Fifty Years of Practice and Innovation Participatory Video (PV)

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Abstract

Benefiting from more than 50 years of practice and innovation, participatory video (PV) is a firmly established approach in the field of communications for development. The term "participatory video" is used to refer to a very wide range of practices that involve nonprofessionals in making their own films as a means to engage communities, develop critical awareness, and amplify citizens' voices to discuss social problems that they prioritize. The canonical texts on participatory video all make reference to PV's grounding in the praxis of Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire, and the influence of feminist practice is often also noted in

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the literature. The authors also draw on affordance theory as a way of clarifying the possibilities for social action enabled by participatory video. In recent years, a number of important critiques have been leveled at PV which have reopened a normative debate about what practices, values, and objectives should constitute participatory video. Rapid recent advances in digital filmmaking technologies coupled with falling costs of mobile devices are opening up exciting new future possibilities and challenges for PV. This chapter reviews a range of PV practices, examines key critiques, and assesses potential future directions for participatory video in communication for development.

Introduction

Participatory video (PV) is a process of involving people without filmmaking expertise in making short films about social issues affecting them, using their own words and their own images. Unlike other kinds of filmmaking, participatory video hands over control of the filmmaking equipment and of the editorial process to inexpert users. An external practitioner or "facilitator" is often responsible for structuring and guiding the PV process in which participants first reflect critically on the social issues that are affecting them and the change they wish to see, before producing their own film to represent their priority issues from their perspective.

In one of the foundational texts on the subject, Shaw and Robertson (1997: 26) describe participatory video as: "a process of media production to empower people with the confidence, skills and information they need to tackle their own issues." However, there is no commonly agreed definition of participatory video. What the term PV *should* refer to and what the focus of PV *should* be are contested normative debates. In practice the term participatory video is used to describe a wide range of distinct community-led filmmaking practices, and there are many processes that closely resemble participatory video that are not referred to as PV by their practitioners (High et al. 2012). For the purposes of this chapter, we take an inclusive approach as to what is considered to be participatory video. This inclusive perspective is perhaps best captured in the definition of PV developed collectively by the practitioner network "PV-NET," which described participatory video as: "a collaborative approach to working with a group or community in shaping and creating their own film, in order to open spaces for learning and communication and to enable positive change and transformation" (PV-NET 2008).

Description

There is also no single agreed correct way to do participatory video. However, it is possible to identify many elements common to different participatory video processes from practical "how-to" guides, including those authored by Shaw and Robertson (1997) and Lunch and Lunch (2006). In most PV processes, an experienced facilitator or team arrives with cameras, tripods, and any other equipment

necessary to make the film. A group of participants take part in practical exercises to familiarize themselves with the functioning of cameras and related equipment. Participants are engaged in group dialogue about the social issues most important to them, and they decide what kind of film they would like to make. Participants then collaborate in the group production of a script or visual "storyboard" which is sketched on paper. This "paper edit" then becomes the plan which participants use to guide them as they take up the camera to begin filming the scenes depicted in each frame of the storyboard in order to produce their own film.

Periodically during the filming and editing process, participants pause to review their progress and to critically reflect on both the technical process and the social issues that they are trying to articulate on film. For some practitioners this group process of dialogue about the social issues is the most important aspect of participatory video. From this perspective, participatory video is designed to create a space for participants to critically reflect and learn together about the injustice that they experience and its root causes and to discuss how they can best communicate their views and act together to produce the social change that they value. From this perspective the process of participatory video has an intrinsic value in creating new spaces for group reflection and dialogue about issues that may be socially taboo or are not prioritized. The films produced fulfill an epistemological role as an iterative process of reflection, filming, and editing, through which participants come to a deeper understanding of their own situation and produce a clearer articulation of their priorities for change. As such participatory video is a means for collective self-inquiry and reflection (Freire 1970) that can enhance participants' ability to "experience their capability and power to produce knowledge autonomously" (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991: 17).

