
Participatory Research: Three Models and an Analysis

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This article examines three models of participatory research: what we call the parallel process model, the mutual engagement model, and the University of Central America (UCA) model. These models represent successively greater degrees of academic engagement with outside communities—from complementary, though not necessarily uncommitted, engagement by academic(s); to compromised full engagement between the academic(s) and the community; to institutional engagement between the entire university and the community.

Our analysis outlines the tensions that may arise within participatory research between service and scholarship. We conclude that for participatory research to capture the attention and involvement of the broader discipline, it must provide a spectrum of theory, methods, and substance that sociologists find of importance independent of the participatory way in which such contributions are generated.

If young people in the eighties were the “Me Generation,” some believe that in the nineties they promise to be the “Thee Generation.” From universities to churches to official candidates, young people are being called upon to volunteer; to make a commitment; to get involved. So desperate have the plight and deprivation of the poor and the disempowered become in the United States that some conditions are being compared with those of the third world. Neither the government nor the private sector has been willing or able to take responsibility for the amelioration of these problems, which is not surprising since ultimately both sectors bear responsibility for having contributed to them. There is a growing mood that change must come from outside traditional helping institutions.

Today, universities are being encouraged to incorporate a component of social commitment into the education of their students. Some schools, such as Swarthmore College, are moving toward a service requirement. Others, such as Drexel University or the University of Pennsylvania have funded student projects

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that target poor people in neighborhoods adjoining the campuses. Students are being urged to tutor urban school children, to help feed, clothe and house the homeless, to help provide free health care screening, to perform pro bono services for the indigent, to help fight AIDs with free syringe exchanges, and to spend their spring breaks rehabing burned out houses.

Our students are, thus, becoming more involved in community service. What about us, their teachers? Among university and college professors and administrators, the trend toward social involvement is not yet so evident. Should academics and intellectuals also have a responsibility to share their skills and resources with socially and economically excluded communities as students are being asked to do? If so, how is that role to be defined?

Many of our colleagues might deny that academics and intellectuals have any particular responsibility to serve the disempowered. This article is not addressed to them. It is with those academics and intellectuals, especially within the social sciences, who affirm a responsibility to the poor and oppressed that we wish to enter into dialogue.¹ This article addresses the question of how the service role of the academic is to be defined, and how it can be integrated into the academic's professional responsibilities. Participatory research is one option and the alternative in which we frame our response here.

What exactly is participatory research or participatory sociology? There are a few common components: 1) a commitment to the needs and interests of the community; 2) a direct engagement with the community so as to permit its problems and goals to be defined in its own voice; 3) a moral commitment to the transformation of social, political and economic injustices directly afflicting the community studied. Here, we define community in its generic sense (without neighborhood or spatial implications) as a self-conscious social unit with a focus on common identity, interests and goals.

When sociologists study and write about grass roots empowerment or community movements what do they give in return? Community members and leaders often provide time out of a busy schedule to afford tolerance and trust to the social scientist engaged in scholarly research about their organization or movement. Having that trust or tolerance, the researcher may be included in confidential meetings. Even as community leaders are engaged in critical struggles or confronting real-life opposition, they may adjust their priorities and routines for the researcher. From observations and interviews, the academic researchers prepare scholarly articles and books. For all this, academic researchers should somehow reciprocate. In fact, the subjects they study frequently expect such reciprocity. It is not uncommon, for example, for grassroots activists to ask academic researchers not only what the research is for but also how it will benefit the organization under study.

Yet, most social scientists concerned with the poor and oppressed do not question their personal or professional relation to the subjects of their research beyond the key ethical guidelines of their disciplines: honesty in reporting, confidentiality, and care to avoid harmful disruption. By and large, sociologists who research race, labor, gender, poverty and stratification do not themselves

become part of the community of oppressed peoples they are studying. Their contributions may be invaluable, but they themselves remain outsiders committed only to the particular study. When it is poor communities they are studying, academic researchers more often adopt a "hit and run" approach than one of continuing involvement. In Latin America, North American academics who come into a country for a short period, interview a few people, and return to the United States are referred to as *paracadistas*, parachutists. This relationship between researcher and subject is fundamentally unequal exchange, and it is this inequality that participatory research seeks to right.

We address the question: How can the researcher reciprocate for the time, tolerance and confidence provided by community leaders and activists? The next section of this paper identifies distinguishing features of the participatory research paradigm. This is followed by a discussion of three alternate approaches to participatory research. The final section offers a comparative critique of these three models and raises questions about the relationship of intellectuals to popular movements.

