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Traditions, Tensions and Trends in Participatory Action Research

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Introduction

Rooted in popular education, community development, and social change movements, participatory action research (PAR) is a research approach that is well suited to support the emerging father involvement movement in Canada. The needs, goals and effects of fathers on children's growth and development and on family life more broadly have often been overlooked in health and social policy and programs as well as in the media. Many programs that claim to reach out to and support 'parents' are actually found to be mostly mother-centred and involving mothers. Similarly, much of the research literature about parenting fails to distinguish data collected from mothers or from fathers as if they were indistinguishable. PAR offers an approach that directly involves father in explorations of experiences and issues and that places them at the centre of decision-making in service provision, research and policy that directly affects them. The umbrella methodology of PAR guided the studies described in this book and framed the community development, knowledge transfer, and social change strategies elaborated by chapter authors. Fathers can and often do play important roles in the lives of children and youth (Allen, Daly & Ball, 2012; Tamis-Lemonda & Cabera, 2002). Calls for policy reforms and program investments to support their involvement are arising primarily from community-based organizations that meet children, youth, and families in direct service capacities in health care, education, child welfare, recreation, newcomer services, and Aboriginal programs (Kishcuk, 2001). Given these grassroots origins, and in the absence

of a robust and differentiated knowledge base about diverse conditions and experiences of father involvement, PAR's commitment to relationship building, peer support, community building, and theoretical flexibility makes it a particularly promising research framework (Doherty, 2000). Underlying this approach is the conviction that fathers are producers of learning for and about themselves, and of support, growth, and social changes within their families and communities.

This chapter presents an overview of PAR's histories, applications, promises, and problematics, with a view to using it to develop understanding and instigate meaningful participation and action relating to father involvement in Canada. The chapter lays the foundation for a pivotal assertion that underpins the work described by authors in this edited collection, namely, that PAR can engender transformative engagement for and by fathers, father activists, service providers, advocates, and theorists. We describe procedures typically used in PAR praxis, involving iterative cycles of community building, exploration, reflection, analysis, evaluation, and action. Some of the tensions and gaps in PAR, especially concerning community members' access to research participation and modes of knowledge creation, and the difficulty of moving from engagement to social action, are explored. We address interpretation dilemmas in PAR related to knowledge production and ownership, ethics, research outcomes, validity, and participation. We identify the promise PAR holds, as a relational praxis of knowledge co-generation and a springboard for social action (Cahill, 2007), to engage fathers in processes of personal and social transformation.

Priorities of the Father Involvement Movement in Canada

Despite their increasing visibility in Canadian policy discussions of paternity leave and child custody, the diversity of fathers' experiences across varied and dynamic family structures and wide-ranging and changing circumstances remain poorly engaged

in policy debates, theoretical understandings, and parent- and family-serving programs (Lero, Ashbourne, & Whitehead, 2006). Monolithic discourses of fatherhood and father rights do not account for the complex ways in which fathers engage with their children as care-givers, providers, role models, and teachers (Palkovitz, 1997). Many fathers are bewildered about how to be directly involved in caring for children given that mothers tend to be the primary care-givers, especially when children are young, and social services are dominated by mother-centric parenting education and support programs and exclusionary terms like 'maternal and child health,' 'mom and tot' playgroups, and Mother Goose library time (Broughton & Rogers, 2007).

While mother-centric images of family life reinforce the stereotype of the absent or invisible father, some fathers remain even further excluded, not only from mother-centred discourses, but from exclusive representations of fatherhood. Outreach and intervention service systems are sustained by research that studies and reproduces dominant cultural and gendered images of fatherhood and understandings of family life in Canada as if fathers were a homogeneous population with common histories, sociocultural contexts, needs, and goals. Social sciences have tended to develop theoretical conceptualizations of fatherhood that are assumed to be universally valid, and service agencies often promote "best practice" programs and policies based on these undifferentiated and underverified assumptions (Coltrane, 2007; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). As a result, fathers who fall outside of dominant constructions of white, able, heterosexual fatherhood face additional barriers to their social inclusion related to their citizenship-immigration-refugee status, language, religion, socio-economic status, ethnicity, ability, and sexual orientation, among other factors (Ball, 2009; Epstein, 2009; Este & Tachble, 2009). These barriers impact their visibility in debates about fatherhood and their level of engagement in the care of their children. Meanwhile, institutional and policy structures that promote dominant narrow views of what it means to be positively involved as a father remain

unexamined, and structural gaps sustain the social exclusion of some groups of fathers (Devault, Gaudet, et al., 2005). These include, for example, a lack of supports to enable immigrant fathers to find meaningful employment (Este & Tachble, 2009), programs and resources that reproduce the problematic heteronormative binary of mother/father (Bell, 2009; Epstein, 2009; Jimenez, 2009; Stafford, 2009), health care policies that tend to exclude consideration of fathers of children with chronic illness or disability (Beaton, Nicholas, McNeill, & Wenger, 2012; Nicholas, 2003; O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005) and a lack of effective poverty reduction measures for Indigenous fathers (Ball & George, 2007).

Over the past decade, some movement has occurred in Canada towards recognizing the important and diverse roles that fathers can and often do play as parents, along with some acknowledgement of serious gaps in knowledge about the experiences of Canadian fathers. The impetus for this movement comes in part from public alarm as the number of children being raised in lone-mother-headed households continues to rise while mothers' labour force participation increases and shortages of affordable, quality child care persist. As Canada's demographic and social composition continues to change, fathers' local realities and engagement with fatherhood also change; correspondingly, dominant Euro-Western, mother-centric, and heteronormative models and discourses must be expanded to encompass multiple experiences of fatherhood in diverse families and contexts. A more differentiated analysis of father involvement would examine men's experiences of the transition to fatherhood, forms of providing and caring for children and youth and sustaining relationships with adult children, and the barriers fathers face to developing and sustaining positive involvement with their children across transitions in family relationships, socioeconomic circumstances, geographic location, child welfare interventions, incarceration (addressed in this volume), and other conditions.