In some processes it may be only the immediate group of filmmakers themselves who reflect critically on the issues. In other processes wider community screenings are central to the iterative processes. Early screenings of the rough footage may be held with the wider community in order to stimulate broader debate and inclusion and input about the issues and to generate agreement about the core message that they wish to communicate in the final edit (Braden and Huong 1998; White 2003; Lunch and Lunch 2006).

For other practitioners it is important that participatory video processes go beyond consciousness-raising of the participants and there is an extrinsic goal to communicate to external audiences a call to action for social change. This often involves constructing films that contain an advocacy message targeted at distant decision-makers. This participant-authored representation format of PV (Shaw 2012) is perhaps the classic form of participatory video and echoes back to the original 1957 Fogo Process (see below).

Product Versus Process

Put another way, some participatory video initiatives are primarily process-focused, while others are primarily product-focused. In some PV initiatives, the primary

objective is to create a space for group dialogue and learning, and the production quality of the film is of secondary concern (Nemes et al. 2007). It may be the case that the subject matter of the film is so personal or political that disclosing the content to a wider audience would raise serious ethical or personal safety risks (Thomas and Britton 2012; Teitelbaum 2012). However, in other PV initiatives, the primary objective may be to communicate an advocacy message in pursuit of social change. If the intended audience is the government or other high-level policy makers, a decision may be taken to invest a larger share of the project's finite resources to achieving high production values in the film. This process-product distinction is not binary. Many PV initiatives value process and product to varying degrees (Kyung-Hwa Yang 2012). Some participatory video processes begin life as internally focused, but over time participants develop an aspiration to project their perspective to external audiences (Shaw and Robertson 1997). In an interview for this chapter, Namita Singh, an experienced PV practitioner at Digital Green in India, said that "[over time] *I started to focus more on the* technical quality of the video. Earlier I used to think that technical quality is not important, the content is what actually matters. Now I place a lot of emphasis is on being able to share the info clearly and being entertaining. It has to compete with highly entertaining content like Bollywood." Given finite resources, a trade-off is necessary between dedicating time and resources on the group consciousness process and taking time to perfect the technical quality of the sound recordings and editing effects. There is no single agreed correct way to practice participatory video, but being aware of and transparent about these trade-offs and opportunity costs is important.

This rest of this chapter will first locate participatory video in a historical and theoretical context before drawing on practitioner interviews and desk research to reflect on the perceived benefits, limitations, and future directions for participatory video practice.

History

The earliest cited example of participatory filmmaking is the 1967 work by the people of Fogo Island, Newfoundland, facilitated by a team headed by Donald Snowden (Snowden 1984). The "Fogo Process" began by filming community members' views on pressing social issues and then organizing 35 separate community screenings to a combined audience of 3000 islanders (60% of the total population). Post-screening discussions were used to animate social dialogue and to identify key issues of common concern to Fogo Islanders. The islanders then co-authored and appeared in a film to represent their concerns. Snowden and his team filmed and edited the film, and it was shown to government officials. The Minister of Fisheries then recorded a filmed response to play back to the communities. This film-mediated dialogue improved communication and dialogue, altered government policy, and led to Fogo Islanders forming a fishing cooperative that increased employment and improved livelihoods (Crocker 2003; Corneil 2012). The

Fogo Process became an exemplar of communication for social change and, in modified formats, has been used in numerous locations around the world.

Participatory video practices have diverse roots including the community arts movement, feminist documentary filmmaking, action research, and video for change activism. Social workers and community arts activists began harnessing video's potential from the 1970s onward (Shaw and Robertson 1997). Feminist documentary filmmakers emphasized the need to express women's knowledge in their own words (Lesage 1978). In action research PV has long been used as a process for citizen groups to analyze the unequal power relationships that they experience (Kindon 2003), and in the video for change movement, Gregory (2005) reminds us of indigenous media initiatives in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Drishti Media Collective in India from the 1990s onward.

