

**11.237 Practice of Participatory Action Research**  
**Spring 2016**  
**PAR Case Study Assignment**

Please find listed below a set of PAR articles and case studies, which we will discuss together as a class. Each student should sign up for one article, which you will read and present in 10 minutes during weeks 5 and 6. If you have another article you would like to present instead, please check with a member of the teaching staff. Many of these articles are just one component of a larger Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, which you should explore through some independent research and include in your presentation. We have provided extra links to check out for some of the projects, but you may have to do some of your own digging too.

As you delve into these PAR cases, remember to pull out key themes and answer recurring questions from the course in your analyses:

- What does your particular case tell us about individual agency?
- What is the tension between individual agency and generalization?
- What is the role of narrative and empathy in social science research?
- What type of knowledge does your case produce? Was it actionable and how?
- Is PAR real social science? How do PAR researchers define reliability and validity?
- What are the ethical dilemmas of being an outside researcher and “coming in”?
- Does PAR build civic capacity in communities?
- Is PAR the correct avenue for social justice?
- How does your PAR case address Dewey’s “problem of a democratically organized public”?
- What does your case tell us about “the right to research?”
- What does this case tell us about the difference between “activism, verbalism, and praxis” in the way Freire describes?

These questions are just starting points and guidelines for your presentation. You certainly do not need to answer them all. Remember to post in the forum about your case. Your forum post and presentation are **due by class 12**. We will use your presentations to choose four key questions to debate in the final class.

**PAR CASES**

Fine, Michelle, and María Elena Torre. 2004. "[Re-membering Exclusions: Participatory Action Research in Public Institutions.](#)" *Qualitative Research In Psychology* 1, no. 1: 15-37.

At a political moment when democracy, dissent and participation are under siege, especially in low-income communities of color, Fine and Torre write this article to reveal how participatory action research (PAR) can be joined with a larger democratic project to re-member institutions and communities exiled today in neoliberal society. This article draws on two large-scale PAR studies conducted in a women's maximum security prison and in a series of racially desegregated public high schools to explore the power, strategic moves and difficulties of PAR within public institutions. Arguing that PAR offers a theory of method for democratic research, the researchers enter two participatory research collaboratives: a four year, qualitative and quantitative study of the impact of college in prison on the women students, the prison environment, prisoners' postrelease outcomes and civil society, and an ongoing qualitative and quantitative study of how race, ethnicity, class, and academic opportunities and outcomes are (inequitably) distributed in public schools.

Also, check out the Public Science Project: <http://publicscienceproject.org/>

**Flyvbjerg, Bent. "Bringing Power to Planning Research One Researcher's Praxis Story." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 21, no. 4 (2002): 353-366.**

This article provides an answer to what has been called the biggest problem in theorizing and understanding planning: the ambivalence about power found among planning researchers, theorists, and students. The author narrates how he came to work with issues of power and gives an example of how the methodology he developed for power studies—phronetic planning research—may be employed in practice. Phronetic planning research follows the tradition of power studies running from Machiavelli and Nietzsche to Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. It focuses on four value-rational questions: (1) Where are we going with planning? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What should be done? These questions are exemplified for a specific instance of Scandinavian urban planning. The author finds that the questions, and their answers, make a difference to planning in practice.

**WILLIAM, F. W., & DAVYDD J GREENWOOD, P. L. (1989). "Participatory Action Research Through Practice to Science in Social Research." *The American Behavioral Scientist* (1986-1994), 32(5), 513.**

This article argues for the scientific and practical value of participatory action research (PAR) and advocates its incorporation in the social sciences. The authors define participatory action research and place it in the context of more widely practiced research methods. Two case studies illustrate the process: one with Xerox Corporation in New York State, the other with the Mondragon cooperative complex in the Basque country of Spain. In Xerox, PAR focused on specific cost reduction and job preservation objectives. In Mondragon, PAR was used to explore and rethink a range of problems and to devise new organizational strategies. The use of PAR as an applied research strategy and for advancing social theory is discussed.

**Chapter 5 “Phronesis, Projects, and Power Research” in Flyvbjerg, Bent, Todd Landman, and Sanford Schram, eds. *Real social science: Applied phronesis*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. (ISBN-10: 0521468507, ISBN-13: 978-0521468503)**

This chapter explores how research is a process of power as any other sphere of social life, and explores examples of phronetic work. It reviews literature about the analysis of power, and critiques the traditional approach to social science.

