

Are Academics Irrelevant?
Roles for Scholars in Participatory Research

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ABSTRACT

The idea of participatory research and its various related forms (collaborative research, action research, participatory action research), as a way to assist community self-determination, has exploded in popularity over the last decade. As a practitioner of the method, however, I have become increasingly concerned about whether I am doing it correctly. There are three roles that academics seem to play in participatory research: the initiator, the consultant, and the collaborator. After discussing these issues and the various models, this paper argues that, in any participatory research project there are three goals to be achieved for all participants: learning something, developing relationships, and acting more effectively. Doing the research is not a goal in itself but only a means. Achieving these goals require that four functions be fulfilled: "animator," community organizer, popular educator, and participatory researcher. Determining how the academic will fit in the project (as initiator, consultant, or collaborator) requires addressing three questions: What is the project trying to do? What are the Academic's skills? How much participation does the community need or want? Typically, the answers to these questions will vary according to how organized the community is.

The word "academic" is a synonym for irrelevant. (Alinsky, 1969:ix)

I think if the academic does the research you are doing a disservice to the community. (statement made at special meeting on Participatory Research, Community Development Society meetings, 1996)

I. INTRODUCTION

I remember the very day my academic career turned the corner. It was 1984. I was a graduate student, sitting in the Cedar-Riverside Project Area Committee (PAC) office to interview Tim Mungavan about this amazing Minneapolis neighborhood that had instituted a radically grass-roots community-controlled redevelopment program. Tim, the group's architect/organizer, leaned back in his chair, put his feet up on his desk, and looked me sternly in the eye. He said "We have students and reporters coming through all the time, asking neighborhood people to give their time and answer their questions. And we don't get so much as a copy of a paper from them. If I agree to talk with you, then I want you to agree that you'll give us a copy of the paper you write." (Stoecker, 1994:25) I was dumbstruck.

Tim likes to tell the story of how I then tried to make myself relevant in the neighborhood (not only was I a student, I was a new neighborhood resident), and he set me to work cleaning the PAC's storeroom, thinking that if I stuck with it after that I might really mean it. I stuck with it, at least partly because the storeroom was a treasure trove of information on the neighborhood. It was the beginning of a long and lasting relationship with the neighborhood that I have never forgotten. I wrote my dissertation and ultimately a book (Stoecker, 1994) on Cedar-Riverside, but it was not participatory action research. I framed the question, I conducted the research, and I wrote what I found out. What I did do was spend a lot of time with activist residents helping to frame my research. I asked them to guide me and tell me what I should focus on. I had them review and react to everything I wrote, and I developed my thinking and writing based on their reactions. And I increasingly tried to write things they were interested in.

When I got my first academic job at the University of Toledo, I got hooked up with another organizer who has remained a mentor. Dave Beckwith at the time was working for the Center for Community Change and the University of Toledo Urban Affairs Center, which was also paying half of my salary. One of the world's great community organizers, Dave just assumed I was going to help, and handed me a list of two dozen community-generated research needs the day I walked in the door. I negotiated with him and other neighborhood activists to do one of those projects—a resource and needs assessment of Toledo's community-based organizations. This was much closer to ideal participatory research, with involvement of neighborhood activists in the research from start to finish, and led to a coalition that helped bring over \$2 million to support those groups.

As time went on, however, I increasingly confronted the tension that my perspective on what needed to be changed did not mesh with the research I was doing. I found myself sitting around a table with bankers, foundation officials, and large non-profits who did not share my desire to transform all power structures to participatory democracies and community controlled economies. I consequently found myself involved in a factional power struggle that destroyed the coalition built by that first research project (Stoecker, 1997). Those struggles led me to question my role as participatory researcher. Should I have spoken up louder from the beginning to promote more radical goals? Should I have kept my mouth shut and stayed out of the fray altogether?

Then, finally, I was in two very divergent situations this past year. The first was a participatory research project that I was in charge of. It began with academics and never made the transition to community control. The second project began with community members, and I became involved as only one of many. The first project died. The second is thriving.

These experiences bring me to this paper and to the haunting question of how I, as an academic, can become relevant. How to conduct participatory research so it is truly empowering and liberatory is a quandary indeed. And whether academics further or hinder the liberatory goals is another important question. How much control must the community have? How much influence can the academic have?

II. WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH?

What is this thing called participatory research, or participatory action research, or action research, or community research, or community-based research, or any one of a number of other labels? Because so many of us have been doing it in isolation from each other, variations in the definition abound. Activists are not nearly as concerned with the labels as academics (Nash 1992), though they are very concerned with the practice. I will use "participatory research" or "PR" to distinguish it from the popularization of the label "participatory action research" by William Foote Whyte (1991), whose perspective I and others (Hall, 1992) see as less oriented to social change and closer to a more conservative "action research"

model (Brown and Tandon, 1983), though in practice there is a broad middle between them (Zúñiga-Urrutia, 1992).

Without going into a long history that has been done well elsewhere (Brown and Tandon, 1983; Hall, 1992), the roots of participatory research are in the 1970s alternative development movement in Africa and India. The more conservative "action research" influence derives from the work of U.S. social psychologist Kurt Lewin and a series of 1950s organizational studies (Brown and Tandon, 1983). The distinction between these two perspectives will become more clear as the paper progresses, though their main difference is that PR sees more structural division between "haves" and "have-nots" and, consequently, more need for community control and conflict to create change. My overall focus will be on PR.

