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A Review of the Literature on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Participatory Action Research

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Abstract

This paper reviews Participatory Action Research as a methodology. It maps the origins of Participatory Action Research and discusses the benefits and challenges that have been identified by other researchers in utilizing Participatory Action Research approaches in conducting research.

Keywords: Participatory Action Research, methodology, knowledge production

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Introduction

Aboriginal people's view of researchers in general and anthropologists in particular often extends beyond mere skepticism to contempt and distrust. In particular, the field of anthropology (and arguably others as well) is viewed by Aboriginal peoples as being largely esoteric, irrelevant, and incapable of contributing to solutions for the myriad of problems faced within Aboriginal communities (Warry, 1990).

Research findings are often cloaked in academic jargon, are often unintelligible to communities, and have largely been irrelevant to community needs. Academic reputations, so the argument goes, have been built on the backs of Aboriginal subjects and at the political and economic expense of Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities are now advocating research that is more collaborative and meaningful to their communities.

Awareness concerning the potential value of research varies enormously between Aboriginal communities (Warry, 1990). Warry speculated that many communities have neither the inclination nor the local expertise to generate research agendas or standards for local research (64). This is particularly true in the north, where, despite licensing by the Science Institute of the Northwest Territories, there still is, each summer, a massive influx of natural and social scientists. Inuit community inquiry groups often lack the time or the expertise to gauge the potential usefulness of the research or are unable to generate their own research agendas. Warry (1990) stated that in contrasting the North with the South, a number of southern First Nations communities routinely enter into contractual relationships before allowing researchers to enter their communities. Aboriginal leaders clearly recognize that the information needs of their communities are obvious, but they denounce the monopolistic control of academia over the research process. Specifically, when the analysis and interpretation of research findings must take account of Indigenous science, which is based on experiential and humanistic interpretation, rather than academic needs (Colorado, 1998; Warry, 1990; Stevenson, n.d.). In the quest to learn more about Indigenous Peoples and cultures, the resulting process and product of research has become a commodity – it can be exchanged with universities, colleges, and publishers for a host of values, including advanced degrees, professional reputation, career mobility, and book revenues (Richer, 1988). Indigenous Peoples themselves have rarely capitalized on the commodification of their own cultural background and knowledge. When information appropriated by researchers from Indigenous sources becomes a commodity for private ends, it inherently becomes a process of alienation (Richer, 1988) and ultimately, oppressive (Stevenson, n.d.).

Today, many Aboriginal communities will not indulge research that benefits only the researcher (Richer, 1988). Indigenous Peoples believe they have been "researched to death" and will no longer tolerate colonial intrusion by researchers (Smith, 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Richer, 1988; Flaherty, 1995). Indigenous Peoples and communities are becoming more aggressive and in some areas, particularly now in the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut, researchers are required to apply for a license in order to conduct research in the North (Stevenson, n.d.; Ward, 1996). These new research measures make it clear that Indigenous peoples now increasingly seek an equal relationship in the research process and will no longer accept researchers who do not respect and honour that equality.

Research, whether it is formal or informal, should not perpetuate the status quo. Non-intrusive methods that are most conducive to the needs of the community should be advocated for which assists in

the research process but at the same time is mindful not to continue to re-colonize participants in the process. Research methods chosen must include a process whereby members of the communities are given an opportunity to voice their opinions and be involved (but not superficially) in the research process throughout the life of any proposed project (St. Denis, 1992). Participatory Action Research or PAR has been identified as one such method that is most conducive to doing research with Aboriginal peoples and communities. Participatory Action Research is seen as a flexible method that complements the ideals held by many academic researchers in the various fields of anthropology, social sciences, history, theology, economics, philosophy, social work, community, and economic development (Fals-Borda, 1992; Frideres, 1992; Gayfer, 1992; Reimer, 1994; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). This paper provides a generic overview of the origins of Participatory Action Research and in doing so also looks at the various definitions as well as discusses some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with this research approach.

