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Patterns of Discovery in Participatory Action Research from the Insider's Perspective

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EDITORIAL

PATTERNS OF DISCOVERY IN PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH FROM THE INSIDERS PERSPECTIVE[1]

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"If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?"

Albert Einstein

INTRODUCTION

Probably one of the more enjoyable experiences of discovery a person can have is playing hide-and-seek with little children. Often the little child points and instructs, "you hide there and I'll find you!" choosing a tiny hiding place in which the grown up is immense. While the hider is manifestly un-hidden and the child's search process is easy, the child has great joy in discovery, demonstrating how fundamentally human it is to enjoy looking for and connecting with another

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person. While social work researchers strive to make discoveries about people that are more complicated and hopefully not obvious, for many researchers, does the pleasure of discovering truths that authentically connect people remain hidden, with scant clues about how to find it?

One of the reasons it may be hard for social work research to foster more authentic connections between people may be because traditional research processes can, in ways we have yet to understand, disconnect people. Social work research methods adapted from other fields (such as agriculture or political science) may seem to be scientifically worthwhile but cannot address all important social work problems. Worse, some methods can, as a leading 20th century U.S. social worker, Charlotte Towle (1958) put it, require a "ruthlessness" that conflicts with social work values and produces alienation (studying a starving person without lastingly remedying her/his starvation, for instance). In my research experiences, the following are unforgettable:

- A homeless person who, when asked for any information about himself by service providers, said only, "I don't want to participate in that research." Eventually he confided (and it was confirmed upon obtaining medical records) that he had had disastrous experiences as a research "subject" in a state psychiatric research facility;
- Citizens of a former Soviet Union country who, when asked to complete questionnaires prior to a parent support group, said, "We don't want to do those, we want you to help us," and who looked aghast at the prospect of being tape-recorded (the researchers had unwittingly unearthed KGB ghosts at that moment);
- U.S. public housing residents who agreed to a partnership only on the condition that no research occurred, because professors from three famous universities had conducted research in their community, and, they said, "got their publications and left us with no benefit whatsoever." The only kind of research they would countenance was that in which they were partners and which advanced their self-determination.

Many other social work researchers report that, when recruiting their samples, people turned down the offer to participate because they feared exploitation, betrayal of trust, or believed the problems under study and the research process to be irrelevant to their concerns (or, worse, yet another instance of oppression).

There is considerable need for approaching research in ways that:

- reduce social exclusion,
- maximize the participation of disadvantaged persons in the development of knowledge about them and services designed to benefit them,
- reduce the knowledge utilization problem,
- yield more precise understanding of the impact of the research process for all participants, and
- enact social work values.

Participatory action research (henceforth PAR) is increasingly valued because it serves those aims. Participatory action research (PAR) is a research process that systematically engages the stakeholders associated with specific problems in an inquiry that includes problem definition, developing methods of data collection, carrying out data analysis and writing up findings. Stakeholders (including those traditionally called researchers) define their roles together, collaboratively. Thus, PAR is a "dynamic process that develops from the unique needs, challenges, and learning experiences specific to a given group. Methods and modes of action are formed over time through dialectic movement between action and reflection" (Kidd & Kral, 2005 p.187).

PAR can be broadly categorized into participatory action research involving clients of services (such as when youth co-design, co-lead and co-evaluate the programs in which they are clients) and participatory action research that recruits community members as co-researchers. The latter versions of participatory action research are used in many contexts, including business and educational settings. In the former context, client service settings, Macran, Ross et al. (1999) described a spectrum of involving clients in service-based research. The most

intensive involvement is when clients are involved in defining research problems all the way through the research process, including co-authoring reports and papers. In the least intensive involvement, clients may give their opinions about services but do not co-design or co-lead them. PAR is especially effective in involving those clients who otherwise tend to suffer from social exclusion from services (Macran, Ross et al., 1999).

Because participatory action methods are increasingly seen as valuable, this paper is not an argument for their merit. *Instead, a different problem will be addressed that remains important for social work practitioners as well as researchers: Given the many problems remaining in social work services and knowledge, how can participatory action methods help social workers make scientifically and socially valuable discoveries?* An important aspect of this question is very practical: How does one do participatory action research in a way that fosters discoveries and minimizes ruthless exploitation of participants by researchers? To address this question, examples will be drawn from the excellent papers (in this volume) prepared for the landmark International Conference on "The Insiders Perspective in Participatory Action Research in Social Work," sponsored by the Centre Européen de Ressources pour la Recherche en Travail Social (CERTS), which took place at Vytautus Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania, in December, 2012. I am most appreciative of the invaluable privilege to be able to read the papers, discuss them with authors in the conference, write this Introduction, and benefit from the feedback of the conference members.

PAR methods have been hailed as promising precisely because, by definition, they systematically apply social work values, and affirm and include persons in all phases of the research process. "Legitimating democratic inquiry, PAR signifies a fundamental right to ask, investigate, dissent and demand what could be" (Fine & Torre, p. 255). Yet PAR can also be rejected by those wedded to a view of science that rejects as inherently invalid the messiness of social research outside of 'controlled' laboratory settings; or those who take the position that valuable discoveries can happen, like cooking, by following a methodological recipe for randomized samples, experimental design, standardized measures for data gathering, and

inferential statistical data analysis, etc. As Stringer notes, whether or not one sees PAR as valuable hinges on one's definition of science (2007, p. 191). To adequately comprehend how scientific discovery can be defined, it is helpful to consider empirical and conceptual perspectives on scientific discovery.