The Participatory Research Paradigm

Participatory research attempts to generate knowledge about social relations and social change more democratically by fostering dialogue and equality between researcher and researched. Built into the paradigm is the academic's commitment to use this knowledge for the community to expose and improve social relations that are inequitable and unjust.

Participatory research is an emerging and transplanted paradigm in the social sciences, which has contributed to understanding community development, work and workplace relations, health care, education and development studies. It shares common values, goals and methods with models used in applied sociology, feminist studies, and ethnic and environmental studies (see, for example, Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Cancian, 1992; Carr-Hill, 1984; Collins, 1989; Krauss, 1992; and Maquire, 1987). One interpretation of collaborative academic and community-based development planning has taken "participatory action research" (Whyte, 1991) or "action research" (Lorion et al., 1987; Truman et al., 1985) as a guide. Internationally, participatory research took its impetus from popular education programs conducted in the third world (Fals Borda, 1979; 1988; Freire, 1970; Huizer, 1979; de Souza, 1988; Whyte, 1981).

Scholars have referred to this general paradigm as "participatory research," "action research," "participatory action research," and "proactive community-based research." Here, we use the terms rather interchangeably because the formal definitions that differentiate them are less important than the shared assumption that communally generated knowledge should be dedicated to transforming unjust and oppressive social relations confronting the community (Armstead and Cancian, 1990).

Beyond this shared assumption, participatory research is ideally characterized by several distinguishing features (Armstead and Cancian, 1990): 1) democratic

participation of the people being studied in the research process itself; 2) inclusion of popular knowledge and personal experiences of the community; 3) a focus on empowerment and power relations; 4) consciousness raising and education of the participants; and 5) political action. In short, as Voth (1979) notes, participatory research is "an integral part of the community or organization in all aspects of the research process, and has as its objectives the acquisition of valid information, action, and the enhancement of the problem solving capabilities of the community or organization."

We may further clarify what participatory research is by distinguishing it from what it is not. Participatory research seeks to be both research and service simultaneously. In the latter capacity, it is supposed to directly serve the particular, oppressed communities in need of empowerment. As such, participatory research is a form of community-based research. Where there is no direct involvement with a specific community, we hesitate to term the research participatory. Statistical studies of inequality, macrosocial structural analyses of capital or labor, and so on are important and vital to the struggle for a more just society. Yet, they do not qualify as participatory research on two counts. First, these studies generally emanate from the scholarly community alone without input from communities in the larger society. Second, the results are often removed from the immediate agendas of community groups. It is true that such studies may frequently help community groups to understand their situation in a larger context and may also provide them with useful ammunition to press their concerns. For the most part, however, such studies are not directed to grass roots users in particular and do not dedicate their consequences to community empowerment.

Neither participant observation nor ethnography necessarily constitutes participatory research per se. Nor must participatory research employ ethnographic methods in any case. Although in ethnography, community members contribute directly to the research findings, they usually do not set the research agenda. Consequently, the research agenda may or may not serve the immediate needs and goals of the community studied. Questions addressed by standard ethnography are normally defined by the academy, and that is where the research findings are generally redirected.

Finally, participatory research is distinct from community activism. Many scholars are also activists. Quite apart from their scholarly pursuits, they participate in community struggles. This is a genuine and important part of our intellectual vocation. However, where the academic scholar's activist role is distinct from his or her scholarly role, the former usually does not qualify as participatory research for the simple reason that it is generally not scholarly research. Since participatory research is supposed to be service and research simultaneously, the intellectual's service must also take the form of scholarly activity to conform to what is meant by participatory research.

Defining participatory research in this way does not denigrate the social usefulness of other forms of intellectual activity. And, as we concede in the final section, participatory research has definite limitations. Thus, it would go too far

to say that all scholarly research should be participatory. Research that issues from the academy and speaks largely to the academy can be of importance, and we, ourselves, are engaged in much research that can hardly be considered participatory. The point is rather that there is also a need for a specific kind of intellectual activity that has come to be known as participatory research. We are trying to define precisely what that means.