Origins of Participatory Action Research

There has long been a growing interest in alternative research paradigms. The search for new alternatives came from professionally trained researchers who found their paradigms inadequate to answer all the questions they had (Tandon, 1981). With the development of alternative research paradigms, common folk (such as the poor, illiterate, and rural people) began to initiate many successful development efforts (Tandon, 1981). Many of these alternative initiatives led to the creation of what would later be called Participatory Action Research. The term Participatory Action Research (hereafter referred to as PAR) is an umbrella term that includes several traditions of theory and practice. Definitions vary according to traditions and users (Brown, 1993). St. Denis (1992) notes that often authors coin their own terms to describe their methods and methodologies, even though they are basically similar to one another. Other terms that are used in the literature to describe PAR include participatory research, action research, praxis research, participatory inquiry, collaborative inquiry, action inquiry, and cooperative inquiry (Whyte, 1991).

According to two early architects of PAR (Tandon, 1981; Hall, 1975), two interrelated forces became instrumental in the emergence of PAR:

- Dominant research paradigms were seen as being insufficient and oppressive, and
- dominant research paradigms exploited a large majority of people in underdeveloped countries.

Classical or dominant research paradigms are premised upon notions of neutrality and objectivity. In the dominant paradigms' ongoing exploitation, it assigned the title of "professional expertise" to researchers, which implies that only professionally trained individuals can undertake to do research. Neutrality and objectivity became the hallmark of the research process. According to these paradigms, only professionally trained persons have the capacity to be neutral and objective (Tandon, 1981; Hall, 1975). Those considered to be professionally trained usually come from sectors of society that "have it all" (Tandon, 1981, p. 21). All of these reasons (and many others too numerous to mention) precipitated the need for finding an alternative research method that would replace the exploitative elements of the dominant research paradigms. It had to provide an avenue for those people traditionally underrepresented in society the opportunity to gain access to knowledge and action for improving their situations (Tandon, 1981; Almeida, Sanchez, Soto, Felix, & Perez, 1983).

The origins of PAR emerged out of development projects by oppressed people in Third World countries and entered English-language awareness during the 1970s (Brown & Tandon, 1983; Gayfer, 1992; Frideres, 1992; Fals-Borda, 1992). Much of PAR was driven by humanistic urges to assist the "victims of oligarchies" and their "development" policies (Fals-Borda, 1992). One of the earliest influences on PAR approaches came from the Brazilian adult educator, Paula Freire. Freire is well known for his support of the liberation struggles of colonized peoples in the rural areas of Latin America (Brown & Tandon, 1983; Jackson, McCaskill, & Hall, 1982; Hall 1981; Frideres, 1992; Gayfer, 1992; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Cain, 1977). Friere's ideas have in turn influenced many generations of adult educators in many parts of the world. It is rare to read a book, article, or thesis on literature, population, education, or social transformation that does not acknowledge Friere, directly or indirectly (Gayfer, 1992, p. 19). Budd Hall (1981) noted that "Freire was the first to articulate the connection between learning and political transformation and to validate that the work of socially aware educators and others were not marginal, but a key to transformation" (Gayfer, 1992, p. 19). Friere's approach to adult education engaged individuals in critical analysis and organized action to improve their dismal situations (Brown & Tandon, 1983). His work affirmed that peoples' own knowledge is valuable to community development and the research process (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

Freire first came to the attention of English readers in 1969 through the Harvard University (Heaney, 1993). Today, Freire's writings are commonly included in required bibliographies of graduate programs in adult education. His books, once banned in his native Brazil, are now used to guide the training of those in the Brazilian military and local universities (Heaney, 1993). Although PAR came later and developed independently of Freire, today Freire would be considered one of PAR's staunchest supporters (Gayfer, 1992).

At first PAR was either ignored or roundly condemned by other researchers the world over (Heaney, 1993; Gayfer, 1992). But by the 1970s and early 1980s, PAR not only became an interesting topic of discussion but it also quickly became the subject of academic discourse in graduate programs and a favorite topic at respectable conferences around the world (Heaney, 1993). One university even established a "center" for participatory action research (Gayfer, 1992). A major advocate of PAR since 1975 has been the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) (Frideres, 1992). ICAE is an international network of participatory researchers, which held the first international forum on participatory research in Yugoslavia in April 1980 (Gayfer, 1981). PAR as an alternative or collective approach to social investigation was introduced to readers in a 1975 issue of *Convergence* (Vol. 8, No. 2). In this issue, Budd Hall called for assistance to develop this methodology, which brought forward both an enthusiastic international response as well as blasts of hostility and criticism from the elite and dominant professional circles (Hall, 1981; Gayfer, 1992). These responses gave rise to the development of a participatory network during 1977 and 1978 as a program of ICAE. This partnership with ICAE came about because it appeared that PAR, with its emphasis on "people as experts," shared a common premise with adult education (Hall, 1981). According to Gayfer (1981), who was the editor of *Convergence* at the time, and Hall (1981), this network was comprised of autonomous centers from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America, with an increased interest shown by educators in the Caribbean and Arab regions. *Convergence* provided an update on PAR in a 1981 edition (Vol. 14, No. 3) and continues to publish numerous articles on PAR discourse (Gayfer, 1992).