PAR and Scientific Discovery

Defining Discovery

A person-on-the-street's exemplar for scientific discovery is likely Archimedes' famous *Eureka!* moment, when he reportedly stepped into his bath, noticed the water level rose, and perceived both the displacement of volume, and that even the volume of irregular objects could be measured precisely. Part of the fame of this moment may be because it is an episode of "streaking" by a noted genius – supposedly Archimedes was so excited he did not get dressed and ran through the streets of Syracuse shouting "Eureka" (meaning, "I have found it!" and derived from the Greek word *heurisko*, the etymological root of our contemporary word, "heuristic"). Discovery is often understood as an exciting moment when a new explanation or frame of reference about a commonly observed event becomes apparent (Hanson, 1958, pp. 6-30) – a heuristic moment.

Still another common exemplar of discovery is Pasteur's 1877 discovery that when anthrax cultures became contaminated with molds, their reproduction was slowed, seemingly a completely serendipitous event (and supposedly he isolated penicillin, although credit for this is normally given to Alexander Fleming in 1928). As Pasteur famously commented, his scientifically 'prepared mind' allowed him to perceive this event and also to appreciate and pursue its significance. This version of discovery consists of a seemingly serendipitous solution to a pressing problem.

While these two examples have features in common, they can be distinguished to represent what contemporary philosophers of science regard as two forms of scientific discovery: 1) the first being a new perception and explanation for a commonly seen occurrence

(everyone sees the bathwater level change when they step into it, but Archimedes conceptualized the significance of this event for measuring volume); 2) the second being the discovery of something, by the impact of Nature (and chance) on the "prepared mind," that others have not seen before.

Discovery is important to us as social work researchers because while significant advances have occurred in social work services and knowledge in the past twenty years, there remain unsolved problems with profound implications for peoples' lives for which discoveries are needed. Consider for instance, from a macro perspective, that providing effective mental health care for traumatized children and youth remains a significant problem globally, including even in the relatively privileged United States and EU (Kazdin, 2003; Pelkonen & Marttunen, 2003, respectively). Another unsolved problem is that in many countries people who have the status of 'minorities' experience social exclusion from social benefits, including social work services. Other problems appear solved in theory but unsolved practically because available research knowledge is not utilized in policy formation. For instance, researchers know there are promising solutions to many forms of poverty (Sachs, 2005), yet in many countries (perhaps most notably the United States, Danziger & Danziger, 2010) it is difficult to obtain public support for implementing the policies that would give those solutions a chance. These problems can be understood as hard to solve in part because traditional research methods do not solve problems of social exclusion and the isolation of research knowledge from practice and policy. An aim of PAR is to be reflective about and strive **not** to replicate those oppressive processes.

Major Philosophy of Science Views of Scientific Discovery in Historical Perspective

Discovery v. Justification?

Debates about discovery in philosophy of science were significantly shaped by Sir Karl Popper, who claimed that the purview of philosophy of science is justification, not discovery, holding that discovery

is essentially a psychological process. Einstein famously rebutted Popper's comments and the accompanying positivistic emphasis on methodological criteria for truth. As is suggested by the epigram for this chapter, Einstein asserted that as a scientist one must be able to embrace the mission of investigating questions to which the answers are not known, rather than continually justifying in various ways what one already believes to be true.

Discoveries and scientific revolutions

Although Einstein was one of many early critics of positivism, Thomas Kuhn is famously credited with complete overturn of the positivistic view of science in philosophy of science. He asserted that discovery is most important to understand and created lasting insights into the process based on his study of discovery in science (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962). Kuhn emphasized there were two types of discovery (emphasizing that often the distinction is "artificial"): "Novelties of fact" and "Novelties of theory." According to him, the process of scientific discovery had three parts: 1) "Awareness of anomaly": Nature has "violated expectations"; 2) "Exploration of the area of anomaly" and 3) Adjustment of received theory so that the "anomalous has become the expected" (Ibid, pp. 52 ff).

While social work researchers are not accustomed to calling the topics they pursue anomalies, consider that in order to be considered contributions to knowledge, the topics of social work dissertations and papers must consider existing theories and address unexplored problems or topics in relation to those theories – anomalies.

Kuhn emphasized that scientists are profoundly influenced by social factors such as their education, pressures exerted by their reputation, feelings about contradicting received or accepted wisdom, and the preconceptions organizing their perceptions of their methodology and data. In relation to PAR and how research organizes relationships, an important implication of Kuhn's work is that social work researchers are vulnerable to assuming that the methods they learned to call "experiments" exhaust the category of possibly legitimate

experiments – shackling their critical thinking and creativity about what could happen if one reorganizes the relationships between researchers and those who participate with researchers in the scientific process.

Kuhn's contemporary, the philosopher Norwood Hanson, argued that "Seeing is an experience," not just a physical sense impression or an interpretation (1958). Even later, the Nobel-prize winning economist Herbert Simon (1966) described what he called a "mental blackboard" that occurs in the mind of the scientist. The scientist builds a great fund of information about the problem, and then in seeking to solve it, goes through an (implicit or explicit) trial and error process. While the scientist is always (consciously and unconsciously) at work on the problem, moments of discovery can happen as the outcome of deliberative, reflective commitments, and also in a seemingly Eureka moment which has as its precondition the previous extensive background and trial-and-error process.

