did orally during the group evaluation and the final presentation. Michael Patton (2002) identified this type of evaluation as *formative evaluation*, as opposed to *summative evaluation*, which is usually accompanied by a full report with data, analysis, and recommendations. Patton underpinned that oral presentation of findings (formative evaluation) may suffice in non-academic settings. He described the characteristics of the formative evaluation as:

The methods are qualitative, the purpose is practical, and the analysis is done throughout fieldwork; no written report is expected beyond a final outline of observations and implications. Academic theory takes second place to understanding the program's theory of action as actually practices are implemented. (p. 435)

When I look at the project as a formative evaluation, I wonder whether writing the report was essential to the project. Perhaps not. This may be one of the differences between academic research and community-based participatory research.

## My Approach to Analysis

Thus far, I have traced significant moments in the process of the project session by session. In this section, I define my data sets and my approach to analysis and discuss the way I take up the issues of trustworthiness and generalization.

### Data Sets

As my thesis involves a double layer of investigation as discussed in Chapter 1, I divide the data sets into two categories for clarification (see Table 3.5 below). The first set was produced and analyzed in the project described in this chapter. The participants and I obtained data from three sources: (a) focus group (also referred to as an internal group discussion, carried out in Session 4), (b) interviews (conducted with video cameras), and (c) surveys (online and snail mail). The second set of data was generated to analyze the process of the project, which is the focus of my thesis. I obtained it from five sources: (a) my participant observation and field notes, (b) the products of the project (the final video, session minutes, and other written documents), (c) the group evaluation, (d) the participants' individual reflection essays, and (e) Amy's and Lizzie's comments on the project.

	First set of data	Second set of data
<b>Context</b>	The participatory video research project	My thesis
<b>Purpose</b>	To shed light on former students' experiences with the Odyssey Project and to help them further engage in the Project.	To analyze the process of the participatory video research project.
<b>Sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Focus group</li><li>· Interviews (recorded in video)</li><li>· Surveys</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Participant observation and my field notes</li><li>· The products of the project</li><li>· Group evaluation</li><li>· Participants' reflection essays</li><li>· Amy's and Lizzie's comments</li></ul>

Table 3.5. Data sets

## **Data Sources**

Here, I map out the data sources for the thesis project (right-hand column of Table 3.5) in more detail.

**Participant observation and field notes.** I wrote field notes before, during, and after almost every session and typed them up on my computer as immediately as possible with my further reflection on critical incidents (Drennon & Cervero, 2002), by which I mean either positive or negative noteworthy interactions with the participants. I have highlighted these incidents in the thesis.

**The products of the project.** These are the data and outcomes that the participants and I co-produced in the project. They include the final video, the research proposal written by Nia, the summary of the focus group prepared by Katrina, the session minutes written by the participants and me, the survey questionnaire, the survey data and written analysis, and the research presentation materials.

**Group evaluation.** I used my laptop to record the audio of the evaluation and later transcribed the audio files. The evaluation was semi-structured so that the participants were encouraged to speak freely about their perspectives on and experiences with the project guided by a series of questions Lizzie posed to them. Besides the guided discussion, the participants also talked about the research problem spontaneously. In addition, I posed some questions about the interactions between the participants and me to have dialogue about our assumptions and expectations from each other. I treat all these components as data.

**Participants' reflection essays.** The participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences with and perspectives on the project similarly to the group evaluation. By prompting the individual participants to ponder the issues individually in writing, I intended to provoke reflexivity differently from in the group evaluation. I included five guiding questions for reflection in the binders distributed to each participant. Most participants submitted their essays immediately before or after the research presentation. I selected significant statements from each essay.

**Amy's and Lizzie's comments.** Both Amy and Lizzie attended the group evaluation and the research presentation. Amy provided me with a one-page long written comment on the project a few days after the final presentation. Two days after

the group evaluation, I interviewed Lizzie for half an hour via Skype (an Internet videoconference application). I recorded the audio of the interview and analyzed it. Then I returned my written analysis of the interview to Lizzie for confirmation. She responded to it in writing. After attending the final presentation, Lizzie sent me an additional comment on the project via email. I referred to their comments in my analysis. Their comments were particularly useful for me to gain insight into the Odyssey Project, as they compared the research project with the Odyssey Project.

### **Analytical Framework**

Reflexivity is the foundation of my analysis. I look back at the process of the project and scrutinize its details in the thesis. As I was part of the research team, I capitalize on my subjective involvement as an observer and academic researcher to gain critical insight into the process of the project that might otherwise go unnoticed. At the same time, I look at the way the participants reflected upon their involvement in the project. Within this foundation, I draw on John Fiske's cultural analysis of television as my analytical framework.<sup>35</sup>

Influenced by cultural studies in Britain in the 1970s, Fiske (1987/1992) saw culture as a "constant site of struggle between those with and those without power" (p. 292) and a "process of making meanings in which people actively participate" (p. 318). Using this premise, he regarded television culture as a terrain in which viewers struggle to produce their own meanings in the context of the dominant messages imbued in television programs. *Text* was the unit of his analysis. Fiske (1989a) defined text as a "signifying construct of potential meanings" (p. 43). Looking at a television program as a text, Fiske (1987/1992) rejected the idea that the text bears a dominant ideology and instead emphasized that it is only a potential of meanings, which can be "activated" (p. 303) in many different ways, contingent on viewers' social situations or experiences. Therefore, he asserted that the cultural analysis of

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<sup>35</sup> John Fiske was one of the most influential media scholars from the late 1970s to 1990s. His work was reevaluated in the context of contemporary cultural studies in a conference titled *Fiske Matters: John Fiske's Continuing Legacy for Cultural Studies*. The conference was held in Madison, Wisconsin in the United States in June 2010. Fiske himself appeared as a keynote speaker (<http://www.fiskematters.com>).

television requires studying three levels of texts and the intertextual relations among them. He explained the levels of texts as:

First, there is the primary text on the television screen, which is produced by the culture industry and needs to be seen in its context as part of that industry's total production. Second, there is a sublevel of texts, also produced by the culture industry, though sometimes by different parts of it. These include studio publicity, television criticism and comment, feature articles about shows and their stars, gossip columns, fan magazines, and so on. They can provide evidence of the ways in which the potential meanings of the primary text are activated and taken into their culture by various audiences or subcultures. On the third level of textuality lie those texts that the viewers produce themselves; their talk about television; their letters to papers or magazines; and their adoption of television-introduced styles of dress, speech, behavior, or even thought into their lives. (Fiske, 1987/1992, p. 319)

Fiske regarded a television program itself as the primary text; parts produced by the culture industry with relevance to the primary text as the secondary text; texts produced by viewers as the tertiary text. He asserted that intertextuality among the texts should be studied both vertically and horizontally to understand a television program. The vertical intertextuality concerns the relations among the three texts. Fiske argued that these three levels of texts "leak into one another" (p. 319): Some secondary texts are close to the primary texts while others are closer to the tertiary texts; the tertiary texts are not independent from the primary text, but produced in relation to the dominant ideology embedded in the primary text. Along with the vertical intertextuality, Fiske (1987) argued that one also should study a television program horizontally to find the links among primary texts in terms of genre, character, or content.

I apply Fiske's textuality framework to participatory video.<sup>36</sup> In participatory video, however, participants are not simply viewers as they typically are in television studies. They are themselves producers who create videos (the primary texts) and also contribute to the formation of secondary texts as well. Interestingly, in his formulation, Fiske (1989b) pointed to the limitations of amateurs producing primary texts. As he observes:

With very few and very marginal exceptions, people cannot and do not produce their own commodities, material or cultural, as they may have done in tribal or folk societies. In capitalist societies there is no so-called authentic folk culture against which to measure the "inauthenticity" of mass culture, so bemoaning the loss of the authentic is a fruitless exercise in romantic nostalgia. (p. 27)

This may be still valid even more than two decades later because mass media seems to be the predominant source of cultural experience among people. However, I do think that the "very few and very marginal exceptions" have increased at least in North America, as people have easier access to the video production equipment, including video cameras, mobile phones, and other visual recording devices, to create their own primary texts. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 1, new modes of distribution have been stimulating production possibilities through social network sites such as YouTube. The participants of my project, who could be identified as viewers in Fiske's analysis, became producers by virtue of their engagement in creating a video. Hence, what is counted as the primary, secondary, and tertiary text in my thesis is somewhat different from Fiske's framework even though the terms are still useful. The primary text is the video that the participants created in the project. The secondary text refers to the documents produced by the participants (e.g., the research proposal, the survey questionnaire, the summary of the focus group) and what the participants, as producers, had to say about the primary text. Like Pierre Doyon

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<sup>36</sup> A few participatory video projects have been analyzed with Fiske's framework. They include Mitchell and Weber (1999), de Lange, Olivier, and Wood (2008), Moletsane et al. (2009), Doyon (2009), and Wood and Olivier (2011).

(2009), I call this text the *producer text*.<sup>37</sup> In participatory video projects, the producers also become audience members, as they intend to look at themselves or their community members through the primary text. The audience, however, may include other members outside the group of producers. Hence, the tertiary text may refer to not only the way in which the producers respond to the primary text, but also the way in which the other audience members respond to the primary and secondary texts. For the purposes of my study, the audience only includes Amy, Lizzie, and myself. In Chapter 4, I analyze the primary text, the video created by the participants, within the context in which it was produced. In Chapter 5, I look at the producer text in relation to the primary text. In building on this structure, I add two more layers of textuality: participant text and researcher text.<sup>38</sup> By *participant text*, I mean what the participants had to say about their experiences with the research project, as opposed to simply creating the video. I analyze the participant text in Chapter 6. By *researcher text* I mean what I, as the researcher, had to say about my involvement in the project. The researcher text is the focus of Chapter 7. As Fiske (1987/1992) argued, the boundaries of these texts are fluid. Thus, they are much less rigid than may be implied in my description of the analytic framework.

### **Trustworthiness and Achieving Credibility**

My thesis is based on my active involvement in the project, and thus, my subjectivity is a key to analyzing its process. While this analytical approach may bring about knowledge that cannot be obtained otherwise, it can undermine the credibility of the thesis. To enhance credibility, I base my analysis on hermeneutics because, from a constructivist standpoint, it can shed light on the way in which the participants came to construct knowledge and reality together (Guba, 1990). Hermeneutics is exercised

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<sup>37</sup> De Lange et al. (2008), Moletsane et al. (2009) and Wood and Olivier (2011) used the term production text instead. To emphasize the agents that talk about their product, I use the term *producer text*.

<sup>38</sup> In his work with secondary school students, Doyon (2010) drew on Fiske's work as well. He found it useful to add the idea of an *environmental text* to refer to site-specific locations, such as classrooms and playgrounds, as production sites.

through the hermeneutic circle, in which the researcher shifts her focus between wholes and parts, between the abstract and the concrete to connect seemingly unrelated ideas and gain critical insight into the process of meaning making (Kincheloe, 2005). To analyze the process of the project within the circle, I take three steps.<sup>39</sup> I begin with a description of what happened in the process, as I showed in this chapter. I then take a closer look at what was produced, with reference to what happened in the process. This step is significant in Chapter 4. Building on this explicative analysis, I relate each subset of data listed in Table 3.5 with one another to analyze the ways in which the participants came to crystallize their experiences and to co-create knowledge. This is the focus of Chapters 5 and 6. These steps, however, are not clearly divided. I constantly move between the second and the third step to ultimately gain a better understanding of the process as a whole.

With the framework of hermeneutics, I triangulate data and methods, as suggested by Silverman (2010) to enhance credibility. As Table 3.5 shows, I generated multiple sets of data. My analysis draws on these different sets of data. While constantly comparing different data sets, I also account for negative or contradictory instances. For example, when I analyze the participant text, I not only look at the predominant, positive aspects, but also attend to minor, negative ones. By reading them together, I aim to provide a more comprehensive picture of the project and to gain a deeper understanding of it. This data triangulation is supported by methodological triangulation (see also Mason, 1996b). By this I mean deploying different ways of looking at one thing. For instance, I sought the same type of information from both the group evaluation (conducted orally) and the participants' individual reflection essays. By analyzing and comparing them, I seek to make my analysis of the information more rigorous. I also analyze comments on the project from Amy and Lizzie to triangulate the way I look at the project.

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<sup>39</sup> I developed these steps based on the technique Philipp Mayring (1983; as cited in Flick, 2011, pp. 136-139) introduced for qualitative analysis drawing on multiple data sources. The author explained: The first step is to summarize the content of each data source. The second step is to explain it. The last step is to structure relations among contents.



## Handling Generalization

Generalization concerns to what extent my analysis can be inferred by other researchers. Generally, it is of less value among qualitative researchers than quantitative researchers; some interpretivist scholars even refute the relevance of generalization in qualitative inquiry (Payne & Williams, 2005). Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985), for instance, discarded the issue of generalization altogether in their constructivist framework, asserting that it only counts for the trustworthiness of a positivistic research paradigm, namely quantitative research. Constructivist researchers cast doubt on the possibility of empirical generalizations for addressing the complexity of human interactions and cultural systems (Patton, 2002). Stake (2010), however, held a more lenient view on generalization. In his observation, “Every thinking moment has its generalizations” (p. 196) because epistemic generalizations are inevitable to building knowledge; some generalizations are refuted whereas others are modified. He argued that even when the researcher looks at a particular case, she makes a *petite generalization*. Stake wrote, “We generalize. We transfer. We extrapolate. It is difficult to specify the limits or risks of the generalization, but we often generalize from particular situations” (p. 197). Lee Cronbach (1975) took a more pessimistic stance on generalization than Stake. He encouraged social science researchers to deal with contemporary facts and present realities instead of amassing generalizations atop because “generalizations decay” (p. 122). He explained, “At one time a conclusion describes the existing situation well, at a later time it accounts for rather little variance, and ultimately it is valid only as history” (p. 122-123): For instance, once a sound generalization that DDT kills mosquitoes became obsolete when mosquitoes became resistant to DDT. Kenneth Howe (2004) added more weight to Cronbach’s argument by stressing that “*making* generalizations decay” (p. 51) should be an explicit goal of social science research.

Clearly, I do not offer the final word on participatory video in the thesis. But, by providing a thick description of the project that I carried out with the participants, I aim to show what participatory video can do in terms of the ways in which it influences the participants’ lives and brings about new knowledge. In so doing, I can say that I made a *petite generalization*, as Stake (2010) called it. Evidently, the

participants were not chosen randomly. They had attended the Odyssey Project as well as the video production course that I had offered before participating in the project. This implies that they generally had significant interests in educating themselves and in working with video as well. This made the participant group special. Because my petite generalization was drawn from a project conducted with this special group, my argument may have limitations in generalization. However, by analyzing the project in relation to multiple sets of literature, such as adult learning and participatory research, I balance generalization and particularization. Thus, readers may be able to find knowledge applicable to their work in my thesis.

### **Summary of Chapter**

In this chapter, I provided a thick description of the participatory video project that I conducted with the participants. Then, I clarified my approach to analysis, defining my data sets and my analytical framework, and discussed the way I ensured the trustworthiness of my study and to what extent generalization could be applied in the thesis. In the next chapters, I analyze the project within this analytical framework.

## Inside the Project: Processes and Outcomes 4

*Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past—but not in order to resuscitate the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages.*  
(Arendt, 1968, p. 206)

In the previous chapter, I described the process of the participatory video research project and defined my approach to analysis. In this chapter, I step back to analyze the project, paying particular attention to the primary text, the video that the participants created. As I noted in Chapter 1, participatory video has too often been addressed in a celebratory context with a lack of critical analysis (Low et al., 2012). Here I respond to this limitation by looking back at the project critically and scrutinizing its processes and outcomes. I organize the chapter in the following order: (1) I summarize the final presentation to highlight the research findings from the participants' perspectives; (2) shifting from this grand overview, I focus on the primary text (the final video) and analyze it cinematically; (3) I show the process in which the participants and I analyzed the video data to create the primary text; (4) finally, I move one step further back to compare the project with a similar project carried out in a less participatory way. Through this comparison, I discuss what difference participation can make in understanding the educational experiences of economically disadvantaged adults living in an inner city.

## **The Presentation**

The participants and I presented the research outcomes in the final session. As I described in the previous chapter, we presented the results of the focus group (internal group discussion), the final video, and the survey. Then we presented our discussion of the overarching former Odyssey Project students' experiences that stood out in the project. In this section, I go over the main points of the presentation except the video, which is discussed in length in the subsequent section.

### **Focus Group**

Figure 3.1 was projected onto the wall while Dana presented the result to the audience. Since I already explained the content in the previous chapter, I do not repeat it here. But I want to draw attention to the two last items because they explain the most fundamental reasons why the participants came to engage in the Odyssey Project. In the summary of the focus group, Katrina wrote about the learning opportunity:

The OP (Odyssey Project) offered this “chance of a lifetime” to adults that may or may not have had a high school education, but only had a desire to learn. Single, married mothers and fathers were also offered the opportunity based on their desire to learn with the hopes of making better lives for themselves.  
(Focus group summary, Extract 4.1)

She went on to address the issue of validation as:

For Dana, validation is the greatest impact that the OP (Odyssey Project) courses brought on her life. She put it, “In the OP class, I didn’t feel stupid. . . . I used to be always an odd one. The Odyssey Project validated my life.” The Odyssey Project also validated Latrice’s life. Latrice mentioned that the class readings validated situations that she was experiencing at the time, and her studies in the OP validated her feelings and thoughts. Her learning experience at the OP encouraged and engaged her to the extent that it prepared her to make

a significant mark in her life. Through the process of validation in class, Katrina has gained greater confidence in her beliefs as well as herself. (Focus group summary, Extract 4.2)

The focus group suggests some aspects of adult education. There may be a number of working-class adults who want to continue basic education. Vocational training is not the only education they seek. They also want to fulfill the desire to learn by engaging in critical conversations (see J. Anderson, 2012).

### **Surveys**

Nia presented the surveys by contrasting the answers between the primary target population (former students who withdrew from their first-year programs) and the rest of the respondents. Later, she summarized her analysis in her reflection essay as:

Graduates wrote about class work and reading materials as being some of their greatest challenges. For non-graduates, especially single parents, getting to and from class was the greatest challenge and for some, an obstacle to completing the course. Child-care was also a big issue. . . .

The differences in listed challenges show a difference in levels of engagement. Those who were fully engaged in their courses found the work and the reading itself to be most challenging. Not one non-graduate listed the work or the reading as a major challenge. (Nia, Extract 4.3)

As Nia wrote, the surveys suggest that a number of students might have dropped out of their programs not because of class-related work, but because of difficulty in balancing commuting and parental responsibilities.

### **Overarching Experiences Among Former Odyssey Project Students**

Star, Lori, Dana, and Teri, contributed to writing the summary of the overarching experiences. Though incomplete, it described eight distinct themes. Extract 4.4 shows the themes Star addressed in the presentation.

1. Many students point to the philosophy class as their favorite and credit the class with having a lasting influence on their lives.
2. Many students like the teaching approach of the Odyssey Project, in which instructors encourage student to relate texts to their life experiences.
3. Students develop a sense of community by sharing their experiences in class.
4. Students have difficulty in commuting because they tend to travel a long distance at night.
5. Single parent students often face more difficulty than others because of childcare.
6. Students, especially graduates, point to unruly class discussions as a drawback.
7. Devotion is critical to students' completing their programs.
8. Earning college credits is important to some students.

(Extract 4.4)

### **Reading the Primary Text, *Ready, Set, and Engage***

In this section, I focus on the primary text (the final video) and read it cinematically. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the film *Ready, Set, and Engage* (10 minutes and 38 seconds) is a product of the participatory video research project, in which eight former students of the Odyssey Project and I worked together in order to bring to light former Odyssey Project students' experiences for the purpose of promoting adult learners' engagement in the Odyssey Project. The main idea was to allow former students to speak for themselves about their experiences. Particular to the film is that the filmmakers were also former Odyssey Project students, not professional filmmakers. It was these students who conceptualized the film,

interviewed other former students, and edited each interview to complete the film. They took video cameras to the interviewees' homes or work places to provoke their reflections on their experiences with the Odyssey Project, similar to what Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin hoped to do in their film, *Chronicle of a Summer*, more than 50 years ago (see Chapter 1). The primary text is essentially a documentary film, in particular, of the style of *cinéma vérité* in that the filmmakers, like Rouch and Morin, aimed to precipitate tensions or critical moments by engaging in conversations with film subjects, as opposed to waiting for such tensions or moments to occur (Barnouw, 1983). And yet, the difference between *Ready, Set, and Engage* and *Chronicle of a Summer* is decisive. In the previous film, the filmmakers are amateurs and maintain a fairly close relationship with the film subjects; in the latter film, the filmmakers are professionals and their relationships with the subjects are much looser. Both films are reflexive, but in different ways. *Ready, Set, and Engage* is reflexive in that the filmmakers looked into their community and brought out some shared experiences although they were not in the film they made; *Chronicle of a Summer* is considered reflexive because the film subjects have an opportunity to see their representation in the film and the filmmakers appear in the film (Ruby, 2000).

The film *Ready, Set, and Engage* consists of three sections (see Table 4.1 below). In the beginning section, the film is introduced in a scrolling text as: "In the summer of 2010, a series of individual interviewees were conducted to shed light on the shared experiences of Odyssey Project students." This text is followed by an introduction to the six interviewees (one man and five women). Each interviewee's name and title are written over a still image extracted from each corresponding interview. The middle section is divided into five subsections marked with five distinct questions written in a white colour text over a solid black background. In each subsection, the interviewees talk about their views that are pertinent to the given question. In the final section, credits are rolled. Over the credits flows Star's narration of the Odyssey Project's mission statement:

The Odyssey Project is founded on the premise to make people free with the conviction that engagement with the humanities can offer individuals a way out

of poverty by fostering habits of sustained reflection and skills of communication and critical thinking in a way of making them free.<sup>40</sup>

This is followed by a segment from an interview. The interviewee says: “I’ve sort of picked up the philosophy that you don’t have to be in a classroom to continue your education. You know, I am still learning. I think I am still growing.” The film ends.

Section	Duration	Content
Beginning	56 sec	The title is followed by a scrolling text, which explains the background of the film. Then, the individual interviewees’ names and titles are introduced on top of their still images extracted from the interviews.
Middle	8 min 20 sec	<p><i>What attracted you to the Odyssey Project?</i></p> <p>(Interestingly, while the non-graduated students mentioned college credits or education, the others answered reading unfamiliar books and learning critical thinking skills. One of them said that it was simply recommended by her friends but that it was surprisingly pleasant.)</p> <p><i>Did the Odyssey Project leave a lasting influence?</i></p> <p>(The interviewees commonly mentioned that they gained confidence to move forward in their lives and came to see society differently.)</p> <p><i>Did you have any problem while taking the Odyssey Project course?</i></p> <p>(While the non-graduated students talked about commuting and childcare, one of the other interviewees pointed to unruly class discussions she encountered at times.)</p>

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<sup>40</sup> The text is also found on the web page at [http://www.prairie.org/odyssey project](http://www.prairie.org/odyssey%20project).



		<p><i>What was your greatest motivation?</i></p> <p>(They talked about the Allegory of the Cave, feeling part of something greater than everyday life, and attention given by professors and the staff of the Odyssey Project to individual students.)</p> <p><i>Do you have any suggestion for the Odyssey Project?</i></p> <p>(Offering classes in the afternoon and more writing workshops, and promoting the Odyssey Project even more to reach out to people.)</p>
End	1 min 22 sec	Over the rolling credits flows Star's narration of the Odyssey Project's mission statement, which is followed by a video clip from an interview.

Table 4.1. The content of the film, *Ready, Set, Engage*

The film is a small anthology or collective story of former Odyssey Project students. It is a documentary film created in a participatory way in the sense that the filmmakers represented their community through the film. I term the film a *participatory documentary film* as a genre. As participatory video becomes widely deployed, there is a growing body of participatory video of various kinds. Some are more narrative-oriented (e.g., Moletsane et al., 2009); others are more in the style of documentary, like *Ready, Set, Engage*. Though they should be treated as equals in the literature of participatory video, they are constructed differently and influence viewing experiences differently. Therefore, I think it is necessary to think about how to classify different types of participatory video and to develop filmic vocabulary accordingly in order to crystallize differences and similarities among different forms of participatory video and to lay the groundwork for more efficient communications among participatory video researchers and practitioners. Hence, I call for attention to participatory video as a film genre and urge researchers working across film studies and participatory video to engage in stimulating conversations in order to explore participatory video more extensively.