PAR as a Promising Praxis

Given gaps in Canadian images of the family, policy supports, and family-focused practice, critical tools are needed to excavate and engage with the intersecting political and social forces that shape father involvement. PAR can contribute to the growing field of father involvement research with praxis that engages groups of fathers in sharing their fatherhood experiences, in the process illuminating opportunities and barriers to their positive involvement and social inclusion in various contexts of child bearing and child rearing in Canada. How do fathers, especially fathers who tend to be socially excluded, negotiate a sense of belonging and engagement in caring for their child when the options available to them are determined by social forces inscribed with dominant social dictates, norms, and views of families, sexuality, masculinity, and gender roles? PAR offers avenues to get beyond the decontextualized, material measures of father involvement that have predominated research in this area (Allen, Daly, et al.,2012), shedding light on the ways that fathers themselves conceive of and gauge their multilayered involvement. Engaging with fathers to understand how they see the world in relation to their father role can highlight structural as well as psychosocial barriers to their meaningful involvement, enhance their visibility in research about parenting, and support the contributions they can make to children's development, mothers' wellness, and family life.

PAR's emphasis on understanding the perspectives of participants in social interactions is particularly relevant to expanding discourses, policies, and practices of social inclusion in Canada. Insights yielded by PAR can have important implications for transforming the landscape of family life in Canada through policy reforms, program development, and practice in diverse disciplines including child health, child welfare, men's health, family services, parent education, and related fields. The explicitly action-oriented stance of PAR on knowledge production and its focus on community

involvement make it ideologically compatible with investigators and practitioners whose interest in examining fathers' experiences is motivated by a desire to enhance fathers' visibility and meaningful participation in decision making about policy and service provisions for children and families.

Men's Inclusion in Parent and Family Policy, Services and Research

Debates about social inclusion and exclusion are an increasingly prevalent focus of social policy and research in Canada and a prominent theme in the field of fatherhood research. In the context of this chapter, a tension relating to the historical roots of PAR, and its ideology is that it has been most often used to include the most 'voiceless' or marginalized populations, such as racialized women, poor communities, and sexual minorities. Many middle class men aligned with dominant cultures do not face the kinds of social exclusions that PAR was originally created to address. Nevertheless, PAR can be a useful approach with diverse groups of men because even white, middle class fathers tend to be excluded from parenting policy, research, and programming. Unless challenged, their social exclusion in this domain serves to maintain polarizing gender norms and the status quo that structures men's roles as 'outside the home' or as 'absent parents' and maintains the construction of women as 'natural' primary caregivers.

Research on social exclusion reiterates the critical role that context plays in shaping family life, underscoring a need to enhance social systems that normalize, embrace and reflect experiences of all people, including marginalized peoples, such as the young, racialized, and incarcerated fathers discussed in this volume. Characteristics of social exclusion include residence in substandard housing; inequitable access to employment, social, and health services; stigmatization; spatial and social isolation;

disconnection from civil society; and everyday experiences of discrimination, racism, and violence (Galabuzi, 2004). These conditions intersect and tend to be mutually reinforcing, erecting barriers to access to various forms of social capital (Kaspar & Noh, 2001). For instance, due to the ongoing effects of colonial policies, Indigenous communities often deal with housing and health deficits and dismantled social and cultural institutions that result in reduced access to family support services, life skills training, education, employment, child care, health care services, and recreational opportunities (de Finney & Saraceno, in press; Trocme, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004)

One sharpening focus within social inclusion debates is how men learn fathering and engage in caring and providing for their children (Doucet, 2006; Hobson, 2002). Another focus asks the extent to which their involvement and developing skills as parents not only promote optimal child health and development outcomes (Ball, Moselle & Peterson, 2006), and build social capital for the family unit (Ravanera, 2007), but also promote fathers' visibility and participation in social and health policy and programs for children and families (Long, 2008). Sociocultural capital grants fathers access to institutional and social networks, provides them with "insider" knowledge of family life, and enhances their ability to participate fully in civic life. One of PAR's strengths is its inherent flexibility, which provides a diversity of avenues for fathers to engage in collaborative, community-based, participatory research with peers and key stakeholders (policy makers, service providers, etc.) as well as with their own children, families, and communities. Participation in a PAR project may actually be one way that fathers – acting as participant-researchers – can build social capital through solidarity with other fathers, engagement in shaping more positive images of fatherhood, and combined action to increase the visibility and cogency of their needs and goals for policy and program reforms.

Methodological Strategies in Participatory Action Research

No single history or unified set of explanatory concepts defines PAR practice. Rather than being a unitary method, PAR is a broad and constantly evolving methodological framework covering a spectrum of approaches and procedures (e.g., Chambers, 2002; Fals-Borda, 1987, 1996; Gaventa, 1988; Gayfer, 1981, 1992; Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2012; Kesby, Kindon & Pain, 2009; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993; Tandon, 2002; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 1997, 2001; Weis & Fine, 2004). A framework for participatory action research in diverse locations and contexts across the world has grown out of the work of diverse community researchers who perceived a schism between the philosophies of participatory education and development and the positivist research practices still prevalent in their fields (Gayfer, 1981; Martin-Baro, 1994; Tandon, 2002). The principles of popular education and, in particular, the work of grassroots Latin American intellectuals Fals-Borda (1987, 1996) and Freire (1971, 1973, 1975) have greatly influenced PAR's focus on critical consciousness, the democratization of knowledge production, anti-oppressive practice, and social justice. In a groundbreaking issue of *Convergence* in 1975, Budd Hall, a Canadian academic, social activist and early innovator of PAR, articulated the value of an approach to social investigation that would challenge the artificial borders between theory, research, and action (1975). His conceptualization of PAR holds participant knowledge to be integral to validity, and democratic and participatory knowledge production as foundational to social change. PAR is part of a groundswell against the assertive seizure of epistemic space by academic researchers wherein the lives and knowledges of vulnerable, often colonized communities have served as "data plantations" (Ladson-Billings, 2000) for research done ostensibly on their behalf. Hall (1975, 1981, 1993, 2000a, 2000b) highlights commonalities that run through the many iterations of PAR, namely, an engagement with three fundamental issues: (1) the meaningful and consequential participation of