Theoretical Framework

The following sections provide a theoretical framework for the chapter. Foundational texts by practitioners of participatory video all ground their work in the praxis of Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire. Contemporary authors increasingly incorporate critical feminist perspectives in their approaches. To these framings here we add the concept of "affordances" as a way of illuminating the unique action possibilities made available to practitioners by participatory video, when compared to other participatory methodologies.

Critical Theories

Although diverse practice traditions contribute to participatory video processes, in terms of theoretical grounding, all of the canonical texts on PV all refer to Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy as having influenced their participatory video practice (Shaw and Robertson 1997; Braden and Huong 1998; White 2003; Lunch and Lunch 2006). These core PV texts all refer to Freire's most well-known texts (1970, 1974) in which he introduced his critical pedagogy of group reflection on generative images (sketches) in order to enhance participant's "critical consciousness" about their own experience of social injustice and its causes. Freire described this process as one of learning to "read the world" more critically in order to "act in the world" for social change. It is interesting to note that Freire does not mention video in these (1970, 1974) texts but 20 years later he did write specifically about the value of using video images to generate critical consciousness (Horton and Freire 1990). Given the centrality of Freirean theory to much of participatory video and Freire's specific advocacy for the use of video in this publication, it is perhaps surprising that it is not more widely read and cited (Roberts 2015). While Freire did not himself use video, he was explicit in this text that video could be used, in pace of the original sketches, as generative images used to stimulate critical

dialogue about the often hidden structures shaping experienced inequality (Horton and Friere 1990: 88):

> Give a camera to several people and say: 'Record what you want, and next week we meet together [to discuss your videos]... They [will be] reading reality through the camera. . . now it is necessary to deepen the reading, and to discuss with the group lots of issues that are behind and sometimes hidden. . . trying to understand the concrete reality that you are in (Freire in: Horton and Friere 1990: 88)

Despite participatory video's roots in emancipatory social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, participatory video practice was arguably diluted in the 1990s and 2000s when, it has been argued, participatory methods in general were "co-opted for a range of agendas other than those with the needs of the poor and oppressed at the their heart" (Cooke 2001: 120). By the late 1990s, participation had become institutionalized as a condition of receiving funding for research projects, establishing what Braden and Huong (1998: 94) referred to as the "new participatory orthodoxy." This practically compelled all those seeking grant-funding to claim that their initiatives were "participatory" in some way. All participatory methods, including participatory video, were in danger of being co-opted. Cooke and Kothari (2001) famously called this the "Tyranny of Participation." This "compulsory participation" resulted in both a dilution of the original, radical meaning of participation and attempts to manipulate "participatory" processes in order to legitimize the top-down agendas of governments and funders (Shaw 2007, 2012).

In recent years there has been a concerted effort to reclaim and reaffirm an emancipatory participatory video practice that enhances critical consciousness (Benest 2010, Roberts and Lunch 2015) and political capabilities (Williams 2004). This movement to reorientate participation back "From Tyranny to Transformation" (Hickey and Mohan 2004) does not deny that forms of fake participation continue to exist. What it claims is that the existence of fake participation does not prevent other practitioners from practicing a participatory video process in which they create space for participants "to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire 1970: 17).

In the last 15 years, progress has also been made in developing a consciously feminist practice of participatory video (Kindon 2003). It has been shown that PV can be an effective means to hear women's voices, validate women's experiences, and project women's representations of issues that they prioritize (Waite and Conn 2012). Feminist practitioners seek to bear witness to issues of gender injustice drawing on the knowledge and experience of those most directly and faithfully articulating their standpoint (Harding 2004). Participatory video can also be used to create a space for participants to effect their own critical reading of what Naila Kabeer (2013: 2) calls "the dense root-structure of gender injustices experienced in daily lives" and to articulate the intersectionality of the disadvantage and discrimination women experience (Poveda and Roberts 2017).

Affordance Theory

The field of communication for development provides a range of approaches that participants can draw upon to produce social change. In order to produce the development outcomes associated with participatory video, practitioners might alternatively use, for example, digital storytelling, participatory photography, or participatory theater. Therefore, the question arises why should a practitioner choose participatory video? One way of answering this question is with reference to the idea of "affordances."