Role, Responsibility, and Reciprocity

Participatory research seeks to equalize the exchange relation between researchers and the subjects they study through some form of collaboration. The academic should define his or her collaborative role in terms of responsibilities and reciprocity that will empower those subjects. Collaboration can take different forms and assume different levels of commitment, depending on the context. Here, we examine three forms that collaboration might take. 1) In the first form, an academic intellectual pursues a research agenda that is unconnected to any agenda of the community studied but attempts, nevertheless, to give something back. Thus, the researcher and the community studied pursue their goals independently, but collaborate, nevertheless, in a mutually beneficial exchange. We term this the *parallel process model*. 2) The second form places the *academic in an activist role*, working side-by-side with members of a group toward concrete goals. This we have called the *mutual engagement model*. 3) The third form directly involves *community members in collaboration with a network of academics* in designing research questions, gathering data and acquiring information, which can then be used by the group. This we term the *UCA model* after the approach developed at the University of Central America in El Salvador (UCA).

There is an overlap of tasks among these three approaches. Each is successively deeper and broader than the prior. They might be likened to three nested models, each representing a successively greater degree of engagement—from complementary concerns but parallel trajectories of academy-based scholars, to compromised full engagement by individual academic or academics, to full institutional engagement. Whichever particular approach participatory researchers employ, at issue is not only their role, but also their responsibility to the community and how they will reciprocate for community cooperation.

The Parallel Process Model

Frequently, an academic researcher who is sympathetic to community concerns studies a community group in order to address scholarly questions that relate to the community group's immediate agenda. Both authors of this article have been involved in research of this kind. Petras (1992), for example, spent extensive time with grass roots community leaders in Chester, Pennsylvania in order to gain an understanding of that city's history of oppression and resistance. In another context, Petras's research investigating the spread of garment sweatshops was reproduced and studied by trade unions and government agencies dedicated

to exposing and eradicating sweatshop abuses. Similarly, Porpora (Porpora et al., 1989) was generously granted time by numerous textile workers in Thailand in order to document working conditions in that country.

In these cases, the authors were sympathetic to the plight and struggles of the people studied. Both authors were asked by the subjects how the latter would benefit from the resulting research. The responses varied. In the first case, Petras later contributed to a social needs assessment which concentrated on the problems of the poor and addressed community organizations on economic problems. In the second case, she organized a conference and publication which brought together academic participants with union and government officials for the purpose of setting a policy agenda. In Porpora's case, he responded that the more the world knows about the workers' situation, the more likely would be the prospects for change. While this may be true, and while it may be partly what motivated Porpora's research, it is, nevertheless, a circuitous route from the academic journal in which Porpora's findings were published to any positive effects that might be visible to the subjects Porpora studied.

In participatory research, academics must give back something more direct to the subjects who have afforded the researchers time and trust. This is essential even when the research question the academic is pursuing is removed from the subjects' immediate concerns. In such a way, the researcher and the researched might pursue their parallel objectives independently while engaging in a mutually beneficial exchange. That is what is meant by the *parallel process* model of participatory research. This is the minimal form of what constitutes participatory research, but it addresses the issue of reciprocity in those inevitable cases where the research interests of the academic intellectual and his or her subjects overlap. Here, we identify some means by which a researcher, working in parallel with his or her subjects, can reciprocate, either directly through research findings or in other ways.

1. *Providing Documentation.* Research that provides a written document of the group or process studied may legitimize and reaffirm the possibility of change. The incorporation of familiar language and customs and the record of the community's representation of reality validates grass roots leaders who may lack the time and sometimes the skills for political reflection. A document such as an historical account of the organization of a corrupt political machine can become a tool for the community in its struggles.

2. *Special Publications and Presentations.* Nonacademic presentation of findings in a format that is accessible to the community may circulate information that the community has given the researcher back to the community members so as to help them formulate tactics and devise further strategies for change. For example, visual ethnography in the form of films, photography and videotapes captures visible phenomena objectively and could serve in training community members for public speaking and conduct of meetings. Researchers currently collaborating on an exposé of the garment industry are preparing a publication that will provide details about the organization of the industry and include a discussion of alternative schemes for defending garment workers from exploita-

tion (Bonacich, et al., forthcoming). This publication will serve garment workers and their representative organizations and circulate information among other scholars concerned with this issue.

3. *Strategy Building*. Research may provide community groups with alternative arguments for use against their opponents. A critique of policies, the structure of power and a representation of the perspectives and goals of their antagonists can demystify or unmask the opposition. This can also help community groups create conceptual frameworks or alternative strategies that encompass their objectives or concretize the types of social movement they seek to build. This is sensitive; we do not necessarily endorse academics as "outside advisors." Yet they may contribute valuable insights because of their broader perspective about alternatives.