marginalized communities; (2) the production of critical knowledge through participatory inquiry; and (3) the implementation of social change for and by communities themselves. Interaction of these elements provides the ideological impetus behind a research process that empowers participants to transform their social reality by becoming critical participants in knowledge production, community development, and social change.

Today, PAR's influence extends to a broad spectrum of ideological, political, intellectual, and methodological streams applied in diverse international settings and disciplines and across academic and applied fields. These include, for example, participatory research in community development, action research in organizations and educational settings, practitioner action research, rural participatory research, feminist action research, Indigenous community-based research, and child- and youth-centred PAR (Cahill, Rios-Moore and Threatts 2008; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Torre, Fine, Stoudt & Fox, 2012). Researchers have developed iterations that fall under the broader banner of community-based research (CBR), including collective action research (Leonard, 2002), research for development (Chambers, 2002), and community action research (Reitsma-Street, 2002; Reitsma-Street & Brown, 2003). Many of these streams have informed the development of our own PAR praxis (Ball & Havassy, 1984; Ball & Janyst, 2008; de Finney, 2007; de Finney, Green, & Brown, 2009; de Finney & Lee, 2008; Lee & de Finney, 2005). PAR's diverse methodological iterations offer a wealth of options for university and community partners interested in innovative father-centered and father-engaged research.

PAR Ideologies and Principles

Given its interdisciplinarity, heterogeneity, and highly contextualized nature, PAR cannot be reduced to a single formula or fixed set of principles. It is better understood as a cyclical, emerging process whose underlying principles evolve from the discussions and debates that arise as it is enacted in specific contexts. PAR researchers nonetheless share

deep concern about the ethics of conventional research practices in which university-based investigators frequently mine population groups or communities for knowledge without confirming the validity of their interpretations with research participants or engaging with them in the pursuit of any of their own research goals. PAR processes subvert the role of the outside "expert" researcher, aiming thereby to flatten the traditionally hierarchical researcher-researched relationship. In PAR, researchers and community members collaborate, pooling their varying expertise and cultural knowledges in a generative process that, ideally, results in socially meaningful analysis and engagement, action plans, and social action that is grounded in the needs and goals of community members. The definition and operationalization of PAR principles is a source of much debate within and outside the field. Nonetheless, PAR researchers have written extensively about commonalities within the PAR spectrum (Fals-Borda, 1996; Gayfer, 1981, 1992; Hall, 1975, 1981, 1993; Maguire, 1987, 2000; McTaggart, 1991, 1997; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993; Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997). Five features common to many PAR initiatives are worth highlighting.

(1) PAR involves a collective process and seeks a more horizontal distribution of power. PAR is explicitly politicized and eschews modernist claims to objectivity and value-free theorizing. It seeks to redefine the privileged relationship between researchers and knowledge production by positioning participants as agents at the centre of their own process of knowledge generation. In contrast to traditional research relationships, PAR works toward a redistribution of resources and power, as reflected, for instance, in the use of such terms as *participant-researchers*, *co-researchers*, *community researchers*, *research team*, and *research partners*.

(2) PAR is grounded in the experiences and participation of communities.
PAR is concerned with supporting local knowledge, working across borders of insiders
and outsiders, and ensuring that research works *with* rather than *for* (Hall, 1973).
Although PAR's organic and contextualized nature accounts for multiple potential
pathways and iterations, at its root PAR originates with, and is owned by, the community.
Ideally, participants are involved in all stages of the research process, from the
conceptualization of the research agenda and design, to the collection and analysis of
data, to the evaluation of outcomes, and to their dissemination and potential
implementation (Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997). The use of diverse methods (e.g.,
theatre, video-ethnography, mapping, narrative interviews, focus groups, community
surveys, evaluation, textual analysis, etc.) that are reflective of diverse participant
experiences, backgrounds and capacities,, and embedded in participants' cultural contexts
positions participants to articulate their own theories about issues they identify.

(3) The cyclical process of PAR generates new praxis. PAR is deeply critical of
linear thinking; it considers causality as circular or spiral in nature, with multiple
determinants rather than singular, predictable antecedents (Fine, Boudin, et al., 2001). As
illustrated in Figure 1, PAR evolves through a cycle of reflection, analysis, action, and
evaluation that recurs throughout the research process, allowing participants to draw
increasingly complex implications for praxis and apply these to social action.

Figure 1. The PAR praxis-making cycle.