The concept of affordances was originated by the visual psychologist Gibson (1977) to refer to actionable properties suggested to a user by something's visual appearance. Later, in the field of technology design, Norman (1988) appropriated the term in order to signify elements of a technology's design that *invite*, *allow*, *or enable* a person to act in a particular way; a cup, for example, signifies the affordance of "liquid conveyance." The technology of a cup, from this perspective, *invites*, *allows*, *or enables* a user to convey liquid. In other words the cup affords the user the *action possibility* of conveying liquid – in a way that a fork does not.

The concept of affordances is relevant to the field of communication for development as it provides us with a basis for determining which participatory methodology to use; it also provides us with an analytical tool for distinguishing which actions are made possible by each participatory methodology (Roberts 2017). For example, from this perspective, participatory video can be argued to have specific affordances for the co-construction of a group advocacy position, compared with digital storytelling which has affordances for eliciting individual participant narratives. As a digital medium, participatory video has the affordance of transmitting its product instantly worldwide, which is not an inherent affordance of participatory theater.

Benefits and Limitations

As background research for this chapter, in addition to a desk review of the existing literature, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with a range of participatory video practitioners, each having over a decade of experience in diverse settings. They were asked among other things to reflect on the perceived benefits of participatory video, its limitations, and potential future directions. In the following sections, these practitioner perspectives are used to both ground and illuminate the academic literature on PV.

Perceived Benefits

The increasing popularity of participatory video within the field of communication for development and social change is related to a range of perceived benefits of the approach. Different elements in the participatory video process are perceived to

contribute to different development outcomes at three levels: individual, group, and societal. This section will present and examine these perceived benefits.

In the participatory video process, individuals may learn to interview others, to be interviewed themselves on camera, to hear themselves speaking authoritatively on issues of importance, and to see themselves projected on-screen (Roberts 2016). These experiences can develop an individual's sense of having something worth saying and of being heard. Interviewed for this research about her work using participatory video for peace-building, Valentina Bau explained how participants expressed a sense of agency and freedom at being able to speak their truth: "Those who told their stories had the perception of finally being given the opportunity to speak and to tell their own story, and to contribute towards peace" (see also Bau 2014). By taking on the roles of film producers, videographers, interviewers, presenters, editors, and sound engineers and incrementally building their skills and capabilities, participants increase their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1995) and self-esteem (Bery 2003). By constructing documentary narratives and expressing themselves through film, participants can increase their confidence to voice their opinion and their sense of authority to speak out on subjects of concern to themselves (Underwood and Jabre 2003).

The group reflection and critical dialogue that are at the heart of much participatory video practice are perceived to contribute additional benefits. In an interview conducted for this chapter, Nick Lunch, Director of InsightShare, recounted that, in his early experience with participatory video working with young people in Nepal, he found that participants used the process to "build consciousness within the group." This resonates with other practitioner experiences that the process of group dialogue enables participants to build their critical consciousness as actors for social change (White 2003; Benest 2010; Walsh 2012). What distinguishes participatory video from other filmmaking is the emphasis that it places on the collective process rather than the film product; it is by working as a group that participants are allowed the time and space to build the political capabilities of collective prioritization and decision-making. It is this iterative process of moving from "reflection on action" to "action on reflection" (Freire 1970) that builds the group's critical consciousness about themselves and their social situation (Thomas and Britton 2012).

To have social change impacts at the societal level, some practitioners argue that participatory video must go beyond engaging with participants themselves and the immediate community (Muniz 2008, 2010). From this perspective, "voice is not enough"; the objective should be social action to change the unjust circumstances that the video highlights. One means of seeking to effect social change is by structuring participatory video initiatives so that the resulting film targets distant decision-makers or power-holders with advocacy messages calling for action. This normative approach also connects with ideas of citizenship; by communicating their messages to those in positions of power and authority, participants are able to develop their sense of themselves as citizens with rights who are able to hold power-holders to account (Wheeler 2012). This form of citizen-representation PV can also be seen as one logical outcome of the Freirean approach of critical reflection

to inform critical action; having used group dialogue to develop their enhanced "reading of the world," projecting their video to a wider audience as a call to action can be seen as "acting in the world" to produce social change (Freire 1970).