Although PAR had its origins in Third World countries, Third World countries are not the only countries where PAR methodology is being conducted. By the late 70s, participatory research work was well underway throughout the world. Subsequent projects brought participatory research from the developing countries to urban and rural North America and to various disciplines, including public health, sociology, economics, anthropology, history, community development initiatives, theology, philosophy, and social work (Fals-Borda, 1992; Frideres, 1992; Reimer, 1994; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). This awareness increased the realization of knowledge as power, an idea first espoused by Paulo Freire in his major publication *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Gayfer, 1992; Frideres, 1992).

The shift of PAR into North America created opportunities to work with traditionally disadvantaged peoples and social movements, such as Latin American immigrants and First Nations Councils (Hall, 1993). PAR has addressed women's issues (Hall, 1981; Maguire, 1987; Gayfer, 1992; Barnsely & Ellis, 1992) as well as the issues of peoples with disabilities (Barnsley & Ellis, 1992). PAR has also served as a tool of the Aboriginal movement in Canada, particularly with concerns surrounding health, social, and economic issues (Jackson et al., 1982).

In Canadian social work, Brant-Castellano (1986) noted its usefulness in resolving the widespread crisis experienced by Aboriginal families and communities in relation to the reform of Aboriginal Child welfare during the early 1980s. According to Brant-Castellano, PAR was initiated because the surrounding society pre-empted the community's right to work out their own solutions respecting family matters and, in attempting to help, compounded their problems (p. 52). With the help of PAR, a healing process began that was initiated by Aboriginal Peoples, and with the determination that their own knowledge would never again be overridden by outside expertise.

Activist researchers in the Tanzanian Bureau of Resource Allocation and Land Use Planning Project are considered, in the literature available, to be the first to use the term "participatory research" (Gayfer, 1992). This term was used to describe an experimental pilot project survey with 46 villages in Tanzania, as part of the self-reliance campaign on village development. Their approach scoffed at the social science research myth of objectivity and neutrality as well as the sanctity of survey methods with a simple principle: "Villagers themselves as active participants in a research plan that would ultimately motivate them to evaluate their own strengths and needs for the development of their villages" (Gayfer, 1992, p. 20). The Tanzanian experience foreshadowed some basic tenets of PAR:

> faith in the capacity of ordinary people to learn, to name their reality, to become their own researchers in seeking answers to the questions of their daily lives and survival; the inquiry as a collective and educative process; participation in agenda-setting, data collection and analyses; and control over outcomes (Gayfer, 1992, pp. 20-21).

Defining Participatory Action Research

No one owns PAR nor is a step-by-step "cookbook of recipes" for doing PAR available (Gayfer, 1981; Hall, 1975). Because there are no hard and fast rules respecting how PAR should be implemented, it is a process easily adaptable to many researchers and research situations. Some of the common values underlying PAR, as identified by Hall (cited in Ryan & Robinson, 1990; Cain, 1977, pp. 11-12) include:

- The problem originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analyzed and solved by the community.

- The ultimate goal of the research is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people involved. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community itself [rather than researchers].
- Participatory research involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process [from beginning to end].
- Participatory research involves a whole range of powerless groups of people: the exploited, the poor, the oppressed, the marginal, [including Aboriginal peoples], etc.
- The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development.
- It is a scientific method of research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.
- The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, which can lead to militancy on his/her part, rather than detachment (Ryan & Robinson 1990; Cain, 1977, pp. 11-12).