## The Process of Participatory Video Making

Now I shift my focus to the process in which the participants and I created the primary text, *Ready, Set, Engage*. In looking back at the process, I draw particular attention to the conflicts and difficulties that arose in the process. Through this reflexivity, I aim to offer insight into better ways of organizing participatory video research. Initially, I designed the procedures of the project in the following order:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Each participant conducts two interviews.</li><li>2. The participants analyze interviews individually by using an analysis form I distribute and edit each interview to less than 10 minutes (the assumption is that each interview is between 30 and 60 minutes).</li><li>3. The research team views edited videos together for discussion.</li><li>4. A final video is created based on the discussion.</li></ol>
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Table 4.2. Planned procedures

I suggested the procedures to the participants at the very beginning of the project. However, as Chapter 3 shows, there were some changes. Not all the participants were able to conduct an interview, and no one edited an individual interview. I take a closer look at these issues in order to tackle what might have caused the discrepancies. I then explain the video analysis form the participants used in the project and discuss how it contributed to the analysis of the interview data.

### Finding Interviewees

The number of interviews was significantly lower than I expected. Furthermore, some of the interviewees were not relevant to the purpose of interviews. At the beginning of the project, I suggested that each participant conduct two interviews based on the assumption that each person could manage two interviews without difficulty and that the total number (16) of interviews, in addition to the

participant researchers' own accounts, would generate a fair amount of data. Even after the research problem of the project was set in Session 2, I thought that the plan was still doable. I proposed convenience sampling. Yet, the participants reported difficulty in contacting interviewees:

One of my interviewees didn't show up, so I wasn't able to interview her. (Star, in Session 5)

My interviewee canceled the appointment in the last minute. (Katrina, in Session 6)

The biggest problem with interviews was to find interviewees. That was a really overwhelmingly difficult part. (Lori, in the group evaluation, Session 9)

Filming and conducting interviews was the fun and easy part. Getting people to participate was extremely difficult. People most willing to participate in interviews were those who had completed at least year one of Odyssey Project (OP) courses, but our target were those who had not completed OP courses. (Nia, in her reflection essay)

As Nia suggested, the difficulty in finding interviewees might have to do in part with the nature of the target population. They were scattered and less reachable than graduates. I had assumed that the participants knew some people among the target population. But even Afrika and James, for example, who expressed strong sympathy toward the population, did not seem to maintain personal connections with them. Thus, convenience sampling failed. Furthermore, although James and Afrika conducted three interviews without much difficulty, they were not very relevant to the purpose of interviews. Perhaps because of irregular attendance and busy schedules, the interviewers might have lost sight of the purpose of interviews and selected interviewees simply out of convenience without considering the interview criteria. This suggests there was a division between the target population and the participants

that I had not perceived. Although Odyssey Project students, as low-income adults, may share common experiences in society, their experiences with the Odyssey Project seem diverse, and they are not necessarily connected with one another. The obscure division was so intense that we had to make more conscious efforts than convenience sampling in order to break the division.

Breaking the division meant more than generating data. It was rather an ambitious initiative to bring out non-graduates' voices to the Odyssey Project community. The participant group in itself was fairly homogenous in terms of graduation status because the participants were recruited among the Odyssey Project graduates who had taken my video production course. This process already excluded non-graduates unintentionally but systematically. This is observed in other activities offered by the Odyssey Project. The staff of the Odyssey Project organizes various activities besides regular programs to encourage former and current students to engage in critical conversations and meet each another. As the participants indicated, such activities continue to provide former students with educational opportunities. However, non-graduates may be unlikely to join them. Due to address changes or irregular access to the Internet, they might not hear of any events. Or, for the same reason that they withdrew from their programs, they may not be able to attend the events. Thus, their presence and voice might have been unintentionally but systematically excluded from the Odyssey Project.

To address the difficulty in finding interviewees and bring out the voice of non-graduating students, the participants and I discussed how to approach potential interviewees in Session 6 (see Extract 3.2). After this discussion, we were able to interview two people from the target population, i.e., former students who withdrew from the first-year programs. Although we set up the policy of not using the video camera if it were the reason why potential interviewees hesitated to participate, there was no indication that this was the case. Even when Nia attempted a telephone interview, she failed. According to her, the interviewee became uncomfortable when Nia read the interview consent form over the phone. The interviewee mentioned, "Too complicated," and hung up the phone. Although the consent form was to inform the interviewee of her right and possible risks involved with the interview, the interviewee

did not seem to perceive it in that way. Latrice's comment provides further insight. She said in the group evaluation:

Initially when I first started contacting people, I never mentioned the fact that it did not matter whether they were not graduated. I noticed that when I wasn't doing that they would shy away much quicker. Then the next set of people I contacted, I let them know, hey we are looking for people to interview, you know, you were an Odyssey student, it doesn't matter whether or not you finished, we were looking for the both just open and honest opinions. And when I mentioned that, you know, they were way more open, much more open to interviewing. So I think, you know, that could be an issue when someone hasn't graduated, they kind of look at like, they don't want to be like, I don't know, something that they don't feel good about, you know? But I noticed that once I mentioned that, there were much more open and comfortable, saying, "Oh, OK, this is why I didn't. OK, they were giving me a chance to explain why I didn't and why I couldn't." (Latrice, Extract 4.5)

This suggests that difficulty in interviewing people from the target population had more to do with a social taboo associated with incompleteness of an educational program than with the camera. Even without the camera, they might have rejected interviews because they hesitated to talk about negative experiences openly. It seemed that it was the topic of interviews, rather than the camera, that turned away some potential interviewees. Lizzie had a slightly different view on the interviews. When I interviewed Lizzie immediately after the group evaluation, she commented:

The issue of the video wasn't so much video itself as kind of interviewing skills. The issues are just what kind of questions to ask and how. It takes a while to learn them anyway. So, it might not have been different if they had used only audio or not using any medium at all. (Lizzie, Extract 4.6)

Lizzie pointed to a lack of interviewing skills as a primary reason why there were only few relevant interviews in the project. Adding to this, lack of understanding the purpose of interviews might have resulted in only a few interviews. Perhaps if the participants had been aware of the purpose of interviews more fully, there would have been more interviews. A question is how it can be done effectively. As the project shows, the participants were likely to be interrupted by multiple events in their lives and unable to attend to the details of research all the time. I kept writing session minutes to address the issue of discontinuity and to provide the participants with consistent information. But I do not think all the participants were able to pay attention to them. Hence, I think it may be useful to develop an interview guideline with participants, which clearly states who is the target population of the interviews, what questions should be asked, and what the recommended time is for each interview, and to ask them to carry the guideline with them as a reminder each time they conduct an interview.

I think that a few factors influenced the difficulty in finding interviewees. They include the topic of interviews, the participants' lack of understanding of the purpose of interviews, their limited interview skills and experiences, and the entrenched division between the participant group and the target population. Concerning the last issue, I did not initially take into account such a group dynamic among the Odyssey Project student population. Seeing the student population as one group of people, I simply assumed that convenience sampling would work. The assumption was wrong. Was there a better method of sampling in this case? With this question in mind, I look at the ways in which Jennifer and Shemecia were interviewed (see Table 3.3). Both cases suggest that there may have been more potential interviewees who were willing to participate in the project. Shemecia, for instance, wanted to talk more about her experience in person. If we had mailed the surveys to a bigger number of former students, more people could have contacted us to participate in the study. Meanwhile, Latrice found her interviewee, Jennifer, through a few random telephone calls. Perhaps her experience—Latrice was an honorary graduate of the Odyssey Project—might have facilitated the interview process. Katrina also tried to set up an interview by calling some people as Latrice did, but she failed to interview

anyone. Hence, I am not quite sure whether we could have reached out to more people with random telephone calls. I do think, however, that there could have been more interviews if we had divided a complete list of contacts into nine clusters and each one of us had contacted people in each cluster by calling them. In this way, we could have handled the difficulty in finding interviewees more collaboratively. This simple idea, however, did not occur to me almost until the end of the project.

### Analyzing Video Data and Creating the Final Video

I discuss here the way in which we analyzed video data and created the final video. To facilitate the analytical process, I developed a form, in which I combined a form often used in editing documentary films with an analytical approach to phenomenological studies, suggested by Creswell (2007). The hybrid form requires the interviewer to select significant statements from the interview in verbatim in one column and write the formulated meaning of each statement in the next column; the interviewer then summarizes the interview and writes her reflection. Extract 4.7 is an example of the form, which Star filled out. It shows what Star regarded as significant statements and how she interpreted them. The last paragraph shows what captured her attention and how she responded to it.

<b>Individual Interview Analysis</b>		
<u>Interviewee: Shilanda / Interviewer: Star</u>		
<b>Timecode</b>	<b>Significant Statement</b>	<b>Formulated Meaning</b>
3:39-4:40	“Because of the Odyssey Project I was able to go back to school. . .”	The OP gave Shilanda the thirst and confidence to further her education. She is currently in an on-line university (Phoenix).
4:52-5:02	“When the teachers came into the class, they immediately began to engage us.”	The OP teachers came to class prepared to work with the students.

5:44-6:36	“More writing workshops instead of saying there is a paper due”; “the students were rambunctious at times.”	Students needed a structured workshop on how to write papers; students’ discussions were lively without order.
7:57-8:57	“My mind’s eye has been enlightened”; “my mother did not finish the 8 <sup>th</sup> grade . . . I am not wrangled by those facts.”	Shilanda’s mind is open to learning more. She is not held back by the fact that her mother’s education was limited.
11:02-11:10	“The Humanities is the study of us as humans”	The Humanities study is applicable . . .
11:17-12:20	“When I first started the OP, I must be honest, the books and authors, I had never been exposed to.”	The OP introduced her to the great books and authors.

In 2008, Shilanda completed the OP and continued to the Bridge course in the following year. But during the second year, she got a full-time job as a supervisor in a support center. Because of her work, she was not able to continue the Bridge course, so dropped out; yet, she hopes to continue in some day. Her education in the OP influenced how she viewed and worked with the clients at her job. Although she completed the first year, writing was the most difficult part of the OP course. She felt that she would not be able to go through, but with the help from the tutors, she learned little by little and was able to manage it. She added that although tutoring was helpful, regular writing workshop would be also helpful to her because she wanted to learn how to write systematically.

Going back to Shilanda’s statement that the students were rambunctious at times: She stated that the class during discussion was rather disorderly and students would be rude and talking over one another. This was so out of order that the instructor had to constantly remind students not to speak over each other, having to write down names in the order in which students wanted to speak so that they would have their turns to speak without being rudely interrupted. And even in this put-together system, the students continued to rudely interrupt and offend.

(Extract 4.7)



The participants who conducted interviews used the form similarly, except Latrice, who did not fill out the form. Although I did not ask whether each interviewer enjoyed the process of analyzing videos in this way, Nia and Lori certainly seemed to. They said in the group evaluation:

I liked writing an analysis of the video that we worked on. (Nia)

I have to admit that the most favorite time was interview analysis even after we were done with the interview. Doing interview was cool, too, but doing interview analysis is more so because it is such a collaborative asset. (Lori)

The only problem with the form was that individual analysis was generally done after group viewing, contrary to the procedures that I had proposed (See Table 4.1). Only the last interview was presented along with its analysis form, which facilitated group discussion. Perhaps the participants needed to understand how the form would be used and why such analysis was necessary. When we began to analyze videos together, we referred to the forms. They were particularly fruitful in the process of editing the final video. While editing the video with *iMovie* software, James and Lori constantly moved between the video interviews and the individual analysis forms. I asked, “Are the forms useful?” Lori answered, “Yes, very much. I just hope that Latrice gives us her analysis.” In order to give James and Lori the liberty to make decisions on their own, I minimized my interference during the process of editing and conversed with them only when they asked for my feedback. They edited approximately one-hour long video footage down to less than 11 minutes. The video *Ready, Set, Engage* was the final product.

### **What Difference Can Participation Make?**

Thus far I have looked at the project as a whole and its parts. Now I take a step further back to discuss what difference the participatory approach taken in the project

made to the understanding of the research problem. I explore this question by comparing the project with the evaluation research project conducted by Kilgore (2010), a research associate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I discussed his project with the participants in Sessions 6 and 7. In May 2010, Amy invited me to attend an Odyssey Project faculty meeting, where Kilgore's report was reviewed. In his report, Kilgore wrote that the graduation rates of the Odyssey Project at the University fluctuated between 28 percent and 53 percent since the inception in 2006. The purpose of his project, as he noted, was to address the problem of graduation and also to assess the impact of the program on former students. He observed the Odyssey Project classroom for a month and conducted six individual interviews with current students and one focus group with seven current students; plus, he interviewed eight faculty members and three graduate assistants of the University. To contact former students, he sent out emails to all of them on record while his assistants made phone calls to some of them. Out of these efforts, he was able to conduct two face-to-face interviews with former students and to obtain two survey responses via email. Acknowledging the lack of data from former students as a shortcoming of his project, Kilgore (2010) stated:

The lack of consistent, complete student records also hampered making contact with former students for this evaluation. Such communication was further complicated by the nature of the constituency of Odyssey. A large percentage of the enrollees are somewhat transient. Their addresses and phone numbers change; their use of email is spotty. (p. 13)

His observation seems relevant to our project as well. For instance, of 42 survey letters, several were returned because their recipients were unknown. Furthermore, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, contacting former students was also difficult, but for a different reason. It was because the participants and I wanted to reach out specifically to *non-graduates* among former students. Contacting graduates would not have been as difficult. In effect, the eight participants themselves were former students Kilgore would have liked to contact. Because of the difficulty he faced, he

seemed to strive to gain insight into the problem of graduation through currently enrolled students. He wrote:

Interview responses highlighted two broad categories of those who failed to remain in the program. The first group was those for whom factors outside of Odyssey precluded their continued attendance. X [a non-graduate], who enrolled in 2007, said she didn't graduate because she was "busy with my children." Other students had to leave due to changes in working hours or health issues. Y [a graduate] (2008-09) cited "economic reasons" as the main factor. (p. 14)

Interestingly, this indicates that Kilgore came across at least one non-graduate in his project. However, he paid little attention to her account of childcare, putting it aside simply as an "outside of Odyssey" factor. He did not consider it at all when he made recommendations for improving student retention in his report. Instead, he suggested making the process of recruitment more rigorous, developing a better record system of students, following up with absent students, integrating the writing class with other classes, and offering the philosophy course during the second semester. I find it intriguing the way in which Kilgore processed the non-graduate's account, because it contrasts starkly with the way in which we handled similar information. Drawing on the handful of data obtained from former non-graduates, we argued that parental responsibilities were one of the biggest challenges that they faced and that these responsibilities, compounded with the difficulty of commuting, caused some students to drop out of their programs. Therefore, we recommended changing the location of the South-side site further south, closer to most students' homes.

What could have entailed the difference between Kilgore's and our analyses? Was it because we had some more data from non-graduates? If Kilgore had encountered one more non-graduate who talked about childcare, would he have regarded it as a factor *inside* Odyssey? I am not quite sure. At least, I think that the difference was made not simply because of different numbers of respondents, but, more importantly, because of different perspectives in looking into the Odyssey

Project. Kilgore looked from outside while we looked from inside; he tried to gain insight into the Odyssey Project while we emphasized bringing out its former students' experiences. His perspective was rather aligned with that of the administrators and faculty of the Odyssey Project, while our perspective was in line with that of former students. Concerning this, Amy wrote:

I was struck by the way that the salient questions that emerged in the research group. The kinds of structural tensions that they discovered in the Odyssey Project were the same as those that emerge when faculty or administrators discuss the Project. At the same time, their manner of addressing these tensions was different, and I came away from the discussion aware of new issues and with new ideas. The group led me to reconsider some basic components of the Project, namely location and schedule. (Amy, Extract 4.8)

The project seemed to provide Amy with new insight into the operation of the Odyssey Project. I think this was mainly because its former students, as opposed to faculty or administrators, explored issues with the Odyssey Project. Surely, this is not the only, or the best way of looking at the Odyssey Project. What I want to point out is that the participatory approach taken in our project brought about knowledge that Amy was not able to obtain from Kilgore's report or faculty meetings. On the side, I wonder whether the different sets of knowledge produced in the two projects might also have to do with the issue of gender among the researchers. Kilgore is male, and the majority of the participant researchers of my thesis project are female. As implied in this project, female students are more likely to encounter the problem of childcare than male students. Feeling empathy towards female students, the participant researchers could have paid more attention to the female students' experiences. In contrast, it may have been Kilgore's sex or his lived experience that led him to discard the issue of childcare simply as a factor outside of Odyssey.

Since our project and Kilgore's project took place in two different locations, each set of recommendations may be useful to each site. Still, I see it as an irony that Kilgore generated a set of recommendations for improving graduation rates without

any input from former students who withdrew from their programs. Due to the limitation in accessing the population, he had to rely on other data sources, including current students and faculty members. Clearly, Kilgore's report provides a broad picture of the Odyssey Project and offers the perspectives of both faculty and students. However, when it comes to former students, especially non-graduates, it offers little insight. Therefore, the set of recommendations he suggested to improve the problem of graduation does not seem so convincing. Our project also had insufficient data from former students who had withdrawn from their programs. This insufficiency, however, was partially recovered because the participant researchers, as former students of the Odyssey Project, looked at and interpreted the data by reflecting on their own experiences. This reflexive process prompted the participant researchers to see what might have been particularly difficult to non-graduating students. Through the process, they brought to the fore stories about former non-graduate students.

Thus far, I have examined Kilgore's project in comparison with the participatory project to discuss the differences that were made when former Odyssey Project students took control of the process of research through the use of video as a research tool. Although there was some messiness in the process of generating and analyzing data, the participatory project brought about a more detailed description of former graduate and non-graduate students' experiences than the other project conducted in a less participatory way. Perhaps it was the messiness involved in the participatory project that enabled us to look at the issue of graduation differently from the conventional academic research (Cook, 2009). Ideally, if former non-graduates had conducted the research, they could have generated a thicker description of their experiences. Nonetheless, the participant researchers were able to bring to light non-graduates' experiences to a degree through the project by reflecting on their own. Therefore, the participatory project provided a more detailed description of former students' experiences than Kilgore's report. This suggests that a participatory approach may be effective in studying the educational experiences of economically marginalized adults, who tend to be scattered around an inner city and hard-to-track from outside.

## Summary of Chapter

I have looked back at my thesis project to analyze its processes and outcomes. First, I summarized the final presentation in which the participants reported the project to an audience from their perspectives. I then analyzed the primary text, the final video that the participants and I created together. In reviewing it cinematically, I termed the video *a participatory documentary film* and urged researchers to pay attention to different types of participatory video and to develop filmic vocabulary accordingly in order to have more stimulating conversations with one another. Next, I critically reflected on the process of participatory video making. I learned that Odyssey Project students are divided within and that the division between graduates and non-graduates is significant. From the outside, the students are one group, characterized simply as low-income adults; from the inside, they consist of different subgroups, which may not interact with one another. I, as an outsider, could not imagine such internal group dynamics at the beginning of the project. In conducting community-based participatory video, attending to such dynamics may be critical to bringing out more marginalized voices within a community. Finally, I discussed what difference participation could make in carrying out research the educational experience of economically marginalized adults. I argued that although there was some messiness in the processes of generating and analyzing data, our participatory video project was useful in providing a thick description of former Odyssey Project students' experiences and highlighting their voices. In the next chapter, I follow up these arguments and center my discussion on voice. The discussion revolves around the subsequent questions: Whose voice predominates in the video? How was it constructed? What does it do?

## The Voice of the Participants and Reflexivity 5

*The respondent's voice is almost always filtered through the author's account. Authors decide whose stories (and quotes) to display and whose to ignore. The decision to privilege some accounts over others is made by the researcher as she develops theories out of the data collected. (Hertz, 1996, p. 7)*

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the process of participatory video making as well as the final video and discussed the project broadly with regard to what difference participation made to the study. To better understand the video (the primary text), I look at the producer text in this chapter in the following order: (1) I examine *what the participants had to say about participatory video* to gain insight into the implications of participatory video in the project through the participants' eyes. This may hint at how best to apply participatory video in addressing social problems that plague participants' lives; (2) grounded in this analysis, I study *what they had to say through participatory video*. I explore these questions with the concepts of voice and reflexivity, drawing on my discussion in Chapter 2. Specifically, I discuss the ways in which participatory video contributed to provoking reflexivity among the participants and bringing out their voices. I also discuss how to promote "more inclusive participation" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, p. 172), which calls for attention to power dynamics among participants, by examining the predominant voice of the final video. My discussion in this chapter largely draws on the group evaluation and the participants' individual reflection essays. To contextualize my discussion, I first explain the way in which each data set was generated.

## Contextualizing the Data

As described in Chapter 3, I asked each participant to write a one-page reflection essay with reference to the following five questions:

1. What was the most meaningful experience in participating in this research project?
2. What was the most challenging?
3. How would you evaluate participatory research? Do you think that it is an effective research approach? Why?
4. What do you think of the participatory video method? Do you think that this method helped find the answers to your research question? Why?
5. Do you have any suggestions to make this research process more effective and valuable?

Table 5.1. The questionnaire for individual reflection essays

I encouraged the participants to write essays prior to the group evaluation so that they could reflect on each question individually before the group discussion. However, Star was the only one who handed in an essay prior to the group evaluation. Just before and after the final session, James, Katrina, and Dana gave me their essays. Some weeks later, Latrice and Nia sent me theirs via email. Neither Afrika nor Lori submitted a reflection essay. Star, Katrina, and Dana wrote their essays in the order of the questions while the others wrote in a freer format. They were also given the option of being interviewed, instead of writing, but no one chose to go this route.

The group evaluation was held in Session 9 with Amy and Lizzie, the director and a former tutor of the Odyssey Project, respectively, while James was absent. Lizzie asked a series of questions to probe the participants' experiences doing the



research (corresponding to questions 1 and 2 in Table 5.1) and their perspectives on participatory research (question 3) and participatory video (question 4). I recorded the audio of the evaluation and transcribed it for my analysis.

### **Producer Text 1:**

#### **What the Participants Had to Say about Participatory Video**

In this section, I look at the video method from the participants' perspectives. Although they commonly noted the positive potential of participatory video, their views on its effectiveness in the project were diverse. Thus, instead of making a general statement simply from what they said or wrote, I aim to understand how the individual participants came to construct their particular perspectives on participatory video by relating them to their experiences with the project. In addition, some of the participants brought out slightly different views on participatory video when they had to write versus when they were prompted to speak in the group evaluation. In my analysis, I pay particular attention to the differences to explore how each probing method allowed the participants to see participatory video differently.

In their reflection essays, four of the participants gave a rather direct response to the question, "What do you think of the participatory video method?" (see Table 5.1). While Star, James, and Dana gave a positive response, Katrina did not. Here is what they wrote:

The participatory video method gives emotion and pure responses, and tells a story from the interviewee's standpoint without pollution of another person's biases. I believe, in the middle of the interview, as the interviewee and interviewer became comfortable with speaking with one another, the answers needed came out. (Star, Extract 5.1)

The opportunity of creating a documentary is so valuable because it documents useful information for generations to come, as well as here and now, and hints at how to affect change in our current condition. (James, Extract 5.2)

Responding to the same question, Dana initially wrote, “Because of illness I did not get a chance to do video.” Then, I asked her what she thought of using video in the project. She answered:

Video allows the researcher to listen to the interviewee and engage in a dialogue. So, using video is a better method than surveys to get to know the research subject. (Dana, Extract 5.3)

Star, James, and Dana were all positive about the video method. This is not surprising to me because they would not have participated in the project if they had not valued video. As I mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, the participants had experience creating videos with me before participating in the project. I think video was a major draw for them to participate in the project. This is particularly evident in James’ essay. He wrote:

This has been a unique experience because of the variety of ways to gather data for one purpose. My interest in the video-telling [the title of the video production course that I have offered] is where my deepest interest is. I really like the editing aspect of the audio/video and putting it all together. I like to incorporate my interest in music, interviews and important information that can help people grow and to think critically about their condition. (James, Extract 5.4)

My question, thus, is not simply whether the participants came to see participatory video as interesting, but rather whether they found it useful and practical to the process of inquiry in the project. From this stance, I read again the above comments (Extract 5.1 through 5.4). Star and Dana thought that a video camera could promote conversation between interviewer and interviewee and prompt an interviewee to reveal

her deeper emotions and experiences.<sup>41</sup> This view is indeed very similar to what cinéma vérité filmmakers argued (see Chapter 1). However, although the participants highlighted the potential of participatory video, it is not very clear how they evaluated the use of the method, especially in the project. I find a similar ambiguity in James' comment. He wrote:

I believe strongly that research like this is truly for the greater good of all humanity. This is for those who do not feel like they have a voice in the academia and are marginalized in our society. Secondly, the group discussions have really brought out many enlightening points of importance during the research. (James, Extract 5.5)

This implies that participatory research gave him a voice to speak about humanity. Yet, group discussions seem to be the first thing that came into his mind when he thought of the project. This may mean that James did not find the video method as useful as group discussions in the project. Katrina took a more critical stance on the video method. She wrote in her essay:

I think that a participatory video method is an excellent way of stating issues and also demonstrating these issues. Participatory videos are excellent ways of showing the effectiveness of the solutions. However, I do not feel that this method helped find the answers to our research question, *why are some people very much engaged in the OP and others are not*, [because] (a) we didn't have enough time to do an extensive research; and (b) there were not enough willing participants to give honest answers or interviews. (Katrina, Extract 5.6)

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<sup>41</sup> It is not obvious, though, whether it was video or the interview that Star and Dana referred to in their discussions. As I will show later in this chapter, the participants generally associated participatory video with interviews. This may be because video was used only for interviews and all the interviews were recorded on video. Therefore, I interpret their comments on interviews as aspects of participatory video hereafter unless there is an obvious indication that this was not the case.