We can use the concept of affordances to analyze the contribution of participatory video at each of the three levels considered above. Participatory video has some affordances that it shares in common with other participatory visual methodologies, but arguably it enables some distinct action possibilities. Like other visual methods, participatory video affords the possibility to work with low-literacy groups or with groups with mixed literacies (Braden and Huong 1998), and, as an audiovisual medium, PV affords its advocacy message greater "recallability" when compared to text-only content. Research has established that we more readily recall what we hear and see compared to what we read (Fraser and Villet 1994). As PV practitioner Fernanda Baumhardt from Pro Planeta commented when we interviewed her for this chapter: "PV is a particularly powerful medium because it projects the voice, and combines video and sound."

Participatory video also has particular affordances of "reflexivity" due to the technologies' functionalities of rewind, replay, and projection on-screen. This provides participants with new action possibilities for reflecting on their ability to act in the world and to revise and rehearse their performance in a "safe space" (Miller and Smith 2012; Waite and Conn 2012). Lunch and Lunch (2006) have likened participatory video's "reflexivity" affordance to Lacan's mirror stage in enhancing a person's sense of selfhood.

Users of participatory video often discover that a tripod and digital camera offer them a reason and excuse to approach and question higher-status people (Shaw and Robertson 1997). In the first author's own research, young women users in Zambia found that holding a digital camera with the recording light flashing enabled them to elicit a respectful and considered response from older men, which they had not been afforded previously (Roberts 2015). This affordance of "respect-ability" can have the effect of raising users' self-efficacy and sense of agency.

It has also been argued that participatory video has distinct affordances for participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E). PV's affordance of "accessibility," removing literacy barriers to participation, provides the action possibility to incorporate PM&E feedback that is more widely representative of the whole population. Lunch (2006) has argued that the iterative process of PV (taking participants through several cycles of action-orientated filmmaking alongside sessions of critical reflection and analysis) lends itself well to the task of monitoring and evaluation. Lunch and colleagues at InsightShare drew on the "mobility" and "accessibility" affordances of video to encourage participants to take the cameras out into the villages and interview people of all backgrounds, asking them evaluative questions concerning a particular initiative. It was also their experience that hearing evaluation feedback directly from villagers themselves, through the medium of film, helped managers and funders to better ground evaluation findings contextually. They also found that evaluation feedback in the form of film can connect at affectual and emotive levels not normally achieved by textual or statistical reports. In order to add rigor and depth to their M&E process, Lunch and colleagues then incorporated the widely used "most significant change" (MSC) approach (Lemaire and Lunch 2012;

Asadullah and Muñiz 2015). The MSC approach provides multiple stakeholders with open-ended opportunities to identify the most significant change that they associate with a given intervention and a structured means to interpret the arising data for evaluation purposes (Davies and Dart 2005).

The participatory video process also has affordances that make it a popular choice for action research processes (Plush 2012). Like PV, action research seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory, and practice, in participation with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people (Reason and Bradbury 2006; 2). Given this shared objective, what are the specific affordances that participatory video contributes to action research? Participatory video brings together marginalized groups to co-produce knowledge on social issues; this affordance of "co-produce-ability" of marginalized groups' own audiovisual representations on key social issues is a unique form of knowledge input to social change processes, which is not afforded by some other means. PV also has the advantage of producing a digital product which has the affordance of "send-ability," meaning that it can be immediately attached to an email or uploaded to social media in order that participants can inexpensively communicate their words and images directly to a single recipient, or to any number of people or groups, whom they may wish to influence or with whom they may wish to make common cause.