4. *Model Sharing*. Building a model based on a community's successful movement can provide a typology that can be replicated by other oppressed communities engaged in similar contests. Research that outlines the historical events and identifies variables that are key to success in a precise analysis without jargon can be returned to the community as a document for discussion among community leaders and political activists. In environmental research, for example, social scientists have formulated a community action model based on citizen involvement that is quickly becoming a prototype for communities organizing against efforts to use their neighborhoods as dumping grounds.

5. *Offering Tools of Measurement*. Defining and measuring either needs or success is sometimes difficult for community activists in the midst of intense controversy. Academic sociologists can provide tools for measuring needs, effectiveness or accomplishment. A good example is provided by our colleague who volunteered his skills to prepare a needs assessment for a trade union to be used in developing policy projections. Sometimes, the research interests of communities and academic intellectuals, while divergent, can be addressed by the same instrument. In such a case, a common survey with questions pertaining to both research concerns can benefit both parties simultaneously.

6. *Practical Skills*. The researcher can impart practical tools and skills of sociology such as conduct of survey research. Community activists can be trained as paraprofessionals to gather information and data. The sociologist's review of literature on community organizing could yield a base of knowledge for discussion, training and defining alternative strategies. In Chester, Pennsylvania, for example, sociologists advised Swarthmore College students in their preparation of a reference base and reading list on grass roots strategies and alternative economic models. This was then circulated among community activists.

7. *Ethical Responsibility*. The researcher reciprocates for the openness and trust of grass roots organizations and their leaders with confidentiality and care not to disclose information that could be harmful to the group. Caution must be taken not to endanger those who provide information nor to violate their human rights. The sociologist must avoid infringing on privacy or disrupting the everyday and organizational tasks of the community. Finally, the most egregious error for the participatory researcher is to be unclear about his or her role. We must

not deceive community and grass roots organizations about why we are interested in them and what we are doing. We must be clear about our role, responsibilities and reciprocity from the onset.

The Mutual Engagement Model

In what we have called the parallel process model, social researchers are committed to giving something back to the communities they study. However, the research itself remains primarily an academic product, to be consumed by academics or by the broader reading public. The research is not intended solely as a product for use by the community that was the object of research.

Participatory research combined with direct action involves a much deeper level of reciprocal interaction between academic researchers and the communities they study. In this case, the researcher plays a direct role in community activities, and the subjects themselves participate actively in the research process. In this instance, participatory research is more interactive. It is specifically designed to serve the needs of the subjects, and they contribute to the formulation of the research questions as well as to the design and evaluation of the research itself. By helping community members conduct social research they themselves can use, participatory research seeks to help those people become active subjects as opposed to passive objects who are otherwise just acted on (Stoecker and Beckwith 1992; Voth 1979). In the "mutual engagement" model of participatory research, researchers team up with organized community groups, lending them their methodological skills and substantive knowledge to jointly pursue problem-solving or decision-making research (Stoecker and Beckwith 1992; Voth 1979).

The academic researcher in such cases is guided by three principles. First, the research agenda is *set by the community*. Its needs determine what will be studied rather than the needs of the academic researcher. Second, *community members are directly involved in the research process*, both in the gathering of data and in the creation of the research design. In the design of a questionnaire, for example, community members would help decide what is asked and how it is asked. They further contribute to the sampling frame by helping to determine who is surveyed. The third principle guiding the participatory researcher is that the research results be usable by the community involved. *The results must in some way directly facilitate community action or decision-making*. The research is an adjunct to community organizing and action.

The specific goal of such research is community empowerment. In this sense, the research process becomes a political act with information as its objective (Greever n.d.). By arriving at the point where a community decides to undertake a needs assessment, for example, that community has already begun to take its fate into its own hands. It has already begun to mobilize itself for action.

That initial empowerment has a momentum that is reinforced in each stage of the research process. By participating with the academic researcher in deciding what should be investigated and how, the community begins to flex its intellectual muscles. Seeing its efforts taken seriously by the academic researcher and

by the academic researcher's institution, the community accordingly begins to take itself seriously. It was by beginning with such a needs assessment and following through with a subsequent action plan, that the tenants of Chester, Pennsylvania's public housing eventually took administrative control of their city's housing authority.