Katrina underlined that participatory video has great potential for demonstrating problems and seeking solutions to the problems. However, she thought it did not contribute to the project because there were not many people who could speak honestly. This led her to write in her essay, “I do feel that this research process is effective and valuable. I wish we had chosen another subject.” She suggested that participatory video might not be a cure-all, but that it might work better for certain topics over others. This may mean that finding such topics may be important if participants are going to capitalize on the potential of participatory video.<sup>42</sup> What types of topics might work well with participatory video? Katrina’s view on participatory video in her essay is consistent with what she said in the group evaluation. In the group evaluation, she stressed, “When you do video, it is hard to say this isn’t so because here it is and you see it.” At the same time, she commented:

I didn’t interview but I did watch others. . . . I didn’t see any complaints about the OP (Odyssey Project) itself or their experience with the OP. And that did not surprise me because I believe that the OP always fulfills its claims and everything. I believe that the more you put in the more you get out. But I did learn a lot and I was really impressed by participatory research, meaning that people involved can come up with solutions. That really impressed me.

(Katrina, Extract 5.7)

Katrina suggested that video did not bring about new information to her; nonetheless, the project taught her a great deal about the concept of participatory research. Her argument is quite similar to James’. A difference between the two is that Katrina pointed to writing as the source of her lesson while James pointed to group discussion as that of his lesson. Katrina wrote in her essay:

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<sup>42</sup> For instance, as I introduced in Chapter 1, I conducted additional participatory video research projects on education for children and health care. In these projects, the participants and I did not experience significant difficulty in finding interviewees. People were willing to share their stories through the videos.

I faced this challenge and responsibility of writing and feel that I succeeded. I feel that writing is another tool that one can use to voice their opinions and make known their issues, including ways of resolving them. Taking notes makes it easier to write a better paper. I look forward to more writing, more issues to voice and better papers. (Katrina, Extract 5.8)

Similar to James, Katrina talked about the notion of voice and implied that she was able to voice herself through writing. She was involved in writing extensively in the project. She summarized the focus group, wrote a session memo in great detail, and prepared the first draft of the project report. The writing experience seemed to enable her to find a way of bringing out her voice. While James and Katrina suggested that the project gave them a voice, Latrice, in contrast, emphasized that participatory video gave respondents a voice. In the group evaluation, she argued:

I also feel like we gave people a voice. We gave them an opportunity to say how they felt and speak on some of the issues that they had in the Odyssey Project and things they liked about the Odyssey Project because, you know, when you leave the Odyssey Project, whether you continue or graduate or participate in the next Bridge course (the second-year Odyssey Project course), you leave feeling in some kind of way. (Latrice, Extract 5.9)

Further, she pointed out that participatory video was more useful than the other research methods, namely surveys. As she put it:

I personally think that in-depth interviews, face-to-face, were the most effective because you got to see a lot more with the person. . . . On the survey, we found out something like a few yes or no questions and writings that you have to make your own conviction with. But with the in-depth interview, face-to-face, like what I said, I found that this person [her interviewee] lives seven minutes away from me, she is a young African American female, she is a single mom, and she has a two-year old. I found out in the in-depth interview that she was

experiencing a lot of the same things that I am experiencing and I had the experience. I feel that you can find out more through in-depth, face-to-face interviews rather than surveys. Surveys are helpful with analyzing some of the answers, getting data, and hard facts, but in-depth interviews help you see a really insight into what's going on and why some people have to quit and don't graduate. (Latrice, Extract 5.10)

I elaborate her argument from my perspective. Through the video Latrice recorded, we were able to see her interviewee and listen to the conversation between the two. In this way, we observed the interview remotely and engaged indirectly in the conversation with the interviewee. Thus, although we did not experience exactly what Latrice did during the interview, we processed certain information, such as the interviewee's characteristics and facial expressions, which might not be available otherwise. I observed that the video interviews captured the participants' attention far more than the survey method and provoked more discussion. I doubt that there would have been the same effect if the interviews had been recorded only in audio or presented orally by interviewers. Video was powerful in capturing the participants' attention and provoking discussion among the participants. This may also be in part what Latrice tried to convey in her comment. Not all the participants, however, agreed to what Latrice had to say about participatory video. Star had a slightly different view. She said in the group evaluation:

I believe that the in-depth interview is the most effective, but I also believe that the survey is effective, too. . . . Even though we get emotion when in one-to-one, face-to-face, when you do a survey, you hear someone saying whether they liked or not and troubles in detail. A couple of issues were [Lori said, "those were about classroom?"], yea, something like that. . . . A one-to-one interview is great, but we were able to get an interview afterwards [having done surveys]. Otherwise we were not hearing things properly from people who dropped out, in a sense. (Star, Extract 5.11)

Star spoke about an aspect of participatory video different from what she had written in her reflection essay, as I showed in Extract 5.1. In the essay, she emphasized that participatory video has potential for delivering subjects' voices directly to an audience. Interestingly, though, the above comment (Extract 5.11) suggests that Star became more critical about participatory video in the group evaluation. She pointed to a disadvantage of video, suggesting that people tend to be reluctant to comment on negative things about the Odyssey Project when they have to talk in person or through video. Perhaps group interactions prompted Star to reflect on participatory video more critically. Or her stance may have had to do with her experience with the project. While Latrice was little involved in surveys, Star prepared the questionnaire and also analyzed its responses. She was particularly disturbed with one entry while analyzing survey responses with me. One respondent wrote:

Classmates made it feel like a joke. I felt I was the only one, with maybe the exception of one or two others, who took the classes seriously, especially regarding homework. At the beginning of the year I felt very honored to have been "chosen" to participate. As time went on, I felt humiliated once I saw standards weren't so high. Loved the teachers & loved the content, but felt embarrassed by my surroundings, like I was a charity case. (Survey respondent, Extract 5.12)

Star was so perturbed as to talk about this and other similar responses in a group session. She argued that such topics are difficult for students to express when they are videotaped. Supporting her argument, Lori said, "In a sense, it is an inhibiting thing to think of yourself being on a video tape. You know, it is inhibiting." Star's and Lori's comments, as well as what Katrina had to say about video (Extract 5.6), suggest that there may be certain topics more favorable to participatory video; some people find a voice through video and others shy away from it. How can these tensions be handled? Should the topics of participatory video be limited to what people are willing to say? Is it OK to make video available only to people who do not shy away from it? What if people actively reject participating in a video project? As Milne (2012) noted, isn't it

also a type of social action? More critically, when there are scarce responses from potential respondents, how can the researcher know whether it is a kind of active rejection, whether potential respondents were simply disinterested in the project, or whether they were not aware of any possible means for participating?

In conclusion, the participants, in general, agreed on the potential of participatory video as a powerful research tool, but disagreed on its implications in the project. It seems that what the individual participants had to say about participatory video was tied with (a) their experiences with the Odyssey Project prior to the research project and (b) the activities in which they were involved in the project. Latrice saw participatory video as critical to her gaining insight into the research problem because she was able to relate herself to her interviewee. The other participants seemed to be less convinced than Latrice about the usefulness of participatory video in the project. Some suggested that other approaches, such as writing, group discussion, and surveys, were as conducive as or more conducive than the use of video to the research. Latrice also believed that participatory video gave people a voice. I think, however, it gave her a voice more than anyone else. She learned to articulate that the difficulty she had experienced was not personal but structural and that there could be a solution to it. I discuss the issue of voice in more depth in the next section.

### **Producer Text 2:**

#### **What the Participants Had to Say through Participatory Video**

Anchored in my previous discussion, I further explore the producer text with a focus on voice and reflexivity to explore the ways in which participatory video contributed to bringing out the participants' voices. Very often, it is argued that participatory video or similar projects involving participant-created media give minority people a voice. Although the notion of voice has been much addressed, it is still under-theorized, and there is little knowledge of how the issue of voice is handled in projects (Luttrell, 2010). Thus, as Chalfen et al. (2010) pointed out, the phrase *give them a voice* remains an often abused and "carelessly delivered cliché" (p. 201). In responding to the gap between the premise and the practice of voicing in the literature



of participatory video, I first examine the reflexive interview (Denzin, 2003) demonstrated in the project. The interviews Latrice and Star conducted are my focus. Then, I look back at the final video in relation to voice and discuss whose voice dominates the video.

### **The Reflexive Interview**

Latrice's comments (Extract 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 5.10) suggest that she identified herself with her interviewee in many ways. Here is a more concrete example of this:

It was random. Here is a 19 year-old girl, a single parent, and she lives in the same area as me. She wanted to take this opportunity as I did, and she had to travel the same way. And the outcomes were somewhat similar. I was an honorary graduate of the OP (Odyssey Project). I tried as much as I possibly could. I was breastfeeding my daughter in class, but came the times that I couldn't make it, not that I didn't want to, but I just couldn't. So her whole interview really stood out strongly to me. It was almost like hearing her repeat so much of what I was experiencing. (Latrice, Extract 5.13)

In the group evaluation, Latrice constantly interweaved her experience with her interviewee's. This demonstrates the reflexive interview that Denzin (2003) discussed. Mediated by the video camera, Latrice was engaged in reflexive communication. By listening to her interviewee, she came to look back at her own experience. Her interviewee was a mirror of her self-image. Once she discovered the commonality between her and her interviewee, she began to construct the meaning of their common experience. Latrice investigated her own life through the reflexive interview. It challenged the binary division between the interviewer and the interviewee and allowed them to reveal their voices together as young single mothers with economic hardship. Referring to this process, Latrice spontaneously coined the term *inter-participatory* in her reflection essay. She wrote:

We used the inter-participatory research method. We gathered information from past students to discover the different obstacles they had to overcome during the Odyssey Project. As a past graduate, I found that many of the issues were similar to my own. We also discovered significance with single mothers and their concerns of traveling late at night. (Latrice, Extract 5.14)

The term *inter-participatory method* describes quite precisely the way in which the interview provoked participation in the project. By giving her interviewee a chance to speak on video, Latrice also gave her a chance to reflect on her experience and speak to the other participants and to the audience of the video. This interview also allowed Latrice to look back at her own experience and to learn that her difficulty in attending classes had had more to do with the location of the classroom than her lack of effort. Once she understood this, I think that Latrice was able to participate more actively in the research process by providing her experience as an example of what former non-graduating students might have experienced. In this way, the interview allowed both the interviewee and the interviewer to participate in the research project.

Though less obvious than Latrice's experience, Extract 4.7 suggests that Star also entered a reflexive interview. In analyzing it, she highlighted her interviewee's statement, "the students were rambunctious at times." Then, she further reflected on it. She wrote, "Going back to Shilanda's statement that the students were rambunctious at times . . ." Star repeated what Shilanda said and contextualized it. This might not have been done without a reflexive process. It seems that Shilanda's story resonated with Star's experience. Even though their experiences might not have been identical, I think the interview enabled Star to look back at her classroom environment critically. By highlighting it in her analysis, she called attention to the problem of classroom behaviour.

Thus far I have discussed the ways in which the interviews provoked reflexivity from Latrice and Star. Within this context, I go on to explore how such reflexivity was vocalized in the project. In both cases, the interviews laid a basis for their voicing. A difference is that, while Star inscribed her voice through the analysis of her interview, Latrice brought out her voice more directly during the evaluation.

One reason why Star and Latrice voiced differently may have to do with the research topic. Although Star entered reflexivity through her interview, what she reflected on was not directly related to the research topic because the trouble in the classroom was not a reason why either Shilanda or Star quit their programs. Another reason may have to do with time. Star reflected upon what she had experienced in the past while Latrice seemed to relate the interview to what she was experiencing now. Latrice wrote in her reflection essay:

I also had the very minimum funds to make it back and forth to the meeting place but help was provided. I was issued bus cards to get back and forth to the building and I greatly appreciated it. It got a little stressful at times carrying film equipment with my two year old on public transportation. (Latrice, Extract 5.15)

These two examples of the interview bring to the fore the following points: (a) participatory video can provoke reflexivity among participants; (b) this enables them to bring out their voices; (c) these voices can clarify a problem and prompt participants to seek a solution to it; and (d) the potential of participatory video is aggrandized when the problem is current.

### **Predominant Voice**

I have discussed how participatory video provoked Latrice's and Star's reflexivity and contributed to bringing out their voices. Grounded in this discussion, I look at how different voices are brought together in the final video and ask whose voice dominates the video. As I noted in Chapter 4, the video begins with the text: "In the summer of 2010, a series of individual interviewees were conducted to shed light on the shared experiences of Odyssey Project students." It is then divided into five sections each of which is marked with a unique question. The questions are:

- (a) What attracted you to the Odyssey Project?
- (b) Did the Odyssey Project leave a lasting influence?

- (c) Did you have any problem while taking the Odyssey Project course?
- (d) What was your greatest motivation?
- (e) Do you have any suggestion for the Odyssey Project?

There are six interviews in the video (see Table 3.3). James and Lori edited the video. They pulled out segments from each interview relevant to each question and assembled them to create the video. It interweaves different experiences among the six interviewees. The video captures well what each interviewee talked about. Some of the interviewees expressed the difficulties they encountered, and others make some suggestions to the Odyssey Project. Despite the interviewees' different experiences, the theme of the video was clear. As I discussed in Chapter 4, it was that the Odyssey Project is good and useful to all students although some changes need to be made to accommodate some students' (especially single parents') needs. This is the very fundamental message that was conveyed in the project, and the video shows it. I think that the participants succeeded in producing experience-based knowledge, as claimed in the literature of participatory research (Fals-Borda, 1991b; McClelland & Fine, 2008; Park, 1993). Yet, I want to move my discussion beyond that by interrogating the dominant voice of the video.

When I look back at the video with the notion of voice, two interrelated issues come into my mind: the voices of the two former non-graduate students among the interviewees and Latrice's voice. First, the two former non-graduate students' voices are not so evident in the video. As I mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4, the initial purpose of interviews was to bring out former Odyssey Project students who did or could not complete their programs, particularly in the first year. When this is taken into consideration, the video is problematic. It is not simply because there are only two first-year non-graduates among the six interviewees, but more importantly because their accounts explaining the reasons why they withdrew from their programs are buried amid other topics. The video fails to highlight their unique experiences among other accounts. Clearly, this is not simply an outcome of the editing. It has more to do with the lack of relevant interviewees. The editors had to work with limited materials. Still, I do think the editors could have edited the video differently to bring to the fore

the unique experiences of the non-graduate students. The video does include the segments in which the two non-graduates talked about difficulties in traveling a long distance at night and taking care of their children. However, their stories are not made prominent as the reason why they had to drop out of their programs. Rather, they are treated as some of the difficulties they faced in taking their courses, as per the five questions listed above. The treatment of the data minimized Latrice's voice as well unintentionally. Relating herself to her interviewee, Latrice held a very strong voice on the location of one Odyssey Project site. It was so strong that it greatly influenced the conclusion of the project. Her voice, however, is dissipated in the final video. The video is structured to show some positive and negative experiences among former students, but does not accentuate the reason why some students drop out.

Who decided to structure the video that way? I think it was James and Lori, the video editors, to a great extent. Nevertheless, they were not the only ones who completed the video. The other participants and I reviewed the rough cut of the video that James and Lori had worked on and gave our approval. At the time, I did not think the way in which the video was edited was particularly problematic because the video indeed showed what the individual interviewees had to say about their experiences. All the other participants were also happy about the video. Hence, though James and Lori took leadership in the process of editing, the video was indeed a community enterprise (Fals-Borda, 1991b). In a sense, we all—the interviewees, the participant researchers, and I—contributed to constructing the message of the video.

Now it should be rather obvious whose voice predominates in the video. I do not think it is the individual interviewees' because their stories are fragmented. They do, however, present a sense of what the Odyssey Project means to students collectively. Yet, their stories are crafted through the processes of interviewing and editing. Then, is it ultimately the editors who decide the dominant voice of the video? I think that they took greater control over what to tell and how to tell it through the final video although their own voices are not directly reflected in the video. However, I think that the dominant voice does come from the participant researchers as a group, who believed that the Odyssey Project is good and useful. They revamped this message by selecting certain interviewees and asking specific questions intentionally

or unintentionally. Their conviction might have influenced what their interviewees came to speak about. Amy commented on the video several days after viewing *Ready, Set, Engage*:

I was surprised to see a woman in the video saying how good her experience was. In fact, she came to class only a few times at the very beginning of the course. It was not the case where she worked hard for some months but could not complete at the end. How does she know the Odyssey Project is good without experiencing it enough, even if it is really good? (Personal communication, Extract 5.16)

Perhaps the interviewee highlighted a positive side of the Odyssey Project not to diminish her experience with it. Or, perhaps she was not encouraged to reflect on negative aspects during the interview. In any case, I think that the participants, especially the video editors, wanted to say through the video that the Odyssey Project is good and useful. A problem with this is that the dominant voice may have suppressed the unique voice that Latrice brought out from the single parent's perspective in the group evaluation. It is not that Latrice disagreed with the dominant voice, but her argument, despite its significance to the research problem, seemed to be undermined.

A critical issue that I want to draw attention to is not simply whose voice predominates in the video, but rather how the researcher can facilitate bringing out the voice of a minority member among a participant group. In general, it is assumed that participatory video can capture the voice of the marginalized. My thesis project supports this assumption to the extent that the video highlighted economically disadvantaged adults living in an inner city with varied educational experiences. However, it also challenges the assumption by suggesting that participatory video can suppress the voice of minority members within a participant group and their community for the following reasons: First, people who participate in a research project are likely to be less marginalized than others in their community. Second, they may bring to the fore, either intentionally or unintentionally, their own beliefs and

perspectives even when they aim to bring out the voice of minority members within their community. In such cases, how can the academic researcher negotiate to bring out the voice of minority members without taking control of the process of a participatory video project? The researcher may need to structure participatory video projects more purposefully at times, as opposed to letting participants decide what to do, in order to help bring out minority members' concerns and voices (Shaw, 2012). In my observation of the thesis project, I think one way of structuring a project may be to encourage minority participants to participate in editing a video so that they can have an opportunity to bring out their voices more clearly; another way may be to urge them to be involved in writing so that they can express their perspectives explicitly. The message of a video tends to be less overt than a written message. By writing, the minority participants may underline minority's issues clearly. In my thesis project, Latrice was not able to do any of this. I encouraged Latrice to engage in analyzing surveys, but she could not, perhaps because of the dire circumstance (custody battle) in her life. She even failed to write an analysis report of the interview she conducted. Nevertheless, my small assistance helped her conduct an interview and ultimately bring out her voice in the group evaluation. As I argued in Chapter 1, the access to media does not necessarily allow marginalized people to voice themselves. To harness the potential of participatory video for bringing out people's voices, especially those of minorities, the researcher may need to attend to group dynamics among participants and intervene in the process of video making consciously. A laissez-faire approach may contribute to suppressing marginalized voices.

### **Ethical Advantages and Challenges of Participatory Video**

Although the voice of the students who were not able to graduate from the Odyssey Project courses was not as prominent as it could have been in the final video, the project demonstrates some of the ethical advantages of participatory video research. It enabled the eight participants, economically disadvantaged adult learners, to bring their life experiences to the context of research from their own perspectives. It also allowed them to shed light on the experiences of more marginalized Odyssey

Project students to a great extent. Based on this observation, I discuss the ethical advantages and challenges of participatory video that were noted in the project in more detail in this section. The tension between voicing and confidentiality is my focus.

A pitfall of the project was that although its objective was to analyze non-graduating students' experiences and to suggest ways to help them graduate, all the participants had graduated from the Odyssey Project. Thus, the research topic was challenging for us because we had to find respondents outside the participant group, as I discussed in Chapter 4. However, once interviews with people from the target population were conducted, they provoked the participants' reflexivity powerfully and prompted them to seek solutions more earnestly. Although there were some survey responses from non-graduates, the surveys did not provoke as much debate as the video interviews did. Therefore, the project created a space, though limited, in which former non-graduates could participate in the discussion on the Odyssey Project and tell their stories through the video. Throughout the project, I perceived a sense of care among the participants, who hoped to include the voices of these former students. This, however, was challenging from the perspective of institutional research ethics. As I described in Chapter 3, I provided the participants with consent forms and discussed with them how to obtain informed consent when they were to interview people outside the participant group. I trusted that the individual interviewees would do their best. Yet, there was no way for me to know whether all the consent forms were obtained in a proper manner according to an institutional standard for ethical research. I interacted with the participants, but it was the participants who interacted with their interviewees (see Figure 5.1 below). Hence, my interaction with the interviewees was only indirect. I have never met some of them in person. Only three out of the six interviewees came to see the research presentation in the last session.



Figure 5.1. The relationships among the researcher, participants, and interviewees



Kindon (2003) discussed that confidentiality is often problematic when interviews are conducted with people who are not involved as participant researchers in research. She noted that if such interviews are part of research, the researcher may need to be more cautious from an ethics standpoint, particularly because the interviewees can take less control of the way in which they are represented in videos than participant researchers. Visual representations, however sympathetic, can be presumptuous. As I reflected on the first video production course in Chapter 2, they may even contribute to maintaining a dominant perspective if there is lack of feedback from the interviewees. Hence, it may be ethical to include ways of obtaining feedback from interviewees. I asked the participant researchers to invite their interviewees to the research presentation. However, as I mentioned, only three interviewees came to the presentation to see the video and their representations in it.

While this arrangement was sufficient when my research ethics application was reviewed, the officer at the Research Ethics Board at McGill University raised another point in the following year when I submitted an ethics application for my independent participatory video project. Because this conversation is pertinent to the issue of ethics in participatory video, I elaborate on it. She asked whether the interviewees would have a chance to see their own representation privately prior to the screening because, no matter how small a community-based screening event could be, it was still public. I agreed with her. In addition, it was unlikely that all the interviewees would come to the event. Therefore, I incorporated two additional methods into the independent project in order to deal with confidentiality more carefully. One method was to ensure that interviewees know the right to see their interview video immediately after interviews are done; if they are not happy with the representations, they may reject the video completely or ask for an additional interview. I noted this procedure in the interview consent form that I distributed to the participant researchers of the independent project. In practice, however, no single interviewee either rejected or asked for an additional interview in the project. The other method for ensuring greater confidentiality was to upload the final video online in a private setting and to send the link to the video to the individual interviewees so that they could see the video before it was presented in a public setting. No feedback from the interviewees followed this

method. This, however, may not necessarily indicate that all the interviewees were happy with the video. Perhaps some of the interviewees had no access to the Internet and thus had no chance to see it. At the same time, it is equally possible that the interviewees were happy to have had the chance to speak for themselves and did not care much about how they were represented in the video. In my experience, it is extremely difficult to handle the issue of confidentiality when participatory video involves interviews with people outside a participant group or any form of visual representations of them even if these people are close to the participant group. I think that the two methods that I used, though not perfect, provided the interviewees with more opportunities to speak about their representations and the video itself.