Degrees of Participation

The use of participatory video is not unproblematic. Not all PV is equally participatory. Power relationships exist between participants, facilitators, intermediary organizations, and funders. The early literature on participatory video understandably focused primarily on establishing the benefits of the approach and was largely uncritical (Shaw and Robertson 1997; White 2003). More recently, and especially in the wake of the "Tyranny of Participation" critique (Cooke and Kathari 2001), the participatory video literature has become less celebratory and more critical, questioning the extent to which control is handed over (and to whom) and scrutinizing claims that PV produces social change (Muñiz 2010; Shaw 2012; Roberts and Lunch 2015).

The basic theory of change underlying all participatory video is that marginalized individuals and groups who take part in participatory video processes can gain a range of benefits which contribute to development or social change. This theory of change has a number of embedded assumptions that give rise to questions including who participates? In which elements of the project cycle? Who is defining development and social change? As well as who benefits? And according to whose evaluation/criteria? While all participatory video involves a group of people making their own film, significant differences exist regarding who participates in which stages of the film's conception, planning, filming, editing, evaluation, and distribution. The next section offers a highly schematic chronology for understanding how participatory control over elements of the PV film production cycle is expanding over time.

The groundbreaking innovation of the 1967 Fogo Process was to extend to communities participatory control over the content of a film about them, enabling

them to voice their own concerns in their own words. They did not operate the cameras or any of the editing equipment. These tasks were reserved for external experts. Editing took place away from the islands (Quarry 1994). There was no editing suite on the Fogo Islands, and it could be argued that professional training was necessary to operate the filming and editing equipment available at that time. In this “PV version 1.0,” participants were able to take participatory control of determining the content of the film and had the ability to require edits and re-edits, but the people with their hands on the camera and on the editing equipment were external professionals. This reflected existing power relationships about ownership of the means of film production.

By the 1990s the cost of video cameras was falling dramatically, and their ease of use and resolution quality were increasing rapidly. This allowed the innovation of handing over control of operating the camera equipment to participants themselves. In this “PV version 2.0,” participation was no longer limited to co-creating a script for external experts to film and edit; participants were now able to take control of the filmmaking equipment and to carry out their own filming. A typical PV process now involved participants taking rotational turns to play roles including camera operator, sound engineer, director, and interviewer. However, they did not yet do the editing themselves. It still remained common practice for all of the film media and equipment to be collected up by the facilitating team and removed to an editing suite, often in a different location, with the final film being returned to the participants at a later date for their approval or suggested further edits (Mak 2012). In the majority of projects, it also remained the case that the cameras would leave when the facilitating organization left at the end of the funded period, which had negative implications for ongoing dependency and sustainability of benefits (Colom 2009). Despite the emancipatory intent of external facilitators, power relationships remained, and these unequal power relationships continued to reflect unequal ownership of the means of film production.

After 2010 the availability of cheap and powerful laptops, free and open-source film editing software, and low-cost and high-definition video cameras made it possible for participants to carry out all of their own editing as well as the filming. In this “PV version 3.0,” participants are able to take not only full editorial control over the film product but also full control over both the filming and editing process. Editing could now be carried out on standard laptops, by participants themselves, on the same day and at the same location as the filming. This makes it possible for external PV facilitators to operate a “hands-off” approach where they decline to touch either the camera or the editing equipment at any stage in the process, ensuring that the film is entirely the participants’ work and that their sense of agency and ownership of both the process and the product is fully optimized (Poveda and Roberts 2017). This has the advantage of accelerating participants’ hands-on skill development, which can boost their self-efficacy and autonomy. The relatively low cost of high-definition cameras has also made it possible for the cameras, tripods, editing software, and laptops to remain the property of participants beyond the initial funded project engagement. The transfer of ownership of the means of film production from external facilitators to local experts is a substantial advance that arguably

shifts power relationships by removing dependencies and handing independent control for determining all aspects of film conception, production, and dissemination.