PAR Cycle: Making Praxis
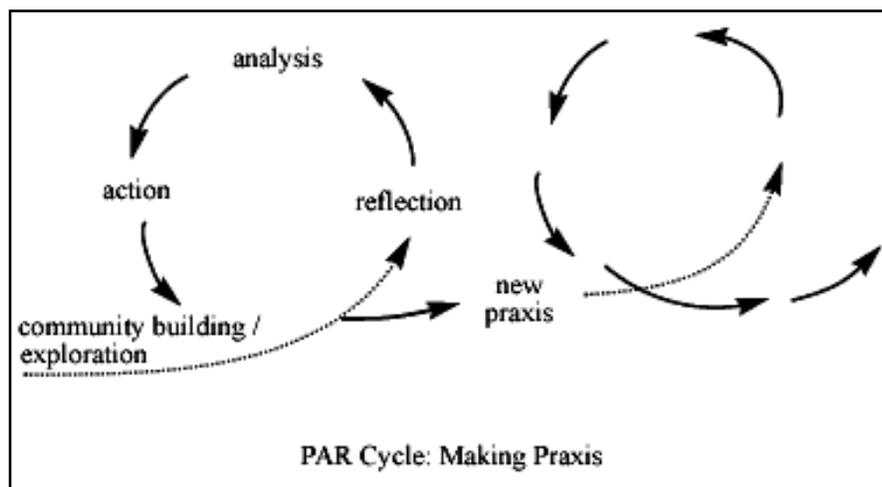
Hall (1975, 1981), Martin-Baro (1994), Tandon (2002), and Vio Grossi (1981) have been instrumental in theorizing approaches to the implementation of the reflection-analysis-action-praxis cycle in PAR. Praxis is a synthesis of theory and practice; it avoids exclusive academic claims to knowledge production by providing community members with tools to translate theoretical knowledge into concrete outcomes on the ground. To develop praxis, participants undertake many iterations of the PAR cycle. To initiate a PAR cycle, a research team typically develops a process or framework for working in partnership, in order to outline common themes and goals. Next, a research problematic originating within the community is defined, refined, and elaborated, drawing out initial themes and strategies that participant-researchers will use to describe and explore the issues they face and their ideas for effective interventions. Coding information about experiences, comparing, and linking, they slowly move from a micro- to a macro-analysis and, in the process, make theoretical and practical sense of the challenges they have identified. At this stage, the goal is to peel back the covers to develop critical consciousness and analysis, a critical understanding of the underlying forces that shape those everyday issues typically rendered invisible by dominant social constructions and forms of interaction. A cycle of critical analysis, involving the identification,

problematization and politicization of the participants' individual experiences, is used to deepen understandings of the issues. Through a process of collective consciousness raising or "conscientization" (Freire, 1970; Freire, 1997), "people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1997, p. 64).

Over time, participatory research strategies such as consultations, focus groups, expressive arts, journaling, community meetings, and other methods help participants to link their individual experiences to the broader context, thereby promoting critical consciousness and collective education about the systemic or structural nature of their personal experiences. At multiple points throughout this cyclical process, participants can initiate actions and change strategies that speak to their emerging findings .

(4) PAR is emergent, fluid, context specific, and open ended. As the PAR cycle demonstrates, PAR sets in motion an iterative, open-ended, highly contextualized process that cannot be prescribed; consultation and ongoing participation emerge in an organic and layered manner. Such a fluid process is necessary to shape the goals and process of any given PAR project. The stages in a cycle of PAR are rarely sequential or distinct, and they may receive different emphasis according to the research context. Training, data collection, consultations, analysis, evaluation, dissemination and action can overlap and occur at any point during the process, depending in part on the group's membership, goals, available resources, timelines, identified issues, and desired outcomes.

(5) PAR is focused on action and change. Concerned as it is with the relationships among research, knowledge production, social control, and social inequity, PAR aspires to move beyond the promotion of critical consciousness and new knowledge to mobilize social change strategies for and by groups who often, though not always,

experience some form of marginalization or exclusion. In this respect, the success of PAR projects is typically contested and partial, with complex ethical considerations related to representation and participation, collaborative research and knowledge ownership, and team-based dissemination and action, among others. While the PAR cycle promotes critical awareness of inequitable power relations, the actual transformation of social conditions is inevitably the greater—and more elusive—challenge. The schism between ideologies of social change and their implementation highlights the gap that can occur between PAR's promise and its practice, as discussed later in this chapter.

Procedures in PAR

PAR procedures are rooted in the strength of partnerships among research team members. Although they typically involve researchers and community members acting as co-researchers, PAR partnerships are incredibly diverse in constitution and scope. Different partners may be engaged during all or parts of the process and can include community members, students, researchers and other university representatives, agencies, community groups, institutions, and stakeholders such as funders, policy makers, and government representatives. The important issue to consider in partnerships that bring together diverse participants is that these groups cannot be thought of as essential and mutually exclusive. Categories such as "researchers" and "fathers" can become tokenized and deeply problematic when they are represented as monolithic, naturally aligned, or unproblematically representative. In reality, partnership building involves constant negotiation of different voices, histories, and agendas within and across any presumed category. Further, partners' roles may overlap (e.g., community member, student, advocate, researcher, etc.), which raises important ethical and procedural issues for the conduct of partnership-based research. Successful PAR requires that research teams

address the inevitable tensions that arise when they try to create and sustain a process for collective analysis, action, and solidarity.

Relational praxis

In PAR, conscientization, networking, and empowerment depend greatly on the quality of the relationships and the processes of partnership and trust building within the research team. Investing in resilient relationships is neither a methodological indulgence nor a by-product of the research design; rather, it is the driving force in the PAR process. Relationships are the medium through which other aspects of research—power, knowledge production, benefit sharing, and social action—become discussed, challenged, implemented, and evaluated. The visceral power of relationships can often be more evocative of transformation than can critical analysis guided by theories alone. As such, effective PAR requires a deliberate praxis of relational engagement and reciprocity. Working relationships among participant researchers often sustain projects through the many challenges encountered in doing PAR. For many research teams, relationships continue years after a research project concludes.

This is why, compared to more traditional research approaches that clearly delineate research roles and boundaries, PAR methodologies typically provide much deeper and therefore messier entry points into collaboration, engagement, action, knowledge creation, and transformation. The relational stakes are always high in research projects that address complex social problems and difficult social action. Thus, while collaborative, purposeful, mutually supportive, and reciprocal relationships are foundational to PAR, sustaining positive partnerships can also be its greatest stumbling block. All iterations of PAR hold critical tensions about voice and participation (who gets to participate, whose perspective is incorporated, who owns the knowledge, who is accountable to whom), what sort of analysis is superimposed onto the participatory process, and who controls and implements recommendations for social advocacy and

change. Debates about participation and representation raise important issues about who speaks and participates on behalf of a certain group, agency, community, or stakeholder.