### **Summary of Chapter**

In order to bring to light and contextualize the participants' perspectives on the project, I discussed the producer text in this chapter. In general, the participants agreed that participatory video has potential for bringing out issues plaguing people's lives, but disagreed on its usefulness for the project. Their views, in general, seemed to be contingent on their experiences with the research project and also with the Odyssey Project. I think the video method was the most influential to Latrice, who was a single parent and could have been a non-graduating student. It allowed her to engage in intense reflexivity on her life and to bring out her voice in the group discussion. This may have prompted her to state that participatory video is a very effective research tool that can give people a voice. Nevertheless, her voice is not so prominent in the final video. It is somewhat dissipated under the dominant voice of the participant researchers. Concomitantly, the difficulties former non-graduate students experienced are also undermined in the video. Although the video shows some of the difficulties that certain students faced while taking courses, they do not highlight what makes some students withdraw from their programs. Rather, the difficulties are blended with positive experiences. This is perhaps because the participant researchers, especially those who edited the video, shared little common experience with the students who withdrew from their programs. Hence, although

they were compassionate with non-graduate students, these students' experiences might have been slipped away during the process of editing unintentionally. In looking at this tension, I argued that the academic researcher might need to intervene actively in the process of participatory video, and yet act cautiously in order to prompt participant researchers to reflect upon their assumptions more deeply and to safeguard against silencing marginalized voices. Grounded in the discussion on the voice of the participants and their reflexivity, in the next chapter, I examine their experiences with the project and bring out their voices even more.



# Learning as Experience 6

*Learning is central to human life—as essential as work or friendship. (Foley, 2004, p. 4)*

In this chapter, I shift my analysis to considering the relevance of this work to adult learning itself. In the group evaluation, the participants were asked to share their experiences participating in the project. Not surprisingly, they highlighted that their participation led to their learning. This may reflect their general interest in education and common experience with the Odyssey Project. I call the participants' accounts on learning the *participant text*, in parallel with the notion of the producer text used in the previous chapter, and analyze the participant text to discuss the influence of the project on the individual participants.

The discourse of participatory video has revolved predominantly around the framework of social change and the researcher's commitment to it (see Mitchell et al., 2012). Naydene de Lange, Tilla Olivier, and Lesley Wood (2008), for instance, argued that participatory video has the potential to move participants into action that contributes to social change. Tamara Plush (2012) took this even further and argued that local people should be trained to become facilitators, as opposed to participants, of participatory video projects in order to bring about social change through participatory video. The assumption here is that participatory video projects can bring forward social change. This idea is not unique to participatory video, however. It is inherent in the principles of participatory research. As I discussed in Chapter 1, participatory research is often regarded as a vehicle to social change. This framework, though important, may have left participants' individual experiences with participatory research and the role participatory research can play in individual lives under-explored (Cahill, 2007). This chapter responds to this gap.

The chapter is broken into four sections: (1) I give a brief overview of aspects of learning described in the literature of participatory research (e.g., Hall, 1984; Maguire, 2008; Maginess, 2010). As scholars often mention social learning in the context of participatory video, I examine it in more detail; (2) I then analyze significant statements in the participant text and formulate their meanings to categorize what the participants actually learned and how they learned it (Creswell, 2007). Based on this analysis, I characterize the participants' experience of learning as *incidental, social, critical learning*; (3) I look at the negative experiences the participants expressed in relation to the experience of learning and discuss how to address them; (4) lastly, I explore the implications of learning-as-experience in developing a sense of agency among the participants.

### **Learning in the Context of Participatory Video**

In response to the question concerning their experiences with the project (corresponding to questions 1 and 2 in Table 5.1), the participants predominantly pointed to *learning*. In the project, learning became experience itself, and as Robin Usher, Ian Bryant, and Rennie Johnston (1997) argued in the context of adult learning, it was “both pleasurable and valued” (p. 120). The outcome of learning is consistent with the prevailing notion that participatory research has potential for educating participants (Hall, 1984; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993; Weis & Fine, 2004). The history of participatory research is important. From the outset, it has had a strong connection to adult education. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the term *participatory research*, in effect, originates from adult education research. In calling for participatory research in adult education, Hall (1975) argued that adults should participate in research to investigate their educational needs; they need to be educated in order to carry out research. Taking up his argument, Maguire (2008) provided a more precise objective of education. She argued that participatory research should help participants develop analytical skills to identify the causes of their problems in a broad social context. As suggested in these arguments, a common assumption in the discourse of participatory research is that people become more critically aware of their

subjective experiences by sharing them; in doing so, they authenticate their experiences and create experience-based knowledge collectively; in this way, they can challenge dominant knowledge and power relations and ultimately emancipate themselves (Fals-Borda, 1991b; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008; Kapoor & Jordan, 2009; Maguire, 2008; McTaggart, 1991; Park, 1993; Swantz, 2008). Hence, Paulo Freire (1993) described participatory research as a “politico-pedagogic instrument for moving women and men to such transformative action” (p. ix). Within this context, participatory research has often been considered instrumental in enabling people to enter the cycle of reflection and action (Brown & Tandon, 1983; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

*The Handbook of Participatory Video* (Milne, Mitchell, & de Lange, 2012) is the most comprehensive book that has ever been written on participatory video and consists of 28 chapters written by 49 authors. The authors of the book frequently cite social learning and related terms, such as shared learning, peer-to-peer learning, and socialized learning, to describe the processes of learning involved in participatory video.<sup>43</sup> Social learning, according to Danny Wildemeersch, Theo Jansen, Joke Vandenabeele, and Marc Jans (1998), is a process of learning in participatory systems such as groups, networks, organizations, and communities. They criticized the discourse of experiential learning, for it is too often focused on individuals. For them, attention to social learning is critical for bolstering a sustainable society by balancing the ethics of justice and individual rights in order to improve living conditions collectively. They explained:

Central to the concept of social learning are processes of *action*, *reflection*, *communication* and *cooperation*. These we call the four axes of social learning. Each of these processes is characterised by particular tensions and contradictions; they are never simple or consistent in themselves. Action moves to and fro between *need* and *competence*, reflection is the product of the opposition between *distance* and *identification*, communication swings

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<sup>43</sup> Other theories include self-reflective learning and participatory learning and action theory (see also Pretty, Gujit, Scoones, & Thompson, 1995; as cited in Wheeler, 2012).

between *unilateral* and *multilateral* control and, finally, cooperation oscillates between *consensus* and *dissensus*. Social learning therefore revolves around finding optimal and dynamic balances between oppositional processes that are in accordance with the peculiar conditions and needs of concrete contexts and challenges. (Wildemeersch et al., 1998, p. 253)

The authors characterized action, reflection, communication, and cooperation as the basic tenets of social learning. These characteristics seem to resonate well with the learning environment of my thesis project. With the four tenets of social learning as a backdrop, I look at the participants' experiences of learning in the next section.

### **The Participant Text: The Experience of Learning**

When asked to comment on their experiences participating in the project, the participants pointed out: (a) discovery of oneself through communication; (b) developing writing and computer skills; (c) learning through collaboration; (d) learning the concept of participatory research; and (e) learning through knowledge production. In what follows, I examine each item and then characterize the type of learning that stood out in the project.

#### **Discovery of Oneself through Communication**

This is the most prominent in Latrice's comments. In the group evaluation, she said:

I've learned that from all different types of people we have so much in common and I am not the only one who is experiencing what I am experiencing. So, you know, inside the OP (Odyssey Project) class, it was a textbook material that I was learning. But inside this research group, I am learning life. So, it was definitely great experience, bigger and broader learning experience for me. (Latrice, Extract 6.1)



For Latrice, learning life may mean learning about her experience in relation to others. As suggested in Extract 3.5, 3.6, and 5.13, Latrice indicated that she entered a self-reflective mode by listening to her interviewee. She made this more explicit in her reflection essay, writing:

It [the project] provides useful filming techniques while discovering new and great possibilities in oneself. (Latrice, Extract 6.2)

Though less obvious, Dana indicated that the project offered an opportunity to think of her experience by listening to others. She wrote in her essay:

The experience was thought provoking. I had never thought about what others might think of the Odyssey Project. I assumed that everyone probably felt as I did if I thought about it at all. The most meaningful part of participation for me was learning others' opinions of the Odyssey Project. It gives learning experience. It increases your knowledge of yourself and others. (Dana, Extract 6.3)

The type of learning that Latrice and Dana experienced can be classified as what Martin Dyke (2009) called reflexive learning. In his definition, reflexive learning is essentially experiential learning or learning from experience. However, he emphasized social context in the process of reflexive learning, arguing that adults learn from their experience through “engagement with the perspectives of others” (p. 295). For him, reflexive learning is absolutely necessary in late-modern society because people need to reassess their experiences constantly to adapt themselves to a rapidly changing environment (see also Sweetman, 2003). I am not sure how much Latrice's and Dana's experiences have to do with the late-modernity Dyke described. Clearly, however, the project provided the participants with opportunities to learn others' perspectives and, in return, to learn more about their own experiences. This learning experience allowed them to understand their experiences in a broader social context.

Especially for Latrice, who was not sure about her lived experience, reflexive learning was very meaningful.

In theory, participatory video is likely to provoke reflexive learning among participants as they share their experiences with other people (White, 2003c). However, reflexive learning was not evident in the participant text of the project. This does not mean, though, that reflexive learning was largely absent. On the contrary, I think, reflexive learning was pervasive, as the participants looked back at their experiences; however, it was only implicit because the research topic was not directly related to the experiences among the participants, with the exception of Latrice. If topics chosen for the project had been more related to the participants' current experiences, reflexive learning might have been much more evident.

### **Developing Writing and Computer Skills**

This topic was apparent in Katrina's experience. As indicated in Extract 5.8, she took the responsibility of writing and was committed to it. Through this, she gained significant learning experience. She explained in the group evaluation:

I had fun with working on reports and then I tried to email Kay [the author]. In doing so, I learned how to use email! Then, I had fun in going back to the class, remembering the class that Amy taught on critical thinking. At this point, I realized that *I had more words*. In this project, I began to learn how to elaborate and to be more descriptive than staying on facts and one thought. And I really enjoyed. I enjoyed that that was new and all were put together. (Katrina, Extract 6.4; emphasis added)

I did intend to teach the concepts of participatory research and the qualitative interview, but not writing, in the project. Nevertheless, I integrated a component of writing to facilitate group communication while tracing the progress of research. Hence, I asked the participants to write session minutes in a narrative format, as opposed to bullet points, to describe what we had discussed in each session. To my

surprise, this became a source of learning for Katrina.<sup>44</sup> While performing writing tasks for the project, Katrina was able to develop her writing skills and learn how to communicate via email; more importantly, she came to discover her capacity for writing and gained a sense of agency. This experience seemed to give her unexpected excitement and pleasure. Her learning experience with writing occurred incidentally while participating in the project, but was paramount to her. Though less obvious, Nia, who worked on the research proposal, described her experience similarly. She wrote in her reflection essay that the experience with the project was “quite educational,” and commented on her writing task:

I enjoyed writing the proposal. I worked hard on it and was almost pleased with the end result. I found too many little errors and changes that needed to be made and so could not be thoroughly pleased. (Nia, Extract 6.5)

Nia said in the group evaluation, “This project reminded me of the importance of elaborative writing.” Katrina’s and Nia’s experiences can be best described as what Griff Foley (2004) called incidental learning. He argued, “All human activity has a learning dimension. People learn, continually, informally, and formally, in many different settings: in workplaces, in families, through leisure activities, through community activities, and in political action” (p. 4). Incidental learning, he described, is a type of learning that occurs incidentally while people perform other activities; it is often tacit and not seen as learning—at least not at the time of its occurrence—for example, community members learning instrumental skills, government policy, and other structural factors while working on a community project together (Foley, 2001). In my thesis project, writing was not the only area where incidental learning was observed. Star, though she did not say so explicitly, seemed to be able to develop her computer skills while working on the online survey. Dana, who worked with her, commented on Star’s learning:

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<sup>44</sup> Except Katrina, however, the participants who wrote session minutes preferred using bullet points accompanied by simple phrases, instead of full sentences.

Star was sitting there. She was typing and putting the questions to Survey Monkey. She was learning something. . . . I guess that everybody had done that. You commit. So, it is a whole different type of learning experience for all of us. (Dana, Extract 6.6)

### **Learning through Collaboration**

Katrina suggested that commitment to the group work was a source of learning in the project. In other words, the more you commit the more you learn. She wrote in her reflection essay:

It was also very meaningful for me to make a commitment and to accept the responsibilities that go along with it. The learning experience was more than I had anticipated. (Katrina, Extract 6.7)

Collaboration was the basic nature of the project. The participants, however, did not always work together. Outside the group sessions, they assumed individual or peer responsibilities for certain tasks. Then, the participants and I put together each task to complete the project as if creating a mosaic. Every single task counted for the project. This structure seemed to enable Katrina to push the boundaries of her performance. In the group evaluation, she commented:

I enjoyed, but it was a challenge, too. It was a hard work, not just sitting down and scratching on a piece of paper, because you want to do your best and your peers want you to do your best. (Katrina, Extract 6.8)

It seems that peer pressure urged Katrina to make more efforts than she could have done if she had worked on an individual project. Lizzie, the facilitator of the group evaluation, noted the ethos of collaboration among the participants. She commented:

There was an emphasis on collaborating. A lot of them seemed to like it, which is probably different from the kind of experiences in more traditional

Odyssey classrooms where collaboration works differently or is not a great deal. I guess that was my biggest impression. (Lizzie, Extract 6.9)

Dana described the nature of collaboration metaphorically as:

It's different because we started from scratch. It has a root. We had to decide what's going to be our research topic and then we had to decide what the questions were. Everything depended on our group working together. . . . We worked together as a group and took one step at a time to put together. It is like building a book. (Dana, Extract 6.10)

### **Learning the Concept of Participatory Research**

The concept of participatory research seemed to strike a few participants.

Katrina said:

I felt it [participatory research] was a really new concept. What it says to me is that people in a situation can say because people in that situation can feel. . . . I really appreciate learning that while you are in a situation you can improve that situation. There are special ways to improve that situation rather than having problems remained. (Katrina, Extract 6.11)

For Katrina, learning the concept of participatory research was meaningful because it showed her that people could solve problems plaguing their lives through participatory research. Similarly, Lori pointed out that learning about participatory research was a meaningful experience. In the group evaluation, she described her experience:

What we work here is learning the concept of video research, learning the idea of grassroots and participants being researchers rather than having researchers somewhere from outside with their questions and their preconceptions. We had participants-once-removed. I want to say it because actual participants would be next to your Odyssey. We had the participants-once-removed, who

had actual experiences. We also had people who had invested interests in the outcome of this project. That's what worked for me. It was learning a whole new concept for me. (Lori, Extract 6.12)

For Star, performing participatory research itself was meaningful experience. She wrote:

The most meaningful experience was the group brainstorming to come up with the research questions, which would hopefully give us answers to improve the OP (Odyssey Project). The OP is so great a project that I felt privileged to participate in research that may help the OP. The second meaningful experience was learning the participatory research process. (Star, Extract 6.13)

James implied that learning the implication of participatory research was the most meaningful experience to him. He wrote in his reflection essay:

I would like to see this research be the catalyst for creating an institution of continuing education students, instructors and administrators so that we as a community can continue to challenge all of society to explore the humanities in major cities of this country so that there can be an implementation of the balancing out of all humanity throughout this country. (James, Extract 6.14)

His comment is somewhat ambiguous to me. Does he mean that the project could catalyze creating an institution, or that participatory research should be incorporated in adult education? In any event, it seems that James, similar to Katrina, Lori, and Star, came to see the potential of participatory research for social change. The participants did read written material about participatory research to discuss in the very first session of the project. It is true, thus, that the participants could have learned the concept of participatory research from the discussion. However, I do not believe that their learning could have been significant without the experience of actually conducting it as a group. Katrina, Lori, Star, and James also suggested that they

developed a sense of group agency, stressing that they could improve their living conditions or contribute to community improvement. I come back to the issue of agency in the last section of the chapter.

### **Learning through Knowledge Production**

Finding a solution to the research problem was a critical part of learning experiences. Some participants argued explicitly that the knowledge they produced would bring about positive change in the experience of future Odyssey Project students. For instance, Afrika commented in the group evaluation:

Location is very important. What I am saying is, to have a better understanding, if there is one in 60628 [a zip code in a South Side of Chicago], Roseland community and Englewood community [Chicago neighbourhoods in the South Side that have elevated poverty and violence rates], I am sure that will bring about more people. (Afrika, Extract 6.15)

Nia argued similarly in her reflection essay:

There are some things the OP (Odyssey Project) can consider. OP student parents can benefit greatly from age appropriate child-care. Also, OP might consider daytime classes, and although the OP cannot conduct classes in everyone's backyard, I suggested that the OP extend further south. Hyde Park [a Chicago neighbourhood in the South Side] is still too close to the Loop [downtown] to really be thought of as the South Side. (Nia, Extract 6.16)

Katrina also noted in her reflection essay the issue of location as an important outcome of the project:

One good thing that did come out of our research is the possibility of having the course on 95<sup>th</sup> street. Hopefully, this will help with the retention rate, thus resulting in a greater engagement. (Katrina, Extract 6.17)

As I mentioned, Latrice's argument on location prompted the participants to focus on the issue and seek an alternative to the current location of the South-side site. I think that her argument was sustained because the majority of the participants could associate themselves to the location in one way or another. Except Lori, all had attended the South-side site of the Odyssey Project. By reflecting on their common experience living in the South Side of Chicago, they came to agree on the problem of location although some participants—namely Katrina and Dana—initially thought location should not matter. Perhaps the location of the North-side site was also problematic, but this never became an issue among the participants. If more graduates of the North-side site had participated in the project, the research might have been very different because of their different lived experiences.

The participants experienced learning by producing knowledge that could influence people's lives. This type of learning is not common in an adult learning site. It is quite unique to this project in that the participants did not just learn knowledge but produced knowledge. It can open up possibilities of action and change in people's lives. It is critical learning. Foley (2001) defined critical learning as a process consisting of "the deprivatization of previously apparently idiosyncratic experience, the completion of understandings, the opening up of possibilities for action and changes in 'the structure and the frame of experience' (Hart 1990:55)" (p. 78). As Mills (1959) argued, the participants came to link individual troubles to social structure by engaging critical learning through the process of knowledge production based on their lived experiences. Since the participants and I had no executive power to change the location of the South-side site, we did not see the impact of our research immediately. A year after the project ended, I asked Amy whether she would consider changing the location. She said that the South-side site had indeed moved from 37<sup>th</sup> to 63<sup>rd</sup> street that year and that the overall attendance was fairly good. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that our recommendation was effective. At least, however, this anecdote suggests that the knowledge we produced had potential for changing the *structure and the frame of experience* among Odyssey Project students. The experience of producing knowledge seemed to enable the participants to engage in



critical learning in the sense that they came to open up possibilities for change in people's lives.

### **Incidental, Social, Critical Learning**

Thus far I have examined five modes of learning experience that the participants described. The project was an opportunity for Latrice, in particular, to discover herself and give new meanings to her lived experience. Katrina was explicit about her confidence in writing. The participants suggested how the collaborative environment helped them learn new skills. A few participants expressed learning the concept of participatory research as meaningful experience and signaled a developed sense of agency through the project. It also seems that producing new knowledge allowed the participants to engage in critical learning and opened up possibilities for action and change. The experience of learning noted among the participants, though challenging, was pleasurable, valued, exciting, and empowering. As Tess Maginess (2010) observed among her participants in a participatory video research project conducted with a group of men in rural areas in Ireland on mental health and distress, the participants' involvement in my thesis project was also an "intensely challenging, humorous, moving experience" (p. 514). The experience was learning.

Now I step back to ponder how to characterize the participants' experience of learning. In discussing the section on developing writing and computer skills, I characterized the type of learning as incidental because such learning was not anticipated but nevertheless occurred during the research. In a sense, the participants' whole experiences of learning were incidental because they occurred unexpectedly while conducting the research. Although the participants might have regarded the project as a learning opportunity at the outset, it was not a site for formal learning as in adult learning classrooms. Clearly, there were some structured lessons, such as discussions on participatory research and methods. But what seemed to influence the participants' experiences of learning most was conducting research itself. Learning occurred *incidentally* while doing the research. Learning occurred *socially* as well through participants' collaborations as a group. The other characteristic of learning that is unique to the project is that it was not simply about enhancing skills or

obtaining knowledge, but about constructing new knowledge. Simply put, the participants learned through the production of knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, this type of learning involves critical learning in that it opens up possibilities of action and change in people's lives. Therefore, I characterize the participants' overall experience of learning as *incidental, social, critical learning*. This observation is in line with Karen Watkins and Victoria Marsick's (1992) argument for a theory of informal and incidental learning among adults. They argued that this type of learning is characterized by:

(1) based on learning from experience; (2) embedded in the organizational context; (3) oriented to a focus on action; (4) governed by non-routine conditions; (5) concerned with tacit dimensions that must be made explicit; (6) delimited by the nature of the task, the way in which problems are framed, and the work capacity of the individual undertaking the task; and (7) enhanced by proactivity, critical reflectivity and creativity. (p. 287)

Although all the characteristics seem to be related to the participants' experiences of learning in the project, I find the last item especially fruitful in discussing their experiences. Watkins and Marsick argued that proactivity, critical reflectivity, and creativity can enhance informal and incidental learning among adults specifically in an organizational setting. They defined proactivity as a "readiness to take initiative"; critical reflectivity as the process in which learners "identify and make explicit norms, values and assumptions that are hidden from conscious awareness"; creativity as a catalyst to enable learners "to think beyond the point of view they normally hold" (p. 297). They further explained the benefits of creativity:

Creativity helps learners break out of preconceived patterns that do not allow them to frame the situation differently, or even to see a situation as in need of reframing. Creativity also allows people to play with ideas so that they can explore possibilities without censoring themselves or others. People may be more likely to play creatively with ideas in informal and incidental learning

because they are not locked into roles where teachers are authority figures with the right answer to problems that can only be solved in one right way.

Creativity has something in common with intuitive knowing; however, in our theory, learners also make explicit the reasoning behind their intuitions so that they can learn from both good and poor thinking. (p. 297)

I think the creativity involved in the research project, in the sense that the participants created knowledge and a video, was imperative to their learning experiences. Their lived experiences seemed to be critical to their learning as well. However, I do not think that they were as significant as the processes of creating knowledge. As indicated in Table 3.1, most participants decided to participate in the project for personal reasons or curiosities. Nevertheless, once the project unfolded, the participants seemed to become more engaged in the topic of the project and to move beyond their immediate experiences. The participants committed to the group work to inquire into the research problem and find solutions to it. They did not linger within their own experiences. They participated in various activities in the project while constructing knowledge through the project. In this way they sculpted new experience. It was incidental, social, and critical learning.

### **Negative Experiences**

The participants expressed that their overall experience with the project was very positive and educational. Some participants, however, also pointed out some negative experiences or suggestions. These include more communication among the participants themselves, frustration out of broken collaboration, and some limitations in learning. I go over each of these points and discuss some of the ways of reducing negative experience in learning. Then, I pay attention to the absent voice among the participants.

First, during the group evaluation, Latrice commented on the lack of communication among the participants:

And also I want to add something that might be more helpful if we can really, really communicate with each other more. Because if we stay in contact a little more through the process, there might be one person that can do it this time another person who can't do it at that time, and time goes on, this person can pick up. . . . If we keep in contact a little more, communicate a little more with each other, instead of you [the author] just reaching out to individuals [it will be more helpful]. (Latrice, Extract 6.18)

It is true that I did not give sufficient thought to communication among the participants. While we got together in group sessions, we generally remained scattered otherwise. We shared phone numbers and email addresses. But it did not enable systematic communication. I recommended that two participants work together for an interview. This, however, did not happen spontaneously. The issue of communication may be something that the researcher facilitating participatory video needs to incorporate more consciously.

Second, although Nia thought her experience with the project was “quite educational,” she expressed an incident in which she felt frustrated. As she wrote in her reflection essay:

I also liked writing the snail mail letter and working on the snail mail survey. It was time consuming, but I liked putting it all together. I only wish I had recruited mailing help on the day they were sent out. Stuffing envelopes gets tired very fast. (Nia, Extract 6.19)

As I noted in Session 6 in Chapter 3, Nia prepared the snail mail survey with Lori and sent out the mail alone the next day. Despite remarkable collaboration among the participants, it sometimes broke. Probably stuffing was not as fun as writing a letter or editing video. James was supposed to work with Nia to help mail the surveys, but he did not. Neither Nia nor I heard from him on the day when the mail was sent out. Collaboration was fun and made the research possible. But when expected collaboration failed to occur, it frustrated some participants and seemed to harm the

sense of trust between some of them. How can this situation be avoided and the potential of collaboration be maximized? This is indeed a difficult question because possible solutions may depend on group dynamics. Thus, instead of offering a definite answer to the question, I only pose the question here to draw attention to the issue.

