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The task herein requires a critical analysis of research by identifying the strengths and weaknesses that are underlying assumptions of a scholarly study on power. The article by Culley and Hughey (2008) argue that as a result of their case findings, community experiences in participating in social disputes so relevant (such as waste hazard issues) align to theoretical views of power. They looked at approximately four years of data collection and were able to ascertain “ Results illustrated how participation was limited and how citizen influence could be manipulated via control of resources, barriers to participation, agenda setting, and shaping conceptions about what participation was possible” (Culley and Hughey, 2008, p. 99). In other words the way their research uncovered a study on participatory power, framed it in a manner which presupposed if their actions correlated to powerlessness, rebellion, or what it meant to whatever community project was involved with the dispute.

In the case of the Culley and Hughey article, one weakness stands apparent. The discussion begins, following a brief abstract, with a perusal of all types of power irrelevant to the discourse they are embarking upon. For example, they mention a litany of all kinds of power naming “ feminist power,” “ reverent power,” expert power, “ zero sum,” “ zero plus,” and on and on it goes appearing as a sidetrack to the issue at hand (Culley and Hughey, 2008, p. 99). This weakness however, is balanced by the targeting of a relevant issue when they begin to unravel a view about conflict and power – in terms of social theory – and what it means for ordinary individuals to be involved with various multi-level manifestations of power. Culley and Hughey (2008) suggest that some researchers like Parenti argue a naïve

approach largely due to the nature of relationships and neglecting to place social problems into the mix.

In discussing their three-dimensional view of power among they initially set the stage for the historical background of the 3-year study. The City of Sugar Creek in Missouri is the site of a crude oil pipeline refinery producing gasoline and other fuel-related products wherein eventually “ Pollution problems reportedly plagued the refinery even before environmental laws were established” (Culley and Hughey, 2008, p. 100). One other perceived weakness in the analysis is that the discussion takes the direction of quibbling over how the corporate legal structure, in representation of the oil refinery, have little research to look to in terms of research that had already been published in the literature. The underlying assumption is that the ordinary citizenry community movements are dead in the water before they begin to fight for not being mistreated, in terms of poisonous fumes and waste materials contaminating their living spaces.

One other example of a research driven investigation had been conducted by Jacobsen and Raakjær (2012) who focus on the co-politics of the case of a Greenland fisheries project in connection with how much catch is allowed under the auspices of allowable policy. A nice, strength in their research on power politics, from the perspective of the average guy or gal in the community, is the firm focus upon the local management and potential (or real) governance powers of “ the creation of alliances of the subject-positions that seek control of the self-rule fisheries governance decision-making”(Jacobsen and Raakjær, 2012, p. 175). An excellent diagram graph presents a visual of power structures that overlap, and compare and contrast

to the entire governance system regarding the co-relationship to all the main elements of the fisheries natural system. Most importantly, perhaps, is how the diagram shows the flow of information.

The kinds of research analysis that really helps people to best understand any situation is when clear graphs show the main components that you are discussing, in the first place. One great example of an overview research presentation concerning community participation and power engagement comes from the United States sector. The report from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (2000) focuses upon how crucial community participation is, hinting that social awareness and active involvement form the keys to success in delivery of strategic plan development. The report states “ Community participation is one of the key ingredients of an empowered community,” because such participation is like a “ heart that pumps” the lifeblood in the business of retaining and garnering resources and getting partners to commit in mutual efforts (United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development, 2000, p. 3). The article incorporates into the research commentary, regarding community power, that when members work together with partners there can be a win-win situation wherein all ideas are welcome to solve a problem - by not leaving power in the hands of a few, but by utilizing the concept of decentralized power.

In creating a research report on power that community participants may (or may not) wield, it is important to not look at the situation narrowly. Even in the case wherein a battle over pollutants contaminating residential living spaces appear to be a lost cause because of the weighty political power of

huge corporations, or moneyed legal interests – sustainability will be the deciding factor for everyone’s survival in the end. Politics is always with us, so these statements are not to suggest otherwise. Grogan (2013) argues that policy does not simply sit dormant while the higher-ups and elite act upon their whims, but rather quotes Marone insisting that policy-making holds a built-in mechanism suitable for participatory democracy. At least this concept seems to have a chance of working, thus far, in the U. S.

In conclusion, one way to mitigate the weaknesses and fortify the strengths in any to address underlying assumptions when studying a research analysis on power, is to search for clear straightforward reporting that allows for real-life possibilities. Obviously there are market-based realities to face and media always plays a factor. But at the end of the day, good research tries to comprehend how you can identify the balances of participatory power.

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