So what is PR? Following Paulo Freire (1982), John Gaventa (1991:121-122) argues that PR "is simultaneously a tool for the education and development of consciousness as well as mobilization for action." In North America that translates into three strategies: re-appropriation of knowledge (of the power structure, in "right to know" mobilizations, etc.), development of knowledge (history, self-survey, planning), and participation in social production of knowledge. Orlando Fals-Borda (1991), with experience in South America, argues similarly that PR is collective research, critical recovery of history, valuing and applying folk culture, and producing and diffusing knowledge. Peter Park (1993) and Budd Hall (1993) also emphasize that PR combines research, education, and action; and is fundamentally about oppressed communities overcoming their oppression.

Combining these positions, I see the two most basic characteristics of participatory research to be increasing participation in the research process and making social change (Stoecker and Bonacich 1992).

A. Participation

The participation component of PR can really be seen as democratizing the knowledge process (Stoecker and Bonacich 1992). This involves legitimizing forms of knowledge, such as folk culture, not normally seen as valid. As de Roux (1991: 38, 44) notes, "knowledge that is generated by people in their daily struggle to survive is not codified and transcribed in articles or books, but in folk sayings and other popular expressions as they add to their cultural baggage. That is why it is difficult for the academic community to recognize such a process." "Both the process of generating knowledge and the knowledge itself would have a liberating effect." In addition, those normally restricted to a role as only "research subject" also participate as researchers in making decisions about the research process (Heron, 1996).

There is a concern among PR practitioners, however, that participation may be promoted unreflectively, or seen as an "empowerment" strategy that powerful outsiders will provide for powerless insiders (Bowes, 1996; Long and Long, 1992), or will be used to cover up structural inequality. As Nyone (1991:112) warns, "Participation has also been subverted into aspirations for solidarity more useful to the interests of the past colonial elites and their Western allies than for the poor majority." Whyte's (1991) work and the action research tradition may dance on the edge of this problem, as the emphasis on social change is almost completely buried and replaced by technical discussions of the liberal notion of using research to increase "participation" for participation's sake-allowing workers to participate in management decision-making even though managers still make the decisions. This problem is also illustrated in "cooperative Inquiry," where the focus is primarily for self-understanding and self-change (Reason, 1994).

From a PR perspective, participation only empowers when it includes two qualities: First, it must be part of a "cogenerative dialogue" (Fear and Edwards, 1995) where researcher knowledge that draws and abstracts from multiple contexts is combined with insider knowledge that is rich in experience and detailed understanding of a specific setting. (Fear and Edwards, 1995; Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1991; Gaventa, 1993). Second, participation must not be about "advising" the researcher but actually having the opportunity to at least collaboratively control the decision-making process

B. Social Change

Essentially, participation is part of a broader social change strategy. For Rahman (1991:14) "domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarization of control over the means of material production but also over the means of knowledge production.... These two gaps should be attacked simultaneously wherever feasible." Fals-Borda (1991:5) says that "to participate means to break voluntarily and through experience the asymmetrical relationship of submission and dependence implicit in the subject/object binomial." Likewise, Patricia Maguire (1987:38-39) argues that "The principle of shared power is central to participatory research. Power sharing begins with a shift in the most basic power relationship in research, the relationship between the researcher and the research participants." "Involving research subjects as partners in the entire research process also increases the potential to distribute the benefits of the research process more equitably."

In addition to changing the social structure of the knowledge process, PR maintains a view of social change that emphasizes the centrality of social conflict and collective action and the necessity of producing societal level change. This is in contrast to action research, which emphasizes individual and group change, and follows consensus theory (Brown and Tandon, 1983; Comstock and Fox, 1993). The goal of PR is to conduct research that will fundamentally transform social relations-helping those with less power get more power, helping those with fewer resources get more resources-by transforming the economic, cultural, racial, and governmental relations that promote inequality. In its most radical manifestations, PR is about revolution.

The social change effort begins within the process of PR itself, making it a form of "pre-figurative politics" (Breines, 1989). As Maguire (1987) notes, the research process is structured to increasingly shift the power and control of decision-making into the hands of community members. The practice is not perfect, however, as women are often left out of PR by male-centered language, women's unequal access to participation, too little attention to obstacles of participation, women's unequal access to project benefits, and an absence of feminist theory and gender issues (Maguire, 1987:46).

The real goal, then, is for community members to become self-sufficient researchers and activists, which of course creates problems for academics like myself who would like to make a career out of PR.

III. VARIATIONS IN PR AND OPTIONS FOR THE ACADEMIC

If PR is really revolutionary, and as academics we are relatively protected from the problems of the most marginalized communities of our society, what is our role? There are those who argue we have no role or, worse yet, have only a damaging role.

