



CHAPTER

25 Lineages: A Past, Present, and Future of Participatory Action Research

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Abstract

Participatory action research (PAR) in the twenty-first century asserts a democratization of who has the right to create knowledge, engage in participatory processes, research social conditions, and take action on issues that impact their lives. PAR is an approach to doing research that is based on a set of commitments. PAR theory and practice is a collective creation, benefiting from the thoughtful work of hundreds of people from more than sixty countries. This chapter traces three of PAR’s historical lineages, explores a current convergence of lineages called *critical PAR*, and offers some areas for future consideration.

Keywords: Participatory action research, critical participatory action research, action research

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Looming large in this mosaic created from 14 definitions of Participatory action research (PAR) are the words “knowledge,” “process,” “research” and “action.” PAR in the twenty-first century asserts a democratization of who has the right to create knowledge, engage in participatory processes, research social conditions, and take action about issues that impact their lives. Although PAR is important to include in a methods handbook, PAR transcends method (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine & Torre, 2004; Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Tolman & Brydon–Miller, 1997; Torre & Ayala, 2009). Participatory action research is an approach to doing research based on a set of commitments (Fals Borda, 1997b; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). PAR theory and practice is a collective creation, benefiting from the thoughtful work of hundreds

of people from more than sixty countries (Hall, 1981; McTaggart, 1997). In this chapter, I offer a brief outline of three of PAR's historical lineages, explore a current convergence of lineages called *critical PAR*, and offer some areas for future consideration.

Lineages

Quantum physics tells us that no matter how thorough our observation of the present, the (unobserved) past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities.

(Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, pp. 105–106)

Just as there are multiple definitions of PAR, there are also multiple histories. Many people have traced the roots of PAR (Adelman 1997; Brydon-Miller 2001; Fals Borda 2006; Hall, 2005; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; McTaggart, 1997; Torre et al., 2012) and have articulated histories that intersect and diverge from each other. Some argue that PAR is the result of a convergence of theoretical and practical traditions in many fields such as social work, education, agriculture, health, obstetrics, housing, and community development (McTaggart, 1997). The kaleidoscope of fields, intellectual traditions, popular movements, and “people’s knowledge” that has contributed to PAR grows more intricate as one examines the history of PAR in other parts of the world, such as Germany (Altrichter & Gstenttner, 1997), the United Kingdom (Adelman, 1997); Colombia (Fals Borda 1991; 1997b); Australia (Grundy, 1997); Venezuela (Dinan & Garcia, 1997), and Spain (Brezmes, 1997).

In this chapter, three historical PAR lineages are examined. One emanates from the notable psychologist Kurt Lewin and his attempts to address “the minority problem” in the United States in the 1940s. Another emerges from committed activists and scholars operating in the midst of revolutions, failed development policies, and large-scale popular reform movements in Latin America. A final lineage traces the emergence of critical PAR. The history constructed by critical PAR theorists and practitioners memorializes activist-scholars not often recognized for their contributions, specifically women and scholars of color. I offer a historical tracing and brief critique of each lineage in order to ground the second part of the chapter, which explores key concepts, methods, and potential new directions for critical PAR in its sociohistorical context.

Lewin

Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. (Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, 1845, p. 72 in Engels, F (1888)

The best way to understand something is to try to change it.

(Kurt Lewin, in Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 19)

In 1933, Germany’s growing anti-Semitism forced a German social-psychologist by the name of Kurt Lewin to flee to the United States. A promising psychologist in Germany, Lewin continued to publish, lecture, and create theory as he settled into his life in the United States (Smith, 2001). In his first few years in the States, Lewin worked at Cornell University and for the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station at the University of Iowa. By the time he became a naturalized citizen, in 1940, Lewin was able to see both the differences and frightening similarities between the United States and Germany in relation to “minority problems.” Drawing on the Marxist orientation he had developed during his time at the Frankfurt School in Berlin before coming to the United States Lewin knew that he must simultaneously study anti-Semitism in the United States and take action. By World War II, Lewin began to devote concerted time and energy to examining the psychological problems confronting minority groups. As director of the Center for Group Dynamics at MIT, a position he held at that time, he began developing methods to alter prejudice and discrimination.

As Lewin became increasingly committed to using research to effect social change, he decided that it was best to do this work outside of the academy. In 1945, the Commission on Community Interrelations (CCI) was officially launched by the American Jewish Congress, with Kurt Lewin as chief consultant (Cherry & Borshuk, 1998). This institute’s mission was to help the United States handle its “group problems” more efficiently and less prejudicially (Cherry & Borshuk, 1998). The emphasis on action research that became the

predominant form of research conducted at CCI was a direct result of the fact that the organization received funding from the American Jewish Congress. Lewin felt that the institute could not receive continued community support for CCI projects unless it met community needs head on. At CCI, he encouraged his staff to join with community groups to study real-life situations and produce results that could be used to effect change.