Many researchers (Hoare, Levy, & Robinson, 1993; Ryan & Robinson, 1990; Simonson & Bushaw, 1993; Readon, Welsh, Kreiswirth, & Forrester, 1993; Lammerick, 1994) have described PAR as being an integrated approach to research that involves the participation of community members. Maguire (1987), in particular, described PAR as an alternative style of research, which uses a three-part process of social investigation, education, and action to share in the creation of social knowledge with oppressed people. In more detail, Maguire described PAR as a method of social investigation of problems, involving the participation of oppressed and ordinary people in problem posing and solving. It is an educational process for the researcher as well as the participants, who analyze the structural causes of named problems through collective discussion and interaction. Maguire recognized that PAR is a way for researchers and oppressed peoples to join in solidarity to take collective action, from both a short and long term basis, toward radical social change. Maguire notes that participatory research aims at three types of change:

- Development of critical consciousness of both researcher and participants,
- improvement in the lives of those involved in the research process, and
- transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationship (Maguire, 1987, p. 29).

Barnsley and Ellis (1992) in their publication *Research for Change: Participatory Action Research for Community Groups*, defined PAR as being a "community directed process of collecting and analyzing information on an issue or situation for the purposes of taking action and making change" (p. 90). A community-directed approach means that community members assist the researcher while at the same time empower themselves in the ongoing investigation of the social reality of their community. PAR helps the participants build local skills and the capacity to increase their community's autonomy (Maguire, 1987; St. Denis, 1992; Hoare et al., 1993).

PAR is often illustrated in the literature as involving the full and active participation of the community in the entire process from start to finish (Maguire, 1987; Barnsley & Ellis, 1992; Hoare et al., 1993; Simonson & Bushaw, 1993; Lammerick, 1994). Fals-Borda (1992) characterized PAR as "part of social activism, with an ideological and spiritual commitment to promote people's (collective) praxis. That informally or formally, the life of everybody, as part of the PAR research is a kind of praxis" (p. 15).

Community members have a role to play in setting the agenda of enquiry; they also participate in the data collection and the analysis of documentation generated over the course of the research and more

importantly, participants have more control over the use and outcome of the whole research process. In a nutshell, PAR means doing research "with" rather than "on" people (Maguire, 1987).

At least five fields of practice have made contributions to PAR approaches: Action Research in Organizations, Participatory Research in Community Development, Action Research in Schools, Farmer Participatory Research and Technology Generation, and Participatory Evaluation. According to the literature review of PAR by Deshler and Ewert (1995) PAR has also been used in conjunction with architecture and community planning, landscape ecology design, and environmental and land use planning. The fields of practice that have contributed to PAR are discussed briefly below as an introduction.

Action Research in Organizations is extensively used in the field of organizational behavior and organizational development in industry and business organizations by management embracing human resource theories, specifically associated with the socio-technical systems perspective that has focused on the fit between technical and social systems (Deshler & Ewert, 1995). This tradition has its roots in Latin America and was strongly influenced by concepts such as critical thinking, critical consciousness, conscientization, and empowerment by Paulo Freire in the late 1960s (Deshler & Ewert, 1995). Among the major authors representing this tradition are Brown (1992); Readon et al. (1993); and Whyte (1992).

Participatory Research in Community Development is considered to be a process of combining education, research, and collective action on the part of oppressed groups working with popular educators and community organizers. The knowledge that is generated is intended to help solve practical problems within a community and, ultimately, contribute to a fairer and juster society. Its primary purpose is to encourage the poor and oppressed and those that work with them to generate and control their own knowledge. It assumes that knowledge generates power and that people's knowledge is central to social change (Deshler & Ewert, 1995). Authors that represent Participatory Research in Community Development include Fals-Borda (1992); Hall (1975, 1981); McCall (1981); Tandon (1981); Brown and Tandon (1983); Maguire (1987); Readon et al. (1993); and Barnsley and Ellis (1992).

Action Research in Schools advocates that teachers should control the educational research agenda and participates in conducting inquiries to test the worth of educational knowledge (Deshler & Ewert, 1995). Some of the authors identified with Action Research in Schools include Simonson and Bishaw (1993) and Husen (1988).

Farmer Participatory Research and Technology Generation is also known as Participatory Technology Development. Mainly agricultural researchers and other instrumental rural development workers developed this approach gradually as an alternative to the traditional "transfer of technology" or "top-down" approach to agricultural research and extension. It emerged from farming systems research and emphasizes the participation of farmers in technology generation, testing, and evaluation to increase or promote sustainable agricultural production and natural resource management (Deshler & Ewert, 1995). Another form within this tradition is Participatory Rural Appraisal, a process that involves villages in a situation analysis that can lead to further participatory documentation of local knowledge and agriculture and natural management experiments. The acknowledgement of the value and importance of Indigenous or local knowledge accompanied the formulation of participatory technology generation (Deshler & Ewert, 1995). Major authors associated with this approach include Schensul (1987) and Cornwal and Jewkes (1995).