In the mutual engagement approach, the community's involvement in data collection is itself empowering. It gets the community members to work together for a common end, thereby fostering community organization and cohesion. Furthermore, to the extent that the monitoring by the academic researcher insures that the project undertaken is a feasible one, the success of the project becomes a success for the community. For many poor and oppressed communities in particular, this may be the first such communal success they experience. That success, therefore, has symbolic importance for community empowerment that can provide the community with the necessary confidence to pursue the action path ultimately indicated by the research results.

The UCA Model

The University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador exemplifies an alternate model of participatory research, a model that is both more encompassing and more theoretically developed than the American "mutual engagement" model. It is broader in the sense that it is a model for the active engagement with the outside community of an entire university as opposed to individual researchers within a university. The theoretical underpinnings of the UCA model are expressly tied to a liberationist perspective. That liberationist perspective has a theoretical status that makes it not just a guideline for research but something of a theoretical paradigm in its own right.²

It was at the UCA where in November 1989 six Jesuit priests were slain along with two female co-workers. The Jesuits were all faculty at the university and included Ignacio Ellacuria and Ignacio Martin-Baro, the rector and vice-rector of the school. According to the U.S. media, the priests were slain because the army believed they were somehow in league with the FMLN guerrillas. The impression conveyed, therefore, was that it was out of ignorance—gross ignorance perhaps but ignorance nevertheless—that the Salvadoran military committed these murders. That was not the case. As in the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the army knew exactly what it was doing. The truth is that although the priests were not in league with the guerrillas, they were in their own right extremely threatening to the status quo (Hassett and Lacey 1991).

The UCA was founded by the Jesuits in 1965 in order to lend a Christian perspective to university education in El Salvador. By the early 70s, the UCA's mission had been elaborated in a number of position papers, including the university's organizational manual (Ellacuria 1991a). It is a mission influenced by El Salvador's political economic situation, by the popular movements, and by the decision of the Jesuit order to adopt the "preferential option for the poor." Above all, it has been influenced by the experience of the Christian base com-

munities and by the liberation theology that has arisen from them. In this respect, the UCA may be unique as the only university fully informed and structured by the theology of liberation (Hassett and Lacey 1991).

The UCA model is informed by three principles:

- 1) The proper object of the university's attention is the "national reality."
- 2) To the extent that the university's interest is in liberation, the experience of the poor is epistemically privileged.
- 3) If the university is to be part of the solution and not part of the problem of the national reality, it must be socially engaged in the *proyeccion social* of political transformation.

We examine each of these principles in turn.

1. *The National Reality*

Let us begin with the word "reality." "Reality," Ellacuria (1991a: 213) writes, "is the grounding and determining principle of intelligence . . . the grounding and determining principle of what intellectual activity in the university should be." The UCA faculty, thus, believe in reality. Indeed, when your star faculty along with your rector and vice-rector are brutally gunned down, reality has a way of imposing itself. Consequently, the UCA faculty find our postmodern doubts about reality to be rather strange. In truth, those doubts represent primarily a reflection on life in the developed world and have far less applicability to the lives of the world's majority.

The national reality in El Salvador is one where the majority of people can scarcely satisfy their basic human needs let alone realize their full human potential. And they are in this predicament "not due to natural laws or personal or group laziness" but due to "historic social arrangements" (Ellacuria 1991a: 208). This is the reality that the UCA defines as its object of study, although a similar reality confronts academic institutions in the United States. In pursuit of this reality, the UCA's output is prodigious. Besides its centers for human rights (IDHUCA) and documentation and information (CUDI), it publishes books on Central America and nine journals, including *Proceso*, its weekly journal of political analysis.

Because the reality the UCA studies is a local one, it claims for itself a privileged epistemic position. As Ellacuria (1991a: 213) notes, "while universities endowed with great resources may know more about biology, mathematics, economic theory, philosophy and so forth, none of them should know more about the national reality, at least as a whole, than the university which is established and placed within that national reality."

The epistemic privilege that comes from situatedness is a theme that recurs in the writings of the Jesuits. It is a theme that has important implications for us. Each of our own universities, regardless of resources, is epistemically privileged in its own locale. Just as the UCA sees its mission to authoritatively uncover, document, and explain the conditions of oppression that surround it

locally, so too might our own universities serve a similar mission in our own neighborhoods, where we are the experts because of our own situatedness. Such a mission, however, suggests an organic relationship between university and neighborhood to which we will have to return.