At CCI, Lewin focused his research agenda on the transformation of groups, communities, and institutions and away from problematizing individuals. This notion ran counter to the prevailing psychological approach of the time. His research and writings implicated all members of society as responsible for changing the conditions that create so-called minority problems. In a seminal piece entitled “Action Research and Minority Problems,” published in the *Journal of Social Issues* in 1946, Lewin wrote, “In recent years we have started to realize that so-called minority problems are in fact majority problems, that the Negro problem is the problem of the white, that the Jewish problem is the problem of the non-Jew, and so on” (p. 44). Although his analysis focused predominately on the Jewish minority, Lewin was adamant that his work should not only focus on Jewish people but be an intercultural project. Lewin utilized the power of groups to engage in collective inquiry aimed at changing communities and social institutions.

Initially, Lewin delineated four different varieties of action research: diagnostic, participant, empirical, and experimental. Lewin’s PAR was based on a spiral model of self-reflective cycles of planning a change, fact-finding, acting, observing and evaluating the process and consequences of change, reflecting on these processes and then replanning, acting, observing, and so forth. For scientific knowledge to be the basis for social action, Lewin wrote, “fact-finding has to include all the aspects of community life—economic factors as well as political factors or cultural tradition. It has to include the majority and the minority, non-Jews and ourselves” (Cherry & Borshuk, 1998, p. 126). Diverse group members would begin Lewin’s research process with a “thematic concern” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) or general idea that some kind of improvement or change was desirable. The group would then engage in Lewin’s cyclical approach to research.

An early example of the work produced by CCI was the use of the Community Self-Survey to research integrating housing, equal employment opportunities, the training of community leaders, and the best handling of street gangs (Marrow, 1964). The Community Self-Survey was initially developed by Charles S. Johnson and colleagues at the Race Relations Department (later Institute) at Fisk University, then systematized for use as a tool for democratic nation building by Margot Hass Wormser and Claire Selltiz, housing activists and research associates at CCI (Torre et al., 2012). The hallmark of the method was large-scale community participation and educational practices throughout the research process, particularly during data collection (Torre et al., 2012). Lewin felt that it was essential that the community being studied take part in the process in order to “instill fact-finding procedures, social eyes and ears, right into social-action bodies” (Marrow, 1969).

This nascent version of PAR in the United States was characterized by Lewin as research for social management or social engineering (Marrow, 1969). Recent critiques of PAR have focused on the negative aspects of PAR’s use in social management because it has commonly been deployed within the international development context (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). At the time, however, Lewin believed that social engineering had potential as a new type of science that could make a viable contribution to the maintenance of democratic traditions (Cherry & Borshuk, 1998). Although Lewin believed that both the process and the products (such as reports, articles, etc.) of PAR should be participatory, the literature of the time suggests that he did not include nonacademic co-researchers in theorizing about how to improve race relations or engage in community development (McTaggart, 1997).

The critique of Lewin’s brand of PAR in no way minimized the impact of its contribution or the contribution of Lewin as a teacher and mentor. Lewin had many intellectual descendants and colleagues who name him as an influential figure in their lives. Psychologist such as Morton Deutsch studied under Lewin at MIT and worked with him on projects related to group tensions and racial attitudes. Deutsch’s later work on integrated housing led to a reversal of the policy of segregated public housing. Deutsch is regarded as the founder of modern conflict theory, has acted as the president of many psychological associations, and has published prolifically. Deutsch also mentored scholars such as Michelle Fine, who has spent her academic career using social science to promote social justice and who has worked with her own students to develop critical PAR (see the section on critical PAR later in this chapter). Other notable students and colleagues include Elliot Jaques, a student of Lewin’s who helped found the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations,

and Ronald Lippit, who collaborated with Lewin on the establishment in 1945 of the National Training Laboratories. Last, Festinger and Cartwright suggest that it is because Lewin showed how research could tackle complex social phenomena that many regard Lewin as a founder of modern experimental social psychology.

Vivencias: PAR's Latin American Roots

The greatest humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves. (Freire, 1970)

There was a lot to do, to fight for, to plan. We had to stop crying and start fighting.

(Che Guevara, as quoted in Castaneda, 1998, *Companero*, p. 83)

In 1960, the success of the Cuban revolution sent shockwaves of change reverberating across Latin America. People felt hopeful, powerful, and inspired to mobilize. According to Fals Borda, a pioneer of PAR from Colombia, this is one of the starting points for PAR (or participatory research/PR) in Latin America (Fals Borda, 1991). Participatory action research's Latin American lineage intertwines the contributions of various theorists, philosophers, and educators, braiding a revolutionary research paradigm that influenced people around the world.

Failed international development policies of the 1960s and 1970s fueled a desire of social scientists in the Latin American lineage to promote self-sufficiency in their research processes (Fals Borda & Rahman 1991). In fact, many social scientists began to reject the positivist paradigm advanced by international development agencies because they felt it served to maintain the status quo (Maguire, 1987). There was an urgent need for a new approach that would both transform people and also attempt to change structures while remaining independent of outside intervention. The goal was to engage in a process of collective inquiry and action to solve problems identified by those most directly impacted (Fals Borda, 1997a). It was the distinctive viewpoint of PAR practitioners in this lineage that "domination of the 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, including control over the social power to determine what is useful knowledge" (Rahman, 1991, p. 14). This lineage was concerned with using "common" people's expertise to shape policy and action.