Unfortunately, PAR researchers often are challenged by how to conceptualize and facilitate issues of access, participation and representation as they are shaped by relational dilemmas, since these are always underwritten by multiple layers of interdisciplinarity and the personal, community, and political politics that are central to PAR. In much of the literature on PAR, this "messiness" is often taken for granted or glossed over. PAR investigators and participant-research teams rightly want to celebrate their successes, but often are reluctant to make salient the struggles they faced in implementing complex partnerships and methodologies. These relational complexities must nonetheless be placed on the table, facilitated thoughtfully and skilfully, and supported with sufficient time and resources. Safe spaces, time, and interpersonal processes must be planned and respectfully facilitated to allow grievances to be heard, problems to be resolved, and successes in stabilizing and consolidating relationships among team members to be celebrated. A critical issue in building and sustaining purposeful partnerships in PAR is to establish the open-ended, questioning, knowledge-creating goal of the research and to prevent, as much as possible, efforts by research team members to insert potentially divisive, exploitive, and pre-emptive ideological standpoints into the research process.

Research ethics and protocols

Effective PAR involves multiple cycles of consultation, collective discussion, data gathering, analysis, evaluation, dissemination and action. This iterative process requires rethinking traditional ethical guidelines and protocols for conducting research. Research partners engaged in PAR typically invest a substantial amount of time and energy in developing agreements that protect the rights and knowledge of partners and their communities. These agreements might address the storage, ownership and

dissemination of collectively-produced data and findings, and the participation of diverse partners at different stages of the project. The emerging nature of ethics in PAR places new demands on researchers; they must be willing to critically locate themselves, to make time for community-paced processes (Ball, 2005), and to put themselves on the line in ways that go well beyond the legal rhetoric of traditional, university-centric research ethics and protocols. In this context, ethics and protocols are always emerging and must be revisited and evaluated at each step, as well as woven through every aspect of project planning and coordination. For example, PAR projects often set aside funds for community members to be involved as co-presenters at conferences and as co-authors in publications even years after the conclusion of the project. Community-based processes related to ethics and protocols cannot be prescribed or rushed without destroying the integrity of the PAR process. PAR is therefore both a highly challenging and rewarding methodology. It demands tremendous commitment to process and partnership, a great deal of the research team's energy, time, and resources, a high tolerance of ambiguity, and a willingness to be accountable to a range of expectations from diverse community and academic partners. Research team members must be willing to trust this process and to negotiate compromises through sustained and meaningful power sharing.

Data sources, collection, and analysis procedures

Investigators who use PAR need to be prepared to use a variety of data collection procedures, analytical methods, interpretive frameworks, and reporting and evaluative strategies, and these must be contextually relevant and accessible to research partners. Data collection and analytical methods used in PAR originate from a variety of disciplines; common methods include appreciative inquiry, surveys, case studies, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and creative participatory methods such as video ethnography, popular theatre, photovoice, and community mapping, among others. As seen in Figure 1, the methodological design of many PAR projects allows for continuous

data generation, gathering, interpretation, and theorizing through iterative cycles of ongoing collaborative processes.

The choice of PAR as an approach to investigation and social action does not constrain or prescribe any particular data collection procedures or the use of qualitative or quantitative data. What counts as relevant data (e.g., survey responses, process, stories, analytical conversations, art, scripts) is varied and context specific. Though collection of non-numerical data is more common than collection of numerical data in PAR, a research team may decide that, for purposes of the topic and the population involved, numerical data collected by means of a highly structured survey questionnaire or even a set of tests may be appropriate. Also, while verbal data may be obtained via interviews, a decision may be made to reduce those data by means of a coding scheme that yields quantifiable representations, such as frequency distributions of key themes that recur in interview data. Thus, data sources may include open-ended questionnaires, structured surveys, conversational interviews, narrative storytelling, videotapes, photojournalism, drawings and other art work, journals, emails, field notes, participant observations, administrative documents, program media, and other documents such as program planning, budget and evaluation records, secondary data sources such as archives, statistical data sets, and individual records, among many other possibilities. PAR research teams often pursue the goal of working towards more critical and complex self-representations than are found in existing theory or in the social status quo by using methodologies for counter-storytelling, including expressive arts, documentaries, popular theatre, ceremony, community organizing, social and policy advocacy, popular education, and political action (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Etherton, 2004; Lee & de Finney, 2005; Lykes, 2001a, 2001b; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001; Tuck, 2009).

Analytical strategies

The iterative nature of PAR incorporates a multiplicity of processes and

contributions that lead to a wide array of possible data, interpretations, and actions (Creswell, 2002; Gaventa, 1988; Leonard, 2002). PAR's transformative power is made manifest through its unique analytical lens. PAR requires a critical analysis that challenges participants to question the social, political, and economic conditions that underlie the data collected. Otherwise, PAR remains a surface methodology, another form of storytelling that reifies the participants' experiences as objects of study (Stoudt, Fox, & Fine, 2012). Without comprehensive analytical strategies that expose historical lines of power, PAR can further entrench silences and reinstate itself as an objectifying research tool (Bennett, 2004; Tuck, 2009). In the case of PAR involving fathers, seeking to represent fathers as a homogenous group with a united voice and agenda would be counter to the principles of PAR: rather the aim is to deploy critical analytical tools to challenge normative, essentialized categories that maintain social inequities among different groups of fathers as well as prevailing stereotypes and assumptions about normative fatherhood. PAR has the potential to redress often taken-for-granted categories as unproblematic and natural and to politicize the discursive and material construction of fatherhood.