21st CENTURY

In our 21st century, Koshland (2007) described the "Cha-cha-cha" of scientific discovery: Scientific discoveries can be categorized as of three kinds – charge (discovering new solutions to existing problems), challenge (explaining anomalies) and chance (serendipitous like penicillin). He emphasized that most discoveries do not occur in a "eureka" moment but rather occur in gradual steps through continual reflection on existing evidence.

Patrick Baert (2005), in his impressive conceptualization of contemporary pragmatism, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences,* emphasizes that social science research is not a "spectator" experience in which the researcher strives to create a better and better approximation of reality, akin to a more and more accurate photograph. Instead, research is an interactive, reflective activity that changes all participants in the research, including the researcher as well as the consumers of the research. A challenge for the researcher is to engage in the deepest dialogue with participants, including engaging one's own critical and creative thinking.

Kevin Elliott (2004) focuses on the initial phases of discovery and, following Deborah Mayo, claims that the investigation of error associated with anomalies plays an essential role in the initial phases of discovery. In sum, he sees researchers as devoting effort to probe whether anomalies are produced by scientific error or represent a deviation from what would be expected that requires further investigation and alteration of the theory. In his model, using research to probe for error plays an essential role in the process of sharpening scientist's focus on procedures that can lead to real discoveries. Following this model, PAR can play an important role in identifying errors. Consider that clients can help social service providers improve services by suggesting remedies for potentially exclusionary practices (Macran, Ross, et al., 1999) and describing iatrogenic practices consumers experience as destructive, but which service providers might overlook (Rapp, Kisthardt et al., 1994).

To foster discovery in social work research it is important to foster new frames of reference and ways of studying society and relationships, which also means restructuring the relationships between participants in the research process. Social work researchers can do much more than conceptualize and build on evidence-based models: They can consider deeply how evidence is defined, the values that underlie the methods by which evidence accumulates, and critique existing evidence using data derived from research processes grounded in social work values. To put this a bit differently, while most social work researchers tend to acknowledge that values influence the research process and its outcomes, they often stop short before allowing their values to comprehensively revise their entire process of research. Yet as Kevin Elliot and Daniel McKaughan (2009) argue in discussing pollution research, there is reason to conclude that values guide how research questions are defined, regulate the experimental design process, influence the data available to refine theories, and influence which theories become available for evaluation. Accordingly, values play a central role in social work knowledge generation, and it is a priority to better understand how and to allow social work epistemologies to be reflectively guided by social work values.

BY REDEFINING RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS, PAR FACILITATES DISCOVERY

RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE BASE FOR SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

When one is studying people, the way of knowing is, invariably, by forming relationships (by comparison for examples with using microscopes to study bacteria and telescopes to study stars). Accordingly, to foster new ways of seeing society and relationships, one needs to create new ways of relating. This is harder than it seems because social roles can so profoundly influence how people relate. A notorious example is Philip Zimbardo's prison experiment. Stanford undergraduates enacted the roles of prisoners and guards for only a few days before the experiment was discontinued because the relationships became so toxically infused with destructive patterns, with the guards abusing the prisoners, and the prisoners abusing each other. Zimbardo (2007), who devoted much of his career to studying the social psychology of evil, commented about the prison experiment that, "the situation won; humanity lost."

Concern about the destructive potential of research relationships in which researchers hold all the power to define relationships and knowledge produced motivates many researchers to use a PAR design instead (including researchers in this volume). PAR as a design strategy is based on the social work values of promoting self-determination, respecting diversity, and maximizing the quality of scientific knowledge (for instance, PAR designs typically have superior ecological validity compared to other designs). A deliberate commitment is made to "amplify" the voices of people otherwise in the comparatively silent and subjugated roles of "subjects" (Rapp, Kisthardt et al. 1994). Examining the historical relationship between researchers and "subjects" in social work in the United States illuminates this issue further.

Past research relationships in social work in the U.S.

Hull house

The Hull House model of social work research developed by Jane Addams and her colleagues in U.S. at the turn of the 20th century eschewed the dominant sociological model for the sake of partnering with the "neighbors" of the settlement house in the research process. Accordingly, research problems were determined with the neighbors and the neighbors evaluated, commented on, and co-presented research findings. Among the advantages of the Hull House model were that obstacles to knowledge utilization were overcome, in part because neighbors could publicize findings and their implications (such as the dangers of child labor for children's development). The neighbors also strategized with Addams about handling problems with potential new policies (such as many poor families' dependence on the earnings of their children). The development of new policies based on Hull House research has been documented thoroughly, and included local innovations such as Illinois' child labor and workers' compensation legislation, and the founding of the Juvenile Court in Chicago. Many Illinois and Chicago policies were then adopted nationally (Muncy, 1991).

Positivism in social work research

The positivistic turn that U.S. social work research took in the 1950s (an emphasis not replicated in many other countries, fortunately) advocated research designs in which researchers alone defined all aspects of the research process. To be scientific, according to that view, there had to be sharp social demarcations between researchers and practitioners and "subjects" (for further description of this evolution, see Tyson, 1995). Neither practitioners nor "subjects" were deemed able to contribute insights into the research design process, and some positivistic researchers went so far as to emphasize that client opinions about the services in which they participated could not yield scientifically valuable data (Campbell, 1969).