In this PAR lineage, trained social scientists or researchers from academic institutions were referred to as "animators" who facilitated the transformation of common knowledge to critical knowledge within a research collective (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991). The ultimate goal of this "animator" was to become unnecessary as the collective became better skilled at engaging in inquiry, producing knowledge, and using it to resolve their own problems. Valuing eventual self-sufficiency of community collectives from "outside" researchers necessitated a focus on capacity building throughout the research process. This sensibility cultivated a "creativist" view of development in which activist scholars worked with people to research, design, and enact social change. This model rejected the approach of "consuming" from those in power an idea of how development/change should happen (Fals Borda, 1997b).

Also in the 1960s, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, philosopher, and critical theorist, emerged as a major figure challenging existing models of education and research. Freire developed a democratized research process to support people's participation in knowledge production and social transformation (Freire, 1972; Kindon et al., 2007). Freire's process emphasized the importance of raising critical consciousness or *concientizacao* in order to create social change. Freire believed that to develop critical consciousness one must learn to perceive economic, political, and social contradictions through inquiry, reflection, and action (Freire, 1970; Kindon et al., 2007).

Freire's ideas and approach to community change connected with those who were fighting against imperialism, colonialism, oppressive "development" strategies, and positivistic models of research. Freire acted as a conduit, bringing the ideas of Fals Borda and other Latin American social scientists to the attention of people in other parts of the world. In 1971, Paulo Freire visited social scientist Marja-Liisa Swantz, who was doing work in Tanzania. Drawing on Freire's methods, Swantz then coined the term "participatory research" to describe her Tanzanian work promoting community-led development projects (Hall, 2005; Kindon et al., 2007). Rajesh Tandon of India used the name "community-based research" to describe a similar approach that he developed from the ideas in this lineage (Hall, 2005; Kindon et al., 2007).

Many of the PAR theorists in this lineage believed that PAR had the ability to radically alter the sociopolitical climate of their countries from the bottom upwards (Fals Borda, 1997a). Fals Borda, a prominent social scientist in Colombia, was determined that PAR had the potential to create a new type of state:

In the same way, the creative sociopolitical force set in motion by PAR may also lead to the conformation of a new type of State which is less demanding, controlling and powerful, inspired by the positive core values of the people and nurtured by autochthonous cultural values based on a truly democratic and human ideal.

(Fals Borda, 1991, p. 6)

Fals Borda and other founders of PAR in this lineage were adamant that creating a “people’s science” would have a profound impact on society as a whole.

The PAR work being done in the majority world until 1977 was characterized by an activist and somewhat antiprofessional bent because many of the researchers quit university posts (Rahman & Fals Borda, 1991). There was a strong rejection of established institutions related to government, traditional political parties, churches, and academia (Rahman & Fals Borda, 1991). This early activism and radicalism eventually gave way to people working with PAR in a spectrum of contexts, both within and outside academia, while maintaining their revolutionary spirit and commitment (Rahman & Fals Borda, 1991). In this phase, many of the founders began to clarify some of their theoretical positions.

Although many theorists shaped PAR’s Latin American epistemological roots, the most influential were Marx and Gramsci. Drawing on Marx’s theory of dialectical materialism, a PAR approach in this lineage views institutions and practices as socially and historically constituted but able to be reconstituted as a result of human agency and action (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Oquist, 1978). Marx considered *praxis*—the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, practiced, embodied, or realized—as an essential component of knowledge creation. Similar to the concept of *praxis*, Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, who, according to Fals Borda, (1991), had a profound influence on the PAR of Latin America, developed the concept of the *vivencia*. *Vivencia* means that “through the actual experience of something, we intuitively apprehend its essence; we feel, enjoy and understand it as reality, and we thereby place our own being in a wider, more fulfilling context” (Fals Borda, 1991, p. 4). Theory in this lineage emerges from experience and collective action. Value is placed on those members of the research team who have experienced the issue under investigation. Additionally, all co-researchers are strongly encouraged to reflect on their own experience to generate theory, create research, take action, and then reflect on those actions to refine theory.

The notion of the dialectic expounded on by both Marx and Gramsci is a key concept in Latin American PAR. Contradictions such as subjective–objective and oppressed–oppressor are analyzed in terms of the relationship and interdependence of the terms (Oquist, 1978). Perceiving the dialectical relationship between commitment and *praxis* led those in this lineage to reject other asymmetrical relationships in traditional academic research paradigms such as subject–object and researcher–researched. The Latin American PAR lineage promoted the idea that there was immense potential for creativity once dichotomies are broken down. PAR researchers believed that offering a seat at the table to those people who have been historically denied translates into better research and action. Researchers and community members in this lineage hoped that PAR would valorize common knowledge and democratize knowledge production in service of the oppressed. In fact, Gramsci called for a new kind of intellectual to be at the forefront of this counterhegemonic process: the “organic intellectual” (Gramsci, 1971). “Organic intellectuals” are described as being critical of the status quo and using common language and culture to activate the existing intellectual activity of the masses. Breaking the monopoly of knowledge by those in power was a core aim, and many academics doubled as revolutionaries attempting to break down hierarchical structures in solidarity with those most effected (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991).