Third, Lori pointed to limitations in learning as her negative experience with the project. She commented in the group evaluation as:

What didn't work for me is rather a lack of time. There wasn't just enough time. I don't think it really does the project full justice. Instead of meeting just once a week, like what I said to Kay before this class<sup>45</sup> started today, it would work for me if there were two or three times a week, because there were so many things that we didn't get to learn thoroughly, you know. We had handouts, and that's great. But the actual learning experience part of it, it was a wash for me because I know how to get people talking and I already know how to write reports. I think it would help all of us if we had more time. But I also realize that that's not possible because of the schedule of the people in this group and the limitations of resources in terms of time and money. So the positive was I learned a whole new concept of research and the negative was that there was no enough time. (Lori, Extract 6.20)

She pointed out that her learning experience with writing and interviewing was not substantial because of the overall lack of time. Her comment raised a couple of issues. First of all, it made me wonder whether more time would have been a solution to her negative experience. If this were the case, why was her experience with writing a wash for her while it was considerable for Katrina (see Extract 6.4)? Writing was substantial to Nia as well (see Extract 6.5). A difference among them, in my observation, was that while Katrina and Nia worked hard on the writing tasks they

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<sup>45</sup> Often, the participants described the project as a course and each group session as a class. This may indicate that they saw the project as a continuation of the video production course (Video-Telling Workshop) and perceived it as a learning opportunity.

were involved in, Lori did not. She might have felt that writing minutes was too easy for her. However, when I asked her to write a one-page summary of the final video, she did not do it. She did not send me her reflection essay, either. Hence, I am not quite sure whether an extended period of time would help her write better.

I do, however, sense from her comment that the project was rather rushed and that it did not provide the participants with adequate knowledge, especially for interviewing, although it was essential to the research. It may be true that the majority of the participants could not develop interview skills beyond what they had already had. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I did try to discuss the qualitative, in-depth interview with the participants. To do so, I distributed two book chapters on the qualitative interview. But they failed to capture the participants' attention. One main reason, I think, was that the materials were written for academic researchers, not for participant researchers; not that the participants could not understand what was written in the chapters, but they might not have found them very relevant to what they were doing in the project. There seemed to be a gap between the knowledge that was considered important to research in general and the knowledge the participants found useful for conducting participatory research. There are handbooks written specifically for participatory video projects, such as *Insights into Participatory Video: A Handbook for the Field* (Lunch & Lunch, 2006) and *Participatory Video: A Practical Guide to Using Video Creatively in Group Development Work* (Shaw & Robertson, 1997). But they tend to focus on developing filming techniques, not interviewing skills. Because the participants already had experience with filming, what they needed was interviewing skills. However, I do not think the project provided them with these skills. Evidently, no single participant pointed to developing interview skills as a significant part of their learning. This may have crippled the overall learning experience among the participants.

In what follows are two lessons that I learned from the above observation. First, it is urgent to develop relevant instructional materials so that participant researchers can gain knowledge of and skills for conducting in-depth interviews in the context of participatory research. Most materials are written for academic researchers who conduct interviews in more conventional, researcher-centered projects. They are

not readily transferable to the milieu of participatory research because the purpose of interviews and the entity of interviewers are quite distinct from conventional research. As I discussed in Chapter 2, interviews are generally considered an instrument for the researcher to inquire into her subject's life and gather information. In participatory research, as suggested in my thesis project, the division between interviewer and interviewee is less strict than in conventional research. They can engage in reflexive communication more easily. Not that the process of interviewing is very different, but there are differences between conventional and participatory research in terms of research setting and purpose. Thus, academic instructional materials for in-depth interviews may not be effective in the case of participatory video research. There should be instructional materials for interviewing specifically designed for participatory video.

Second, there should be a more effective way of providing participants with information of in-depth interviewing than reading and discussing instructional materials. As my analysis in the previous section suggests, participants learn by doing more effectively than by only reading materials. Session 3 was designed to help the participants conduct interviews, but it ended up focusing more on filming techniques than on interviewing skills. In retrospect, this session could have been designed differently such that the participants could conduct in-depth interviews with each other to hone their skills. This could have offered them an opportunity to learn what the in-depth interview could involve. Without experiencing it, how could they be expected to lead the in-depth interviews? Thus, I would suggest that every participatory video project should include an exercise of interviewing each other if it involves interviews. Then the participants would be able not only to develop filming techniques and interview skills, but also produce richer knowledge by gaining access to each other's lives that might not be available otherwise.

Finally, I draw attention to the absent voice among the participants. I noticed it, especially in Afrika. Generally she was very active and outspoken, and conscious of social issues, such as racism and violence. However, her voice was largely absent during the group evaluation. In addition, because she did not send me her reflection essay, it is more difficult for me to understand her experience. The absence of her

voice might imply that her experience was not so good. How should I deal with the situation? I reflect on this issue further in the next chapter when I examine positionality.

### **Agency and Reflexivity**

While describing learning as the primary experience, the participants hinted that they developed a sense of agency through the experience of learning. In this section, I discuss how learning-as-experience contributed to developing this sense of agency. I first review literature on the notion of agency to anchor my discussion and then examine the ways in which the participants described a sense of agency.

My working definition of agency is “an individual’s capacity for action” (McNay, 2004, p. 179). Lois McNay (2004) argued that lived experience forms the basis of agency and that intention and reflexivity are central features of agency. She emphasized that agency is trained and developed. In the dominant view in humanism, in contrast, agency is seen as a universal resource and a natural right available to everyone (see St. Pierre, 2000). The concept of universal agency predominates in the discourse of adult learning as well, notably in experiential learning theory. It is assumed that agency is inherent in individuals. For instance, Malcolm Knowles (1970/1996) argued:

The important implication for adult education practice of the fact that learning is an internal process is that those methods and techniques which involve the individual most deeply in self-directed inquiry will produce the greatest learning. This principle of ego-involvement lies at the heart of the adult educator’s art. In fact, the main thrust of modern adult educational technology is in the direction of inventing techniques for involving adults in ever deeper processes of self-diagnosis of their own needs for continued learning, in formulating their own objectives for learning, in sharing responsibility for designing and carrying out their learning activities, and in evaluating their progress toward their objectives. (p. 96)



Knowles assumed that an individual adult is an autonomous self with agency, who can diagnose their needs for their learning. This idea is also hinted at in the discourse of participatory research, as I examined earlier in the chapter. Hall (1975), for instance, argued that traditional research methods were inconsistent with the principles of adult education because adult learners, as whole people, participate actively in the world. Taking up a postmodern theoretical framework, Usher et al. (1997) asserted that the notion of individuals as autonomous selves with agency is a legacy of the Enlightenment and a “specifically Western cultural phenomenon” (p. 102). They argued: “The dominant tendency in educational theory and practice theory has been to privilege the agency of the autonomous self and exclude any notion of determination on the grounds that to admit determination would be to render educational work impossible” (p. 96). The authors, thus, suggested that rejecting the concept of universal agency would require a new perspective on adult education. Within this context, they brought to the fore the notion of “learning becoming experience”; they argued that the *experience* of learning, as opposed to learning from experience, can be “pleasurable and valued for itself” and should be seen as “the source rather than the raw material of knowledge” (p. 120).

My analysis of the participant text is aligned with this view. Although the project was not designed for adult education per se, the participants noted that learning was their primary experience. This experience was surprising, exciting, and empowering. Evidently, the participants did not bring about measurable change out of the project. However, as a group, they informed Amy, Director of the Odyssey Project, of former students’ experiences and recommended a way of addressing the issue of graduation; as individuals, they created new meanings of lived experience among themselves, developed new skills and knowledge, and learned that they could improve their own living conditions. This suggests that the participants came to develop a sense of agency through the experience of learning. As Amy noted:

They described learning new skills, including basic computer and Internet skills, as well as learning more about collaboration in general. They also

described an increased sense of agency as individuals and as a group. (Amy, Extract 6.21)

I look at the role that learning-as-experience might have played in developing a sense of agency using Caitlin Cahill's (2007) framework. Building on a post-structural feminist perspective, Cahill argued that participatory research could enable participants to struggle within and against material conditions by offering them an opportunity to develop new subjectivities. Chris Weedon (1987) defined subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to her world" (p. 32). In this paradigm, subjectivity or the sense of self is not a universal category, but a type of fluid identity produced in social relations (St. Pierre, 2000; Stuckey, 2009; Usher et al., 1997). It is seen as "unstable, multiple, contradictory, and in process" (Cahill, 2007, p. 269) and regarded as the basis for personal and social transformation. Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000) argued that agency becomes available when an individual constructs her subjectivity by taking up available discourse and cultural practices, instead of being forced into subjectivity. In this view, thus, what is important to developing agency is cultivating new subjectivities, in other words, creating other possibilities of being in the world (Cahill, 2007; Cameron & Gibson, 2005). In what follows, I examine this argument through the experiences of Latrice, Katrina, and the participants as a group.

For Latrice, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, reflexive learning enabled her to construct a new subjectivity. Until conducting the interview with Jennifer, who had experienced similarly to her, Latrice did not seem to be sure whether the difficulty she had experienced while taking her Odyssey Project course was personal or structural. Perhaps she might have internalized that her honorary graduation was partly her fault and a reflection of insufficient efforts. But the interview gave her new insight into her lived experience. She realized that the problem was not in herself, but in the location of the classroom; it was too far from the neighbourhoods where she and the majority of the student population lived. Once she learned this, she came to understand her lived experience more critically and realized that there could be a different way of experiencing the Odyssey Project. As she described "new and great possibilities in

oneself” (see Extract 6.2), I argue that Latrice gained a new subjectivity through the project and that reflexivity was critical to developing the subjectivity. True, gaining a new subjectivity alone does not warrant any change in life unless there is action. In the project, I saw Latrice’s action as well. Once she developed a new subjectivity, she was able to obtain the agency to reveal her experience with the Odyssey Project without victimizing herself and to speak about the problem of location strongly so that the research team began to see the problem from her perspective and to seek solutions to the problem. In the project, Latrice did not simply learn from her experience. More importantly, she acted for change in her own way, based on the new subjectivity she cultivated through reflexivity.

There is a strong indication that Katrina developed a new subjectivity as well. She said, “I realized that I had more words” (see Extract 6.4). By taking up the responsibility of writing, she came to see a new possibility in herself. She learned she could voice herself through writing. This is not something she learned from her lived experience, but a new subjectivity she came to develop while actively participating in the project. Collaboration and interactions with the other members of the research team seemed to provoke her reflexivity in the sense that she came to see herself more consciously. Without reflexivity, I think, she could not have developed the new subjectivity. With this subjectivity, Katrina seemed to gain a sense of agency as well. She wrote, “one can use [writing] to voice their opinions and make known their issues, including ways of resolving them” (see Extract 5.8).

In reflecting on the potential of participatory research, a few participants implied that they had obtained a sense of agency in that they could find solutions for themselves in order to improve the problem of graduation among Odyssey Project students. What is more, they thought that they were the most qualified people to do so, as expressed in their reflection essays:

As a group of participants in the Odyssey Project, there is no body more qualified for finding the information needed by the Odyssey Project on how to increase the retention rate for the Odyssey Project. (James, Extract 6.22)

I think this research approach is very effective because, who better knows the problem and who better could come up with a solution than the ones having a problem? While these people are not educated in this field, I feel that their life-experience makes them qualified to resolve their own issues. (Katrina, Extract 6.23)

Who would better do research on the engagement or disengagement of students in the Odyssey Project than those who were actual students of the Project?  
This type of research gave us an insight that otherwise could have been lost.  
(Star, Extract 6.24)

These suggest that the project enabled the participants to develop a collective subjectivity, i.e., a new way of being and acting together. I do not believe that this type of subjectivity existed before the project began. They came to create the subjectivity while learning the concept of participatory research and working together. The collective subjectivity was an outcome of the incidental, social, critical learning that occurred through the participatory research project. As Cahill (2007) wrote, “A collective subjectivity was not only about a shared social identification, but also about the process of working together, of collaborating in producing their understanding of their situated position” (p. 285). The participant text suggests that the participants reflected on themselves collectively and saw new possibility of being. They would not have developed the new subjectivity without looking back at their lives and working together to make change in their community. It seems that reflexivity prompted them to develop the collective subjectivity, which enabled them to develop a sense of group agency.

In brief, my analysis suggests that the project allowed the participants to experience learning and construct new subjectivities as individuals and as a group. Reflexivity was a key to provoking the new subjectivities. Interacting with each other and working within a group dynamic, the participants seemed to be prompted to look back at themselves and to create new possibilities of being in the world. The newly created subjectivities were different from the old ones. The new subjectivities were

more critical and productive and enabled them to develop a sense of agency. This challenges the prevailing notion that adults are self-directed, autonomous individuals with agency inherent in themselves. Agency is not just there as a natural right, but cultivated *through* learning. By this I do not intend to infantilize adults. On the contrary, I emphasize that adults can improve their living conditions by obtaining a sense of agency through the experience of learning. I do not think, however, that all learning nurtures agency. The study suggests that agency is an outcome of learning that is experienced through processes in which people make conscious efforts to improve their living environments collectively (McNay, 2004). By experiencing this type of learning, they can open up new possibilities of being in the world.

### **Summary of Chapter**

In this chapter, I examined the participant text—what the participants had to say about their experiences participating in the project. Learning predominated in the text. Learning-as-experience seemed challenging to the participants at times, yet pleasurable, valued, exciting, and empowering. I discussed five dominant modes of learning indicated in the participant text: (a) discovery of oneself through communication; (b) developing writing and computer skills; (c) learning through collaboration; (d) learning the concept of participatory research; and (e) learning through knowledge production. The processes of learning allowed the participants to carve new experiences. It was incidental, social, and critical learning. I also reviewed some incidents of negative experience presented in the participant text. Based on this discussion, I put forward some urgent issues that need to be addressed to develop participatory video as a more rigorous research method. Finally, noting an emerging sense of agency in the participant text, I argued that the participants came to develop this by constructing new subjectivities through reflexivity while participating in the project. In this way, I have examined what the participants had to say about the project. In the following chapter, I turn my gaze to myself and look at the researcher text.



## Locating the Researcher 7 in Participatory Video

*Friday, August 14, 2010. As usual, I dropped by at a donut store. A cashier, whose face was familiar to me, smiled and asked me, “A dozen donuts, Ma’am?” as soon as she saw me standing in the line. I nodded. She gave her coworker an instruction: “A dozen donuts with half a dozen chocolates.” This guy seemed to be new to this place. He put a dozen donuts slowly but surely in a box. In the meantime, I paid \$8.87 to the cashier. Then, she walked away. While the new guy was wrapping the box, another guy came and asked, “Did he charge you for your dozen donuts?” How does he know I got a dozen donuts? Anyway, it didn’t matter who charged me. So, I nodded, smiling. They seemed to know me. Would they be interested in knowing my name or why I need a dozen donuts every Friday? (My field notes)*

In the previous two chapters, I discussed the participants’ perspectives and experiences with the project. In doing so, I discussed the ways in which I believe the project provoked reflexivity amongst them and contributed to bringing out voice and developing a sense of agency. In this chapter, I focus on the researcher text, using reflexivity to look at my own involvement in the project. This type of reflexivity, as I discussed in Chapter 2, has been much discussed in contemporary qualitative research. Marilys Guillemin and Lynn Gillam (2004) argued that reflexivity is essentially an “*ethical* notion” (p. 262), which can sensitize the researcher to ethical tensions that may arise in practice of research. Among feminist scholars, especially those informed by post-structuralism, reflexivity has been a key element in doing research (Mauthner, 2000; Sultana, 2007). Some have paid particular attention to the notion of *positionality* while reflecting on their subjective involvement in research. Frances Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault (1993) defined positionality as a concept that signifies that “gender, race, class, and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities” (p. 118). The authors argued that positions are

constructed within a web of relationships (Maher & Tetreault, 2001). They went on to stress the importance of positionality in knowledge production: “Knowledge is valid when it includes an acknowledgment of the knower’s specific position in any context, because changing contextual and relational factors are crucial for defining identities and our knowledge in any given situation” (Maher & Tetreault, 1993, p. 118). The concept of positionality has been adopted in adult learning theories to address how the educator’s position, which is shaped by race, gender, class, and so on, influences the experiences of teaching and learning (Johnson-Bailey, 2002; Tisdell, 1998, 2001). It has also been a central issue among feminist participatory scholars who interrogate the power relationships between the researcher as outsiders and participants as insiders.

In this chapter, I locate myself as the researcher of participatory video within the scholarly dialogue on reflexivity and positionality and examine the researcher text. The chapter is divided into five sections: (1) I review literature on how feminist participatory researchers have taken up positionality; (2) building on the notion of positionality Maher and Tetreault (1993, 2001) discussed, I reflect upon my own story of race, gender, and class in the context of the thesis project; (3) I further explore the concept of positionality by defining my position as a facilitator, as is often the case in the literature of participatory research. I argue that the term *facilitator* does not represent the essential role that the researcher may need to take in conducting participatory video research; (4) I continue the discussion of positionality by situating myself as an adult educator and discuss some of the challenges that I encountered; (5) within this context, finally, I reflect on my ethical responsibilities and some of the ethical dilemmas that I faced to illustrate the process of participatory video more transparently.

### **Positionality in Feminist Participatory Research Scholarship**

While working in a Mayan community, M. Brinton Lykes (1997) interrogated her “situated otherness” (p. 726) as a white feminist American woman scholar and described the challenges and contradictions she experienced:



As an outsider—along lines of culture, gender, ethnicity, and nationality—my capacities to challenge Guatemalans varied by context and were frequently deeply constrained by the dominant group in each context. I experienced my “status as other” as both a privilege and a limitation. I was repeatedly challenged to walk a “razor’s edge” between accepting, however passively, “traditions” that I experienced as embodiments of patriarchal power and male privilege and being subjected to charges of “cultural imperialism” when I challenged these gendered practices. In this incident I felt that I had fallen off the edge. I was forced to reexamine the multiple and contradictory consequences of actualizing my desire to be an “insider” and once again was challenged to recognize a certain elasticity in seemingly more rigid categories of “insider/outsider” and “other.” (p. 734)

Lykes’s desire to be an *insider* in the community where she worked threatened her feminist epistemology. Situated in a male dominant society, she confessed that she often longed to be treated as “one of the boys” (p. 733) in order to work with community members. In sharp contrast, in situations where the majority of participants are women, female researchers seem to maintain a more cooperative relationship with participants. For example, in their work with women prisoners, Michelle Fine and María Torre (2006) saw their status of being outsiders as follows:

Outsiders have the freshness to ask the deliberately naïve questions (Kvale, 1996), and have the relative freedom to speak a kind of truth to power that may provoke new lines of analysis. But rarely did we operate as two separate and coherent constituencies. Instead we grew to be, over time, a group of women with very distinct and sometimes overlapping commitments, questions, worries, rage, and theoretical and political concerns. (p. 261)

Nevertheless, noting the vulnerability of the insiders (participant researchers) as women prisoners, Fine and Torre argued that outsiders (academic researchers) should assume the ethical responsibility to speak about social injustice; for instance, the way

in which the prison industrial complex victimizes women of colour in poverty.

The line between insider and outsider is not always so clear, however. At times, researchers are situated as insiders and as outsiders simultaneously in participatory research settings. Working in their own community of origin, Oksana Yakushko, Manijeh Badiie, Anitra Mallory, and Sherry Wang (2011) called attention to nuanced tensions that emerge between cultural boundaries. They reflected on their insider-outsider positionality as:

[A]cknowledging our privileged position is often one of the most difficult personal undertakings by any of us who are engaged with marginalized communities and individuals. In addition, in cross-cultural research across the borders, we often fail to accept the responsibility of being part of a Western U.S.-dominated super-power that may be viewed, especially in developing countries, as a bully that abuses other countries and communities for its own financial benefit. (p. 282)

In the context of participatory video, the discussion of positionality has rarely moved beyond the notions of insider and outsider. Typically, the discussion of these notions is related to power relationships between insiders (participants) and outsiders (researchers). A key issue in this discussion has been how to destabilize power imbalances between them. In this regard, Kindon (2003) argued that participatory video does contribute to equalizing power as it allows both of them to *look* together. She wrote:

Such movements of our bodies behind and in front of the camera—across the conventional boundary between researcher and researched—simultaneously positioned members of Ngaati Hauiti, as well as both the VPT (video producer/trainer) and myself, as researchers and researched, observers and observed, and documentarians and documented. They symbolize a degree of destabilization of conventional power relations in the research relationship and of particular claims to the unquestioned transparency of the image. (p. 146)

While I do agree with her on the potential of participatory video to challenge the conventional power relationship between the researcher and participants, I am also curious about how the researcher's positionality interplays with the potential of participatory video in the process of knowledge construction. Who is the researcher? Does she have always power over participants? How does power play out in participatory video research? Why does power seem to play out in one participatory video project in one way, but differently in another project? In short, how does the researcher's positionality influence participatory video? This topic is important because without interrogating the researcher's positionality, the study of participatory video may remain blind to issues of power related to the researcher's gender, race, and class. As Maher and Tetreault (1993) reminded their readers, knowledge is not valid unless the knowledge producer's position is acknowledged. By addressing the issue of positionality, I explicitly locate the researcher in participatory video and aim to reveal the complexity of participatory video.

### **Positionality of the Researcher in Participatory Video: My Own Story**

I am an immigrant Asian woman who came to Chicago in 1997 and lived there full time until 2008. The participants in my thesis study included one African American man, six African American women, and one Caucasian woman. As far as I know, all of them grew up in the city or had lived there for longer than I had. Although the majority of the participants and I shared a commonality as women of colour, our lived experiences seemed to be more different than similar. Besides different races, we had very different upbringings. Until I moved to Chicago, I had not perceived "racialised oppression" (Akom, 2011, p. 123), not only because I was a majority in my home country in terms of race, but also because there is not as much racial diversity in the country as in the United States. According to Antwi Akom (2011), racism in the United States is an ongoing process produced through the interaction of multiple institutions governing social structure such as housing, education, employment, and health (see also Calmore, 1998; Powell, 2008); it

intersects with other forms of oppression such as class, gender, immigration status, nationality, surname, and accent (see also Collins, 2000). Having lived in Chicago for over a decade, I became more conscious of racism in general. Sometimes racism was palpable. Two incidents in which I felt this are described below:

Incident 1:

*In the summer of 2010, I went to a moderately expensive restaurant in Chicago on a special occasion. After the meal, I asked for a cup of tea instead of coffee, which seemed to be the server's preference because of simplicity. He hesitantly asked, "Hum, what kind of tea would you like?" I answered, "Anything decaffeinated, except mint." He immediately responded, "The only tea we have is mint." It was hardly believable. I felt that the server, a white man, did not want to serve an Asian woman. I ordered decaffeinated coffee instead.*

Incident 2:

*Another incident was at the University of Chicago several years before I experienced the previous incident. My coworker and I were invited to a conference on campus to talk about digital audio to a group of language instructors and linguists, most of whom were not from the University. After my coworker provided an overview of the possibility of digital audio archiving, I presented how to digitize audio for language teaching and learning. After my presentation, a woman, who was white, asked a question to my coworker, who was also a white woman. But the question was more relevant to my presentation, and my coworker was not able to address the question properly. So, I responded to the woman. She rarely looked at me, and then asked my coworker again to verify what I answered. My coworker mumbled. So, I responded to her again. Yet, she did not look at me, seemingly unsatisfied. She continued to ask one or more questions to my coworker. I stopped responding to her.*

Having had these experiences, I had a degree of empathy toward the participants in terms of racism and understood racialized experiences the participants might have had. But it was educational experience that made me feel very different from the participants. I was in my doctoral program, but some of the participants may not have a high school diploma. I do not know whether any of them has a university degree. Ironically, different educational backgrounds made our initial encounters possible. I was an instructor and the participants were the students in the video production course I taught. In my thesis project, however, my position changed. At least in my mind, I was no longer an instructor to the participants. Of course, I clarified my role at the beginning of the project: I was a researcher who would facilitate the participatory video project and look at some of issues related to participatory video. But, did the participants see me as such, instead of an instructor? I am not sure. At any event, we were positioned very differently: I was a researcher and they were participants. And I was an Asian woman, and the majority of the participants were African American women. What could make us a congruent group that could work together? How easy, difficult, or effective could it be?