2. The Epistemic Privilege of the Poor

There is not much that needs to be said about the epistemic privilege attributed to the poor beyond the clarifications necessary to avoid possible misunderstanding. It is a basic tenet of liberation theology that truth, knowledge, and even salvation come not from the center but from the periphery of our collective existence. As a third world country, El Salvador lies on the periphery of the world economy. But that periphery too has its own periphery. On the periphery of the periphery, lie the poorest of the poor. It is from there that the UCA seeks knowledge.

The poor are not epistemically privileged in all regards. Their knowledge is certainly not of a theoretical sort. Nor are the poor epistemically infallible. It is their experience of reality that is privileged, that must be listened to, that must be taken seriously. If the overall project is liberation, then it is to the experience of oppression that we must attend first. We need to vividly understand not only how the poor see and feel their oppression but also the solutions they envision. The solutions after all must ultimately come from them.

As academics, we can help them reach these solutions. With our theoretical and substantive knowledge and with our methodological skills, we can help them formulate, clarify, and otherwise think through their viewpoints. As Ellacuria (1991a: 215-216) puts it, the university should strive to become "the reason" of the poor. This means more than speaking in their behalf. It means more than unidirectionally raising their consciousness. It means that the poor themselves set the agenda.

3. The Proyeccion Social

After considerable time and money, our own institution has just managed to come up with the following mission statement: "Through excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship to train men and women to live in a technological society." With some exceptions, we imagine that most American universities have a similarly vacuous mission statement.

While the UCA too sees itself as training people to fulfill vital roles in society, that is not its primary mission. The mission of the UCA involves a commitment to the *Proyeccion Social* or collective project of social transformation. But the university's role in this project is a specific one. As Ellacuria (1991a) puts it, "the university is the theoretical and technical cultivator of truth and knowledge, so that its role transcends the mere training of professionals to serve the needs of a particular social system." A commitment to truth, in other words, is the primary mission of the university.

To the North American ear, that sounds almost archaic, and, indeed, within

American universities, the very notion of truth is now disparaged as "logocentric." If we North American academics have despaired at the idea of truth, perhaps that is because we have overlooked something that the UCA faculty have not. Ellacuria (1991a) notes that "in a social system where injustice prevails, it is not only difficult to proclaim the truth but it is almost impossible to find the truth." This is an intriguing idea, that our very difficulty in locating the truth is related to the injustice in which we are situated. That is why it is the university and not the church, the university with its technical, methodological, and theoretical skills that must be most responsible for locating the truth. "The question," says Ellacuria (1991a), is how to do so vis-à-vis a society that does not want that to be done and that not only resists efforts by the university to do so but demands that it do the opposite." We academics in the United States might well ask the same question.

The UCA does not, however, equate truth with actuality. Instead, in a Hegelian manner, it looks to the possibilities for truth that have not been actualized in existing society (Hasset and Lacey 1991). The truth for humanity from this perspective is the "Reign of God" realized here on earth. Thus, from this perspective, "the existence of the poor and oppressed majority represents the most powerful existential and material negation of truth and reason" (Ellacuria 1991a). The task of the university, then, is not only to unmask present values and present injustices, but to herald and point to new values and a new vision, the vision of the truth that has not yet been but can be actualized (Ellacuria 1991b).

Since the truth is not politically neutral, neither can be the university. It must take the side of truth, which is simultaneously the side of liberation (Ellacuria 1991a; 1991b; Martin-Baro 1991). The university must become the critical and creative conscience of the local reality, where conscience explicitly denotes *conscience* (with knowledge).

In its role of local conscience, the university must be outward rather than inward looking. It is to be the reason rather than the voice of the poor and oppressed. That means that the university does not so much speak in behalf of the poor and oppressed as lend the poor and oppressed the theoretical and technical knowledge they need to speak authoritatively in their own behalf.

As previously noted, this requires an organic relationship between the university and the local community. The two must work together. The university must put itself at the service of the local community, turning the entire locale into a school. This does not mean training competent functionaries to fit into the current power structure, as community commitment currently means at our university. It means rather putting the university at the service of the weak.

To accomplish this, the UCA faculty not only go into the field themselves, they send their students, who are required to do a certain amount of public service. Thus, philosophy students are sent to work with oppressed communities, helping them articulate their own conception of human rights. Psychology students document and explore the psychological effects of terrorism. Engineering students aid in the development of appropriate technologies. Sociology students discuss feminism with female factory workers.