Although this PAR lineage was resurrected mainly in Latin America, Africa, and some parts of Asia, a consciousness was growing in Europe and North America as well. In Canada, Stinson developed methods of evaluation along action research lines for community development work (Hall, 1981). Bud Hall became a major figure in Canadian PAR work and around the world. Dr. Hall has either founded or led a variety of organizations and networks that utilize and promote PAR, including the International Participatory Research Network and the North American Alliance for Popular and Adult Education. In the Netherlands, Jan de Vries has explored alternative research paradigms from a philosophical base (Hall, 1981). In Britain, the

National Institute for Adult Education pioneered participatory research in evaluating its adult literacy campaign (Hall, 1981). In Italy, Paolo Orefice applied PR research to investigations of community and districts' awareness of power and control (Hall, 1981). And, finally, in the United States, in addition to those working with PAR from the Lewinian lineage, from the 1930s on the Highlander Center in Tennessee became a space for activists to use PAR and popular education in the service of workers' rights, land issues, civil rights, immigrant rights, and youth movement building.

In 1977, the Participation Research Network was formed to support people from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America engaging in ongoing dialogues on how to improve PAR/PR. In 1982, Mohammad Anisur Rahman, a founding PAR researcher from Bangladesh, made a formal presentation on PAR in academic circles during the Tenth World Congress of Sociology in Mexico City. According to Rahman and Fals Borda (1991), in the 1980s PAR showed signs of intellectual and practical maturity as encouraging information arrived from fieldwork and through publications in several languages. Cross-cultural dialogues continued to flourish and reassessment and evaluation became an integral part of this growing movement. This "second wave" of PAR happened mainly in the community development and international development contexts (Kindon et al., 2007), characterized by methods like *rapid and participatory rural appraisal* (RRA and PRA). By the 1990s, PAR grew in popularity both inside and outside of institutions.

Participatory action research emerging from this lineage continues to speak back to power, work the hyphen between activist-scholar, democratize knowledge, and define anew who is considered expert. Yet there are valuable critiques and fears voiced from within and without the PAR community. Some, such as Lykes and Coquillon (2009), say that as PAR has come to be utilized more regularly "in universities, in the work of governments, international organizations (e.g., the World Bank) and non-governmental organizations, in schools and universities, and in the research literature... it is becoming divorced from its revolutionary roots (p. 12). They argue that PAR is becoming a tool for improving practice (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009), not a means of using social science to expose inequity.

Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that it is important to examine the discourse of participation itself, what they describe provocatively as the "tyranny of participation." Among other cautions, they suggest that the particular forms of "democratic participation" championed in action research and in development may marginalize indigenous ways of knowing and purposefully silence knowledge that actually challenges the status quo. In "Do You Believe in Geneva? Methods and Ethics at the Global Local Nexus," indigenous PAR scholar Eve Tuck echoes warnings against blindly promoting notions such "democratic participation" without thinking about issues such as sovereignty and sacred knowledge (Fine, Tuck, & Zeller-Berkman, 2008).

Feminist PAR scholars have also questioned what "democratic participation" looks like in PAR projects when those who *do* participate are in many instances those who *can* participate (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009). In Lykes and Coquillon's (2006) piece on PAR and feminism, the authors mention the notable absence of women from many PAR initiatives, citing barriers such as the duration of an action project (i.e., more hours than a participant can spare from minimum-wage or day work) and location at distance from the duties of participants (e.g., away from the field or children).

In addition to exposing the absence of women from many of the PAR projects, feminists critiques have noted that gender oppression and heterosexism were rarely topics of study (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009) and that women, more specifically feminists, were marginalized in professional gatherings of PAR practitioners (Brinton Lykes & Coquillon, 2006; Maguire, 2001). Womanists also charge that the participatory norms of PAR fail to challenge gendered hierarchies or transform traditional relations that oppress women (Lykes & Coquillon, 2006) and that PAR that emphasizes local issues, dynamics, and change does not directly address larger political and economic structures (Lykes & Coquillon, 2006; Brydon-Miller, Maguire, & McIntyre, 2004).

Notable PAR scholar and feminist Patricia Maguire (2002) has argued that the intersection of PAR and feminism may actually be a way to reinvigorate, re-energize and re-politicize participatory work (see <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/parfem/parfem.htm>). It is with the cautions of these feminist, critical, and indigenous scholars in mind that a new lineage of PAR was formed, *critical* PAR. The scholars in this lineage acknowledge the equally significant, yet often invisible scholars, particularly women and men of color who have shaped the theory and practice of PAR today (Torre et al., 2012). In the next section I retrace a history of critical PAR and, from this historical foundation, move into a discussion of contemporary commitments, methods, and potential new directions of critical PAR.

We wanted more. We knocked the butt ends of our forks against the table, tapped our spoons against ↵ our empty bowls; we were hungry. We wanted more volume, more riots.

(Justin Torres, *We the Animals*, 2011 p. 1)

There are social scientists who want more. They want the words “activist and scholar” in their names. They want theory and action. They want communities of scholars in graduate institutions but also in community centers, staff lounges, prisons, youth programs, and rural fields. They want to evoke ancestors such as Lewin and Freire, but they also want to uncover hidden parts of their family tree, including silenced aunties and great grandparents of color. With intellectual descendants in both the Lewinian and Latin American lineages and “drawing on critical theory (feminist, critical race, queer, disability, neo-Marxist, indigenous and/or post-structural), critical PAR is an epistemology that engages research design, methods, analyses, and products through a lens of democratic participation” (Torre et al., 2012, p. 1). Drawing heavily on the work of critical PAR theorists Torre et al. (2012), here I trace the history of this lineage.