Now, a generation later, some former "subjects" report on the harm caused by being treated as objects by supposedly neutral researchers. For example, J. Christopher Hall eloquently describes his experience as a "subject" as a youth in the Louisville Twins study, and how he and his brother dreaded and then mocked the researchers in lab coats who talked with them without seeming to know, care about, or recognize them as persons (Hall, 2012). Not until Joseph Vigilante (1974) and Dennis Saleebey (1979) published critiques was the positivistic view of science questioned by U.S. social workers in academia.

While in other countries such as Belgium, PAR is recognized as legitimate to the point where governmental entities commission PAR research for families of children at risk and involve nineteen schools (see Frenkel in this volume), in contemporary social work in the United States PAR is at times regarded as at the cutting edge, at other times devalued as not "scientific." As a result, U.S. academic social work researchers who seek assured funding tend to select more positivistic methods.

"SUBJECTS"?

PAR represents a new epistemology (way of knowing) because by definition it radically restructures the relationship between researcher and "sample" or "subjects." Just as the discovery of telescopes and microscopes led to the discovery of new realities, PAR as a new way of knowing also can promote discoveries in social work. One of the interesting problems PAR unveils is what the researchers' partners are appropriately called. Most authors in this volume do not use the term "subjects," instead replacing it with adjectives and nouns describing the professions (e.g., educators), age (e.g., youth), or status (e.g., homeless).

PAR is in a process of continually re-constructing the roles of all those involved in the research process. As of yet, there is not a good name in English for those who agree to participate in the PAR process with the researcher. While "subjects" certainly bespeaks a respect for subjective experience and is potentially better than the objectification that

was the hallmark of positivistic models, it also connotes a subjugation that PAR practitioners strive to overcome. How to overcome such subjugations is an important topic in itself, and part of the purpose of studies such as those presented in this volume.

There are two primary ways that the researchers from the "insider's perspective" structure relationships with those persons formerly called "subjects":

1) as an "engaged researcher," by definition helping or empowering and then reflecting on that process; or

2) as a researcher partnering and engaging in collaborative process of developing "savoir and savoir-faire" (knowledge and knowledge for doing, per Frenkel, in this volume).

In some papers an "engaged researcher" is reflecting on interactions s/he has with disadvantaged persons, and empowerment is the aim of intervention and the focus of reflection (see for instance Gulczyńska in this volume). In other PAR models, stakeholders influenced by a problem area work together with the researcher as partners (see for instance Frenkel's work in this volume, and her emphasis that researchers, school staff and parents were a *partenariat* in the research). In a thoroughgoing form of partnership, partners do not have to fit into researchers' theoretical categories and/or be manipulated by researchers' methodologies, but instead share in the problem identification, organization of research roles, data collection methods, and data analysis and reporting.

It is harder than it might seem to reorganize traditional relationships and include all potential partners in all phases of PAR research. The problem is that an outsider researcher is an outsider even if temporarily an insider. People used as informants and then abandoned when research is over, only to read about themselves later with their private stories made public, can feel understandably betrayed (Estroff,1995). PAR no doubt goes further than other methods in addressing and striving not to replicate those inequities, but as the papers in this volume eloquently point out, it is naïve and finally not good science to believe that the inequities can be eradicated simply by the use

of a method. PAR can promise to strive not to replicate them and also to expose further how such inequities work in society and in research, and also what researchers can do about them. For instance, Gulczyńska, in discussing the activities of an 'engaged researcher," discusses what is power and empowerment in the context of participatory observation research occurring during her "street pedagogue" interventions with disadvantaged youth in Łódź. As she learned from the youth, the world is divided into two – a "world of strangers" and a "world of fellows." The youth strive to be seen as "fighters" and not "losers" in the "world of fellows." The engaged researcher certainly starts in the "world of strangers" and strives, as one type of empowering action, to bridge the worlds. This means supporting the youths' efforts to define their own identities outside of stifling, stigmatizing interactions.

Another way in which researchers need to respect the different experiences of their partners is the impact of publishing and speaking the truth. For those partners without the protection of academia and/or tenure, publication of findings may not be in the partners' best interest. For example, in a PAR project with imprisoned women (Fine and Torre, 2006), the imprisoned partners could not publicly identify with research revelations about their maltreatment by prison staff, for fear of retaliation. Accordingly, the prisoners' ability to be co-authors and co-reporters was limited. A similar problem can occur when research serves human rights in political contexts where human rights activists or their family members can be murdered.

Yet another obstacle to true equality in research is that when researchers take the stance of advocates, they do not necessarily empower their informants. Instead, "sometimes social work studies, seeking to advocate the needs of respondents and to raise their voice in the society, describe and construct them as *passive prisoners to the life* or *unable to handle the situation*" (Malinauskas citing Gould and Shaw, this volume).

As Malinauskas emphasizes (in this volume), in the process of discovery researchers can be very vulnerable. If researchers handle

discrepancies between what they expect to find in their research and what their partners actually tell them by adopting categories from society's dominant discourse, they lose their discovery. Once again they reduce their partners to "subjects" and the knowledge produced becomes overly restricted.

Through unveiling the obstacles for researchers who seek to avoid disempowering their partners, PAR generates knowledge that can be used by all researchers to be reflective about their impact on their partners and on social work knowledge.

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

1ST PERSON POINT OF VIEW

While not all PAR research is from the Insider's Perspective, that was the focus of this conference. The Insider's Perspective is, in this volume, understood as representing the world as the research partner sees it (from that person's subjective experience, or a 1st person perspective). The 1st person perspective clearly values individuals and their stories, by comparison with the 3rd person ("outsiders") perspective used in standardized measurements of behavior or in generation of formal theory, in which anonymity and an individual's representativeness of a population are more valued (Danziger, 1988).