Lastly, Participatory Evaluation as described by Deshler and Ewert (1995) emerged out of responses to concerns that program evaluations were being under-utilized and that participation on the part of stakeholders would increase their use. Reflection on the relationship of program evaluation practice as a way of serving the public's interest led to participatory evaluation that could serve democratic ideals of social justice and equity. A similar recognition occurred in the evaluation of international programs of community health, rural development, literacy, agriculture, and natural resource management that involving people who are on the receiving end of development in evaluations is likely to assure the most efficient allocation of scarce resources and early identification of ineffective or wasteful use of those resources. This tradition emphasizes that people on the receiving end are ultimately the best judges of whether or not benefits have been produced. Among the major authors representing this approach are Uphoff (1992) and Reimer (1994).

The Challenges of Participatory Action Research

While participatory methodologies seem to be all the rage these days, many researchers (Hall, 1981; Conchelos & Kassam, 1981; Pigozzi, 1982; Simonson & Bushaw, 1993; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995) have expounded upon some of the possible negative elements and pitfalls associated with PAR. While conventional research strategies have been identified as being inadequate, researchers (Tandon 1975; Hall, 1981; Conchelos & Kassam, 1981; St. Denis, 1992; Reimer, 1994; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995) agree that PAR, while preferable, is not a simple alternative.

Some academics, most notably Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), have noted that when engaged in PAR that "working with local people is far from easy" (p. 1673). Some of the factors that make it difficult for researchers to conduct participatory research include the fact that not everyone within the community will want to partake in participatory research. Add to this the fact that local people may be skeptical about the perceived benefits of the research and as such, may not want to invest their time and energy into any research project. In relation to this, Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) noted that community participation often carries more significance for outsiders than it does for those within the community. Even if there is interest by community members in the research project, there may be the added barriers of time as participation in any research related activity is time-consuming. Most individuals, especially those living within oppressed economies, are too busy trying to secure the basic necessities of life to participate in research activities (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

Cornwall and Jewkes (quoting Madan [1987]) reminded researchers that participating communities are "made" rather than "born." Further, that involvement by the community members may not always be continuous or predictable. Participants can experience task exhaustion and the composition of the research group(s) can fluctuate over time. Researchers must be careful to tread softly between the need to generate sufficient interest for the research project and at the same time avoid raising false hopes within the community. They also suggest that the limitations of the research should be honestly identified at the outset so that the establishment of trust within the community is not compromised. Trust can be compromised if participation leads to frustration for participants if they think benefits might be available through participation but then find that knowledge about benefits in no way translates into or guarantees access to benefits (Pigozzi, 1982). St. Denis (1992) warns that if people do not understand the research being conducted and/or do not have the opportunity to negotiate a direction for the research to take; they will be reluctant to participate in the research. She further postulates that community people are not

academics, and they will not take seriously or get involved in a research project that they do not understand. Even the concept of research as something that can benefit the community, in of itself may be an alien concept to the community (St. Denis, 1992).

Hall (1981) recognized early that there are some dangers for participants under PAR. Hall noted that social science researchers often gravitate toward participatory research as a way to get people to agree to a position, an action, or a policy, which others (e.g. social workers, adult educators, etc.) feel is important to their purposes. These purposes are not necessarily the same purposes of the participants or communities. In this way, PAR can be used as an effective and manipulative "tool" for getting the predominant views of the state into the heart and minds of those that oppose the predominant views (Hall 1981; St. Denis, 1992). A good example of such an approach is the consultation approach the Department of Indian Affairs in Canada endorsed through the much-anticipated revision of the *Indian Act* by Minister Nault's promotion of the First Nations Governance Act. In such instances, PAR is used as a coercive instrument, which governments can use to subtly brainwash those who resist the dominant position.