Critical PAR theorists, like critical psychologists, feminist psychologists, and key quantum physicists, reject notions of rationality, objectivity, and absolute truth. In fact, a critical PAR history like the one outlined by Torre et al. (2012) in the *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology* (Cooper, Camic, & APA, 2012) begins in the 1800s, with early psychologists like Wilhelm Dilthey who were wary of the growing trend toward positivism even in the beginning era of the field. Writing in the 1800s, Dilthey called for the field of psychology to distinguish itself as a holistic science that placed human experience into its sociopolitical context. He promoted multiple methodologies that moved between deep and broad, capturing the complexity of human experience (Dilthey, Makkreel, & Rodi (1989); Fox et al., 2010; Torre et al., 2012). Dilthey urged psychologists to move away from causal explanations for human behavior and social relations (Fox et al., 2010). Along with early psychologist such as Wilhelm Wundt, he expressed concerns about the limits of experimental psychology for fully capturing the importance of sociohistorical context and the unique experience of individuals (Danzinger, 1990; Torre et al., 2012).

Later in the 1800s, W. E. B. Du Bois took on the challenge to design research studies that would adequately capture the sociohistorical contributions to psychological phenomena, as well as to locate the “problem” not in individuals or groups but in the conditions in which they live (Torre et al., 2012). Du Bois launched a series of studies focused on the social conditions of African Americans in the United States at the Sociological Laboratory at Atlanta University, where he was director and professor of economics and history from 1897 to 1910. Du Bois created a series of now famous studies—the Philadelphia Study (1986–7), the Farmville Study, the Virginia Study (1897), and the Atlanta University Studies (1897–1910)—which utilized some of the first large-scale community surveys in the United States to examine regional economics, birth and death rates, conjugal relations, occupations, wages and class distinctions, business and trade, communal organizations, and the experience of group lives (Torre et al., 2012). These surveys, which required the participation of many community members, were the precursors to the Community Self-Surveys utilized in the Lewin PAR lineage. This history, however, is rarely mentioned beyond critical PAR theorists.

Du Bois’s studies created a detailed account of structural racism at the turn of the century (Du Bois, 1898). Du Bois adamantly believed that scholarship drawing on diverse methods joined with structural analyses could be used to inform policy and create social change. The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory became a center for social inquiry, producing quality empirical research designed to use social science to support the transformation of oppressive conditions. This commitment of using social science for social justice is one that undergirds critical PAR today.

In addition to Lewin, critical PAR scholars identify Marie Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel, Ruth Benedict, Gene Weltfish, Goodwin Barbour Watson, Robin Williams, and Claire Selltiz and Margot Haas Wormser as progressive scholars creating vibrant and important social action-oriented research in the 1930s–1950s (Torre et al., 2012). These scholars used PAR to speak back to economic and racial segregation.

Jumping continents and decades, critical PAR historians locate their roots in Latin America, specifically in the work of Freire and Martín-Baró. Although not as well known as Freire, Jesuit priest and social psychologist Martín-Baró transformed the notion that one could explain human behavior independently of the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural context in which it is situated. Martín-Baró argued that

decoupling the role of social structures and/or oppression from its impact on psychological well-being incorrectly attributed sociopolitical problems to the individual. With the focus mainly on the individual, Martín-Baró articulated that it was no surprise that psychology was “serving the interests of the established social order, as a useful instrument for reproducing the system” (Martín-Baró, Aron, & Corne, 1994, pp. 37–38). ↪ Liberation psychology reorients from an individual to a social orientation and therefore necessitates methods and actions that explore social injustice and inspire social change (Torre et al., 2012).

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Working in the context of war and state-sponsored terror in El Salvador in the 1980s, Martín-Baró developed public opinion polls that were designed to reveal the social conditions and lived realities of El Salvadorians. Martín-Baró used his scientific instruments as social mirrors that would simultaneously interrupt propaganda spread by those in power and orient people toward what ought to be. He created a science “of the oppressed rather than for the oppressed, that designs research from the perspective of those most impacted by injustice” (Torre et al., 2012, p. 11).

Martín-Baró charged psychologists to engage in three critical tasks: recover historical memory, de-ideologize everyday experience, and utilize people’s virtues. Critical PAR theorists have taken on this charge by creating research firmly based in historical context, generating research on forgotten alternatives in the history of science, and drawing on the strengths of all those in research collectives to produce important research and action that disrupt injustice (Torre et al., 2012).