Thomas Heaney (1993:43-44) asks the most provocative questions of the role of the academic, and his thoughts are worth quoting at length:

However well-intentioned and zealous the efforts of individual faculty who have brought participatory research into the academic arena, one can only question by what compromises such researchers are likely to survive?. Having made our work acceptable in academic terms, we see that work now being incorporated into academic curricula. Our papers have become required readings for professional researchers who are expected to master the theory and methods of participatory research. It is not difficult to imagine the day when Third World governments and community organizations will hire only professional participatory researchers trained and certified by graduate institutions."

Heaney's comments are insightful. While there is still some stigma attached to doing community-related work (Hubbard, 1996), participatory researchers overall seem to do increasingly well in the university (Cancian, 1993). In one case university administrators even stood up to powerful mining interests to support a participatory researcher (Gedicks, 1996). But there are often compromises. Programs like "service learning" that try to bring students into a kind of participatory research practice may be hobbled by bureaucratic shackles that limit their liberatory impact and may even reduce the community to just another laboratory (Marullo, 1996; Beckwith, 1996). Graduate students trying to do PR are still forced to take control of the research in order to get credit to graduate (Heaney, 1993). Those few students who have tried to conduct participatory research found that, when it came time to write their dissertation, the university insisted the work have a single author. The reward system of universities discourages true collaboration with others, especially non-academics, and community members have to make time and even money sacrifices to collaborate in research while academics get rewards (Hall, 1993). In a careful feminist analysis of some of the risks of community-based research, Hubbard (1996) discusses community-research/organizing as a kind of "community housework" that is not socially valued, and thus does not receive much attention. Thus, these researchers are more vulnerable--their work is neither highly regarded in the activist community nor in the academic community, pressuring them to restructure the research process to give the academic a higher profile.

Add to this the fact that many communities seem to quite effectively conduct their own research, from the East Toledo Community Organization (Stoecker, 1995) to the residents of Yellow Creek (Merrifield, 1993:78). People do research and win struggles without academics. The Highlander Research and Education Center has built a long-standing tradition of people doing their own research, the most famous of which was the Appalachian Land Ownership study (Horton, 1993), which continues to be used for grass roots policy development in Appalachia.

At best, academics are seen as sometimes having something to offer (Hall, 1993). I remember being told by one community activist at a meeting to speak up--I had all that education and should use it for something. In a case of pure participatory research, when an Alinsky-style organization in Toledo studied the city budget and then marched to city hall demanding the government adopt their recommendations, they "could have used help" from academics. But this was only to save some of their members the time involved in digging up information from scratch. (Beckwith, 1996). Bowes (1996:8.3) notes that, "the women with whom we worked were not structurally oppressed into silence, but were completely competent and capable of speaking, presenting their views of the world and acting upon them: they did not need an action-research project to do this, though the project did become an effectively mobilized resource which helped strategies, which might otherwise have been difficult to be pursued."

These statements from organizers and others in the field are hardly ringing endorsements for the value of the academic.

So, is the academic relevant in PR? And if so, how?

Within the broad practice of PR there is much variation in the role of the academic, from breaking down the distinction between researcher and researched (Gaventa 1988) to organizing partnerships of researchers and community activists and Leaders (Maguire, 1987; Park, 1993; Nyden et al, 1997). One of the continuing difficulties, however, is that we go into participatory research thinking about it as a research project, and consequently too often limit ourselves to research roles.

Today academics, *as academics*, seem to play three researcher roles in participatory research. Comstock and Fox (1993) review three ways that researchers relate to communities in participatory research. One way is for the researcher to assume a pedagogical role, and help community develop theoretical understanding. Another is for the researcher to bring resources into the community, and supply technical research and writing skills. The third is where the researcher and community start from very different places, but attempt to merge skills, giving the researcher more experience and the people more theoretical and technical knowledge. These roughly parallel the three roles I will explore below: the initiator, the consultant, and the collaborator. Here I will critically evaluate each of these three roles. Following this, I will build a model of participatory research that discusses the role of the researcher academic in the context of the other crucial roles in participatory research.

A. The Initiator

One of the things that most distinguishes participatory research from its mainstream complement, action research, is the belief that the research question should be generated by the community rather than by the researcher (Brown and Tandon, 1983; Deshler and Ewitt 1995; Prendergast 1996). Reason (1994:334) notes that "The perspective of PAR is radically egalitarian?. Yet, paradoxically, many PAR projects would not occur without the initiative of someone with time, skill, and commitment, someone who will almost inevitably be a member of a privileged and educated group." Maguire (1987:40,43) likewise, finds that researchers either invite community organizations to participate with them, or respond to requests coming from the community, but they still are usually the initiators.

Some also see the researcher's role as an educator who helps the community overcome its own false consciousness. This is tricky, of course, as the researcher/educator could simply teach the community to substitute one ideology for another. Rahman (1991), in fact, accuses some PAR practitioners of adopting the position of a vanguard in relation to oppressed communities. de Roux (1991:50) similarly argues that "In order for the alternative ideology to result from a collective effort throughout the research process, all forms of indoctrination and ideological imposition had to be ruled out." And while it is possible that an academic could manipulate a community, community members are usually too savvy for that. Stringer (1996:43) notes that "When we try to ?get? people to do anything, insist that they ?must? or ?should? do something, or try to ?stop? them from engaging in some activity, we are working from an authoritative position that is likely to generate resistance."