PAR requires facilitative and analytical tools that take into account the participant-researchers' particular social locations, as well as the nature and level of their engagement with inquiry and social action. The research team must evaluate which analytic tools will help to sharpen collaborative analysis of interlocking social formations and move emergent understandings beyond one-dimensional representations of the lives of the research participants and their communities. This aspect of a PAR project is both aided and complicated by the multitude of data sources that are often brought into play. The mixed methods of data collection in many PAR projects call for the research team to

create a hybrid analytic strategy that engages multiple layers of data. Some investigators innovate fluid, multi-method analytical tools to aid in critical and collaborative data interpretation (see, for example, Weis & Fine, 2004). Others borrow approaches from hermeneutic inquiry, grounded theory, phenomenology, appreciative inquiry, discourse analysis, thematic analysis and other qualitative analysis approaches that aim to organize copious textual or visual data and represent it in ways that capture participants' meanings and intentions, and set the ground for recommendations for education and action.

As co-researchers and co-participants, university investigators are accountable not only to their own goals for data interpretation and dissemination, but also to other team members, to the constituents whose interests the research is intended to represent and support, and to the community members with whom the research team has worked (Hagey, 1997; Naples, 2003). The interwoven layers of "answerability" in PAR studies create significant ethical and conceptual dilemmas, particularly for academic researchers. The requirement in academe to make individualized knowledge claims collides with the deeply held belief of many PAR investigators in the communal ownership of knowledge. These dilemmas may become particularly salient when academic researchers who engage in PAR are considered for peer review, tenure and promotion on the basis of collaboratively-developed and co-authored research products.

In addition to making these tensions visible with their research teams, university investigators must reconcile for themselves debates on data analysis within PAR, particularly those that relate to the validity of knowledge claims within community-university co-generated projects. Unfortunately, due to their diverse nature, PAR frameworks offer few explicit guidelines for navigating the challenging inner workings of collective knowledge making. In fact, PAR methodologies provide a rather thin analytical structure for systematic and comprehensive data interpretation (Bradbury & Reason, 2003; Cook & Campbell, 1976; Kock, McQueen, & Scott, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000;

Maguire, 2001). Since PAR researchers are committed to "opening up the private lives of participants to the public," it is ironic, as Constas (1992) argues, that PAR investigators' own methods of analysis "often remain private and unavailable for public inspection" (p.254).

Because PAR outcomes are shaped by communal knowledge and the co-construction of praxis, prescriptive analytical procedures that objectify data as separate from the collaborative process fail to capture the most integral aspects of PAR (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morawski, 2001; Park et al., 1993). As a result, PAR researchers are often criticized for overemphasizing the positive aspects of collective praxis-making while under-theorizing and obscuring salient dilemmas in data interpretation and the production of research-based knowledge. Research teams must ask themselves: How do we reconcile and adequately represent multiple interpretations within a research system that promotes individual claims to knowledge? What interpretive methods will reflect the coherence achieved between the research design and methodology, the researcher team's diverse epistemological and ontological locations, and our ideologies about social change? What kinds of interpretive processes have the capacity to produce concrete, relevant tools for the research partners and the development of their communities?

Verification and accountability

To make data interpretation procedures more transparent in PAR, traditional notions of reliability and validity must be rethought; transparency and trustworthiness must be established through ongoing and flexible verification strategies. This requires a dynamic and recursive interpretive dialogue among many sources in an "interpretive community" (Fish, 1980; Tappan & Brown, 1992). In many PAR projects, reliability, trustworthiness, and authenticity of findings are established through a multi-pronged strategy that goes beyond the typical "data triangulation" of more traditional approaches. First, the collaborative analytical process is evaluated through persistent and rigorous

member/community checking and consultation; responsiveness to emerging questions and tensions; adoption of a participatory and active analytical stance; and methodological coherence. Second, the process and outcomes themselves are transparently evaluated, including the level, quality, and impact of participants' engagement, and benefits to and effects on the community's capacity to address and act on identified social issues (Pretty & Chambers, 1995).

These measures, focusing as they do on both content and process, are intended to ensure that data analysis is multifaceted, based on multiple perspectives, grounded in intersubjectivity, and shared transparently. Because PAR involves transformational praxis, data analysis focuses not only on what is, but on "what is not … and what ought to be" (Martin-Baro, 1994, p.29). In stark contrast to the positivism that typifies traditional social science and health research, these qualities take precedence over the need to "control" the research process, thus destabilizing hegemonic constructions of validity and ownership of scientific knowledge.

The deliberately dynamic and generative nature of the interpretive phase of a PAR project contrasts with the dominant tendency to freeze analyses as a means of objectifying research findings and making declarative truth claims. This tentative hold on knowledge is, perhaps, congruent with the positioning of many investigators, like ourselves, who are attracted to PAR—interdisciplinary, "in-between" knowers, shaping knowledge by engaging with various sources of data and documentation, fields of study, interpretive communities, socio-political issues, and contexts of research and practice.

From micro- to macro-analysis

As discussed earlier, while PAR often takes participants' personal experiences as a starting point, the research does not remain in the personal realm. Herr and Anderson (2005) note that PAR "challenges many of the premises of more traditional models of action research...[which tend] to concentrate on an individual or group level

analysis of problems, whereas participatory research, with its more emancipatory emphasis, tends to focus on a broader societal analysis. (p. 16)

At some point in the cycle of PAR praxis, participants move from exploring their individual circumstances and stories, to a critical collective analysis that sets the stage for action. At this juncture, participants develop their own theories and solutions to identified problems (Hall, 1975), thus moving beyond knowledge generation to concrete social transformation and praxis making. Taking on the roles of advocates and activists, PAR participants select and decide on actions. Outcomes reported for PAR projects are incredibly diverse and can include community forums, training opportunities, workshops, conferences, public media, resources for community members or service providers, documentaries, arts-based projects, meetings with policy makers, advocacy and educational campaigns, political lobbying, innovative policy or program development, proposals for follow-up research, or creation of a community or political organization.