In 2009, two visionary activists/scholars—Michelle Fine and Maria Torre—created a home for critical PAR researchers in the Public Science Project (PSP) at CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. The Public Science Project grew out of more than a decade’s worth of PAR at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) being done by a coalition of activists, researchers, youth, elders, lawyers, prisoners, and educators (with which I identify). In varied settings, the collective has “focused on the history and accumulation of privilege and oppression, the policies and practices of reproduction, the intimate relations that sustain inequity, the psycho-dynamic effects on the soul, and the vibrant forms of resistance enacted by individuals and collectives” (Fine, Tuck, & Zeller-Berkman, 2007, p. 498). Projects nurtured in this vibrant space for critical PAR scholars include those that examine opportunity gaps (Fine et al., 2005; Guishard, 2009), heteronormativity in education (Linville & Carlson, 2010), sexual harassment (Smith, Huppuch, & Van Deven, 2011; in conjunction with Zeller-Berkman) and violence (Stoudt, 2006), the critical relationships between health and education (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Ruglis & Freudenberg, 2010), pushout practices (Tuck, 2012), school restructuring (Ayala & Galleta, 2012), and college access (Cowan & Chajet, 2012) across elite and underresourced schools. Many research collectives have examined the long arm of the carceral state, including policing practices (Fine et al., 2003; Stoudt, Fine, & Fox, 2012), prisons (Fine et al., 2001; web.gc.cuny.edu/che/changing_minds.pdf), as well damage, resilience, and resistance to the collateral consequences of mass incarceration (Muñoz Proto, 2012; Zeller-Berkman, 2007; Boudin & Zeller-Berkman, 2010) and those who have served their time (Marquez, 2012). Other research collectives look at the embodied consequences of gentrification (Cahill, 2004), resilience of LGBTGNC young people dealing with economic injustice (Welfare warriors, 2010), the streets as a site of resilience for young African-American men (Payne, 2011), hyphenated selves (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zaal, Sala, & Fine, 2007), the relationship between young people and adults in the United States (Zeller-Berkman, 2011), privilege (Stoudt, 2009; Stoudt, Fine, & Fox, 2012), and participatory public policy (Fine, Ayala, & Zaal, 2012). Some projects such as “polling for justice” collect data that move across the spheres of education, policing, and health (Fox & Fine, 2012), whereas PAR theorists such as Fine and Ruglis (2009) theorize across those “circuits of dispossession.” Last, PAR theorists are studying social movements, offering activists tools to create shorts in those same circuits of dispossession through the use of collective action (Muñoz Proto, et.

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al. (in press) <http://www.memoscopio.org/>; OCCUPAR): ↪

Critical PAR exemplars

- Investigating the subjectivities and heteronormative violence of white elite masculinity within exclusive private all-boys school (Stoudt, 2009)
- Documenting the material and psychological consequences of opportunity gaps in wealthy desegregated school (Fine, Roberts, Torre, Bloom, Chajet, Guishard, & Payne, 2004).
- Developing school-based internships in which students in small progressive public schools investigate finance inequity and college access (Bloom (2007); Cowan, & Chajet, (March, 2012); Chajet (2006)).
- Collaborating with mothers and youth in varied communities of the Bronx organizing for educational justice (Family-to-Family: The Guide to the Schools of Hope http://www.lehman.edu/deanedu/thebronxinstitute/Media_And_Publications/ENLACE_Family-to-Family_Guide.pdf)
- Mobilizing with youth pushed out of their high schools, researching the politics of the GED, the subjectivities of educational desire, and meritocracy (Tuck, 2012)
- Facilitating research as queer youth document the sexuality climates and heteronormativity in schools and beyond (Linville, & Carlson, 2010)
- Researching, in a longitudinal design, with urban youth, educators, and parents in the midst of school restructuring (Ayala & Galletta, 2009).
- The Street Life Project, a systematic historic, quantitative, and qualitative analysis of the “streets” as a site of resiliency for young men of African descent (Payne, 2011).
- The Fed Up Honeys, with young women from the Lower East Side of New York “fed up” with the stereotypes that spew across their neighborhoods (Cahill, Rios-Moore, & Threats, 2008)
- The Corporate Disease Promotion project, in which youth from elite and neglected communities document the promotion of disease by corporations selling alcohol tobacco and low-nutrition foods (Ruglis, 2008)
- The “Anything can happen with the police around” a quantitative survey, produced, disseminated, and interpreted by youth researchers and completed by more than 900 young people on the streets of New York City, documenting their experience of police surveillance, including sexual harassment by police (Fine, Freudenberg, Payne, Perkins, Smith, & Wanzer, 2002)
- The “Weight of the Hyphen” study of Muslim-American young women living in post-9/11 and post-homeland security New York City and negotiating surveillance by the state, media, community, family, and self (Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007).
- Projects to document, assess, and resist the collateral damage provoked by mass incarceration of people of color and a series of projects designed to document, assess, and resist the collateral damage provoked by mass incarceration of people of color: one in a women’s prison in New York State, documenting the impact of college on women in prison, the prison environment, and on the women’s post-release outcomes; (see Fine, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton, Martinez, Missy, Rivera, Roberts, Smart, Torre and Upegui, 2001; www.changingminds.ws); one with the children of women in prison (Boudin, Kathy & Zeller-Berkman, 2010); and one with women and men who have served long sentences in prison for violent crimes (Marquez, 2012)
- The Morris Justice Project, an intergenerational collective of researchers from the Morris Avenue section of the South Bronx, the Public Science Project at the CUNY Graduate Center, and Pace University Law Center. Working together since the spring of 2011, they have documented community experiences with the police, surveying and interviewing more than 1,000 residents of the neighborhood ([http:// morrisjustice.org/about-us](http://morrisjustice.org/about-us))

- OCCUPAR, a collective of graduate, undergraduate, alumni activists, and scholars from the CUNY system who studied the occupy CUNY movement. Working together from the beginnings of the Occupy CUNY movement in 2011, this collective has collected more than 300 surveys from across CUNY campuses to explore the barriers and opportunities for student political engagement at CUNY.