This is not just social service as we understand it, where students go and do volunteer work for a period of time, where the students are generally in subordinate roles, where they can consequently offer little of the distinct assets of a university education. Rather, the work of the UCA students is part of a mutual exchange between the academy and the community, where each brings to the exchange its own strengths. It is part of building an organic relationship between the academy and the community and as such is another important aspect of the UCA model that we should consider here in the United States.

The UCA faculty argue that to build this organic relationship with the community, to truly serve as the theoretical reason of the poor, the entire university must be restructured, from its administration and curriculum to its professors and students. Those in North America who are bothered by “political correctness” on campus here have not seen anything.

Ellacuria (1991b) argues “that the university cannot take as the fundamental and ultimate horizon for its activity the subjective interests of students and professors, unless these subjective interests coincide with the objective interests of the oppressed majority.” The university, according to the UCA model, does not exist for the students, whose main concern is career advancement. It exists rather for the community (Martin-Baro 1991). Ellacuria (1991a; 1991b), in fact, is very clear that the primary mission of the university is not the kind of cultural diversity we have been struggling for here, where the less-privileged are let in so that they too “can move up within the consumer society.” In terms of the university’s mission, he says (1991b), “the important point about the character of the student body is not *where they come* from but *where they are going*.” Only those students should be admitted who are at least capable of becoming committed to social change, and “master’s and doctoral theses . . . ought not to be left entirely to the discretion of the student, but should be made to fit with the real interests of the country.”

If the university does not exist for the students, neither does it exist for the faculty. Ellacuria (1991a) warns that the UCA’s mission will be compromised “if teachers come to the university with the same attitudes and concerns with which other professionals enter the labor market.” Thus, both Ellacuria and Martin-Baro were explicitly committed to hiring faculty not just on the basis of technical competence but on criteria of ideology, political conscience and human values as well. As Martin-Baro writes,

The university has been an elitist institution and it is absurd to deceive ourselves with pseudodemocratic bombast which actually does nothing more than disguise our own reticence in placing the university at the disposal of the oppressed . . . Because of this, no one should be scandalized that we are proposing criteria in the selection of personnel. These criteria should not only take into account the scientific and pedagogical quality of specific academics, but also their ideologies and fundamental values . . . If the university chooses the development of consciousness and liberation as its mission, it must be selective with respect to the academics that it hires for its faculty. (Martin-Baro 1991)

This is explosive stuff. If we wonder how this would go over in the United States, remember that it did not go over well in El Salvador either. There is a lesson in that. The UCA faculty were considered effective enough by the powers that be to become targets for murder. While there are not death squads here in the United States, our own society is also unjust. Whether or not we agree with all the UCA advocates, we could in comparative safety be doing more as academics to make a dent in our own injustice.³

Analysis

When we speak of a call to participatory research, to what are we being called? At minimum, in the parallel process model, we academic researchers are called to reciprocate for the time, effort and trust afforded us by our subjects without fundamentally changing the end use of our research itself. At the other extreme, the mutual engagement and UCA models are firmly committed to a form of research that simultaneously serves the purpose of community empowerment. They thus represent a fusion of theory and praxis that does fundamentally alter the kind of research we conduct. Accordingly, the spectrum encompassed by the label "participatory research" is rather broad. Is it too broad?

There are twin dangers here. On the one hand, if we define participatory research too broadly, the designation is threatened by vacuity. It ceases to designate anything really new and comes to mean little more than what many of us are already doing. On the other hand, if participatory research is defined too narrowly, then it may exclude much of what is actually done and done consciously under that label. It may, furthermore, establish a standard that many will regard not as inspiring but as entirely out of reach, thereby inhibiting efforts at participation rather than fostering it. In this analysis, we wrestle with the question of what participatory research ought to mean. We begin with the mutual engagement and UCA models and consider whether all research ought to conform to the participatory standard they set.

Our traditional identity as academic sociologists represents a call to the development of disciplinary theory, methods and substance. Thus, our research is primarily oriented toward the academy, where our findings are evaluated as a contribution to the intellectual community of which we are a part. This is true even when our research concern is with the poor and oppressed. We may do ethnographies and other kinds of research that aim to serve the poor and oppressed by uncovering the causes of poverty and oppression. Even, then, however, our orientation generally remains academic. We come to the poor with questions that have been debated in the academy; we then use our contact with the poor to answer those questions. But ultimately, if we return to the academy to engage in dialogue, our primary measure of success is the reaction of our colleagues to what we have written.