The first person perspective is an especially powerful lens for perceiving people in terms of their agency in relationships. In this volume, Kostrzyńska redefines homelessness from within the subjective experience of homeless persons. From a first person perspective homelessness is a change in identity commencing with loss of prosperity, the onset of loneliness, and loss of roots in a specific place. Kostrzyńska describes how homeless persons strategized asking for money, organized their time, collaborated together to make the most of donated food, and made spaces in parks or tunnels to which they could return, analogous to homes. She also recounts the powerful exertion and generosity of a homeless person who, "impatient with

the lack of the possibility to change his situation, took all his possessions – composed of a few foil bags – blocked with his own body the door leading to the office of the President of the city, threatening that he will not leave until he gets social housing. In this way, after a few days, he was able to move into a social flat (along with several other homeless people whom he immediately took in)." Kamińska (in this volume) shares the narratives of persons with severe mental illness, and describes their anguish, experience of stigma, and also the potential healing that can be fostered by the act of biography in the context of a helper (including a researcher).

Natalija Mažeikienė (in this volume) eloquently describes the potential transformative and political power of a 1st person perspective. She distinguishes the ontology of an objectivist position (or 3rd person perspective) from the ontology of a subjectivist perspective (1st person). Emphasizing the creative potential of narrative biography that embraces a subjectivist perspective within a context of critical consciousness (humanization, per Freire), she gives many examples of the use of biography for empowering clients and understanding the inner lives and identity struggles of social work practitioners. Biographies as she describes them can have a healing impact for traumatized persons. She gives the example of how prostitutes used their biographies to describe and mourn traumatic poverty and sexual violence. The women created a new identity born out of self-definition, rather than definitions internalized from oppressive structures and persons. Mažeikienė also points out how social workers can use biographies to come to terms with disparate aspects of their own identities. An example she offers is Lithuanian male social workers seeking to reconcile seeming contradictions between an empathic, receptive emphasis (associated with women's roles) with an active, dynamic approach to social work more associated with masculinity. Far from being limited to the micro- sphere, biographies as Mažeikienė describes them have the power to help individuals and communities re-define their identities and the conditions of their lives, a power that goes far beyond the individual and can build changes in communities and social policies.

How can researchers know they are maintaining fidelity to the Insider's perspective? PAR research has standards, many of which have already been described above. Other standards one can use to evaluate fidelity are described by Malinauskas (in this volume). The researcher can ask her/himself,

- "what feeling will the participants gain from the research?" and
- "what type of narrative – restrictive or empowering?" -- will the research knowledge create?

SOLIDARITY

A value guiding the papers in this volume, all based from the "insider's perspective," can be termed "solidarity." Solidarity, in the sense of a commitment to and joining with a vulnerable person, means seeking to understand how that person experiences her/his identity and social environment, without shrinking from suffering, outrage, or injustice. For instance, Gulczyńska (in this volume) differentiates' disadvantaged youths' perception of a "world of strangers" (including the researcher) and a "world of fellows," who are "enemies of losers and the police. While a researcher is ineradicably part of the world of strangers, yet as an "engaged researcher" she strives continually to bridge the two worlds, and arguably creates yet a third world. For example, the youth call her, affectionately, "Anitka," clearly not a name to be used with a "stranger." Rather than advocacy for a particular agenda, the engaged researcher's solidarity is for the empowerment of individuals by understanding their priorities, and bridging of the social divides that create rejection, stigma, and humiliation. The specific discoveries revealed in the papers for this conference deepen our understanding in several areas, described further below:

- Empowerment,
- The role and impact of the PAR researcher,
- Origins of partners' disconnection,
- Improving social work practice, and
- How PAR can be a catalyst for innovative actions.

DISCOVERIES OF CERTS RESEARCHERS

ON EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a term used by virtually all contemporary social workers. In a context of globalization and multiculturalism, it likely has many meanings for many people. As Mariusz Granosik (in this volume) comments, citing Barstow, empowerment is understood as "a social construct, or as a critically understood concept, or as a reflective practice" and all those meanings are undergoing further elaboration and definition. Clearly, empowerment entails a context in which there is social conflict in the sense that some persons have less access to power, resources, and self-determination than others. The writers in this volume discover new meanings for empowerment, both as a concept and as an interactive intervention.

Jarkiewicz, (in this volume) describes how social workers can and do relate with clients diagnosed as severely mentally disturbed. She builds a concept of empowerment that assumes that an individual acting upon and aware of her/his own strengths can then change her/his environment. Her strengths-based concept of empowerment builds on a conceptualization that originated in Poland in the 1960s: "In the Polish tradition, the idea of social work comprehended in such a way was introduced by H. Radlinska … creating the concept of 'human strengths,' according to which, while working with other people one should reveal in them their 'strengths' that are going to make the basis for the transformation (change) of the *milieu* in which they live." The social worker functions as a supportive companion on the client's path, nondirectively, and emphasizing emancipation rather than control (Jarkiewicz).