Feminist scholars have explored the influence of gender and race on the process of interviewing in the context of qualitative research. Kalwant Bhopal (2001) stressed that racial identity does affect the process of interviewing because “our ability to listen and our ability to interpret are influenced by our background, our gender, ‘race’, age, class and sexuality and to deny this is to deny fundamental differences between women” (p. 282). Louise Archer (2002), however, argued that shared race and ethnicity between interviewer and interviewee does not warrant truer data. Similarly, Maud Blair (1995) pointed out that race is not the only factor that influences the outcomes of interviews; political considerations may influence the information the interviewee reveals. Uvanney Maylor (2009a) argued that commonality of racial identities between researcher and participant does not necessarily prompt the participant to be more willing to share information with the researcher. However, she suggested that the researcher’s identity as a black woman does facilitate the process of interviewing black women because of a shared understanding of racism and sexism

(Maylor, 2009b). How would an interview be affected if a minority woman researcher interviewed other minority women? Little research has been conducted on this issue, although Itohan Egharevba (2001) reflected on her experience as a black woman interviewing South Asian women. She argued that a shared experience of racism in England facilitated the interview process although her understanding of the interviewees' culture was minimal. These arguments suggest that my racial identity can be advantageous in interviewing women of colour. But how does it play out in participatory video research? How can the researcher who has different racial identity from participants and shares very limited common experiences with them conduct participatory video research that focuses on participants' lived experiences in a society where race does matter? To address this question, in the next section, I look at some of the literature on the role that the researcher plays in participatory research and reflect on my position within this context.

### **Researcher-as-Facilitator**

In the literature on participatory research, a researcher is commonly described as a facilitator. For instance, Alice McIntyre and M. Brinton Lykes (2004) saw themselves not as scientific knowledge producers, but as mediators who could prompt the socially marginalized to bring out their voices. Similarly, White and Nair (1999) suggested regarding the researcher as a facilitator. They defined the facilitator as a communication catalyst who can “unlock the human potentials of individuals, increasing their capacity to think, to relate, to act, and to reflect from a foundation of communication competencies” (p. 40). Tina Cook (2009) saw her expertise and knowledge of research processes as secondary to her role as a facilitator. She argued that the facilitator's role is “to open the floor to discussion in a stimulating way, to get ideas into the open, to help members of the group listen to each other, debate and reflect” (p. 285). At times, it is emphasized that the researcher, as a facilitator, should have less directive power in participatory research than in other types of research (Stringer, 1999). Undoubtedly, the participatory researcher assumes different roles from a more conventional researcher. She needs to facilitate participants' engagement

in research. However, I speculate on whether the term *facilitator* adequately describes the role of the researcher because it has the connotation that the researcher should take a back seat in the process of knowledge production so as not to impose her own perspectives and beliefs on research projects as they unfold. On the contrary, my experience suggests that the researcher needs to play a very active, even directive, role in participatory video projects in order to “unlock the human potentials” (White & Nair, 1999, p. 40) and to facilitate participants’ engagement in the process of research.

I recall some critical incidents (Drennon & Cervero, 2002) that serve as evidence of this. As I described in Chapter 3, between Sessions 6 and 7, I telephoned Latrice to assist her in contacting potential interviewees. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this ultimately enabled her to see her experience differently and to contribute to the project. Before calling her, however, I experienced an ethical dilemma about whether I should call her or not since participation in research should be voluntary. I was not quite sure whether I had the right to urge her to conduct an interview. But I decided to call her because I thought that our conversation could help her participate in the project more fully. After talking with her, I learned that she was experiencing extreme financial hardship as well as a custody battle. The conversation made me realize that I had seen her as an anonymous research participant rather than as a unique individual. I felt guilty. I said I would provide her with bus fares and some remuneration. Still, the custody battle was an issue, which hindered her from active participation. I made an arrangement so that the student specialist of the Odyssey Project could help her. This experience prompted me to wonder whether I had overlooked any pressing personal problems among the other participants. The specialist was willing to contact them to ask. Fortunately, no further issue came out of this survey. As Lykes (1997) pointed out, systematic data analysis was difficult because most participants could not fully participate in the project. Some worked full-time and others had personal responsibilities other than conducting research. Thus, a critical question we, as researchers, may need to ask ourselves is how we can assist participants in dealing with personal obligations and participating in the research project at the same time. This might require the researcher to intervene in the participants’ individual lives while facilitating the project.

At times, however, I was not certain how much I could intervene in the participants' lives during the course of the project. I asked myself questions such as the following: Do I need to call each time a participant is absent from a group meeting? To what extent do I need to urge them to perform their tasks? Do I have the right to do so? Whenever these questions came to mind, I subconsciously decided not to be too assertive because I thought that, after all, it was not me but the participants who should decide what to do. So I took a moderate laissez-faire approach. However, I had to pay for it at the end of the project. I was caught in a dilemma: I thought completing the research report would make the participants feel a sense of accomplishment and elevate their self-esteem. In reality, however, there was little progress in the report—not even a rough draft. The participants seemed to care much less about the report than I did. I asked myself whether I should write the report myself or just drop the idea of writing the report entirely. I was not sure what to do. Then, I thought, *am I trying to shape the project in the way I want? Would this help the participants?* I restrained myself and then talked about my feelings in the group evaluation. Below I include part of the conversation:

**Author:** How do you feel about a bunch of writing? At the very beginning, I said the goal was writing a report with a supporting material, video. I felt like behaving like a devil. You had to write a session memo right immediately [after a session was over], but I was the only person who was doing it. Everybody waited until the last minute. To me, it was important to make full sentences instead of bullet points . . . [When it comes to writing,] so far, not everyone did what I asked for.

**Nia:** It was not bad. Actually I kind of liked the writing part. I liked the proposal and I liked writing an analysis of the video that we worked on. The data survey, to use collaborative efforts, I didn't want to do that by myself. I did do part of it by myself. It was so dry. The time thing with the survey, it made bad for collaborative efforts. Does it make sense?



**Lori:** Did someone work on it?

**Nia:** Latrice and I were supposed to work on it, but we never got together. So I felt a little more pressured.

**Author:** It wasn't fair to ask you [Nia] to go over all those things. Me, I am a kind of pace leader. Sometimes I have to push, but sometimes I have to be relaxed, so I try to control myself in a sense. In the beginning I was a bit relaxed. But as time went on and data was coming in, I was thinking, why don't people work on this? So, I felt that I was pushing everybody too much. Is it really good or bad? Am I trying to structure the research as I expected?

**Lori:** Everything has to be pushed further and a little harder. . . . No, I don't think you need to worry about your pace. You set a good pace. I think the short amount time we had for the entire project was a negative issue and I think that there were also factors, in my case, besides my computer falling apart, I couldn't get anybody to interview. I had to wait until Shemecia, whose zip code happened to be my area code. She filled out the survey and said she wanted to be [interviewed]. But everybody that I tried to call, they had anything to do with it. I think that you setting the pace was a positive thing. Maybe if we decide to do this in the future, you might look at either a longer time period or at least more meetings. More meetings will give us the ability to feel more [Latrice said, "engaged"] engaged in it and more knowledgeable of what we were doing.

**Star:** If you gave us a definite time, you asked us to have notes after meetings. You said, "I usually write right after the meetings," but you never said, "I expect you to do this right away so that we can do other things."

**Author:** I did! I did at the very beginning, but nobody did it.

**Star:** The work you asked us to do, I didn't hear it. You say definitely. Personally, I like to work right after, but it was not like that. You didn't say, "I expect you to have this to me so that we can have all in front of us before the next meeting." I didn't hear you say those words. Not for me, but to yourself.

You talk from your own stance. So say you expect to have it. I think that was something I could, because I could work afterwards. I kind of liked it too, you know. Nobody else. Waiting to the last minute, I emailed that because I had a problem with that. Everyone else was saying “waiting.” I felt into that. If you say, “this is what I expect,” then I can work any way.

**Author:** More disciplined?

**Star:** Say, “Go further.” Just say it.

(Extract 7.1)

According to Star and Lori, I neither clarified my expectation nor encouraged them to bring out their capacities to the utmost. Preoccupied with my own conviction that I, as the researcher, should not control what the participants decided to do, I think I positioned myself too far from the participants. What I regarded as intrusion could have been inspiration and encouragement to some of them. Based on the lesson that I learned in the group evaluation, I decided to be more assertive in interacting with the participants. After the project ended, I contacted them on two occasions. One was to remind Nia, Latrice, Afrika, and Lori about sending me their reflection essays. Soon, Nia and Latrice forwarded theirs. Even with further reminders, I have not received anything from Afrika and Lori. Afrika responded to my message, though, saying that she would send me her essay. But it never came. Lori did not respond at all. Perhaps they were so busy with other things, or something unexpected might have fallen into their lives. But the other participants, who might be equally busy and had little time to write, did send theirs. I thought it was an irony because Afrika and Lori were the people who indicated their interest or confidence in writing during the course of the project. Afrika said at the beginning of the project, “I enjoy writing. I always carry a notebook with me to write. People ask me, ‘What are you writing?’ But I like doing that.” Lori said in the group evaluation, “it [the experience of learning] was a wash for me because I know how to get people talking and I already know how to write reports” (see Extract 6.20). Thus, I am not quite sure how to make sense of the fact that Afrika and Lori failed to write their one-page reflection essays. Although I “pushed further

and a little harder,” as Lori suggested, nothing came out of my action. Perhaps Lori and Afrika did not prioritize writing essays or did not feel like doing it. Or they were not sure what to write. I do not know. Reflecting on this incident, I questioned my own positionality: To what extent does the fact that Lori and Afrika did not forward the essays have to do with me?

The other occasion in which I contacted the participants was to follow up on the group’s decision of completing the report. Thanks to Katrina and Nia, progress was made in the report. In December 2010, I sent an email to all the participants in order to ask them to forward a few lines of their author bios. I wanted to include them in the final report. But only Teri, who joined just before the presentation, did it. I was puzzled because I thought the participants would be excited about putting their names in the report. I was also frustrated because no writing seemed to be easy with the participant group. I even felt ignored by the participants. Only a year later, I gained better insight into this incident. To keep the tradition of the Video-Telling Workshop, the video production course I had offered to Odyssey Project graduates, I was preparing for a grant proposal. This time, I wanted to incorporate a photovoice technique (Wang & Burris, 1997). Because Nia had shown a strong interest in photography and had already taken relevant courses, I asked her to be a co-instructor. She accepted. A problem occurred when she had to write her curriculum vitae and bio for the grant application. Nia, who wrote the proposal of the participatory video research project, could not write a short paragraph about herself. So we first looked through her curriculum vitae, which was not complete, either. To fill the gap in the section of education, I asked about her educational experience. She said firmly, “I don’t remember. My experience in those years was so bad that I wanted to forget all. And I was pretty good at it. I don’t remember any more.” It seemed that the process of writing the curriculum vitae provoked her to remember a traumatic experience when she was a teenager. So, I stopped asking about it. Instead, I tried to prompt her to talk about pleasant memories, such as practicing dancing or participating in dramas before and after the traumatic period. Then, she talked about some activities she used to enjoy doing and a scholarship she recently obtained to attend a photography course. Step by step, her curriculum vitae became clearer and came to demonstrate a positive

side of her experience. We moved on to her bio. Writing the bio seemed to be more manageable then. I said, “Nia, you have been involved in many different types of arts. That’s awesome. You are experienced with dancing, drama, photography, and videography. If you can write about these, it will be good for the grant application.” She still seemed to be unsure and asked unenthusiastically, “Really?” We began to write a draft of her bio that day, and she finished it later. It seemed clear to me that she did not write the bio, not because she did not know how to write, but because she did not know what to write. She did not seem to think her experience was valuable and relevant to the grant application. Perhaps she suffered from low self-esteem, which made her unsure about her bio.

After this incident, I rethought the fact that no single bio, except one from Teri, was forwarded to me. I no longer saw this as either accidental in that the participants all forgot to send me their bios, or intentional in that they wanted to ignore me. Similar to Nia, some of the participants might have felt that they had nothing particular they could write to describe themselves in a few sentences. In order to enable them to write, it might have been necessary for me to talk to them face-to-face and to validate their positive experiences, as I did with Nia. Then, bios would follow naturally. This suggests that to “unlock the human potentials of individuals” (White & Nair, 1999, p. 40), the researcher may need to work with individual participants at a very personal level at times with an ethics of care in mind (Noddings, 1997/2006). In the context of research, an ethics of care attends to “care, compassion, and a desire to act in ways that benefit the individual or group who are the focus of research” (Wiles, Clark, & Prosser, 2011, p. 699). With the ethics of care in mind, feminist scholars, in particular, have rejected the neutrality of scientific research (Cahill, Sultana, & Pain, 2007). Instead, they have emphasized relationships with communities and responsibilities involved in working with them (Cahill, Cerecer, & Bradley, 2010). Inevitably, an ethics of care at the individual level requires much energy and devotion from the part of the researcher. It may not be easy. It certainly challenged me. But I believe that once an attempt is made, however trivial it may seem, it can transform an individual’s life. I sensed such transformative experiences, especially in Latrice and Katrina. As mentioned before, after I talked to Latrice over the phone, she came to participate in

the project more fully and gained her voice. When I contacted Katrina about her writing after Session 6, she wrote, “ You take the fear out of making mistakes” (see Extract 3.3), and came to state at the end of the project, “I realized I had more words” (see Extract 6.4). As such, the outcome of the ethics of care in the project was a sense of learning and agency among the participants. The project suggests that an ethics of care may be essential in working with minority women because the multiple forms of oppression they might have experienced due to the convergence of sexism, racism, and classism (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1990) are likely to interfere with their participation in a participatory video project; sharing experiences can carry great weight to some participants, but moving forward to unlock individual potential may require greater care from the researcher because they may need encouragement to be able to participate in research. This suggests that the researcher in a participatory setting needs to take on an active role as an educator with an ethics of care.

### **Researcher-as-Educator**

Pointing to multiple forms of oppression experienced by black women in the United States, Patricia Collins (2000) wrote, “The large numbers of young Black women in inner cities and impoverished rural areas who continue to leave school before attaining full literacy represent the continued efficacy of the political dimension of Black women’s oppression” (p. 4). Studies show that black students are nearly twice as likely as white peers to drop out of high school (Aud et al., 2011; as cited in E. Anderson, 2012); the dropout rate among black students has been typically higher in inner-city schools than rural areas (Fine, 1986; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989). William Wilson’s (1987) report was particularly alarming in that regard. He observed that only 37 percent of the 25,500 ninth-grade black and Hispanic students who were enrolled in segregated, nonselective high schools in Chicago in 1980 graduated by 1984, which is the period close to the schooling years of the project participants. Studies have also highlighted differences between girls and boys. Among girls, pregnancy has been noted as a major reason for leaving schools (Manlove, 1998; Moore & Waite, 1977; Oakland, 1992). A more recent study suggested that it is often

family reasons, such as family formation and care of others, that lead female students to drop out (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Furthermore, a correlation between dropping out and the socioeconomic status of a student's home has been more evident among girls than boys (Cairn et al., 1989; Oakland, 1992). Hence, among pregnant girls, those from low socioeconomic status are more prone to dropout (Hofferth, Reid, & Mott, 2001). Girls who leave school due to pregnancy are more likely to be students of colour (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011).

These studies seem to resonate with the participants' educational experiences. Of the six black female participants, two said in the first session that they had left high schools because of pregnancy; later, another participant revealed that she had dropped out of high school. Since I did not ask about their educational background, I cannot say for sure. But as the Odyssey Project accepts students regardless of educational levels, it is possible that more than three participants did not complete secondary education. It may be possible that they might not have been given a chance to challenge themselves and push their boundaries at school; their families' financial deficits might have limited what options they could choose for their lives other than dropping out of school altogether.<sup>46</sup>

Once I looked at education through the lens of gender, race, and class, I came to have a better sense of what the participants' experiences with education might have been. I felt empathy toward them. Still, this did not make us work as equal partners in the project. I was a privileged doctoral student who was carrying out a research project as the academic researcher; they were participant researchers who were carrying out the project based on their experiences. However, I do not believe the participants conceived of our relationship as such; rather, I think they still saw me as an instructor, at least in the first half of the project, because I had been their instructor. When the project unfolded, however, their perception of my position seemed to gradually change as indicated in the title Research Director that the participants gave

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<sup>46</sup> James, the male participant, is African American as well. He missed the first session, in which we shared individual stories, and the group evaluation. In addition, his attendance was inconsistent. Hence, I have few opportunities to gain insight into his educational experience.

me in the credits of the final video. Being called Research Director was a humbling experience; after all, I was only a student who was learning how to conduct research and did not always feel confident about my ability to lead the project. For instance, while discussing research methods in a group session, a participant asked what ontology meant. I addressed her question as best as I could, but was not able to satisfy her curiosity. I ask myself: Did I do a good job as an academic researcher? Certainly, as a student, I could justify my knowledge and aptitude in research to myself. Then why did the participants feel compelled to spend their time working on the project under my leadership? What would they gain out of the project? This is an ethical question. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the participants pointed to learning as their predominant experience with the project. This means that they saw the project as an opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge. This prompts me to examine my role in the project as an educator. Reminded of Star's comment, "Say, 'go further.' Just say it" (see Extract 7.1), I ask myself: Did I do a good job as an educator to help the participants develop their skills to the utmost? This is also an ethical question because the project was not designed explicitly for adult education, unlike the video production course that I offered. However, I felt more responsibility to be an educator than I did for my role as an academic researcher, because the participants seemed to regard the research project primarily as a learning opportunity, and as an extension of the video production course. How exactly was I supposed to be the researcher and an educator at the same time? Randy Stoecker (1999) defined popular educator as one of the positions that scholars assume in participatory research. Drawing on Freire's idea of education, the author defined the role of the educator as:

The popular educator . . . facilitates the learning process. This is not a teacher who is assumed to have knowledge that he or she gives people who are assumed to be ignorant. Rather, it is a facilitator who helps people discover for themselves what they already know and create new knowledge. (p. 846)

Stoecker saw the participatory researcher as an educator and identified the role of the educator with a facilitator. In the literature on adult education, the educator is

commonly described as a facilitator. Yet, there are radically different views on what the adult educator, as a facilitator, needs to do in order to facilitate adult learning. At issue is the concept of self-direction. Among the scholars who championed self-directed learning, Carl Rogers (1969) argued that the educator should be a non-judgmental facilitator with no specific goal in mind about what to accomplish by helping adults learn. Influenced by Rogers, Knowles (1970/1996) diminished the role of the educator even further, as I discussed in Chapter 6, on the premise that every individual adult has agency as a natural right. He argued, “The teacher’s role is redefined as that of a procedural technician, resource person, and co-inquirer; he is more a catalyst than an instructor, more a guide than a wizard” (p. 88). Similarly, Jack Mezirow (1997) underlined the role of the educator as a facilitator who can foster self-directive learning. While the notion of self-direction predominates in the literature of adult education, some scholars have criticized it. Stephen Brookfield (1993), for instance, pointed out that the problem was not self-direction, but its interpretation. He contended that the prevailing interpretation of self-direction as atomistic self-gratification separates private troubles from public issues (Mills, 1959) and masks the fact that learning is always “culturally framed” (p. 270). Ronald Cervero and Arthur Wilson (1999, 2001) took a more critical stance on self-directed learning. They argued that self-direction or learner-centeredness is ethically blind because adult education is a site of struggle for knowledge and power and always benefits one group of people over another. They stressed that, by ignoring unequal power distribution in the classroom, the educator can reproduce unequal power structures. In doing so, the authors rejected the neutrality of the educator. Instead, they emphasized that the educator should constantly ask who benefits from the site of adult education and attend to power differentials. Aligned with this argument, Foley (2001) gave more prominence to the power of the educator. He argued that learners become empowered when educators use their power to create an educational situation where learners can exercise power; the reduction of the educator’s power does not necessarily empower learners. He continued, “This will involve educators in recognizing the *invasiveness* of their work and struggling with learners to build a different sort of relationship, one



that is based on a notion of solidarity rather than on a patronizing notion of service” (p. 75; emphasis added).

I can relate Foley’s concept of the educator to my experience as the researcher-as-educator in my thesis project. Star’s and Lori’s comments (Extract 7.1) and my interactions with Katrina and Latrice described earlier in this chapter suggest that my *invasiveness* was critical to engaging the participants in researching and learning. It seems clear that the more I interacted with the participants, the more they seemed to engage and learn. I believe that my interactions with participants and interventions in their activities did facilitate participation in the project and increase learning experience among them. When I define my role as an educator in this way, I come to see my relationship with Afrika differently. I have known her since 2009, as someone who is very conscious of social issues such as racism, poverty, and violence and involved in activities around the issues. She expressed in the group evaluation:

In the first year video-telling class, it was just five minutes. But we [her group members] had about 29 hours [of video footage]. So we [her and her husband] decided to make a full feature film. So we’ve gotten some equipment from a student at Columbia College. Now we are focusing on a two-hour piece on democracy and how it relates to racism. . . . We made commitment that study should be a way of life. So, no matter what happens, we will take a class. When we choose to take a class or camp, we will always commit ourselves to studying something. It can be an online class or in-class where we are physically right in the room. We are always committed to learning. Period. (Afrika, Extract 7.2)

Despite her devotion stated in her comment, however, her participation in the project was not particularly active. Although she conducted interviews with James, analyzed them, and prepared a brief meeting memo, her attendance was irregular and her participation seemed to even diminish toward the end of the project. One reason might be that she began a new job during the course of the project, which made her busier. Also, she was a mother of two sons. Understandably, she had many daily

responsibilities. To help her engage in the project more fully, I asked her to write a draft of the research report with me. I tried to communicate with her through email for the task. In spite of my initiative, there was no fruitful result. I was disappointed. Then, assuming that she was busy, I no longer asked her. In retrospect, I wonder whether this was a good decision. Though she had limited time, perhaps she would have challenged herself if I had insisted on her working with me. By ignoring the possibility, I perhaps missed the chance to foster her participation.

Related to this, I wonder why Lori decided not to attend Sessions 4 and 5 without a notice and failed to send me her essay although she actively participated in the project otherwise. I met her by chance at an event after Session 5. She told me that because she had to deal with health insurance issues for a member of her family, she would not be able to participate in the project. I nevertheless encouraged her to come back if she could. Indeed she joined us again in the following session. In general, she was very supportive of others and active in all aspects during the course of the project. Hence, it is more difficult for me to understand why she did not inform me of her decision not to participate in those sessions, or return my calls and emails with regard to her essay. To what extent should I have encouraged Afrika and Lori to participate in the project and perform tasks? The incidents with Afrika and Lori suggest that the researcher may have limitations in terms of what she can do while interacting with participants despite all her good intentions. Even when I, as an adult educator, tried to build a different relationship with the participants through intervention and interaction, as Foley (2001) suggested, my initiatives did not always enable them to interact with me more fully and experience learning significantly. I wonder if this may have had to do in part with my position in terms of race, gender, and class. In the context of adult education, Juanita Johnson-Bailey (2002) argued that race is a salient factor that influences the processes of teaching and learning among adults. For instance, her case study conducted with Cervero (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998) showed that when the male professor put race as a central topic of the class, the students did not perceive that the professor pressed the agenda; in contrast, the black female professor was seen as pushing her agenda even though race was not a central topic of the class. Similarly, Elizabeth Tisdell (1998) drew attention to the

impact of positionality of both students and instructor on the process of adult education. She argued, “Clearly the positionality of the instructor always affects what goes on in classes; however, the conditions under which instructors would *directly* discuss it in the class might vary”(p. 147). She contended that a significant factor to the conditions is who the instructor is in terms of race, gender, and class. The issue of positionality has also been noted outside of formal education. Cassandra Drennon and Ronald Cervero’s (2002) study, for example, showed that facilitators (nine white and one black females) of practitioner inquiry<sup>47</sup> groups in adult literacy education struggled around their positionalities. One of the facilitators said, “Your gender and your color and your social status matters [*sic*]. It matters big time” (p. 206). In this regard, the authors commented:

It [power relation] goes without saying that facilitators occupy a privileged position in the hierarchy of organizationally-structured power relations; they are the leaders. In spite of leadership status, however, facilitators may be lower-rung occupants in the social hierarchy based on identity characteristics including race, class, and sexual orientation. (p. 206)

The literature suggests that positionality plays a role in both formal and informal adult education. It can thus be deduced that the positionality of the researcher also matters in participatory video research in which the researcher takes up the role of an educator. In my thesis project, however, the issue of positionality was not so evident despite the differences between the participants and me in terms of race, gender, and class. At least, I did not sense the issue acutely although I thought of the implications of positionality when Lori and Afrika failed to forward their essays and when James ignored the collaborative task of mailing surveys. The reason why the notion of positionality did not stand out strongly to me during the course of the project may be because there was mutual respect between the participants and me built on the

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<sup>47</sup> Practitioner inquiry is a teacher research approach, in which teachers, as a research team, produce and disseminate knowledge in the field of their practice (Drennon & Cervero, 2002).

previous experiences of working together in the video production courses. Without the experiences, the participant group could not have been even formed. The existing positive relationship seemed to add a new layer to the issue of positionality in this project and to make it less evident than it might have been otherwise. Thus, despite our different positions in terms of race, gender, and class, we were able to work together without significant conflicts.