This progressive extension of participatory control over elements of the participatory video process should not be read as a simple linear unfolding logic. There have always been, and continue to be, exceptions to and contradictions within the schematic model presented above. Even in cases where participants have control over film content, filming equipment, and editing equipment, there are always people who are excluded from the process. Inequalities of power between funders, facilitators, and participants mean that initial framings or dissemination processes may continue to lack the participation of all players.

However, some progress continues to be made. Recent years have also seen a shift away from short interventions led by externally funded facilitators toward long-term participatory video processes and processes designed to build the capacity of independent and sustainable participatory video capacity in grassroots organizations. Networks of such independent PV organizations are forming, and south-to-south exchanges have happened. In this "PV version 4.0," independent participatory video organizations have full control of the entire project cycle and are free to conceptualize their own PV initiatives from the outset and have the freedom to film, edit, and disseminate their work without the historical dependence on external experts. Examples include Drishti, Video SEWA, and Digital Green in India (Singh 2014) and the community video hubs developed by InsightShare in South Africa, Peru, and London (Muñiz 2011). This is not to claim that these entities operate free from structural constraints and power relations; it is only to say that the "PV version 4.0" innovation of building independent long-term capacity is preferable to parachute interventions, which may raise agency in the short term only to accentuate a sense of powerlessness in the medium term (Milne et al. 2012). Longer-term participatory video engagements that build permanent local filmmaking capacity are arguably more effective at sustaining the political spaces that groups are able to open up through the use of participatory video and other means (Colom 2009).

Conflicting Objectives

One other way that power relations often play out in participatory video initiatives is in the form of multiple and sometimes conflicting objectives. PV practitioners are motivated by a wide range of objectives, and their initiatives are informed by a wide range of explicit, or implicit, theories of change. Within a single participatory video process, there may be multiple and contradictory theories of change in operation. The motivations of the funder, the practitioner, and the participants, for example, may not be the same and may not be mutually compatible. The contradictory nature of these objectives may not be known, or may not be made explicit at the outset, and may only become apparent when conflict arises. This reality is not specific to participatory video and occurs in a wide range of development initiatives.

Several practitioners have written about the challenges of reconciling the contradictory demand of stakeholders including funders, practitioners, and participant groups themselves. Shaw (2012) has reflected on what happens when it transpires that the commissioning organization's objective was not to elicit community input into a decision-making process but rather to secure community validation for decisions that they had already made; Milne et al. (2012) provides an example of a community doubting the funder and research objectives and refusing en masse to participate; and Dougherty and Sawhney (2012: 447) point out that based on their extensive experience: "Quite often, community-produced video projects have obligations to satisfy funders or non-governmental organisation's agendas; the degree to which the community owns and controls the process can be in question as the project advances." Clearly it would be optimal to co-develop the objectives of a participatory video process jointly with all stakeholders and to agree in advance what happens if participants wish to take the PV process in an unforeseen direction midway through the process. But achieving this is not always practical due to time and resource constraints and the power relationships that always exist between funders, intermediary organization, practitioners, and participants (Wheeler 2012).

In clarifying objectives, it may be useful to think through the stages of the participatory video process and the kind of outcomes that it is possible to generate at each stage. This can then inform a discussion about which elements participants wish to focus their finite time and energy on. The first operational phase of a participatory video process often involves setting shared expectations and developing ground rules. This preparatory phase may involve some icebreaking exercises to establish trust and familiarity. If there has been success in bringing together people from the margins who are not normally heard, this group-building phase can be key in breaking down inhibitions and building a sense of shared enterprise. Often the first phase also includes some games or demystifying exercises with the camera equipment (Lunch and Lunch 2006).