In her PAR partnership with school staff and parents of "at risk" students in Belgium Stéphanie Frenkel describes how she understand the empowerment that occurred: "Dans la pratique le terme empowerment vise le renforcement des compétences des personnes. En termes de management, ce concept repose sur 3 piliers : vision, autonomie et appropriation. Une « équipe empowered » sait où elle va (vision),

a une marge de manœuvre suffisante pour y aller (autonomie) et se sent légitime de mener cette action (appropriation)."

As Gulczyńska (in the study of disadvantaged youth previously mentioned) defines empowerment, it "means being able to influence your social picture the way you become whom you want (for the variants of social identities in the particular world) and get where you want (the status) in interactions with the representatives of this world." With such a definition of empowerment, knowledge itself can contribute to undermining stigma and researchers provide opportunities for partners to create their social pictures (for their own eyes and the eyes of others), free of stigma.

Through his research, Hervé Drouard sought to understand what about a social worker's empowerment nurtures what Drouard calls the "ideal human relationship." Drouard asked former members of sailing groups for youth who experienced relationships with their social worker or group leader that become friendships about what made such enduring relationships happen. His findings re-affirm the power of the human connection – of empathy, warmth, giving and receiving, in the face of increasing mechanization (internet-based relationships, even robot therapists). "Acknowledgement of the other as equal in dignity, capacities, richness allowing the release of the relational dynamic, including the friendly relationship, one of the ideal human relationship."

About the Role of the Engaged and/or PAR Researcher

Negative potentials

While much can and will be said about the benefits of research from the Insider's Perspective, researchers in this volume also raise some important cautions. There are pressures on scientific knowledge in any field, including the impossibility of publication in political contexts requiring confidentiality (certainly this occurs in all sciences with some regulation and stakes held in them by governmental agencies).

There can be pressures on research about services to document success for political reasons (as described eloquently in the high-profile study of interventions in the Carre des Biffins in Paris, by Chouatra, Grimaldi, Rullac, this volume). While such pressures and concerns would exist using any research process, participatory action, with its openness to reflexivity, makes it possible to discuss these pressures and their impact on the researcher as part of the research process (rather than hiding them). In that sense PAR serves the important freedom of transparency, and protects social work research from a corresponding unfreedom (that occurs if such pressures on researchers remain hidden, applying Sen, 1999).

Research from the Insider's perspective can also have specific implications for partners. Because it is potentially more biographical (and hence more revealing of individuals), partners can experience researchers as intruding into their privacy. As Malinauskas says, researchers need to try to avoid causing partners to withdraw to protect their privacy. Also, researchers who are not sensitive about the possibilities of exploitation can in effect be 'burglars' (Malinauskas).

Engaged researcher (practitioner using participant observation and ethnographic methods)

Many of the researchers writing for this volume use a model Gulczyńska terms, "engaged research." According to this model, the researcher eschews any pretense of neutrality and without restriction seeks to understand and represent the world of the disadvantaged person. Whether providing services to disadvantaged youth (Gulczyńska) pregnant or parenting single teenagers (Bouquet), interviewing homeless persons (Kostrcyńska) or persons with severe mental illness (Kamińska), the stance of the researcher is to illuminate social interactions entailed in sustaining the exclusion of disadvantaged persons. These researchers focus on the first person perspective of the disadvantaged persons. Their findings reflect persons' strengths and, even at times, heroism, as well as insightfulness about the exclusion they experience. While a misunderstanding of the first person perspective might be that it is solipsistic, trapped

in only an individual viewpoint, this engaged research is far from solipsistic. It shows that a complete commitment to representing the perspective of disadvantaged persons leads to a discussion of social interactions that perpetuate injustice and to clear recommendations for policy makers and service providers. For instance, Daniel Bouquet recommends that rather than negatively judging pregnant and singe parenting teenagers, educators instead respond in respectful and empowering ways in developing programs to better support teenage mothers.

Engaging in joint research with partners

Stéphanie Frenkel details a two-year PAR project that partnered with parents and school staff serving at-risk youth in 19 Belgian schools. Consistent with the challenges associated with PAR research, not all schools could follow through with the substantial commitment entailed in the project (ultimately nine completed the program). The in-depth meetings and reflection with parent-school staff teams made it possible to nurture a process in which parent-school staff relationships gradually shifted from a hierarchical model in which parents were only receiving information, to a reciprocal model in which parents and school staff shared insights with each other about how to care for the youth. Thus the project illuminates PAR's potential to be a catalyst for improving empathic dialogue, nurturing perceptions of strengths and competence and thus fostering teamwork.

Providing a reflective space for social workers

In their papers in this volume, Jarkiewicz and Motiečienė and Naujanienė describe how social workers and clients are inheriting from previous social constructions, and jointly constructing, categories of social worker and client. Whether social workers' categories used to evaluate clients are good and bad mother (Motiečienė and Naujanienė) or normal v. "nuts" (Jarkiewicz), the researchers perceive that social workers themselves need dialogues that free them of a context imposing unfair power dynamics on the social workers'

thinking and relating with their clients. PAR potentially provides a context in which the needed dialogues can occur.

Chouatra, Grimaldi, Rullac document the role of research in a highly political and innovative process of social service intervention (in the Carre des Biffins in Paris). The research tasks provided for the program director/researcher a welcome reflective space, relatively free of political and social (publishing, grant-getting) pressures. A specific and important role for social work research emerges: While cost-effectiveness is the continual concern of policy-makers, social workers need to evaluate and improve their effectiveness using more exacting and comprehensive criteria. Thus "a scientific approach is essential to ensure the collective formal expression of the end product. This will allow evaluation outside the simplistic perspective of cost-effectiveness. To do this, social work needs to develop research skills and competence" (Chouatra, Grimaldi, Rullac).