Many of these projects have been youth PAR projects. In most of these projects, research camps set the stage for research designed to bring together differently positioned people around a common table to design and implement the research. Whether collaborating with youth or adults, formerly incarcerated people, students or other activist-scholars, the following principles and commitments guide the work. In the hope of maximizing participation within these critical PAR projects and addressing some of the historical critiques of PAR, Torre has outlined the following set of agreements (see www.publicscienceproject.org):

- To value knowledges that have been historically marginalized and delegitimized (i.e., youth, prisoner, immigrant) alongside traditionally recognized knowledges (i.e., scholarly).
- To share the various knowledges and resources held by individual members of the research collective, across the collective, so members can participate as equally as possible.
- To collaboratively decide appropriate research questions, design, methods, and analysis, as well as useful research products.
- To create a research space where individuals and the collective can express their multiplicity and use this multiplicity to inform research questions, design, and analyses.
- To encourage creative risk-taking in the interest of generating new knowledge (i.e., understanding individuals and the collective to be “under construction,” with ideas and opinions that are in formation, expected to grow, etc.).
- To attend theoretically and practically to issues of power and vulnerability within the collective and created by the research.
- To strategically work the power within the group when necessary to benefit both individual and collective needs/agendas
- To excavate and explore disagreements rather than smooth them over in the interest of consensus (because they often provide insight into larger social/political dynamics that are informing the data).
- To use a variety of methods to enable interconnected analyses at the individual, social, cultural, and institutional levels.
- To conceive of action on multiple levels over the course of the PAR project.
- To think through consequences of research and actions.
- To an ongoing negotiation of conditions of collaboration, building research relationships over time.

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These agreements have been shaped by Lewin, Freirer, Du Bois, Marie Jahoda, and Martín-Baró and take seriously the critiques leveled against PAR in the 1990s. Feminist critical scholarship continually molds, reminds, and propels contemporary critical participatory action researchers. For example, Patricia Hill Collins’s (1990) and Dorothy Smith’s (1987; 1990) discussions of how power shapes gender relations within and across racial, class, and sexual diversities are reflected in the work of Fine, Torre, Maguire, Lykes, McIntyre, and others who work at the intersection of feminism and action research (Lykes & Coquillon, 2006). A feminist perspective is reflected in the value critical participatory action researchers place on diverse ways of knowing, encouraging dissent, exploring silences, developing relationships, and interrogating how one’s position in structures of subordination shape one’s ability to see the whole in a way that may not be possible from a top-down perspective. Critical PAR theorists such Maria Torre and Jennifer Ayala use Gloria Anzaldúa’s lens of *borderlands* to capture multiple identities and positionalities in PAR research (Torre & Ayala, 2009). Like other womanist PAR researchers before them (Brydon-Miller, Maguire, & McIntyre, 2004), Torre and Ayala argue that feminist scholarship is useful for delineating aspects of

critical PAR that retain its commitment to liberation as opposed to aspects of PAR that have been co-opted and misused (Torre & Ayala, 2009). Feminist scholarship reminds PAR practitioners to maximize PAR's transformative potential, making an explicit commitment to social justice.

Feminists and indigenous scholars alike have honed critical PAR researchers' attention to the nuances of power in a global twenty-first-century society. Scholars such as Parpart claim that researchers cannot afford to focus their power analysis only on local dynamics, considering that "national and global power structures constrain and define the possibilities for change at the local level" (Parpart, 2000, p. 18). Globalization, neoliberalism, and global politics require critical participatory action researchers to explore an expanded notion of "generalizability." Fine et al. (2008) have articulated the concept of *intersectional generalizability*: "work that digs deep and respectfully with community to record the particulars of historically oppressed and colonized peoples/communities and their social movements of resistance, and work that tracks patterns across nations, communities, homes and bodies to theorize the arteries of oppression and colonialism." (Fine et al., 2007, p. 516). While assuring that the results of PAR work be accountable to local history and desire, critical PAR theorists are currently being asked to bring an awareness of what stretches topographically across circuits of privilege and oppression, boroughs, countries, and continents (Katz, 2004).

A critical PAR lineage, mentored by feminist and indigenous scholarship, also interrogates what it means to have evidence:

The work of proving, long colonized to mean the work of men, of progress, of the whitestream, the work of scientists, the work of the academy, is reclaimed through participatory research. Participatory research, mentored by Indigenous concepts of "researching back," infused by a call for knowingness, analysis, and recovery (LT Smith, 1999) means the proof is under our fingernails, in our melting footprints, on our park benches, in our clusters, in our flights, on our backs, our chapped lips, in our stories and the grandmothers who told them.

(Fine, Tuck, & Zeller-Berkman, 2007, p. 519)

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This expanded notion of proof means thinking critically about the products that emerge from the research process. In Cahill and Torre's 2010 piece, "Beyond the Journal Article," the authors explore the politics of representation, audience, and presentation of research, posing questions such as: What kinds of research products speak to what kinds of audiences? How do we engage new audiences with our research? Should some audiences be privileged? How might the research provoke action?