There is more than one way to break down the stages of the project cycle of participatory video, but Shaw (2017) breaks her extended video process into four key phases: (1) ensure inclusive engagement during group forming and building, (2) develop shared purpose and group agency through video exploration and sensemaking, (3) enable horizontal scaling through community-level videoing action, and (4) support the performance of vertical influence through video-mediated communication. Inclusive participation is a key outcome in phase 1. Unless all stakeholders, from commissioning funders to low-caste women, are in the room at this stage, there is potential for later conflict when the group discovers that conflicting objectives disrupt progress. In phase 2 participants begin to develop shared intent and a collective voice as they critically reflect on their priority issues. In Shaw's third phase, the active engagement and input of the wider community are secured, and it is not until phase 4 that vertical influence is attempted through video-screening with decision-makers. This staged approach reflects Shaw's (2012) concern that having voice is not the same as being heard and being heard is not the same as having influence. According to this logic, producing external social change in a context of complex power relations requires a staged strategic approach that

connects vertically with relevant power-holders. This resonates with the work of PV practitioner Tamara Plush, which analyzes the capacity of PV to transform power relations. When we interviewed her as part of the background research to produce this chapter, she pointed out that: “Just because a voice is amplified it doesn’t mean that you are shifting power relations.” Like Shaw her concern was whether anyone was listening and being influenced, and also like Shaw, her conclusions include that: “PV needs to be included in wider projects of citizen engagement and mobilisation that connect it to local and national advocacy campaigns” (see also Plush 2015).

Ultimately it can be argued that no PV process is “maximally participatory” as not everyone wants to participate in every element of a film’s conception, production, and dissemination. Realistically external funders, government officials, and even facilitators will exercise unequal influence over some element of project framing, partner choice, process, or product in most participatory video. It may be that being as open and transparent and as reflexive as possible about these realities and aiming for PV that is “optimally participatory” rather than “maximally participatory” is a more realistic objective.

Future Directions

Continuing rapid technological change, practitioner adaptations, and theoretical developments suggest that innovation in participatory video practice will accelerate in the years ahead. The incorporation of microprojectors into video cameras; the advent of high-specification, low-cost tablet computers; and the increasing video capabilities of mobile phones are creating exciting new opportunities and challenges for participatory video practitioners. In an interview for this research, experienced PV practitioner and academic Jay Mistry commented that “in our current projects we are already using tablets because they are cheaper and because we can edit directly on them” and also noted that “Community researchers bought smart phones and in their spare time have been training a lot of people and doing conservation projects with other organisations. They are becoming independent facilitators (see also Mistry 2014).” Outside of “projects” people are independently acquiring the equipment and the skills to produce their own films and to incorporate them into their communication and social change work.

The first book on mobile phone-based participatory video appeared in 2016 following the first conference on incorporating mobile phone films into visual research and activism (MacEntee et al. 2016). Perhaps we will soon be incorporating 360-degree virtual reality cameras into PV. The digital nature of video media certainly has the potential affordance of “combine-ability” with other digital visual methods to create new participatory methods. Participatory video practitioner Namita Singh, in an interview for this chapter, stated her experience that: “People want to transfer videos between phones using WhatsApp. The video format will change to create shorter videos that don’t make people spend too much data to download.” So the question arises whether in the future PV content will be compromised in order to accommodate new communication practices and digital formats. We should be asking ourselves

whether moving away from cameras to tablets and mobile phone-based PV dilutes group dialogue in favor of more individualized processes. Is there a danger in the rapidly changing technological landscape of losing sight of the original radical purpose and emancipatory objectives of participatory video?

We have seen in this chapter that participatory video practice is always in flux over time and that, like any approach, PV can be used for repressive or for emancipatory ends. Participatory video can be used to legitimate top-down decision-making or to create critical consciousness and shift power relationships. Given the rapid pace of technological change, practitioners will have to resist the glittering temptation of the new for its own sake and instead be mindful of the specific affordances each new video technology has for stimulating critical consciousness and collective action. What came over in the interviews that we conducted with practitioners in advance of writing this chapter was a desire to remain focused on challenging power relations and supporting people to create the change that they want in their lives. Achieving this in practice means not expecting PV to achieve this in isolation but rather to integrate PV practice vertically and horizontally within wider programs of communication and action for transformative social change.

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