Creating and mobilizing such strategies requires a research team to move beyond the boundaries of the project participants and their own political communities and into public consciousness. Most PAR projects aim to link micro-experiences of participants and their communities to an evolving macro-analysis that typically, and importantly, involves critical reflection on the sociopolitical, economic, and historical contexts of social inequity. To avoid the homogenizing and universalizing flatness and erasures that are frequently disappointing outcomes of traditional social science research, PAR teams must incorporate an analysis of the relations of power that exist within any community and provide strategic alternatives for change. In this regard, PAR projects often suffer limitations due to insufficient attention to the intersecting effects of ethnicity, race, language, sexuality, ability, class, gender, nationality, and age, among other factors, in

shaping not only social conditions under investigation, but power dynamics within research teams themselves (Torre, Fine, Stoudt & Fox, 2012).

The capacity of a PAR project to produce useful and transformative knowledge ultimately depends on the much more elusive development of strategies for social change. It is in meeting this challenge that many PAR projects struggle and even collapse. The partnership-building, knowledge generation and collaborative analysis stages of PAR projects often drains participants of energy, time, and commitment and also often exhausts project resources in terms of time, funds, and institutional supports. Ideally, however, PAR results in a continuum of meaningful interventions and action for and by participants. These benefits are not immediate or guaranteed, however.

Tensions and Dilemmas in PAR

While PAR is a promising approach for research on issues such as the experiences, needs, and goals of diverse populations of fathers, there are gaps and tensions in PAR as well. Conceptual, theoretical, and practical dilemmas almost always complicate easy assumptions about the applications and benefits of transformative community-based PAR. These complexities are due, in part, to tensions between core principles and practices of PAR and a social group's highly contextual history and concerns (Hall, 1992a). For instance, many PAR projects encounter difficulties negotiating engaged action research with an under resourced community network. Further, PAR is not an inherently transformative medium disassociated from existing power dynamics embedded in modes of research production. Indigenous, feminist, queer, and youth-centred theorists, among others, have rightly questioned claims to empowerment, democratic research, community participation, and equal access in studies that have employed PAR (Bennett, 2004; Smith, 1999; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Strategies are needed for critical analysis that resonates with the participants' own goals for personal and social change and that offers them creative, flexible tools to foster engagement and action. For some academic investigators, their desire to bolster communities of interest and to make participatory claims may conflict with the onus to make visible their own collusion with dynamics of power in the practice of social research. Academic researchers' roles, and the ways in which they benefit from the knowledge and funding produced, often remain unquestioned, while few returns accrue to research participants.

Questions must also be raised about establishing equity in collaboration and building solidarity. Many PAR projects are founded on the implicit assumption that privileged, educated members of the dominant culture can, through the equalizing tenets of PAR, uncritically operate in solidarity with a vulnerable community. Some academic

researchers influenced by PAR have addressed the conundrum of participation by developing research models that straightforwardly acknowledge the elusiveness of building fully participatory community-university collaborations involving "vulnerable" populations. For instance, Reitsma-Street (2002) has developed a model for community action research (CAR) that provides a framework for undertaking action-oriented community-based research partnerships without making claims of comprehensive or sustainable participation by community members. Rather than glossing over these complexities and accepting the limitations of participation as inevitable, much can be learned from making them explicit and engaging as a research team in working through them (Fuentes, 2009; Sabo Flores, 2008; Ravitch, 1998). Indeed, efforts to address debates about appropriation, power, and participation are critical to the integrity of implementation of a PAR project and to creating the enabling conditions for the participatory research to have its intended effect of increasing civic engagement and social transformation.

Exclusions from PAR

One important concern for father-related PAR is the lack of engagement of children and youth in PAR scholarship and practice. Because of its strong roots in adult education, PAR has historically focused on adults. The prevalence of adult-based research, education, and development programs in PAR has obscured the needs and realities of children and youth, who have often been seen as secondary, de facto beneficiaries of effective adult education and PAR, rather than as primary, decision-making participants.

Recently, however, child and youth participation has become a more important policy focus, resulting in a proliferation of PAR projects involving child/youth-adult partnerships (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Sabo Flores, 2008). Many of these initiatives engage young people to utilize diverse PAR principles and practices to document social

issues and intervene in social problems in their lives (Berg, Owens, & Schensul, 2002; Cahill, Arenas, Contreras, et al., 2004; Fine, Torre, Burns, et al., 2007; Morgan, Pacheco, Rodriguez, et al., 2004; Sydio, Schensul, et al., 2000). Some PAR project with youth focus primarily on understanding the experiences of youth (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Zeller-Berkman, 2007). Unfortunately, multiple barriers may impede implementation of these partnerships, and young participants frequently debate the extent to which PAR methods and practices that involve them are wholly participatory or collaborative. In many research projects that tout a participatory approach, homogeneous notions of 'child participation' and 'youth leadership' obscure age, gender, class, and racialized dynamics. Legal and social issues about informed consent, full participation, and access to funding and research resources compound these barriers.