Can an academic play an "initiator" role that is truly empowering? Comstock and Fox (1993) show that, in a truly "participatory" research project, community members' work exposes ideological contradictions that leads to their rethinking their own understandings. Brydon-Miller (1993) describes how a researcher-generated process became more and more participatory over time. Her initial research led to the formation of a "Community Accessibility Committee" that began taking action on its own. In this case, the research process strengthened awareness in people of their own skills and resources, requiring the researcher to take on more of a process facilitating role and less of a product-

oriented role. On the other hand, in a participatory research project I initiated, we were never able to switch control over to the community, as too many of our academic members were not skilled at moving into a community organizing and process facilitating role (Stoecker and Stuber, 1997).

Essentially, for the academic to be an effective initiator, they must also be an effective community organizer (Park, 1993). The organizer role is different from the researcher role, however, and most academics are not skilled in it, a point we will discuss further below.

B. The Consultant

In the strictest sense, the participatory research model says that the community should do the research themselves. However, in many cases academics find ourselves operating in a consultant role in relation to community groups. In the consultant role the researcher acts as they would when consulting in any situation. The research project is commissioned by the community and the academic carries it out while being held accountable to the community. In some cases the accountability process can be intense, with the researcher checking with the community at each stage of the research project to get community input and guidance. Some of my most successful participatory research projects have placed me in this role, though I have also had the luxury of working with strong community-based organizations.

My own justification for practicing this model, elaborated below, is that people have only so much time or energy. To ask community members to do the research work when they could be doing other more important things for the cause, contradicts the social change goal of participatory research. My organizer friend, Dave Beckwith (1996), also argues that a community group armed with a research study that has a PhD's name on it may be in a more powerful position than if the research were authored by someone not seen as following scientific standards.

John Gaventa (1993:33-4), however, offers a serious critique of both the initiator and the consultant roles. Because not just material wealth, but also intellectual knowledge, is power, we need to change not only material relations but also knowledge relations. Consequently, "To the extent that the research still remains in the hands of the researcher, a real transfer of ownership of knowledge may not have occurred. The dichotomy between those who produce knowledge and those who are most affected by it still exists... the approach is usually dependent upon the initiation of the outside, committed researcher, and is dependent upon the researcher's presence. Eventually, the researcher may decide to leave, taking the skills, experience, and newly acquired knowledge along with him or her." It is possible that, as we do research for people who don't know how to do it themselves, we reinforce knowledge inequality and dependence. What if the community needs other research and we're not available? What if the media shows up and they only want to interview us about our research instead of talking with the community?

C. The Collaborator

In an attempt to find a niche for academics that remains consistent with the tenets of participatory research, the Policy Research Action Group in Chicago has pioneered the practice of "collaborative research. "In collaborative research, "there is equal participation in defining the research problem and the research strategies. It is recognized that the researcher may have certain technical expertise and the community leader may have knowledge of community needs and perspectives. Rather than either side using these resources to gain control in a research relationship, they need to be combined to provide a more unitary approach to research." (Nyden and Wiewal 1992:45; also see Nyden et al., 1997). In

contrast to those PR practitioners who fear the academic further disempowering the community, the PRAG model wonders if other traditions place the researcher in a subservient relation to the community, making the researcher less useful than they otherwise might be. Peter Park (1993:3) seems to argue for a similar approach when he says "The real investigator in this case is not the traditional researcher who, as a technical expert, relates to the ?subjects? of research... only as objects of inquiry.... Rather it is the ordinary people with problems to solve who form a partnership with the researcher...."

Is this possible? Rahman (1991) worries that "It is not easy to establish a truly subject-subject relation at the very outset with people who are traditionally victims of a dominating structure." Community members don't have a resource base to be equal participants, they are not used to the "talk" world of academics, and they may not believe they have anything to offer in the academic world, or that they will be listened to. And real collaboration takes a lot of time-time for meetings, time for accountability processes, time to work through the inevitable conflicts. And time, especially for community group members, is often in short supply. In addition, this model may be caught between two problems.

On the one hand, this model may be less efficient than the consultant role--asking community members to participate in ways they aren't interested, or don't have time for. Maguire (1987:46) reminds us that "While researchers may be able to invest their total work time in a participatory research project, participants continue their regular life activities." Corporations and other large institutions hire consultants because they don't have time to figure things out for themselves. Why should poor people have to do things for themselves that rich people have done for them? On the other hand, does collaborative participation go far enough in changing existing knowledge relations? If the collaboration generates new knowledge and understanding for both community members and academics then perhaps so, but if the collaboration is just each doing what they do best then maybe not.

IV. A MODEL OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMICS

So we are left in the quandary. The three PR roles available to academics--the initiator, the consultant, and the collaborator, seem unsatisfactory, and fraught with contradictions. The problem, however, is not with the roles but with a conception that too many of us hold that participatory research is a *research project*. It's not. It's a community organizing and/or development project of which the research is only one piece. When we think of participatory research in this way, the possible researcher roles become less contradictory, because we can consider the researcher role in the context of all the necessary functions to be filled in the project. In this section, I will develop a model of participatory research, looking at its possible goals and the roles that derive from those goals.

A. Goals in PR

I see participatory research as having three goals:

- Learning knowledge and skills relevant to the task at hand.
- Developing relationships of solidarity.
- Engaging in effective action that wins victories and builds self-sufficiency.