Researchers who utilize participatory methods must be very careful to recognize that no two groups of peoples or communities are ever homogenous. Within groups and/or communities, there exists a multitude of interrelated axes of differences, including wealth, gender, age, religion, health, ethnicity, and power (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Researchers, as a result, must be cognizant of competing, contested, and changing versions of what constitutes "community needs" and/or "values." Added to this is the need to be aware that different definitions will emerge depending upon which interest group is consulted and accordingly to the way in which these groups or communities interpret the researchers' intentions (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

In utilizing PAR methodologies, researchers can be caught in a catch-22 situation depending upon whom they align themselves with upon initial contact with communities and/or groups. Research has been noted to be more easily facilitated if it is organized through the medium of dominant stakeholders or "leaders," who are often most able to mobilize resources, interest, and articulate concerns about the research project. However, the problem with utilizing these individuals may mean, "inviting manipulation of the research according to the agendas of the powerful" (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1673). On the other hand, working outside the power structures can weaken both the potential impact of the project at a wider level, as well as invite continued marginalization of the people and goals of the project (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

PAR can also bring other unintended negative consequences to those who participate. Participants may become alienated from their community by virtue of their association with the research project. For instance, heightened awareness by a marginal group of its oppression can increase unhappiness (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). In the extreme opposite, participants might come to view themselves as, or align themselves with, the elite. Some projects have resulted in the creation of a participating elite among the local people. That is, participants come to believe that his or her newly gained skills or knowledge somehow make them superior to non-participating members within their communities (Pigozzi, 1982). Pigozzi (1982) noted that in one participatory situation, those participating in the research project "considered non-participants as stupid, at best" (p. 11). Researchers must be conscious of these kinds of attitudes that which, when cultivated under the participatory process, can foster factionalism within a community.

Factionalism sometimes exists irrespective of the introduction of participatory research activities. For instance, Pigozzi (1982) pointed out that within some participatory relationships (especially in Third World countries), there already exist class structures (whether they be real or perceived) which researchers should be aware of. Researchers must be aware of the local constraints that enable class systems to exist. And further, that the participatory process can be affected by such factors as class tensions, factionalism, and ethnicity, which can have a direct impact upon participatory research. In acknowledging that these factors have relevance, researchers might benefit from understanding how these factors might be affected by project activities and vice versa (Pigozzi, 1982, p. 10). To bring home this point, Pigozzi (1982) highlighted a story about rickshaw pullers and how participation contributed to factionalism rather than eradicating unfair structures that previously existed:

> Within the cooperative program of the Comilla Project rickshaw pullers were one of the disadvantaged groups. Each puller rented a rickshaw at a high daily rate, which he paid to the owner from his daily earnings. A group of pullers asked help in forming a cooperative. Each contributed a portion of daily earnings to the cooperative so that each member could eventually own a rickshaw. It worked. Within the relatively short period of time, each puller had become his own master through following simple cooperative principles (p. 10).

As successful as this story sounds, Pigozzi states that it failed to capture the negative outcomes that resulted from this participatory endeavor. The rickshaw pullers, becoming themselves owners, ended up repeating the very same exploitative cycle all over again. By hiring out their newly acquired rickshaws at high rates to other pullers less fortunate than themselves, they perpetuated the same exploitative mentality (Pigozzi, 1982, p. 10). Pigozzi (1982) stresses that it is important researchers recognize what participatory research and the education associated with it can do to participants and what its limitations are (p. 11).

There are other parties that have direct involvement in participatory activities. The role of these third parties has remained silent in most of the literature on PAR. However, some scholars (Hall, 1981; Conchelos & Kassam, 1981; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995) have identified their concerns with the role of third parties in PAR. Third parties can include funding and sponsoring agencies as well as government officials and its bureaucracy. Funders of research projects can play a major part in wielding influence over the research project and process. For instance, Hall (1981) noted influence can be exercised by utilizing funding policies to expand procedures that regulate certain groups within society and he cites two examples such as immigrants and Aboriginal peoples. Intervention and influence are especially predominant in situations where the research is funded by government sources. In such situations, the researcher is rarely given complete discretion to carry out research in the manner he or she sees fit. The third party may intervene in a variety of ways from demanding practical results of a certain sort at a certain time or demand project documentation at awkward moments and points of time during the life of the research project. Thus, the results generated by the research can ultimately run the risk of becoming a programmed product of the third party or sponsoring agency rather than being owned by the researcher and the participants of the research project (Conchelos & Kassam, 1981).