Although critical PAR researchers have produced many academic articles, chapters, and books, other products include using huge projectors to display data on buildings, creating videos, designing stickers, writing reports and white papers, and performing the data, to name a few. In fact, designing multiple products aimed at impacting multiple audiences is key for many critical PAR research collectives. Most importantly, all members are involved in the collective imagining of what products best represent the evidence for a particular audience.

Many critical PAR theorists are intentional about capitalizing on the point of contact between participants in the study and researchers to conceptualize methods that use the process, not only the product of research, as a potentially transformative experience. Critical PAR asks researchers to take into consideration the research questions, transformative potential of the method, the audiences for the research, the strengths of the research collective, and time constraints, as well as the needs of funders or institutions when choosing methods. Because PAR is a design, not a method, researchers have often utilized multiple methods, including large-scale surveys (Fine et al., 2003; 2004; Stoudt, Fine, & Fox, 2011); autoethnography (Cahill, 2004), focus groups (Zeller-Berkman, 2008, and many others); and visual texts including collages, collective drawing (Brinton Lykes, 2005), interviews (Anand et al., 2001; Guishard et al., 2005; Fine et al., 2001; Segalo, 2013; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1996), participatory video (Hume-Cook et al., 2007), participant participatory GIS (Elwood et al., 2010), photo-voice (Krieg & Roberts, 2010), participatory theater (Guhathakurta, 2008; Fox & Fine, forthcoming; Cieri & McCauley, 2007), participatory art (Tolia-Kelly, 2010), participatory mapping (Futch & Fine, 2014; Sanderson et al., 2010), participatory diagramming (Alexander et al., 2007), and life histories (<http://highlandercenter.org/resources/library-and-resource-center/>). Like many researchers, critical PAR research teams often use multiple methods in order to triangulate their data, layering traditional and creative methods in the same design.

Although acknowledging that participation exists on a continuum (Hart, 1997; Kinson et al., 2007), critical PAR practitioners strive to operate on the more participatory end of the spectrum. Joint decision making is encouraged while developing research questions, designing the project, collecting data, analyzing data theorizing, and developing products. Critical PAR researcher Maria Torre (2005) has written extensively about how to work the contact zone between very differently positioned researchers in a collective to support maximum participation. Other critical PAR scholars have explored how to use cycles of critical reflection and action to deepen participation on multiple levels (Cahill, 2007; Williams & Lykes, 2003; Zeller-Berkman, 2008). Speaking back to earlier critiques of Lewin that claim nonacademics are often left out of components of the research process such as statistical analysis and theorizing, many in the critical PAR lineage have ensured that all co-researchers participate in deciding which questions to ask of their data and in uncovering what their findings reveal about theory and/or practice (Cahill, 2004; Stoudt et al., 2011).

Being grounded in an ethical framework is essential when doing critical PAR (Smith, 1999, Tuck & Guishard, 2013). Because institutional review boards (IRBs) vary in their knowledge of PAR, at times contesting whether PAR is in fact research, whether nonacademic co-researchers are actually participants, and whether PAR research is too risky for educational institutions to sanction, critical PAR researchers continue to push each other to adhere to ethics that mirror the ideological commitments of critical PAR. Critical PAR theorists Tuck and Guishard (2013) envision an ethics of doing participatory research that moves beyond IRB approval and assures the individual rights and autonomy of research participants. Tuck and Guishard (2013) argue for a relational ethics framework that values partnership, commitment, accountability, and social justices as core tenets.

With its deep roots and strong commitments, contemporary critical PAR builds on its history to branch out into new spaces, create innovative methods, revive forgotten ones, and push the boundaries of what it means to be an activist-scholar. Training grounds have emerged to support those interested in doing this type of research. Annually, people from all over the country and many from other countries come together at the Public Science Project for five days of seminars, roundtables, and hands-on workshops with seasoned PAR researchers. It is at these institutes, as well as at community lunches, in think tanks, and during virtual conversations that scholars, educators, students, activists, and community members who work the hyphens between these identities continue to push PAR theory and practice (see publicscienceproject.org). It is in these spaces that PAR scholars contribute to and contend with future areas for consideration.

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Future Questions for Consideration

Some questions for PAR researchers to consider include¹:

- How can PAR researchers use technology to broaden notions of participation? How can technology increase access in local settings, as well as open the possibility for global collaborations?
- How can technology (mobile data collection with real-time analysis, “big” data, apps, etc.) be used to speed up or scale up cycles of research, action, and reflection?
- How can PAR researchers utilize meta-analysis across PAR projects united by a common theme (i.e., educational equity) to create a cycle of reflection, research, and action on this level?
- How can PAR theorists and practitioners engage in an education campaign for IRBs to remove institutional barriers to this form of research? How do PAR researchers outside of the academy deal with ethics?
- How can the use of theory of change modeling push PAR theory and practice?
- How can funders support the use of PAR by adjusting proposal formats to allow for participatory research processes and for adequate time to engage its cycles of reflection, research, and action?
- How can we incorporate PAR and the arts, where arts aren’t used only as a potential product, but integral to the process?

Note

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