The first component comes from the increasingly noted "popular education" or "adult education" approach to learning. Paulo Freire and Myles Horton are most often cited as core influences of this approach (see Horton and Freire, 1990). And those working in the tradition of participatory research regularly draw from this tradition as part of their practice (Williams, 1996; Lynd, 1993). Popular education is, most importantly, a participatory approach to learning that makes participatory research a central part of the learning process. Research is not done just to generate facts, but to develop

understanding of one's self and one's context. It is also about understanding how to learn, which allows people to then become self-sufficient learners and evaluate knowledge that others generate (Park, 1993, Heron, 1996).

The second component, developing relationships of solidarity, is one of the central features of community organizing, and is becoming increasingly important in new forms of community organizing by women and in communities whose social relationships have been shattered by institutionalized economic brutality (Stoecker and Stall, 1996). But those who might be called traditional "Alinsky" organizers also recognize the importance of building community relationships (Beckwith, 1997). Good participatory research helps build these relationships by bringing people together to collectively research, study, learn, and then act.

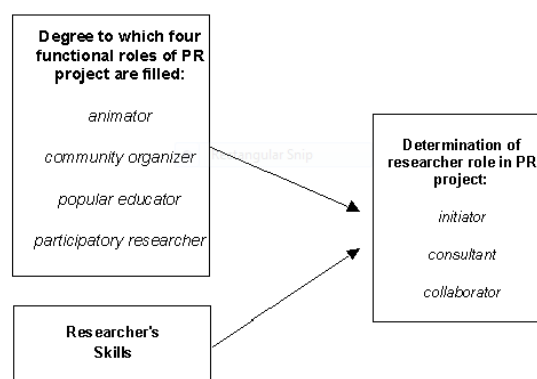
The third component, engaging in effective action, is the essence of community organizing. But it is more complex than it seems on its face. Knowing when you've won, and maintaining self-sufficiency is part of an ongoing "research" process that often involves community self-evaluation research. And this ongoing evaluation can also be done as participatory research (see Wadsworth, 1991; Fetterman, 1997).

Note that "doing research" shows up nowhere as a goal. Research itself is only a method to achieve these broader goals. And that is where the crux of the issue lies. Because in this model the researcher role is only one of many, and we need to consider the other roles that make for successful participatory research.

B. Functional Roles in PR

Based on what people have written about PR to date, every PR project has four functional roles that must be filled in order to achieve the three goals of learning knowledge and skills relevant to the task at hand, developing relationships of solidarity, and engaging in effective action that wins victories and builds self-sufficiency. These functional roles are: "animator," community organizer, popular educator, and participatory researcher. The functional roles are distinct from the three researcher roles of initiator, consultant, and collaborator. Indeed, whether the researcher acts as an initiator, consultant, or collaborator is determined partly by how the projects functional roles are filled, and partly by the researcher's own skills (see figure I).

Figure I



What is the animator? Part translator, part facilitator, part self-esteem builder, the animator's job may be the most general and combines parts of the other roles, but in essence is to help people develop a sense that they and their issues are important. Rahman (1991:96) lists the qualities of a good animator as: "a sense of commitment and a desire to live and work in the villages; innovativeness in work and a willingness to experiment with new approaches; communication skills, in particular the ability to dialogue, discuss and listen to the people; flexibility and a readiness to learn from one's own and others' experiences; and intellectual ability and emotional maturity." Tilakaratna (1991) provides an overlapping set of qualities, including: starting from where people are, helping people undertake self-analysis, assisting people to organize, facilitating actions for change, assisting people and their organizations to do self-review, efforts by outside agent to make their role increasingly redundant, helping people developing agent's skills.

The organizer's role is often confused or combined with the researcher's role-a dangerous practice that devalues the importance of organizer skills and misleads academics as to what the real tasks are. Ernie Stringer (1996), for example, describes the "researcher" as a catalyst, to stimulate people rather than impose on them, emphasize process over product, enable people to do it themselves, start where people are, help people plan and act and evaluate, do not advocate for people, don't focus just on solutions to problems but also on human development. Likewise, Peter Park's (1993:8) discussion of the need for a "researcher" would perhaps make more sense if he had substituted the role of organizer: "This sense of the problem may not always be externalized as a consensually derived and objectified target of attack in the community, although there may be suffering, a sense of malaise and frustration, and anger. For this reason, the situation characteristically requires outside intervention in the guise of a researcher...to help formulate an identifiable problem to be tackled." Park even goes so far as to argue, eerily parallel with Saul Alinsky (1969 [1946]; 1971), that the "researcher has to learn everything about the community before entering and needs to be sponsored and accepted into community."

The tragedy of conflating the organizer and researcher roles, which I have painfully learned and relearned, is that only a few academics are good organizers. And this may be partly a generational problem. Those established academics trained in the Civil Rights, Student, and other social movements have organizing skills that are almost intuitive. But those of us not trained in active mobilizations are far less skilled. We know *how* to do research. But we only know *about* organizing. I am among those who are not well-trained organizers, being too young to have gotten on-the-job training and too geographically isolated from the few good organizing efforts out there today. My most successful participatory research experiences then, have been working with those who are good organizers (Stoecker and Beckwith, 1992).