Biography and autobiography

An important role of the PAR and engaged researcher is, by listening, to offer partners the opportunities to create transforming autobiographies. The researcher thus is in a sense a biographer. Accuracy is important as a hallmark of stigma and social exclusion is the inaccurate portrayals of stigmatized persons. Based on his research listening to the personal narratives of grandparents caring for children whose parents had to leave them to seek employment outside of Lithuania, Malinauskas writes that it is possible as a biographer to distill universals with more accurate, complex, and therefore transformative impact.

Kamińska concludes from her interviews with persons with severe mental illness that biography can potentially protect a person from recurrence of severe mental illness, and in this sense can be part of a process of empowerment. This protection occurs when the person has the opportunity to create her/his own biography in the context of a relationship with someone who helps the person build a reflective identity outside of, yet aware of, the experiences of the illness.

The PAR process can potentially have a similar immunizing impact, "The study created space for the subjects to give their own meaning to their lives."

Origins of Partners' Disconnections

Stigma, or the response of "deafness" and rejection to "alterité"

Being "other" from a majority, or acting in ways that vary from what is most accepted, can create vulnerabilities to rejection. As Bouquet so eloquently says, even though sharing the same space, certain ways of life expose social groups to a form of deafness ("Bien que partageant le même espace, certains habitus exposent les groupes sociaux à une forme de surdité"). All the researchers in this volume describe various forms of social alienation. The "engaged researcher" or PAR researcher aims to both describe these forms of alienation, and also actively engage others in building connections that can have a lasting effect of being able to listen to "others" and bridge social distances.

Kamińska strives to describe empowerment from the standpoint of persons diagnosed with severe mental illness. She quotes her informants' sharing the pain of acute episodes of mental illness, with accompanying disorganization of thought and paralyzed agency. Being stigmatized was a tragic experience for them -- feeling rejected, fearing rejection, being disrespected, feeling unliked and not part of everyday social exchanges were extremely painful elements of social interactions. Kostrcyńska describes the social exclusion of homeless persons as a process not accounted for by the persons' deficits, but as "a process of gradual impoverishment of the areas of social participation." Social exclusion can include the efforts of individuals to protect their identity from the pain of rejection, which contributes to the restriction in participation.

Gulczyńska describes how stigma works both in terms of degrading interactions, and also even in locations. The disadvantaged youth she aids have nowhere to go but to hang out on the streets, at the

gates. This location alone makes them immediately suspect by the police. Incidentally, this phenomenon occurs not only in Łódź, but also in Chicago where police "sweeps" are notorious for arresting innocent but poor youth without recreational resources who are simply hanging out in certain public locations.

Bouquet describes an intense social divide in Guadeloupe (into two worlds, one of middle and upper class, one of poorer and darker people), a stratification based on legacies of colonialism, slavery, and continued class discrimination. He illuminates reasons why efforts to reduce rates of teenage pregnancy fail so miserably. The act of becoming a mother is culturally a way to enter adulthood, and motherhood itself is deemed the foundation for women's value, thus creating a need in disadvantaged girls to use parenthood as a path to social acceptance. The girls' families' tradition was to not discuss sexuality and the girls could not imagine using contraception because it required a self-acknowledged intention to engage in sexual intercourse. The girls could not be so reflective because they felt themselves to be doing something terribly wrong if they engaged in sexual activities. Then, when pregnant, the girls felt very alone and many said it was only the social worker who bridged their isolation. The young women accurately perceived that the adults in their world (aside from the social worker) were struck by incomprehension of their pregnancy. Consider that in publishing his research, which makes comprehensible what was incomprehensible, Daniel Bouquet is already offering educators and social workers aiding the young women the opportunity to replace their "deafness" and incomprehension with listening and support – another example of research bridging alien worlds.

Helping social workers improve their practice

Studies of social workers suggest how PAR can help social workers listen more carefully to their clients (again overcoming 'deafness'). In their examination of the discourse of social workers and "at-risk" clients, Motičienė and Naujanienė listened to the client's story and

arrived at the conclusion that she was "heroic" for having rescued herself and her children from a violent, alcoholic husband. However, the social worker, while seeing this mother as a "good" mother, focused on avoiding problems and the need to control and monitor the client. The social worker could not see the social obstacles of poverty and disempowerment facing the mother, and did not perceive the mother's strengths. The researchers recommended that social workers have the opportunity to voice and have help with their internalization of the "prevailing discourse …and strategies of actions to empower the client could be planned" (Motičienė and Naujanienė).

Another way PAR knowledge can be helpful is that as it gathers and summarizes service recipients' opinions, it becomes available for social workers to use in understanding coping strategies and planning services (Izabela Kamińska's research in this volume about severe mental illness).

Finally, it is important to understand how social workers can strive to make empowering decisions in relation to their clients, in the context of pressures and even hostility from the wider society. Anna Jarkiewicz describes a social worker struggling to respect her clients' autonomy but also frightened at the possibility that the clients could harm themselves, and that she would suffer considerable humiliation and censure from the media and agency supervisors. Social workers' inclinations to resort to power and control tactics appear here as clearly driven by such negative pressures. Mariusz Granosik echoes that concern when he finds how relatively devalued social workers are in a multidisciplinary team. As Jarkiewicz says, is it "only the clients that need empowerment?"