It is important to note that the participatory process has political dimensions attached to it as well. Participation, especially when it is linked to decision-making, is political because change through

participation often demands change in the distribution of power (Pigozzi, 1982). Under such circumstances, Pigozzi (1982) elucidated that,

> those who are threatened by a redistribution of power have, in their own best interest, responded in predictable ways. Usually they try to prevent loss of power (or resource control) by making it difficult to operate or continue research or development projects that facilitate the confrontation of power structures by the disadvantaged (p. 12).

Thus, researchers who advocate participatory methods must be cognizant and aware that the response of the rich and/or powerful might not always be one of accommodation to the project, the researcher, or the participants in the project. Again, Pigozzi (1982) cites an extreme example of non-accommodation by the local elite to attempts by the powerless to lessen the gap between the rich and the powerless. In this example, 15 peasant participants were killed when a project-meeting center was burned down. The fire was attributed to a coalition of local elites who allegedly were threatened by the power that the cooperating participants might be able to wield (p. 13). Pigozzi concludes that participatory projects that are political by virtue of their goals may run into difficulties imposed from the outside during implementation. However, Pigozzi also states that participatory projects need not always have such dire effects to be problematic. He states that if participation His supposed to enhance benefits in some way, then the very absence of outcomes and benefits can be considered to be a negative result of participation (p. 13).

It is primarily through the participatory venue that researchers have been provided with insights and views that they ordinarily would not have access to or know about. One of the earliest proponents of PAR, Budd Hall (1981) had this to say about PAR: “It would be an error to assume that naive or uncontrolled use of participatory research results in strengthening the power of the powerless, for experience has shown that power [under PAR methods] can easily accrue in those already in control” (p. 15). As a result, researchers have gained more power for themselves within the academic status quo and this has fed ideological control by giving more power to the institutions that researchers do research for (Hall, 1981, p. 15). Moreover, most academic researchers are ill prepared to do participatory research simply because they have been taught to consider themselves and Western scientific knowledge as superior (Colorado, 1988; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Within this milieu, research is given artificial neutrality. Training instills in researchers notions of “objectivity” and the “purity” of science that numbs them to the political realities of life in the real world of those they conduct research on and/or with (Colorado, 1988; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). On the other hand, it has also been highlighted by some academics (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995) that the participants drawn from local communities, like academics, carry their own biases, prejudices, and beliefs into participatory research. While their local knowledge and connectedness into local networks can enhance communication and commitment, in some contexts it may be inappropriate to engage local people in certain types of participatory research projects. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) highlighted an example of research being done in Uganda on HIV/AIDS, where it was necessary to employ non-local individuals to collect sensitive data so as not to further stigmatize the local people who had contracted HIV/AIDS (p. 1674). In this project, it was necessary to shelter the privacy of these people from the community members who did not have the HIV/AIDS virus/disease.

Another disadvantage highlighted by Reimer (1994) as to community impressions of PAR, relate to the inherent relationship outside researchers have with local individuals that are hired to assist in the research process. Individuals that are hired under the rubric of “co-researcher” may have ambivalent

feelings about their role in the research process. He or she may know that his or her role encompasses more than just interpreting for the principal researcher. However, to other community members, he or she may not be seen as being a "researcher" simply because he or she has not received the formal education or training to become a "researcher." As a result, those community members who have not yet had direct participation in the research project will see these individuals as merely "helpers" rather than legitimate "co-researchers." Reimer (1994) points out that the history of colonialism within the research enterprise and the relationship of research dynamics is impossible to eradicate. Much work remains to be done to "decolonize" and "de-mystify" social science research being done particularly in Aboriginal communities (Reimer, 1994).

Conclusion

This piece has attempted to define PAR and map its origins. It has outlined advantages and disadvantages as identified in the prevailing literature that has evaluated PAR as a primary research method. As highlighted there are benefits coupled with weaknesses in choosing PAR as a method of doing research. PAR attempts to undo the monopoly over knowledge production by universities (Hall, 1999) and within the hands of Aboriginal peoples, in particular, it can be used as a powerful tool among many methods that empower and reflect ways of knowing, being, and doing that are culturally endemic to the diverse Aboriginal societies in Canada. This article merely offers readers and Aboriginal communities as well as researchers an opportunity to choose for themselves whether the advantages as outlined above outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa. While PAR as a research method has been around for close to 35 years, its use in the Aboriginal context of research is still relatively uncultivated. However, there are many research initiatives undertaken by Aboriginal communities and researchers which have since taken advantage of this powerful approach.

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