The popular educator facilitates the learning process. This is not a teacher who is assumed to have all the knowledge and gives it to the people who are assumed to not have any knowledge. Rather, it is a facilitator who sets up situations that allow people to discover for themselves what they already know along with gaining for themselves new knowledge (Freire, 1970; Horton and Freire, 1990; Williams, 1996). As a consequence, people develop greater self-confidence along with greater knowledge. Ideally, in such a setting, the expert knowledge of the educator combines with the experiential knowledge of community members, creating entirely new ways of thinking about issues (Fear and Edwards, 1995).

Finally, the participatory researcher is just that. It is the person who knows how to find the references quickly, can construct a survey blindfolded, and can create a research process either with strong guidance from community members, or in collaboration with them. For the moment, the concept of participatory researcher in this context is stripped of the other tasks of the initiator role discussed

above. This role is limited to conducting the research, though what research is might be quite broadly defined. But this role is also about more than being a technically skilled researcher. It is also about being a researcher with a commitment to transforming the social relations of knowledge production (Gaventa, 1993), and to democratic participation in the research process.

How do these roles combine or interact? Well, it is possible for one person to occupy multiple roles. It is possible, for example, that a researcher who is a good organizer can be an "initiator," thus filling multiple functional roles in the PR process. It is also possible for multiple people to occupy the same role, especially in the research process where there might be a variety of people collectively making decisions about the research process.

C. Guideposts for the Academic

If we are going to avoid doing the wrong thing, there are some questions we should ask whenever we enter a PR situation. Asking these questions will help us determine which of the three researcher roles (initiator, consultant, collaborator) fits best with the community. The main distinction is whether you are working with an organized community or an unorganized community. As Maguire (1993:161-2) notes, "the degree of organizing and mobilizing that will be required of the participatory researcher will vary greatly according to the type of organization which is involved in the project initiation. For example, if the initiating organization is a popular people's organization, the researcher won't have to do the grass-roots mobilizing that will be necessary if no such collaborative organization exists or if the possible collaborating organizations do not directly represent people's interests." The tasks of a PR project, the skills needed of the researcher, and the degree of participation necessary from community members all vary along this dimension of degree of community organization.

1. What is this PR project trying to do?

Some PR projects begin in disorganized communities and are actually community organizing projects--using the research to bring people together and build skills and relationships. In this case community organizing occurs through the practice of the research project. The Appalachian Alliance conducted a massive 80 county, six state study that remains one of the best examples of community-based research around (Horton, 1993). Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens found that doing their own health survey "gave them a reason and an incentive to call at every household along the fourteen-mile length of the creek, and sit down and discuss with them the problems they were experiencing.... [It also] broadened and strengthened the leadership within the group. The prime activists in the health survey were women who became better informed and more vocal and confident through their work with the survey?. Now, you have to remember that none of us were trained health scientists, and some of the people who were doing this research had not graduated from high school." (Merrifield, 1993:78,80).

If you are entering a disorganized, low resource community, you may be entering a community that also has not yet filled all of the functional roles of animator, organizer, educator, and researcher. If these roles have not yet been filled in the community, then please see question #2: What are Your Skills? Because depending on which roles are filled, and which *can* be filled by others, the researcher may find themselves occupying multiple roles in the process.

Coalition formation is a special form of this example, and creates special difficulties. Some PR projects involve coalitions of organizations who often provide services for others. A coalition, in its early stages, is no different from any other unorganized community, and so all the roles required for any PR project working with disorganized communities are also required for new coalitions. The extra complication

arises from doing PR with multiple organizations that provide services to communities. If the research project is to "study" the service population, but the only people making research decisions are those who provide services to that population, it is not participatory research. A project like this violates the most fundamental characteristic of participatory research-that the people effected also participate in controlling the research process.

These disorganized communities, when they lack members who can fill the functional roles of animator, educator, organizer, and researcher, need an initiator researcher. These situations are the most difficult for the academic to enter, since they require so many skills beyond simply doing research. I have learned this lesson in attempting to organize a statewide coalition of neighborhood-based organizations in Ohio using participatory research. Neither myself nor most of my academic colleagues in the other areas of the state were skilled organizers and animators, and the project folded under the weight of our skill deficiencies and funding shortages (Stoecker, and Stuber, 1997).

Other PR projects may come from already organized communities who realize they need research to help achieve their goals. As I write this paper I was interrupted by a phone call from a neighborhood group. This group, one of the strongest in the city, is concerned about outside landlords' and realtors' attempts to transform the neighborhood from homeowners to student renters, and wants to document how many houses have already been turned into student rentals. They are already organized, have chosen their issue, and now need to do basic research on their neighborhood demographics. They are even going to do the research themselves, and only want some technical advice on their research process. In this situation, the consultant researcher role fits well, as they don't even need ongoing assistance of an academic.

There are also community groups that have research as such an integral part of their mission, and whose own resources are so stretched, that they desire ongoing collaboration with outside researchers. The Policy Research Action Group (1997), for example, supports over a dozen research projects each year. Here, the collaboration researcher role makes the most sense. The difficulty with this is maintaining collaboration over long periods of time, especially since academic schedules and community schedules are so different. This model also presents opportunities for university-trained researchers who are indigenous to the community to offer a unique contribution, though as "outsiders-within" these researchers can sometimes be caught between the two worlds rather than firmly rooted in both (Collins, 1990; Park and Pellow 1996).