**Cahill, Caitlin. ""At Risk"? The Fed Up Honeys Re-Present the Gentrification of the Lower East Side." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (2006): 334-63.**

While gentrification is often represented within the framework of real estate capital as evidence of urban progress, this emphasis loses sight of not only its role in processes of community transformations, but also how it is experienced within a broader context of disenfranchisement by working-class communities. In this essay, the author considers the experience of urban economic restructuring for the “inside” perspective of young working-class women of color who have grown up in the neighborhood of the Lower East Side in New York City in the 1990s, a time of intensive gentrification, witnessing their neighborhood change while still living in it. In a participatory action research project titled, “Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of Young Urban Womyn of Color” (see <http://www.fed-up-honeys.org>), six young women researchers (the Fed Up Honeys) investigated the relationship between the disinvestment and gentrification of their community, public representations, and their self-understanding.

**Giachello, Aida L., Jose O. Arrom, Margaret Davis, Judith V. Sayad, Dinah Ramirez, Chandana Nandi, Catalina Ramos, and Chicago Southeast Diabetes Community Action Coalition. "Reducing Diabetes Health Disparities Through Community-Based Participatory Action Research: The Chicago Southeast Diabetes Community Action Coalition." *Public Health Reports* 118, no. 4 (2003): 309.**

To address disproportionately high rates of diabetes morbidity and mortality in some of Chicago’s medically underserved minority neighborhoods, a group of community residents, medical and social service providers, and a local university founded the Chicago Southeast Diabetes Community Action Coalition, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention REACH 2010 Initiative. A community-based participatory action research model guided coalition activities from conceptualization through implementation. Capacity building activities included training on: diabetes, coalition building, research methods, and action planning.

**Calderón, José. "Lessons from an Activist Intellectual: Participatory Research, Teaching, and Learning for Social Change." *Latin American Perspectives* 31, no. 1 (2004): 81-94.**

Positivist studies do not have the heart or foundation for social change. “How do we use civic knowledge and civic engagement to **advance** a type of research that really benefits our communities?,” is the question that fuels the Jose Calderon’s work. Sociologist Jose Calderon sees engaged scholarship not only as a form of knowledge creation and research, but also as a pedagogy and most importantly, as a tool for activism. Calderon speaks a lot about the importance of his identity and his experience as the son of immigrant farm workers. “My struggles with learning English and growing up in a poor immigrant farm worker family became the foundations of language, labor, and immigration issues that I passionately took up in my organizing, teaching, and research as an activist intellectual in academia” (in Stockdill, 2012: 87). While many academics enter communities unlike their own for the purposes of PAR, Calderon already belonged to the networks and places in which he wanted to fight for social justice. Thus, Calderon had the advantage of teaching his students about these issues from the inside. In this way, he advances “the right to research” by connecting his communities with his students, and consciously relating to and negotiating the roles and relationships of all parties.

Review some other publications by [Jose Calderon](#) to better understand his approach to research, teaching, and activism.

***Count Us In! Inclusion and Homeless Women in Downtown East Toronto.* Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, Ontario Women’s Health Network, Toronto Christian Resource Centre and Toronto Public Health. Wellesley Institute. June 2006.**

The purpose of this project, called *Count Us In!*, was to investigate how health and social services in Toronto, and in the province of Ontario, can be made more inclusive, and in turn, promote the health and well-being of marginalized groups. Homeless and underhoused women who live in Downtown East Toronto led the research and were actively engaged in all stages of the project.

**Ayala, Jennifer. "Split Scenes, Converging Visions: The Ethical Terrains Where PAR and Borderlands Scholarship Meet." *The Urban Review* 41, no. 1 (2009): 66-84.**

This paper examines theoretical linkages between Anzaldua’s borderland scholarship, in particular the notion of mestiza consciousness, and participatory action research. Two studies with high school and college co-researchers falling along different points of the PAR spectrum are described to illustrate these conceptual linkages. Points in the process including critical decisions in crafting questions and conducting actions, reflections on who are the knowledge holders and producers, and struggles with responsibilities and vulnerabilities doing this work, are discussed through a lens of mestiza consciousness.

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

11.237 Practice of Participatory Action Research (PAR)  
Spring 2016

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.