In contrast, when I worked with people who I had not known before, the notion of positionality was more evident. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, in 2011, I conducted an independent participatory video project with six participants. One of them, an African American woman, constantly challenged or ignored my authority. She disrupted group conversations and did not comply with group rules that the participants had created, although she seemed to enjoy working with video. Using the video equipment to create a video seemed to be all she wanted from the project. She walked out of a group meeting one day without an excuse and on another occasion made me wait for her for some hours. Would she have behaved the same if the researcher had been someone else? Perhaps her behaviour might have more to do with her lack of consideration for others in general. Regardless, I wondered whether I could ever influence her positively no matter what I did since she did not seem to have minimal respect for me. It is true that I, as the academic researcher, possessed more power than the participants at least in terms of institutional power because I was the one who set up the framework in which they were to work. Yet, I was not in a position where I could ask for respectful collaboration from the participants or reinforce group etiquettes when they decided not to comply. I felt that there were very limited ways for me to interact with them. Furthermore, although I may have doubled as an educator in that participatory video research project as well, I was not an educator who was situated in a regular classroom and gave them credits. I think I had far less directive power than what an adult educator could have. Such limitations may be inherent in the characteristics of the researcher in participatory settings because the researcher has to negotiate its process with participants. However, although I do not have sufficient evidence to make a strong case here, I do sense that the researcher's positionality makes the process of negotiation more complicated and creates more

dilemmas for researchers who are not from socially dominant groups in terms of race, gender, and class. The democratic potential of participatory video for knowledge production and empowerment among participants may be contingent on the researcher's position. It is because research sites are not free from power relations stemming from race, gender, class, and other social and cultural factors. This may be more evident in participatory (video) research than in more conventional types of research because the researcher has to work *with* participants face-to-face in the process of the research. Furthermore, although it is typically assumed that the researcher has more power than participants, this may be oversimplified. The issue of power may depend on the researcher's position. I think that there has to be more critical analysis of positionality and power dynamics between participants and researchers in the study of participatory video.

As I discussed earlier, Foley (2001) argued that the adult educator should use her power to empower students. I agree with him. However, as scholars in adult education (Johnson-Bailey, 2002; Tisdell, 1998, 2001) pointed out, the educator's position in terms of race, gender, class, and so forth troubles the assumed power relationship between the educator and students. This becomes more complicated in participatory video research because, as I argued above, the researcher takes up the role of an educator only implicitly. Let me reconsider Foley's argument in relation to the notion of positionality. If the researcher has only limited power in relation to participants because of her race, gender, and class, how could she, as a researcher-as-educator, use her power to empower participants and to offer them rich educational experience? The same researcher may be an excellent educator in one context and a mediocre one in another context. To be clear, I am not refuting the researcher's role as an educator. What I want to emphasize is that positionality matters when the researcher takes up the role of an educator in a participatory video project. It is not enough to say that the researcher should use her power to empower participants. At stake is how she can use her power when she has only limited power because of her positionality.

The concept of positionality should be seen as a critical element when we, as researchers, attempt to develop theories of participatory video. I do believe that there

is fundamental knowledge specific to the nature of participatory video. However, the knowledge may not be translated from one context to another unless the researcher's positionality is taken into consideration. It is because the researcher in a participatory project is an "organizing force that will act as the focal point around which they [participants] can rally and deal with their problem" (Park, 1993, p. 9). The researcher plays a very active and important role in a participatory video project. Nevertheless, the role she can play may be contingent on her position in each context. As I suggested in my experience, the impact of positionality can be subtle, elusive, and hard-to-define in one incident. However, when we as researchers pay close attention to subtleties in the microscopic relationships with participants with intense reflexivity on multiple incidents, we may unmask the way in which positionality influences participatory video. In doing so, we can not only increase practical knowledge of participatory video but also talk about unbalanced power relations in society more openly.

### **Concerning the Researcher's Ethical Responsibilities**

While discussing my role as a facilitator and educator thus far, I have suggested some of the ethical challenges I faced and ethical decisions I made during the course of the project. A greater ethical challenge, however, emerged when I had to end the project after the 11-week period as planned. Star wrote in her reflection essay:

I think that in the future the research process should be given more time. I know that there always will be deadlines, but I do believe that those deadlines should be scheduled according to the work of the research data being accumulated and properly analyzed, which takes time. (Extract 7.3)

Star was not happy that the project had to end because she felt there should be more time for analysis. Her comment, on the one hand, suggested that she developed a kind of ownership of the project over the period of time, which I consider positive; on the other hand, it brought me an ethical dilemma. I wondered whether I had the right to

end the project that way. When I designed the project, I set the period of 11 weeks as an optimum length for both the participants and me. The participants agreed on this at the outset of the project. From my stance, hence, wrapping up the project as planned was the right thing to do. In addition, I had no other choice because I had to come back to campus in Montreal for the new semester. I did, though, extend the project by proposing that the participants and I communicate via email to complete the report. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the follow-up plan was not successful. In my email, I urged Star to keep writing the part she had been working on. Although she responded to me, she could not make a progress. This might have been different, however, if we had met face-to-face. Even with this potential, I am not quite sure how many participants could have committed beyond the 11-week period. Nia and Latrice already had gone back to school before the project ended, and Afrika was busy with her new job. What could I have done to be a more ethically responsible researcher?

Fundamentally, the ethical dilemma is related to my institutional power that allowed me to initiate the project. I was motivated. I gathered as many resources as I could in order to make the project beneficial to both the participants and me within the set period of time to my best knowledge. My institutional power, though meager, allowed me to do that. Once the project began, however, my institutional power seemed to have its own life. It was modified and shaped as the participants brought their ideas to the project. This, I believe, allowed Star to develop a sense of ownership of the project. In this sense, do I have the right to end the project? This question concerns the sustainability of research. De Lange and Mitchell (2012) addressed this more broadly in the context of community-based participatory research. As they put it:

Funding runs out, members of the research team move on, or a new community may beckon. The stakes are much higher in work that sets out to be participatory and collaborative in nature; such work demands adherence to different criteria, not just in relation to gaining entry through negotiation and collaboration but also in building in sustainability as a way of answering the question, “What happens when we’re gone?” (p. 318)

The issue of sustainability, however, does not seem so relevant to the process of institutional ethics review, at least in Canada. According to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS), a policy document that provides Canadian institutions with guidelines for the ethical conduct of research involving humans, “much research offers little or no direct benefit to participants. In most research, the primary benefits produced are for society and for the advancement of knowledge” (p. 22). The assumption is that research can inherently involve harm to participants and to others; hence it is important to measure risk factors against benefits in a given context in the process of reviewing research ethics. From this standpoint, the researcher has no ethical responsibility for the sustainability of research. Community-based participatory researchers have criticized this limited ethical stance. They have contended that, in a conventional model, “external researchers parachute in, conduct research on community members, and leave without providing information or assistance” (Cargo & Mercer, 2008, p. 326). Aligned with this criticism, Lynn Manzo and Nathan Brightbill (2007) called attention to a participatory ethics, arguing that the rule of ethics in participatory research should not be limited to a no harm policy but that it should include social change. This approach to ethics resonates with the *PV-Net Statement on Participatory Video in Research*.<sup>48</sup>

**We are nevertheless convinced** that the effective use of participatory video in research practice can enrich knowledge production and sharing, improve research outcomes and align academic research with the interests of the individuals and communities who are the stakeholders in our research, particularly in the area of social justice for those who find themselves

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<sup>48</sup> The Participatory Video in Research Network (PV-NET) is an initiative that was run by a group of researchers in Britain between April 2007 and August 2008 in order to promote participatory video practice (<http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/NMI/2007/nmi.php>). This statement was written after the meeting at the Open University in Milton Keynes in February 2008.



disadvantaged, and in giving voice to those who are excluded or oppressed. (p. 1; emphasis in original)

In practice, however, as Margaret Cargo and Shawna Mercer (2008) and de Lange and Mitchell (2012), to name just a few, suggested, the institutional structure in which the researcher is situated, such as funding infrastructure, staff turnover, and so forth, makes the sustainability of participatory research indeed difficult. In this regard, de Lange and Mitchell (2012) argued that participatory video can be useful in sustaining research because video can be used to reach out to a wider audience even after the research is over; in addition, the researcher can further contribute to the sustainability by creating a more professional video—they called it a composite video—which contextualizes participant-produced videos with related background information so that the participants and other community members can use it as a reference in viewing individual participatory videos on their own. I do agree to them with the potential of participatory video. But in my case, I had to leave the research site although some participants did not feel that the project was complete. To a degree, the dilemma that I faced seems to be inherent in the nature of academic research. On the one hand, I have institutional power to organize a project to work with people. On the other hand, I have to work in the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) of academic research that marks out specific practice, discourse, requirements, and certain limitations. This seems to be especially critical in conducting participatory research because the academic researcher needs to work not only in the academic *habitus* but also in the rhythm of everyday life among participants. The researcher may need to negotiate research processes with both her academic institution and the community she works with. Hence, the kind of dilemma that I experienced may be something that I—probably many researchers—need to cope with in conducting participatory research.

What makes the ethics of research more complicated in my thesis project was the use of video. While the TCPS provides some generic guidance for participatory research in Article 10.5<sup>49</sup>, which addresses *research involving emergent design*, it says

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<sup>49</sup> Article 10.5 states: “In studies using emergent design in data collection, researchers shall provide the REB [Research Ethics Board] with all the available information to

little about video. In the entire document, video is mentioned only in the context of safeguarding information (Article 5.3 and 5.4). It states that researchers are required to disclose the full cycle of “any recording of observations (e.g., photographs, videos, sound recordings) in the research that may allow identification of particular participants” (p. 60), ranging from data collection to retention or disposal.

Participatory video, though it may contain identifiable information, is not a recording of observations, but a type of data and a form of dissemination created by participants. Furthermore, although the researcher is required to set up the full cycle of video before beginning research, it is difficult—probably not so ethical as well—for her to determine the cycle because participants, as co-authors, ought to agree on ways of collecting and disseminating data. I think this is one of the discrepancies between what institutional ethics review boards want to see and what the participatory video researcher can provide as evidence of ethical research.

Let me discuss the issues of privacy and safeguarding information that came up in the processes of ethics review for my thesis project. The TCPS (2010) defined privacy as “an individual’s right to be free from intrusion or interference by others” (p. 55); it is respected if an individual participant has an “opportunity to exercise control over personal information by consenting to, or withholding consent for, the collection, use and/or disclosure of information” (p. 56). To adhere to the privacy rule, as I noted in Chapters 3 and 4, I created two types of consent forms. One was for participant researchers (Research consent form; see Appendix I), and the other, for their potential interviewees (Interview consent form; see Appendix IV). I explained the previous one to the participant researchers, whereas they explained the latter one to the interviewees. Although each form was crafted with assistance from the McGill Research Ethics Board, the content of the research consent form was not transparent to all the participant researchers. When I showed the research consent form to the participants, its legalistic formality seemed to make some of them even slightly anxious (see, for another example of this, Elwood, 2007). I needed to intervene and rephrase the form

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assist in the review and approval of the general procedure for data collection.

Researchers shall consult with the REB when, during the conduct of the research, changes to the data collection procedures may present ethical implications and associated risks to the participants” (p. 144).

so they could understand it clearly. This might also have been the case when the participant researchers used the interview consent form. As indicated in the case where Nia could not succeed in her telephone interview (see Chapter 4), it seems that using the interview consent form was not always easy for the participant researchers, even though they reviewed content of the interview consent form with me.

To abide by the safeguarding information rule, I stated in the interview consent form that the final video would be circulated among restricted audiences, such as Odyssey Project instructors, donors, or academic researchers.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the interviewees were asked whether they would agree to upload the video on social network sites such as YouTube. All the interviewees agreed to make the video available online without restricting access. As the video is online, it is available for everyone to see. This means that the video can be shown outside the research context. In effect, online dissemination is effective to reach out to a wide audience with a minimum cost. But can researchers determine the full cycle of the video once it is online? While online dissemination was not much questioned, the clause about DVD distribution caught the attention of the Research Ethics Board when I submitted my ethics application. I stated in the application that each participant researcher, as well as interviewees, would receive a copy of the final video in DVD format. I had no reservations when I wrote that because I felt the participants should be entitled to a DVD copy because it was their work. To my surprise, the Research Ethics Board questioned how I would prevent any misuse of the DVD. I had no clue to the question. Yet, after discussion with the officer at the Board, I came to see her point from the perspective of a group ethics: Because the final video is a collaborative asset, there has to be an agreement on the use of the video among all the people involved in the video. On this premise, I reminded the participants at the outset of the project that the final

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<sup>50</sup> Reading the interview consent form, I realize that I did not make it explicit that the video would be shown at the research presentation. It was an unintended omission. All the interviewees were invited to the presentation. More problematically, the consent form did not specify interviewees' rights to editorial commenting on their own interview materials. I think that there should be a type of private screenings for interviewees before a public screening. This issue, however, was not raised when my ethics application was processed. Please refer to Chapter 5 for more discussion.

video would be a collaborative product and the use of the DVD would be restricted to what we, as the research group, would have agreed on with each other and with the interviewees. But is it possible to prevent *misuse* of the DVD in all circumstances once its copies are released? More critically, why was I asked to take cautions to avoid possible misuses of the DVD, but not the online version?

Institutional guidance on participatory video seems vague, and sometimes contradictory. Moreover, as it focuses on how to protect data and identities, the guidance pays little attention to how to bring out under-represented voices and to recognize them (Wiles et al., 2011). As I suggested in Chapters 4 and 5, the idea of giving a voice to people is essential to the practice of participatory video (Luttrell & Chalfen, 2010; Mitchell, 2011). This makes participatory video a socially responsible research method. However, it seems that the principles of participatory video sometimes collide with institutional ethics guidance, as discussed above. How can we, as researchers, negotiate such contradictions and conflicts in order to conduct more ethically responsible research with participatory video? This, I think, is a fundamental question that we need to ask. Though important, it is beyond the scope of my thesis. Hence, I only pose the question here and provide an example to call for further discussion.

### **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter traced my subjective involvement in the project. I first reviewed the literature in which participatory researchers had discussed positionality. Then, looking back at the project, I reflected on my position in relation to the participants' to draw attention to the possibility that our contrasting positions in terms of race, gender, class, and education could have influenced on the project. I then explored my role as a facilitator, as the participatory researcher is often described as such in the literature. While the term *facilitator* may imply that the researcher plays a passive role in leading participatory work, I found that this was not the case. I played a very active role in prompting the participants to engage in the process of research more fully and shaping their experiences with the project. For this reason, I prefer defining my role, not as the

researcher-as-facilitator, but as the researcher-as-educator, especially because the participants pointed to learning as their predominant experiences. However, what I could do as an educator seemed to be limited in part because of my position in terms of race and gender. Nevertheless, the issue of positionality did not come to the fore overtly in the project. I think it was in part because the participants and I had pre-existing, trust relationship. This dismantled the positional differences between us to a certain degree. Hence, I was able to work with the participants more easily than if we had not already known one another. This suggests that positionality matters in participatory video; and yet, distinct positions between the researcher and participants in terms of race, gender, and class can also be compensated for when members of the research project work together and build sustained relationships. Moreover, I do not think that differences are always an obstacle. They can catalyze new possibilities by bringing together people with different positions and backgrounds. In the next chapter, I synthesize my arguments thus far and conclude my thesis.



# Toward a More Engaging, Enriching, and **8** Educational Method

*Social change happens through people. What a film can do—that is, whether it is video people have made themselves or a film made by professionals—a film can open up new horizons. It can show people, similar to the ones they are watching, accomplishing things. It can encourage people to try new things to get their lives in their hands. (Hénaut, 2009)*

Participatory video can bring people together to examine issues that are relevant to them from their perspectives and to construct knowledge collectively. It can allow them to reflect upon their lives and to experience learning. It can prompt the researcher to be more conscious of her positional power that may be taken for granted in a more conventional research setting. Nevertheless, there remain the issues of power—among participants and between them and the researcher—that need to be addressed. I have explored the complexity of participatory video by analyzing a participatory video research project that I organized and conducted with eight economically disadvantaged adult learners. Centering my discussion on the notion of reflexivity and thinking through the concepts of voice and positionality, I scrutinized the process of the project and argued its influence on knowledge production as well as the participants' experiences. In this final chapter, I summarize the project and recapitulate the focus of the analysis that appears in Chapters 4 through 7. Then, I respond to the two research questions posed in Chapter 1. This is followed by a discussion on the contribution of my thesis to advancing knowledge. Finally, I address some of the limitations of my study and suggest a future direction in the study of participatory video.

## Summary of the Thesis

The participatory video research project took place over a period of 11 weeks in June, July, and August in 2010 with eight adults who graduated from the Odyssey Project, an adult educational program that offers low-income adults free yearlong college-credited courses in the humanities in the Chicago area. Among the participants there was one man and seven women. Seven members of the group were African Americans, and one was Caucasian. I recruited them from the former students who had taken the video production course I offered in 2008 and 2009.

I took a generative approach to selecting the topic of the project. The participants chose to investigate former Odyssey Project students' experiences to try to find out why some students dropped out while others were still engaged with the Odyssey Project years after graduation. Through the project, we ultimately hoped to help remove obstacles that non-graduating students faced in order to help them complete their programs. We used online and snail mail surveys and focus group in addition to the video method, which I initially proposed to the participants. Each method was used for a unique purpose. The video method served to examine former non-graduate students' experiences. Yet, we had difficulty in finding interviewees, and the interview data was not consistent. There were only six interviewees, and two of them were not so relevant to the purpose of the study. Nevertheless, each interview provoked much discussion among the participants. Drawing on the group discussion, two participants edited the interview videos to create a documentary video, titled *Ready, Set, Engage*. On the 11<sup>th</sup> week, we presented the research findings along with the documentary video to approximately 30 people, consisting of former students and the staff and faculty of the Odyssey Project and their friends and families. We concluded that the location of the South-side site of the Odyssey Project was too far from most students' homes and suggested to the director of the Odyssey Project that the classroom should be moved further south in the city.

In order to probe the participants' perspectives on and experiences with the project, I organized a group evaluation approximately one week before the presentation. To triangulate my analysis, I invited a former tutor and the director of



the Odyssey Project to the evaluation and had the tutor facilitate the evaluation process. They provided me with their observations on both the participants' experiences and the project itself. In addition, I asked the individual participants to write a one-page reflection essay. The group evaluation, the two outsiders' comments, and the individual reflection essays, along with the participant-generated data and my field notes, constituted the data sources for my analysis.

The research project provided me with rich data, although it was slightly challenging for me to identify what participatory video contributed to the project exactly, as the project involved more than one method. In Chapter 4, I drew focus on the process of the video making and its outcome. In discussing the unforeseen difficulty in finding interviewees, I pointed to a group dynamic within the community of the Odyssey Project. The participants had little connection with the target population, former students who had withdrawn from their first-year programs. Nevertheless, in comparison with a more conventional research project, the participatory project provided a thicker description of experience among former students because the participant group, as former students, was able to shed light on the students' experiences by reflecting on their own.

Chapter 5 built upon the previous chapter and focused on the producer text, i.e., what the participants had to say about and through participatory video. In general, the participants agreed that participatory video has potential for bringing out important issues plaguing people's lives, but disagreed on its usefulness particularly in the project. Nevertheless, as Latrice, one of the participants, pointed out, the project does support the notion that participatory video contributes to giving marginalized people a voice (White, 2003). However, I critically examined the notion of voice by questioning whose voice predominated in the final video. In my analysis, the dominant voice came from the participant group, who believed that the Odyssey Project is good and useful. Although the video shows some of the difficulties that former non-graduate students faced while taking Odyssey Project courses, they are blended with other, more positive experiences, which are given more prominence in the final edited video. Thus, it is not so evident in the video what makes some students drop out of their programs. I argued that it was because the majority of the

participants, though compassionate with students who did not graduate, shared little common experiences with them and treated these students' experiences from their own stance.

I further interrogated the participants' voice in Chapter 6 by centering my discussion on the participant text, i.e., what they had to say about their experiences with the project. Learning was the predominant experience among the participants. They did not simply learn from their experiences, as is often argued in experiential learning, but experienced learning through the project. I noted five distinct modes of learning: discovery of oneself through communication, developing writing and computer skills, learning through collaboration, learning the concept of participatory research, and learning through knowledge production. Looking at the process of learning, I characterized it as *incidental, social, and critical* learning. The participants also pointed out negative experiences, such as lack of communication among the participants, frustration from failed collaboration, and limitations in the experience of learning. While discussing these issues, I stressed that it is urgent to develop educational materials for participant researchers in order to facilitate their participation in the process of research. Finally, I argued that the project allowed the participants to gain new subjectivities—sense of oneself—as an individual and a group through reflexivity and that the new subjectivities enabled them to develop a sense of agency.

In Chapter 7, by using positionality as a key conceptual framework, I located myself in the project and examined the researcher text through reflexivity. I reflected on my position in relation to the participants' in terms of race, gender, class, and education. Then I explored my role as a facilitator of the project. I refuted the passivity that the term *facilitator* might imply. I was an actively participating “organizing force” (Park, 1993, p. 9) in the project. Some participants wanted me to be a stronger leader who could impel them to develop their capacities to the utmost. This expectation led me to think of my role as an adult educator who should use her power to empower learners (Foley, 2001). However, what I could do as the researcher-as-educator might have been limited in part because of my positionality. Nevertheless, the differences between the participants and me in terms of race, gender, and class were not so evident in the project. Despite the fact that the participants and I

had radically different lived experiences, the differences were blunted to a degree because we had known each other and worked together previously. This suggests that, although positionality may limit what the researcher can do, it can also be dealt with through sustained relationships between the researcher and participants.

### **Responding to My Research Questions**

Now that I have reviewed my analysis, I return to each of my research questions. The first question was: *How does participatory video contribute to shaping participants' voices and experiences and affect knowledge construction when a group of adult learners who are socioeconomically disadvantaged generate a research topic by reflecting on their lived experiences and conduct research together?*

Participatory video can provoke participants to reflect upon their lived experiences. This is particularly the case for those who are directly influenced by the research topic. It prompts them to interact with each other and to seek solutions to the research problem. This process enables the participants to construct a voice as an individual and as a group. Such voice is instrumental in creating knowledge from the insiders' perspective, which can be very different from knowledge created by an outsider. This may be critical in conducting phenomenological studies about socially marginalized and hard-to-track populations. Even when a group of participants has little connection with people they hope to reach in their community, they can bring out the experience of the population to a great extent by reflecting on their own. And yet, as the final video of the project suggests, the participants may not give prominence to the voice of more marginalized community members because they tend to create a video from their own stance. Therefore, academic researchers should be conscious about whose voice is being heard through videos that participants create. Researchers may need to intervene actively in the process of making the video, and yet act cautiously in order to prompt participant researchers to reflect on their assumptions more deeply and to safeguard against silencing marginalized voices. It is because participatory video is not a site where the participant researchers simply talk about their experiences to synthesize new knowledge. Rather, it is a site of struggle to bring out voices among

themselves and within their community. Alongside, at an individual level, the participants of the project described learning as their predominant experience with the project. The experience of learning was challenging at times, yet pleasurable, valued, exciting, and empowering (Usher et al., 1997).