2. What are your skills?

Researchers with good organizing skills can potentially walk into any community so long as they are aware of the basic issues confronting any organizer such as insider/outsider status, being sponsored/invited, understanding the preexisting community members' skills and leaders, etc. Researchers with these skills can easily play the initiator role, helping the community define its needs and organizing action research projects to fill those needs.

If those are not your skills, however, be critical of yourself and the community you enter. The first important skill is to be able to ask and answer for yourself the following questions:

- How organized is this community?
- To what extent are the functional roles of animator, organizer, educator, and researcher filled?
- To what extent can the unfilled roles be filled by others?
- Which of the unfilled roles can you play?

If you are really only comfortable playing the role of researcher, then you are probably limited to being a consultant, and that means you are limited to working only with well-organized communities. Be wary of attempting to work with communities with lots of internal conflict or weak organizational structures unless there are others in the community or entering it who are effective at filling the other functional roles (Simonson and Bushaw, 1993). If you are not comfortable or good at facilitating a discussion in the classroom, you won't be on the streets either. I have, in fact, learned my most effective teaching skills not from other educators, but from organizers and self-taught community-based "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971) who have to work with groups that can't learn from a lecture and don't trust someone who presents themselves as an expert. Communicating abstract academic ideas so that people think about their practical implications, discussing research in a way that helps people organize action, and helping people build confidence in their own knowledge are special skills indeed.

If you are also comfortable with the functional animator and popular educator roles, then you may be able to act as a collaboration researcher. Here also be wary of working with disorganized groups, though it is probably necessary, if collaboration is to work, that the group have some degree of organization. Being able to interpret and communicate among an often diverse membership is also a requirement of the collaborator role, so even in well organized groups, maintaining communication is crucial. True collaboration may even mean dramatically altering the character of the research, as tastes for research differ, and thus theater, storytelling, and other forms of creative education need to be considered (Comstock and Fox, 1993). The issue that haunts the collaboration researcher role, however, is how much everyone should collaborate in which aspects of the research process, since collaboration is such a time consuming process, and I will discuss this issue further below.

There are other issues to be aware of in terms of your own skills.

First, are there some kinds of research you are good at and others that you are not? Participatory research has a habit of changing midstream, requiring sometimes dramatic shifts in the research process. When I began working with research into Toledo philanthropic foundations, I was prepared to conduct interviews, but found myself counting numbers on foundation tax returns from poorly produced microfiche. You need to be comfortable shifting on the fly and using a variety of research methods.

Second, what are your writing skills like? Academics are often expected to do the writing, both because a PhD author is still seen as having credibility in some quarters, and because academics are seen as having the time and skills to write. But if all your writing sounds and looks like a journal article, no one will read it, and no one will use it. In a participatory evaluation project I recently consulted on, I wrote the group's final report using framed sidebars, varied fonts, graphics, and other "magazine-like" qualities. And the group's members told me that it helped them actually read the thing.

Third, what are your time constraints? There is nothing more undermining of academics' reputation as help that doesn't follow through. Deadlines in the real world aren't like those in academia. Missing a deadline means missing a grant opportunity, missing a government hearing, missing a legislative vote. You can't make up those kinds of misses and you can't get extensions. In the real world, research (at least good research) matters. And just like in Saul Alinsky's (1972:128) rules of community organizing, a participatory research project that drags on is a drag. Find out ahead of time what the group's deadlines are, and either commit to them or stay out of the project. And finally, remember, there's no spring break in the real world.

3. How much participation in the research does the community need and want?

This may be the most contentious issue in participatory research today. Rahman's (1991) and Gaventa's (1993) concern that we change not only the social relations of material production but those of knowledge production, must be heeded. At the same time, there is an efficiency concern that all that participation will undermine the need to also act quickly and forcefully. Here again, distinguishing between organized and disorganized communities matters.

For communities that are organized, have a sense of their own empowerment, and are moving on an issue, participation in every aspect of the research process may not make sense. These are groups that could do their own research if they needed to, but have more important things to do with their time, and having an outside researcher facilitate and even do the research does not hinder them from learning any new skills and does not maintain knowledge inequality. In these cases, an academic who works in a consultant researcher role may be perfectly acceptable, and in some cases where the research work will be ongoing, a collaborator role may be more desirable. This is also a case where an initiator role will most likely *not* work since an outsider academic pushing an agenda will be seen as attempting to undermine the community.

With less organized communities, though, the research process is also a community organizing process. If an academic had conducted the Appalachian land ownership study, or the Yellow Creek research, relationships would not have been built, coalitions would not have formed, and leadership would not have developed. In these cases participation must be organized and maximized throughout the research process and, if there are no organizers available and the researcher has organizer skills, the initiator researcher role may be appropriate. It is extremely important, however, that the initiator researcher strictly follows good organizer practice that builds community control as the project progresses, and maintains the priority of community organizing over doing the research.