PAR as a Catalyst for Innovative Actions

To consider how PAR can be a catalyst for innovative action (or discovery) it is helpful to begin by defining discovery in social work. Chouatra, Grimaldi, & Rullac (in this volume) state, "Research into a project provokes and stimulates innovation in social action. Innovation is synonymous with development in that it recombines

elements in a new way. In that sense, innovation is synonymous with *« the development of different, alternative working practices, new approaches, experimentation with new and innovative schemes, etc. »[citing Dominique Fablet].* In this sense, innovation is distinct from invention in the strict sense of the term. However, there are various levels of innovation, going from an important development to a complete break."

While not formally a social work service, there are clearly ways in which PAR results in direct social change, thus filling the gap between research and practice (also alternatively called the problem of knowledge utilization). As Frenkel found in her PAR with parent-school staff teams in Belgium, the PAR process could be a catalyst for innovative action, discovering and formalizing *savoir-faire*, (knowing how to do). PAR reduced social alienation by promoting teamwork across barriers caused by differences of values, and rather than a focus on deficits or problems of 'at risk' youth, the team's focus changed to looking at the youths' competence and strength, and sharing practical expertise. The parent-staff dynamic changed from one of hierarchical giving and complying to reciprocity.

Anita Gulczyńska comments that her engaged research had two primary effects: bridging social world and social advocacy. These bear more elaboration because they seem to be common across many of the research studies in this volume.

By bridging social worlds Gulczyńska means "such actions that bring together representatives of different social worlds through the organization of such communication contexts that will make it possible for both sides to get to know better the rationale of the other party, as well as to exist in the world of the strangers with a highly valued identity in its symbolic structure." An example is the photographic exhibit by disadvantaged youth her project sponsored. "The exhibition allowed to redefine the image of young unprivileged people by their appearance in the new social identity – high indexed in the whole community – the identity of an emerging, self-made artist."

For Gulczyńska, social advocacy "involved an attempt to explain the risks arising from the application of traditional ways of interpreting the actions of the boys from the 'hood' in the school context, trying

to convince people to other – alternative – grounds as the basis for reflective teacher professionalism in communication with the student recognizing another point of reference as the fundamental symbolic structure." She essentially sought to help those in authority reframe their understanding of the youth and find more respectful ways to communicate with the youth, thus diminishing a cycle of stigmatization by authorities and the youths' need to protect themselves from humiliation by more intensive defiance and bravado.

CONCLUSION

The studies in this volume document how vitally important it is for the field of social work that its research processes be open enough to nurture discovery. In a field so inevitably riddled with political and social pressures, research can provide a reflective space to perceive those pressures and plan forms of intervention that can better immunize vulnerable persons against negative effects of inequities. PAR and "engaged research" are especially important for social work because they have the dual mission of 1) revealing those inequities and 2) protecting persons from those inequities infusing the content of scientific knowledge and the processes by which it is obtained. The innovative nature of PAR is also suggested by how hard it is to do: requiring skills associated with practice, policy analysis, advocacy, and research, PAR integrates many dimensions of social work.

While considering the nature of innovation and discovery in social work, Chouatra, Grimaldi, and Rullac (in this volume) comment that social workers have tended to shy away from using terms such as innovation, recognizing that it can be misused for marketing purposes or seeking protection from scientific evaluation. Certainly those cautions are valid. Also, the authors emphasize that it is possible for social work researchers and practitioners to make genuine innovations, characterized by "diversions from traditional practices, building of alternatives, dissenting from customary norms" (at times to the point of triggering rejection from the environment), building

new "systems of representation" in members of an organization (Chouatra, Grimaldi, and Rullac, in this volume) and, as so many authors in this volume note, new identities and patterns of relating in sub-cultures and cultures. Innovators tend to be perceived as deviants, incurring the disadvantages associated with such a label. In the field of social work research, perhaps we can be more reflective about handling deviance and aspire to welcome innovations for the sake of the long-term benefit of the field.

Among the most exciting discoveries from the papers in this volume is about how research advances empowerment. Whether the researcher's role is to be engaged in reflection upon her/his empowering interventions (for instance, Gulczyńska), reflecting on biographies and narratives (for instance, Mažeikienė and Malinauskas), or designing research that systematically joins all partners in a knowledge-building and social structure-building enterprise (for instance, Frenkel) there is agreement about empowerment and how it is accomplished through knowledge. Empowering research enables participants (*partenaires)* to experience an interaction, and with it, an identity, with self-expression free of stigma, discrimination, and subjugation. In so doing, barriers of alienation or status are bridged and the creativity of the partners is available for self-determination (*autodetermination).* By discovering creative strengths of persons and the falsehoods of subjugation and stigma, readers and the general public interacting in the context of research reports can be transformed. In this sense, PAR is especially suited for social work's contemporary need for glocalized knowledge. It can reduce the danger of researchers enshadowing their partners in imposed cultural, theoretical, and methodological lenses, and makes it possible to create and evaluate interventions that social service consumers experience as meaningful.

It has been an honor to read and comment on the contributions of the CERTS participants. From Belgium to France to Guadeloupe, from Poland to Lithuania to the United States, this volume documents the research process as one that deepens our humanity, that makes it more possible to connect across social barriers by revealing those barriers and engaging participants' creative energies to transcend

them. To you, the reader, our invitation is to move PAR forward… to join us in this exciting process of discovery!

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