

## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Just Research in Contentious Times: Widening the Methodological Imagination***

Author: **Michelle Fine**

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Reviewer: **Valentina Rada, MBA, PMP, PMI-ACP**

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### Introduction

Just Research in Contentious Times is a book that outlines ways to design successful and impactful participatory research projects. Fine, the author of the book, is a second-generation immigrant from Europe. She comes from a middle-class Jewish family and her roots are highly portrayed on who she further became: a mother, a teacher, a writer, a researcher. The book starts as a novel about her family and childhood and how Jewish culture and customs put a fingerprint on her life.

In the book the author portrays the true meaning of researchers, that of being caring and empathetic with others, of giving back more than receiving. Fine provides in her book thoughtful ways to present her epistemology and ontology, and how participatory research could be performed in constructive ways for its participants.

### Overview of Book's Structure

The book is structured key six areas that help a novice researcher better understand the meaning of critical participatory research: 1) *Loss and Desire: Bearing Witness in White, Working-Class, Suburban New Jersey*. That talks about author's origins and impact of her research; 2) *Exiles Within: Wild Tongues and Critical Bifocals at the Radical Margins*. Research on how Muslim American youth adapts in the US after 9/11 attacks; 3) *Civics Lessons: The Color and Class of Educational Betrayal and Desire*. Students perception over education system, instructors and other students; 4) *Wicked Problems, Flying Monkeys, and Prec(ar)ious Lives: A Matter of Time?* School disruptions, teachers' turnover and long-term substitutes impact on students' lives and academics; 5) *Just Methods. Historic and Contemporary Laboratories of Democratic Knowledge Production*. Tracing racial patterns of inequity; 6) *Speaking Words of Wisdom: Metabolizing Oppression into Intersectional Activism, Radical Wit, and Care Work.; Conclusion: Critical Participatory Action Research and Democracies: Lighting the Slow Fuse of the Research Imagination*.

## Highlights

As the author presents a couple of researches in the book, one major point is dedicated to community participatory research of how immigrants, those of different color or different sexual orientation adapt to the US culture. She calls them as “exiled within” (Fine, 2017, p. 11). She even goes deeper with her study participants and objective, around the dropout in crisis in high schools. It is touching her high school memory of the percent dropouts when she graduated. Her research instruments were unique and original. The identity maps she used to research feelings of acculturation of young American Muslims. The results were emotional, these young people reported high level of discrimination, but most sadly depression, anxiety. They see themselves less American and less engaged.

The other area of research Fine explores and presents in her book is related to focus groups as insightful approach related to qualitative method. The beauty of focus groups is that allows researchers to go deeper to the respondents’ world and be able to transcribe that sense to the audience. Fine does an amazing job capturing not only the dialog but the emotions and the untold body language.

## Highlights: What I liked!

The way Fine makes the transition from her personal and family heritage is insightful and helps the reader “see” her world through her lenses. It is the way she brings the reader to the main roots of what made her the research she is today. I can relate to her memories, especially those about her mom. Fine’s participatory research brought a lot of learnings for me as a novice researcher. I really enjoyed how she was able to feel and sympathize with her respondents and her research techniques.

What I would have expected to see more in the book, and from Fine’s learning, is how her studies improved the lives of the participants she interviewed. Throughout the book there was a sense of compassion and unfairness for the minorities, and I can surely sympathize with them, I still believe that our society should find solution rather than issues. Fine does a great job identifying the issues for why kids drop school, and how minorities are discriminated. However, I was expecting to see how these issues are further evaluated and appropriate solutions are found. I can see how differences can create frustrations, but we need to encourage students and minorities to overcome their frustrations and to blend to with rest of the society.

Fine’s transition from her epistemology, her roots to the five studies covered in the book is well done and looks like a blend of belletristic and research. Reading through her book, I was easily able to transpose myself into her world and further into her research studies. Every case being well narrated, but also structured in a manner that a novice researcher can comprehend and learn. Prior to reading her book, Community-Based Participatory research was not clear for me related to the approach, but Fine made look easier and having much more practical sense.

## Who might benefit from the Book?

I would highly recommend this book to both novice and advanced researchers. Novice researchers can learn how to outline their epistemology and how social research methods, such as participatory research, can impact the way our society perceive others different than the majority.

## Conclusion

Fine's book is inspiring in the way it flows, from novel to research. Every research example is presented in a narrative way that anyone can understand, and same time so profound that research techniques are described as well. Fine's book and her research are warning signals to learn to tolerate and include others into our lives and minimize their struggle while they try to adapt.

The way Fine presents the outcome, the results and the insights of her research is done in more narrative way, being able to tell a story and make easier to understand for her participants, which most of the time, are minority young people. That is presented as a dialog, and the sketches of her respondents are insightful as well. From the way she runs her research, Fine feels like she blends in with the crowd she is researching. She is not only passionate about her research, but she is empathetic as well.

Fine's book and her research are warning signals of how to tolerate and include others in our lives and minimize their struggle while they try to adapt.

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For more about this book, go to: <https://newbooksnetwork.com/michelle-fine-just-research-in-contentious-times-widening-the-methodological-imagination-teachers-college-2018/>

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## About the Reviewer



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Valentina Rada's professional experience includes twenty years of experience in market research, retail and restaurant industries as research analyst and project manager. She is a Project Management Professional and an Agile Certified Practitioner. She has a Master in Business Administration from the University of the Incarnate Word. She is currently pursuing her education as a PhD student in Organizational Leadership at the University of the Incarnate Word.

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