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Unions, Academics and the Research Process as Political Terrain

Argument

The research *process* IS a political terrain; unions, workers and academics can connect through it to mobilize, organize and share information.

The connection between research *products* and the union movement is centrally important but the engagement and politicization can and does begin in the research *process*.

Context: Why should we be thinking about the politicization of the research process?

Neoliberalism driving two trends:

1. Contemporary challenges for unions
 - ❑ changing nature of work (precarious work)
 - ❑ globalization/ internationalization of prod'n makes fragile economies & labour markets
2. Contemporary Challenges for academics:
 - ❑ Growing Academics in precarious working conditions
 - ❑ the corporatization of the university, industry partnerships and commercialization of research in public grants

Empirical Work

- Research from 2001-2006 on globalization, gender, work, and community in Automotive Parts Industry
- Results: *Negotiating Risk, Seeking Security, Eroding Solidarity* with C. Yates and B. Leach (Fernwood Publishing 2012)
- Gendered ways in which insecurity and risk have been heightened and individualized and the challenges this poses for solidarity
- 5 communities: 4 in Southern Ontario and 1 in Northern Mexico
- Conducted ethnographic interviews

Research Process as:

1. Information Sharing

to disrupt management/political information

to share information about politics & policies

2. Organizing

interviews an ntervention to access workers

3. Mobilizing (sense/acts of Solidarity)

unions demonstrated “ownership” of the research process

Union felt the interview process itself would encourage work-politics-unions connections

Interventions into 4 discussions

1. Epistemological and Methodological Questions about Political Projects and responsibility to research communities raised by Feminists & Postcolonial theorists and others
2. The legitimization and growth of academic research with Community Partnerships/stakeholders
3. Globalization, Information and “The Other” worker:
4. Public Academics & Knowledge Transfer , Union-Academic Relationships in Research Product to Action

Existing Tensions

1. Controlling the politicization?
2. Autonomy to produce critical research?
3. Ability for planned politicization?

Moving forward...

- Continue to build typology and practices to legitimize the language of this type of political engagement as academic work
- Continue to see the research process as politicized and that this can be positive – hopefully encourage research that engages workers as knowers and therefore, methods that engage workers and unions