In the field of father involvement research, the perspectives of boys on topics such as sexuality, contraception, anticipation of fatherhood, and – for some – becoming a teen father, are sorely lacking (Ball, 2008). Also lacking are studies involving children and youth discussing their constructions of gender roles in relation to parenting, their experiences of their own fathers and mothers, the meaning and significance of father involvement in their own lives, and their needs and goals for understanding fatherhood. Several well-documented PAR projects carried out across the world illustrate the potential of PAR for engaging young people in using creative research methods (Barker & Weller, 2003; Backett & Alexander, 1991; Loiselle, de Finney, Khanna & Corcoran, 2012; Cammarota & Fine, 2008). For example, children in Lahore and Nepal used video projections of street life as a backdrop to their theatre production about street children, which they used to lobby local government (Etherton, 2004). Turner (1982) documented a Zimbabwean project where children transformed art and natural materials such as stones and sand to map a project for child-focused social change in their communities. An educational PAR project in an American school engaged boys in exploring

constructions of violence and masculinity (Stoudt, n.d.). In Canada, Sanford and Madill (2008) have responded to boys' insistence on playing active roles in their research on their use of videogame playing as an alternative literacy activity, creative enterprise, and elaboration of masculine identities through virtual social engagement. These examples suggest various ways that young people might be engaged in exploring father-related issues through methods that are age- and context-appropriate. Child- and youth- friendly PAR methodologies would also provide rich opportunities for inter-generational PAR projects where children/youth might work with fathers and perhaps other family members to explore fatherhood-related topics from their unique perspectives. Such inter-generational participatory studies might provide useful models for inter-generational programming and policy innovations involving fathers and their children.

Tokenism and appropriation in PAR

Limitations related to funding, scope and depth of analysis, structural constraints, and sustainability are important considerations for projects employing PAR (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2012; Kesby, Kindon & Pain, 2009). When a PAR process fails to engage with structural and material barriers to full participation, abstract and potentially tokenistic notions of participation and transformation become problematic. Hall recognized early on the potentially manipulative role that third parties (e.g., funding and sponsoring agencies or government officials, for example) can play in influencing research goals, processes, and outcomes:

> 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. (Hall, 1981, in Bennett, 2004, p.22)

Many researchers impose an institutionally sanctioned model of PAR that does not necessarily represent research participants' models of knowledge production or social change, thus making research an imperialistic tool (Lykes, 2001b; Smith, 1999). Potentially manipulative or exploitative research partnerships may be instituted under the tokenistic guise of the 'best interest' of communities. Ostensibly participatory community research projects may actually impose and expand a hidden agenda of government objectives, policies, and procedures that serve to regulate social groups – especially marginalized and vulnerable groups (McTaggart, 1997). PAR then becomes a coercive instrument promoting pre-determined outcomes rather than the self-identified needs and goals of the research participants (Bennett, 2004; Hall 1981; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1993).

PAR concepts and terminologies become entwined in exploitative research practices when oft-used concepts such as 'vulnerable,' 'leadership,' 'voice,' and 'community' collapse important hierarchies of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, language, class, citizenship, and ability. The presumed homogeneity of a population such as 'fathers' or a 'community' such as 'gay fathers,' 'Indigenous fathers,' or 'incarcerated fathers' minimizes the power differences that exist within any group and limits opportunities to explore how PAR itself can reproduce lines of power, essentialism and exclusion within and across communities. PAR researchers must seriously consider critical questions about the degree, quality, and nature of participation in a PAR project— who is included and excluded, who becomes engaged and takes on leadership positions and how, who leaves the project, who will be involved in evaluating the project, and what concrete outcomes stem from these processes. Given that economic and political power typically flow outside of the realms of influence of populations living in contexts of social exclusion, it is important to consider the extent to which they can become

empowered and/or transformed by a research process—and to what extent critical awareness and politicization in and of themselves can transform structural and material conditions.

For community members to be truly involved in PAR, they must be directly involved in translating their experiences into meaningful knowledge—inside and outside academic contexts—with concrete implications for multiple levels of change, from solidarity, community building and innovative storytelling, to policy, programming, and institutional change. These are methodological issues that must be carefully considered in order to harness the potential of PAR findings to facilitate, support, and reinforce positive social change. When co-researchers are engaged fully in research that is motivated by their self-identified needs for action and change and carried out in ways that are perceived by them as congruent and potentially effective for achieving the transformations they envision, then a PAR project finds its stride. Conscientization, networking, empowerment, and critical sociopolitical analyses of the web of factors creating barriers and opportunities to achieving desired personal and social transformations are, in themselves, enabling conditions for production of new knowledge and for an emerging social agency and informed social change agenda. Partnerships and solidarity among participant-researchers and their constituent social and political communities can provide the momentum needed to enter the social arena with meaningful action for social transformation.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have described PAR's promise as a broad methodological framework that can inform theoretical, policy, and practice debates in child and youth care, parenting education and support, child welfare, child health, family services, and understandings of men, masculinities, gender norms and roles, and fatherhood. Rather

than presenting PAR as a prescribed set of procedures, we have highlighted PAR's flexibility as a methodological framework that values engagement to build social capital, consolidate social movements, and advocate for policy, research, programming, and social change. Despite its gaps and tensions, PAR's overarching principles—collaboration between university and community partners, meaningful participation of low-visibility or marginalized groups, critical consciousness about social problems, and community-driven social change—provide a framework within which the enabling conditions for social transformation can be nurtured.

As growing numbers of children in Canada are being raised in lone-mother-headed households, several federal and provincial agencies, community organizations, and fathers' groups have acknowledged fathers' relative invisibility in public policies and programs intended to support child and family well-being. Calls for research as a first step to identify social and policy reforms needed to support their engagement has led to a growing literature on the effects of positive father involvement on children, families, communities, and fathers themselves. . PAR can be a useful way for fathers, family members, parenting groups, and community organizations to collaborate with researchers to deepen and broaden understandings of fathers' experiences, needs, and goals in regards to developing and sustaining positive involvement with their children across varied conditions and changing circumstances. PAR methods of raising awareness, strengthening communities of praxis, and building solidarity to stimulate social transformation offer a set of strategies for engaging diverse voices, including those of boys and men, in making their experiences more visible, addressing dilemmas they face as fathers and prospective fathers, and working toward civic actions to redress the status quo and create awareness about their needs for policy, knowledge and practice reforms.

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