The second question was: *How does reflexivity shed new light on the knowledge of participatory video when I, as the academic researcher, look back at my own involvement in a participatory video research project?* I explored this question with the concept of positionality (Lykes, 1997; Maher & Tetreault, 1993, 2001). Positionality may explain some of my negative interactions with the participants. Although, during the overall process of the project, everyone was cooperative and mutually respectful, I was not able to understand certain reactions from the participants, especially when they remained silent. For example, although one participant suggested doing a snail mail survey, he did not help with the process. Another participant completely ignored my request to write a reflection essay although she knew that it was important to me. The participant was a white woman. True, these participants' gender and race might just be a coincidence and could have little influence on their interactions with me. By revealing their gender and race, I am not trying to simplify my relationships with the participants. What I want to emphasize is that the implementation of participatory video is indeed complex and may be contingent on the positionalities of both the researcher and participants. In the thesis project, the impact of positionality was, in general, very subtle and elusive. Nevertheless, I think the issue of positionality influenced the project throughout. As an immigrant Asian woman, I do not think I occupied a more powerful position than the participants socially. However, I did have institutional power, which the participants did not have, in the sense that I organized the research project within which the participants had to work together. Looking back at my involvement in the project, I sense that balancing these power differentials that lay between the participants and me was a part of my job in conducting the project. However, there has been little discussion on this issue in the literature of participatory video. I think this is a gap that needs to be addressed in the study of participatory video.

## Contribution to Knowledge Advancement

My thesis contributes to knowledge of participatory video in relation to research. Over the past couple of decades, there has been an increasing interest in participatory video in various fields such as education, community development, human rights, and policy making (Mitchell et al., 2012). The conceptual framework of participatory video can even go back to the 1920s when filmmaker Dziga Vertov (1924/1984) embarked on the Kino-Eye movement in the Soviet Union to study the phenomena of life that surrounded people. A more contemporary form of participatory video evolved in Canada through the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program, an initiative launched by the National Film Board of Canada and government agencies in order to reduce poverty through documentary film production in 1967 (Baker et al., 2010). Communication scholar Shirley White (2003) was one of the early researchers to implement participatory video for community-based research. As she noted, despite the history of participatory video, there has been lack of well-formulated theories to underpin practices. In this context, the recent publication *The Handbook of Participatory Video* (Milne et al., 2012) makes an important contribution to the field of participatory video. It has brought a number of participatory video practitioners together. It may inspire researchers new to this field to learn “from the ground up” (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). However, because each chapter was written in a limited space and problematized a specific critical issue, the book offers only limited descriptions of individual projects. This may leave readers unsure of what goes on inside the projects. My thesis counterbalances this. By providing an in-depth substantive analysis of a single project, I have tried to present a comprehensive picture of participatory video and to put forward its complexity in ways that can lead to further investigation. My study suggests that participatory video can foster systematic reflexivity from both researchers and participants by allowing them to examine their perspectives and experiences together. Drawing on the notion of reflexivity, I have focused on the ways in which participatory video can shape participants’ voices and experiences, the roles the researcher plays in participatory video, and the implications of her positionality in the process of participatory video research. My discussion of

this last topic may make a particularly significant contribution to the field of participatory video. Although positionality is a critical concept for building a theory that can support practice, it has been addressed only in a limited way in the literature on participatory video. There has been little discussion about how the researcher's positionality, shaped by race, gender, class, and so forth, interplays with participatory video practice. My thesis offers insight into this issue and prompts readers to carry out further inquiry.

Furthermore, my thesis, less intentionally, contributes to knowledge in adult education at two levels. At one level, the knowledge that the participants and I produced together through the project adds a new dimension to adult education. Although I did not discuss this extensively in the thesis because it was beyond the scope of my research topic, the project offers critical insight into educational experiences among low-income adults living in an inner city. It suggests that there may be a number of economically disadvantaged adults who aspire to learn and pursue higher education; yet, they often face a new set of challenges, such as commuting and childcare. They tend to be women of colour. If so, what can be done to facilitate their learning experiences? This was indeed a central question of the project. Although the participants and I focused on the problem of location, the project raised other critical issues, such as lack of social support, problems with public transportation, geographical segregation, classroom dynamics, and so on. These are important issues that should be addressed to provide adults, in particular, female learners, with needed and highly desired education. It is because, as implied in the project, classism is not isolated from sexism; rather it is maintained within a patriarchal structure (Hart, 2005; McNally, 2002).

At the other level, my thesis contributes to theoretical understandings of adult learning. In particular, it provides empirical evidence to support Watkins and Marsick's (1992) theory of informal and incidental learning. Learning was the predominant experience highlighted by the participants in their group evaluation and individual reflection essays. This prompts me to think that participatory video can be an effective way of engaging adults in a process of learning that can empower them. In the group evaluation, Dana, one of the participants, commented on this:

What we have seen is maybe doing another video, or maybe the Odyssey will have continuing education or research projects. What you have to do now is to use some learned skills of how to put together in this research project. Perhaps we ourselves will form another group. It [participatory research] is a usable material. It depends on how your life is going on and how you use it.

The participants suggested that the experience of learning was paramount in the project and required much commitment as well. I think it was mainly because they dealt with a practical issue relevant to their experience and were motivated to solve a problem together. Often they taught themselves along the way and developed new skills while participating in the project. This approach to learning may be used very effectively in an adult learning program in either formal or informal settings. I believe that participatory video can be particularly useful because the process of video production guides participants systematically from conceptualization of a problem through discussion to analysis. In addition, the possibility of having a tangible outcome can stimulate participants to engage more while having fun in the process of creating videos.

My thesis also contributes to feminist participatory research methodologies by drawing on the concepts of voice, reflexivity, and positionality. As Cahill (2007) informed her audience, interrogating power relations is germane to participatory research concerned with social change whether tackling individual relationships within social structures of power or attending to power differentials within the research process (e. g., Maguire, 1987, 2008; Lykes, 1997; Moletsane et al., 2009). When I conceived of my thesis project, gender oppression was not in my key conceptual framework. Although I was not blind to the issue, my approach was based on classism to a greater extent. Hence I recruited participants from a low-income community. However, in working with the participants, I had the privilege to work primarily with minority women, most of whom were women of colour. The project shows what difference participatory research can make when minority women take charge of investigating issues related to their experiences and can voice their concerns. They can

highlight their unique experiences that might not be easily accessed from outside. Furthermore, my thesis hones an understanding of positionality in a participatory setting. The researcher's positionality matters in the process of participatory video research. Thinking through my positionality, I came to the conclusion that we, as researchers, should exercise relentless self-interrogation or reflexivity on our relationships with participants in order to help them participate in the process of research more fully, as their participation is key to the success of participatory research; at the same time, we may need to be prepared for what the reflexivity may stir up within ourselves, as it may prompt us to examine our own lived experiences both within and outside the context of research.

Finally, my thesis contributes to testing out analytic frameworks for studying participatory video research. Drawing on Fiske's (1987, 1987/1992, 1989a, 1989b) approach to cultural studies, I identified and developed two new levels of textuality, *the participant text* and *the researcher text*, to indicate what participants and the researcher, respectively, have to say about their experiences with a project from their own stances. The project shows that interrogating these texts alone can provoke reflexivity among participants and the researcher on the process of research and bring out individual voices explicitly. By analyzing these texts, the researcher can make the process of research more transparent. Fiske's approach was centered on media. He identified three layers of texts: media products as the primary text; any materials concerned with the products as the secondary (or producer) text; and the audience text. In the context of participatory video, the producer text can underline what participants have to say about and through participatory video. By analyzing the text, the researcher can bring to the fore the participants' voices to a great extent. However, as the thesis project shows, their experiences with a project are unlikely limited to video production alone. Thus, by interrogating the participant text, the researcher can highlight their experiences in the context of research more fully and bring to light their voices even more. Likewise, by including the researcher text in the analytical framework of participatory video, the researcher can engage in reflexivity more systematically and explicitly bring to light her perspective, doubts, and beliefs. In so doing, she can also make the process of research more transparent.



## Limitations

In the thesis, I explored my research topic based on a single project. No doubt, as *The Handbook of Participatory Video* (Milne et al., 2012) suggests, there are many ways of conducting participatory video. My thesis provides only one example. It may not be a typical one, either, because the project was built upon the previous work in which the participants had learned basic video production skills and had already experienced creating participatory videos. Specifically for this reason, I purposefully selected the participants for the project in order to explore participatory video in depth in a timely manner since I would not need to address video production techniques extensively during the course of the project. The ability to select participants who had already learned video production as my sample was a strength of the project, as the participants and I could focus on the process of research more than video production itself. However, this also limited the scope of discussion in my thesis. Because I did not go over the very basic steps that I would take otherwise in terms of video production, my thesis may leave some readers questioning how participants came to learn video production skills or how other researchers can emulate the process of participatory video I described. In that regard, my thesis did not provide a full picture of participatory video. Although I left out the issue of know-how, it is very important in conducting participatory video projects because dealing with video, especially editing if required, can be a daunting task to some people, including researchers themselves if they are not already familiar with video production. Some useful texts include: *Insights into Participatory Video: A Handbook for the Field* (Lunch & Lunch, 2006) and *Participatory Video: A Practical Guide to Using Video Creatively in Group Development Work* (Shaw & Robertson, 1997). Mitchell and de Lange (2011) also provided a detailed description of know-how specifically in an educational research context and using a method that does not involve the process of editing.

Another major limitation was time. I set the time boundary as 11 weeks for the project in order to have a reasonable amount of time to explore my research topic with the participants. However, in many ways it turned out to be too short for the scale of the project. As one participant suggested (see Extract 7.3), the boundary in time

limited the extent to which the participants were involved in the analytical process. Consequently, it also limited my own analysis of what the participants could do in terms of analysis and distribution of knowledge. Perhaps if I could have stayed in the research site longer, I might have been able to work with at least some of the participants who were willing to continue to work on the project. Then, my thesis might be telling a quite different story. Nevertheless, I learned what could be accomplished within 11 weeks. Many things can happen. What the researcher may need to do is to keep a project focused. If possible, it may be useful to make the length of time more flexible if she attempts to conduct participatory video research in the way I did.

### **Moving Forward**

The contribution of my project to knowledge advancement also points to areas for further research. As I implied in discussing the limitations of the project, there are many ways of exploring participatory video. Scholars have used it with children and indigenous people (e.g., Plush, 2012; Kindon, 2003, respectively), as well as people with early-onset dementia (e.g., Capstick, 2012). Some projects were conducted through an intensive one-day workshop (e.g., Mitchell & de Lange, 2011) followed up by community-based work over several months or longer, and others, for some years (e.g., Bloustien, 2003). Researchers have looked at the process of participatory video rigorously while exploring it in various contexts. Yet, I think that the use of participatory video is still in need of further interrogation of the process itself in order to build a more solid theory that can inform practices. I believe that this thesis is a step in the right direction. As Luttrell (2010) suggested, the more transparent and reflexive we, as researchers, are about the use of participatory video the more we gain knowledge of it and also have a deeper understanding of the social phenomena we aim to study.

Furthermore, while working on my thesis, I incidentally obtained much knowledge of adult learning. The project showed that participatory video has great potential for facilitating adult learning. Exploring this potential purposefully can be an

exciting topic that can move adult learning and participatory video forward together. I also came to gain insight into what role positionality might play in participatory video by locating myself as the researcher in the project. The issue of positionality is subtle and elusive. Nevertheless, the more I think of the issue the more I think it is critical to be aware of its subtlety in order to develop theories of participatory video that work in practice. The researcher's positionality in terms of race, gender, class, education, and other factors is an area that deserves more scholarly attention.

My doctoral study has opened up a possibility for me to be in the world differently, thinking differently and acting differently. By writing this thesis, I have accomplished a small personal goal. Yet I feel I only came to reach the starting point of a scholarly task. In concluding, I borrow from the words of Herman Hesse (1972), who wrote:

To be satisfied was the very thing I could not bear. Poetry became suspect to me. The house became narrow to me. No goal that I reached was a goal, every path was a detour, every rest gave birth to new longing. (p. 157)

In the future I hope to explore participatory video in the context of informal education in the context of such areas as public health education, labour and social movements, and ethnographic studies among socially marginalized populations, in order to contribute to advancing social justice through my research.

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## RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Kyung-Hwa Yang, PhD student, McGill University (kayland@gmail.com  
/ Tel: 773-679-xxxx)

Research Topic: Critical Inquiry into a Participatory Video Method for Social Sciences  
Research

Supervisors: Dr. Ratna Ghosh (ratna.ghosh@mcgill.ca)  
Dr. Claudia Mitchell (claudia.mitchell@mcgill.ca)

**PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:** I am a PhD student in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. My thesis research is concerned with analyzing and theorizing a participatory video method. In this paradigm of research, research participants collectively set, analyze, and solve a problem by using video production technique. This study will contribute to the development of participatory video methods. The research findings will be disseminated through my doctoral dissertation and possibly journal publications and conference presentations.

### PROCEDURE:



For this purpose, I will carry out a study with you and your colleagues who already took a Video-Telling Workshop and call us a Video-Telling Summer Research Group. We will meet together for about three hours a day for eight days in June, July, and August. Once a topic is chosen through discussion, you will be asked to conduct two video interviews and edit them outside of group meetings. Then, we will collectively analyze

the interviews, create one final video, and write up a report. The final video may be shown in a community-based screening event at the end of August and the report and video may be distributed among government policy makers, donors, and anyone who is relevant to the research topic you will choose, as long as resources are available. While facilitating this participatory research, I will observe our research progress and obtain written feedback from you to evaluate this study. Our group evaluation may be recorded on audio for my analysis. There may be a 2-hour follow-up session in a couple of months after the completion of this study to discuss how another Clemente course students react to your video and report.

*Do you agree to audio-recording the final evaluation session?*

☐ Yes ☐ No

*Your participation will remain confidential in my thesis and journal publications. However, the final video and report may be included in them. In that case, do you agree to reveal your name in the report and the video credit? (If you do not agree, I will remove your name from them for my publications.)*

☐ Yes ☐ No

**REQUIREMENTS:** You will be asked to follow a set of ethics rules when you conduct an interview. An interview guide will be provided and you will be required to use the Interview Consent Form. Following the conduct of social sciences research, videotapes and consent forms that you will have used for this study will be collected at the end of this research.

**DATA STORAGE:** To respect the privacy and confidentiality of your interviewees, all the original tapes and the interview consent forms will be kept at my home in a locked box and no one can access them unless all the Research Group participants agree. The audio recording of the evaluation (burned on CD) and your consent form will be kept in the same location. Three additional sets of the final video and report will be duplicated for my supervisors and me.

**BENEFITS AND RISKS:** There will be no monetary compensation for your participation in this study. However, you will receive training for video production and research skills. You will be also given a research notebook and a copy of the final video and report. Additionally, you will have the shared authorship of the final video and report. No foreseeable risks are expected in this study except in relation to interviews. Interview ethics will be discussed and guidelines will be provided to minimize any risks.

**RIGHTS:** Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at anytime by talking to me. In this case, you have the right to ask me not to include materials you have created. Finally, if you have any questions regarding the rights of research participants and ways in which this research is conducted, you may contact McGill Research Ethics Officer (Lynda McNeil, (514) 398-xxxx, [lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca](mailto:lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca)).

		MM/DD/YYYY
Print Your Name	Signature	Date
Kyung-Hwa (Kay) YANG		MM/DD/YYYY
Researcher	Signature	Date

## **READY, SET, ENGAGE! AN ANALYSIS OF ENGAGEMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT OF ODYSSEY PROJECT STUDENTS**

Nia Gabrielle

July 20, 2010

### **INTRODUCTION**

Earl Shorris believed that the way out of poverty and disenfranchisement was through the study of various courses in the Humanities such as, philosophy, art history and literature, so in New York in 1995, he began the Clemente Course in the Humanities. In 2000 the Clemente Course was brought to Chicago as The Odyssey Project (OP). Since then it has expanded from its original location site at the Carol Robertson Center on the Westside of Chicago to several sites located throughout Illinois. The OP provides college-level introductory courses in the Humanities to low income adults with the conviction “that engagement with the humanities can offer individuals a way out of poverty by fostering habits of sustained reflection and skills of communication and critical thinking (<http://www.prairie.org/odyssey project>)”.

Since 2008, the Video-Telling Workshop (VTW) has been offered to OP alumni each summer. Aiming at progressive social change through collective and creative action, and under the instruction of Kay Yang, the VTW has allowed students access to tools and methods of video documentary filmmaking in order to expose them to greater methods of expression along with an opportunity for personal empowerment and growth.

In the summer of 2010, we alumni of both the OP and VT class graduates formed a Video-Telling Summer Research Group to carry out participatory research grounded in the OP community.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Sheila Fondren, a 2006 OP graduate said that the OP gave her the energy to become a more positive force in the world. This is most encouraging to all involved in the

Clement Course. It would be better if more OP students could experience the surge of positive energy that Fondren has experienced. Many OP students, however, do not even complete the OP course. The news is unsettling because the OP has minimized many of the obstacles that could interfere with completion of OP courses. In the First Year Course, books, transportation, tutors, and childcare are all provided for free to students. The same help is provided to Bridge Course students with the exception of childcare. Yet, the student retention rates are still low.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND GOALS**

The Summer Research Group would like to find out why some students do not complete OP courses and to understand the obstacles encountered which foster disengagement. We also want to know what aspects of the program keeps many of the students engaged with the course. Within this circumstance, the Summer Research group aims to (1) find out what aspects of the program keeps students engaged with the course, (2) if OP instruction is conducive to learning engagement, and (3) what changes can be made, if any, in order to retain a greater portion of students entering the OP program.

In this light, we ask the following questions: What interferes with completion of the OP course? How does the undertaking of OP courses influence the life of its students? What features of the OP program do students find to be most conducive to learning engagement?

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Centered on participatory research methodology, we will use various methods to answer our research questions, including:

- Online survey: We will conduct an online survey utilizing the service of Survey Monkey. This survey will go out to former OP students with active and legitimate email addresses on file;
- Group discussion and analysis: We will conduct group conversations among those in the Summer Research Group and analyze how the OP has influenced the lives of its graduates, and why the graduates continue to support the OP. Again, the Summer



Research Group consists of alumni of both OP and the VT classes and so the researchers in this group are excellent resources in helping the OP understand what works well for OP students;

- Individual video interviews: We will conduct live on-camera interviews with former OP students who did not complete OP courses. Each researcher will interview two OP students who failed to complete the OP course. Each interview will be transcribed and analyzed by the interviewer and edited down to approximately seven minutes long with the analysis to be presented in a group discussion.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

We alumni of the OP and the VTW, participating in the Summer Research Group, believe the greatest benefit of our participation in the OP to be the validation of our potential along with the encouragement to move forward in that potential. We would like every student who joins the OP family to experience that validation and encouragement. Our research will not only help improve the student retention rate, but will also enable the OP and its supporters help more of the disenfranchised release themselves from the bonds of poverty and become actively engaged in creating the life they seek for themselves.

### **DISTRIBUTION**

This results obtained by the Summer Research Group will be distributed to teachers and instructors in the OP. It will also be distributed to donors and other supporters of the OP. Filmed interviews and report analyses will be presented at conferences, fundraisers and other events to support the OP and the IHC. It may also be presented to various policy makers in the IHC and the OP in order to improve the OP, and possibly, the IHC.



## INTERVIEW GUIDE

As a responsible interviewer, you must adhere to certain rules related to interview ethics. It is particularly important so that the content of the interviews may be included in Kay's thesis and other academic publications.

(1) All the interviewees must be over 18 years old. Some social sciences research includes minors as interviewees, but this particular study requires the age restriction.

(2) You will need to clearly explain the rights of interviewees written in the consent form before obtaining consent from each interviewee. Here is the recommended procedure:

When you make an initial contact with your interviewees, explain the purpose of this interview and how it may be used. To do so, introduce yourself as a co-researcher of the Video-Telling Summer Research Group and tell the interviewees about the research topic that we work on. Then, explain that this interview may be included in Kay's thesis, which will analyze the process of this research. Once they agree, set up an appointment.

On the interview day, take a couple of interview consent forms with you and clearly explain the interviewee's rights, as written in the interview consent form. For example, they may skip questions you do not feel like answering, choose whether to reveal their names, and withdraw their participation at any time. They will be invited to a screening event at the end of August and given a copy of the final video if their interview is chosen. After explaining these steps, while reading the consent form with the interviewees, ask them to sign at the bottom. Then start interviewing.

Once the interview is over, show your appreciation for their participation and remind them that they will be given a DVD copy of the final video if their interview is chosen as part of a final video. Also let them know that they have the right to withdraw their interviews at any time by contacting either you or Kay. If they withdraw, their interviews will no longer be referred to.

(3) You must not ask topics related to suicide, depression, and domestic abuse, because they are very sensitive ethical issues.

(4) After interviewing, bring all the consent forms to group meetings. To respect the privacy and confidentiality of your interviewees, all the original tapes and consent forms will be kept in a secure place once this study is over. Without explicit consent from the interviewees, the original videos will not be used for another project.



## INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I am participating in the Video-Telling Summer Research Group as a co-researcher. We look at [research topic].

This interview may be included in the final video that the Summer Research Group will create and analyzed in the Group's final report. The final video and the report may be circulated among the OP instructors, donors or policy makers for adult education, and can be presented in academic conferences. Once this research is over, your interview tape will be kept in a secure area that no one will have access to.

*Do you agree to reveal your name in the final video?* ☐ Yes ☐ No

*Do you agree to reveal your name in the final report of the Summer Research Group project?* ☐ Yes ☐ No

*Do you agree to have the final video uploaded online if your interview is included?*

- ☐ Yes, for all types, including YouTube
- ☐ Yes, only for restricted views, such as password-protected academic sites
- ☐ No

Additionally, this interview is part of the thesis study that Kay Yang, PhD student in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University, is carrying out. In her thesis, she will analyze the use of video production for collaborative research conducted with non-academic people. To do so, she organized the Summer Research Group. While the Summer Research Group carries out its own research, Kay will observe and analyze its progress for her own study. Her supervisors are Dr. Ratna Ghosh and Dr. Claudia Mitchell at McGill University. You may contact Kay via email at [kayland@gmail.com](mailto:kayland@gmail.com), if you have any questions about her study. Thus, this interview may be included in Kay's thesis and other academic publications or presentations if it is included in the final video and/or report of the Summer Research Group.

*Do you agree that Kay include your interview in her publications or presentations?* ☐ Yes ☐ No

*Do you agree that Kay reveal your name in such cases?* ☐ Yes ☐ No

**YOUR BENEFITS:** There will be no monetary compensation for your interview. However, you will be given a copy of the final video if your interview is included in it. You will be also cordially invited to the screening event at the end of August.

**YOUR RIGHTS:** Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and there is no foreseeable risk involved in this interview. However, you have the right to skip any questions that you do not feel like answering or stop the interview completely. You will also have a chance to see the way in which this interview will have been edited in the final video on the screening day. You may also withdraw your interview at any time by talking to Kay or me. In this case, you will have the right to change the options you made above and/or to ask not to include your interview. It will be removed from further disseminations of the research findings. Finally, if you have any questions regarding the rights of research interviewees and ways in which this interview is conducted, you may contact McGill Research Ethics Officer (Lynda McNeil, Tel: 514-398-6831, [lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca](mailto:lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca)).

	MM/DD/YYYY	
Print Interviewee's Name	Signature	Date
	MM/DD/YYYY	
Print Interviewer's Name	Signature	Date

## Appendix V: Survey questionnaire

### **The Video-Telling Summer Research Group**

We, Video-Telling Summer Research Group, are several graduates of the Odyssey Project (OP). In conjunction with Kay Yang's (Video-Telling Workshop instructor) doctoral thesis study, we are compiling data to create a short report about the experience of the OP students. Please provide answers to the following seven questions.

1) Did you complete the OP?

- a. 1<sup>st</sup> Year                      Yes   or   No
- b. Bridge Course              Yes   or   No

2) In your experience, did the OP class instruction encourage you to learn more?

Yes \_\_\_\_ Somewhat \_\_\_\_ Barely \_\_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_\_  
Why or how? (Please elaborate your answer)

3) Was there anything that you did not like about the OP? (e.g. location, transportation, class room environment, class instruction, class mates (age or sex), etc.)

4) What were your greatest challenges in taking the OP classes?

5) Has the OP influenced your life?

Yes \_\_\_\_ Somewhat \_\_\_\_ Barely \_\_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_\_  
Why or how? (Please elaborate your answer).

6) Referring back to the OP's mission, "The Odyssey Project is founded on the premise to make people free, and it proceeds on the conviction that engagement with the humanities can off individuals a way out of poverty by fostering habits of sustained reflection and skills of communication and critical thinking," do you as a former or current student of the OP feel free in any way as a result of your participation in the project?

Yes \_\_\_\_ Somewhat \_\_\_\_ Barely \_\_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_\_  
Why or how? (Please elaborate your answer)

7) If you are interested in talking with us in person, please e-mail Star at [star@xxx.com](mailto:star@xxx.com) or type in your contact information below.