There are mixed cases, however, where it is less clear what to do. Those difficult middle cases, where there is some degree of organization and a looming deadline, often requires a tradeoff between efficiency and democracy. We have found this in our latest participatory research project building a community network in Toledo (Stoecker and Stuber, 1997). As the grant deadline approached, we had to make the choice of filling in some of the blanks with less participation than we wanted or missing the deadline. In this case, we chose to fill in the blanks, building in opportunities for later participation in the event the grant arrived. This is no different than the tension between democracy and efficiency that afflicts any community organizing/development project (Stoecker, 1994). There is another even more difficult case explored by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1993) where the researcher takes on bulk of the work in the project when the target population can't participate. This is especially the case with undocumented populations who have no rights of assembly to go to meetings or attend demonstrations and who can't be identified in the research process.

One way to think about participation in the actual research process is to think about decisional points. The most important thing is for communities to consciously choose which decisional points to control, and which to let a researcher control. These decisional points are:

- Defining the research question
- Designing the research
- Implementing the research design
- Analyzing the research data
- Reporting the research results

- Acting on the research results

The community must always control defining the research question. The academic can initiate the process of developing the question, but not the question itself. The only case where it is possible for the researcher to initiate the question is in doing research to find out what needs people have so that a useful research project can be constructed, which an initiator researcher can undertake.

The academic can take responsibility for designing the research, but community involvement in this step can prevent many a foolish decision. When we designed an eight page survey to send out to community groups as part of an Internet access study (Urban University and Neighborhood Network, 1996), our community participants pointed out that anything over two pages would be ignored.

Community involvement in implementing the design will only serve two specific objectives-to help individuals build specific skills and to help participants build relationships with each other. If the research process is not going to also be a community organizing process, it may be more effective for the community to have the researcher carry out the actual research. And beware that community involvement in implementing the design can significantly lengthen how long it takes to collect data. Those carrying out the research may also need extensive training. The only participatory research project I became involved in that ended up unfinished was one where community members did the interviews. It was probably a bad decision on our part. But since we were working with a community whose members predominantly spoke Spanish, and neither of us researchers were effective Spanish speakers, we used the miniscule grant we had to pay community members to interview each other. We were unprepared for the other stresses on these community members that prevented them from completing the interviews quickly, and for the problems created by the lack of training.

Analyzing the data, if it cannot be done collaboratively, should at least be done with strict accountability to the community. One of the most effective methods is to present or show rough drafts of the analysis to community members, who can then add, subtract, and modify the findings, and even interject new data that seeing a draft of the results reminds them of. Even in my graduate school research of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, I quickly learned that I got more information from people's reactions to papers I wrote about the neighborhood than I did from the original interviews.

Who should take responsibility for reporting the results is another tricky issue. There may be a strategic purpose, as I've noted, for having the "PhD" on the cover of the report. But many communities are also very concerned that the academic not use research from their community to enhance their own career. "Ownership" of the research is becoming an important topic in participatory research. Some savvy communities already demand ownership of the data and the results. Others could care less. But you should at least talk with the community about this issue in case they haven't thought about it. Don't try to publish an article from the research without the community's permission.

Organizing action is often the weakest part of a participatory research project, often because the researcher sees the project as a research project rather than a community organizing project, and the functional roles of animator, educator, and organizer have been neglected. But this phase is also the most important part of the project, and another phase where community control is paramount. While a researcher who is also a good organizer can help the community think about what possible strategies and tactics might be, the community has to make strategic and tactical choices based on what they can do and are willing to do.

V. CONCLUSION

Please understand. There are cases where the academic is irrelevant, and where we can do no good. But also don't sell yourself short. Even in those cases where the academic clearly is not needed, you may be able to help simply by documenting the struggle so that others may learn from it. We are the "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973) or "reticulation" (Gerlach and Hine, 1970) between groups that otherwise may not find out about each other. As a graduate student academic in Cedar-Riverside, when community members first got me thinking about participatory research, I was of little use to the neighborhood. I had no expert knowledge in anything that they didn't have more of. How I did end up making myself useful was in documenting the neighborhood's struggle, and spreading the word of what happened there so the neighborhood could remember itself and others could adapt what they did. Just don't get in the way while you do it.

It is also true that if we do a really good job at participatory research we will work ourselves out of a job. That might be an important fear if we lived in an ideal world, but the need for social change struggles will go away no time soon, and our opportunities to assist will not diminish very quickly either.

And this paper is also an academic speaking mostly to other academics, in words and ideas that make sense (hopefully) in that milieu. My organizer friend, Dave Beckwith (1996) offers a set of much more earthy recommendations for academics who want to help. And they are worth listing here.

- be quick
- listen
- don't just listen, participate
- know the sources
- use your priestly power for good
- be creative
- use people
- help us get ahead of the curve
- look to all your work for opportunities to help
- Pecca Fortiter! Sin bravely!

The last may be the most important. Us academics, so concerned with doing the right thing, and so trained to evaluate everything from every angle before we make any commitment to action, can often end up paralyzed. If we have real respect for the communities we work with, we will understand that they will tell us when we screw up, and they won't let us lead them astray. My recommendations come from my successes and mistakes, and may or may not make sense in the abstract. My main advice is to think about the possibilities and give it a shot and learn from it.

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