By asking us to surrender the research agenda to the communities we study, the mutual engagement and UCA forms of participatory research ask us to redefine who we are. They ask us to measure the success of our research not by the

reactions of our colleagues but by the assistance it affords particular communities in the broader public. These forms of participatory research, therefore, create a tension between theory and practice that, for such research to be feasible, needs to be resolved. It needs to be resolved, moreover, in a way that does not reject either source of the tension. If praxis is rejected, then we are back to straight academic research and to a “trickle-down” theory, according to which our academic papers will eventually matter to the outside public. If theory is rejected, then we are no longer contributing members of an intellectual community of academics.

Although the word academic may have a pejorative connotation, particularly in a context where we are discussing research that has direct service implications, our academic identity should not be disparaged. It is after all because of the strictly intellectual work done in the academy that participatory researchers have something to contribute to the communities they study. It is in the academy that the research methodologies are developed. It is in the academy that substantive knowledge of issues is accumulated and theoretical frameworks are articulated for the analysis of those issues. This is all crucial if the participatory researcher is to have anything at all to contribute. The one thing the intellectual community of academics asks in return is that all researchers give something back, that our research somehow contribute to the accumulation of substantive knowledge, to the development of methodology, or to the growth of theory.

Sociologists engaged in the mutual engagement or UCA forms of participatory research consequently inhabit two separate communities with competing claims. On the one hand, they have engaged themselves with an outside community and in that capacity have committed themselves to research that is directly usable by that community. On the other hand, they are part of an intellectual community that expects its own return from their research. It is not evident that these two agendas will necessarily coincide. What serves the needs of the outside community does not necessarily serve the needs of the intellectual community and vice versa. It is for this reason that for all our sympathies with the poor and oppressed, for all our willingness to engage in social activism in other capacities, when it comes to our research, many of us will opt for some form of the parallel process rather than for the mutual engagement or UCA models.

For the mutual engagement or UCA forms of participatory research to prosper in sociology, they must contribute to the larger discipline itself in some way. Certainly, a more extensive application of such participatory research might benefit the discipline by enhancing the value that the general public places on sociology. Currently, the general public has only a vague sense of what sociology is and, as a consequence, has little commitment to it. Our discipline attracts fewer majors than psychology, for example, and has recently been a prime target when universities seek to downsize. If, however, through the mutual engagement and UCA forms of participatory research, sociology comes to be seen as an important ally of grass roots community groups, the general prestige and security of the discipline could conceivably be broadened. More students might come to think of sociology as an exciting and relevant major for them-

selves. These are benefits that the field might well begin to recognize. Yet, they are not, strictly speaking, intellectual benefits. They do not extend sociology's concepts or methods.

For the mutual engagement and UCA forms of participatory research really to prosper in sociology, they need to yield substance, methods, and theory that the larger field finds valuable quite apart from the participatory way in which these yields are generated. Is that possible? Imagine a sociology journal devoted to participatory research, defined exclusively in terms of the mutual engagement or UCA forms. What would that journal contain? Presumably, there would be articles detailing the role of participatory research in community empowerment. For these to be of interest to the larger discipline, however, they would have to tell the larger discipline something it does not already know. What?

Clearly, such participatory research raises a range of methodological questions peculiar to itself that might give rise to interesting journal discussion. The fallacy of "value free" social science notwithstanding, all social scientific findings must be defended on the basis of validity, objectivity, and truth. Participatory researchers are under greater pressure to verify the objectivity of their findings. Because participatory sociology demands commitment, advocacy is implied as well. If so, how authentic is the data from research-through-action or research by a sympathetic observer?

Knowledge is also power. When knowledge is acquired through a process of participatory research, who owns it, the researcher or the researched? This is a question frequently faced by researchers working abroad who discover that their previously cooperative research community is not willing to relinquish the findings (in the form of raw data, computer tapes, etc.) to the researcher.

There are also dangers or pitfalls to participatory research that could be discussed. One is that the academics may begin to feed on their own self-importance and start to take over or direct activities that are rightfully the responsibility of authentic leaders from the community. Because of the academics' own political biases, they may manipulate community activities or make unrealistic assessments of individuals or projects. Since we are often able to envision what should be done on a broader plane, do we sometimes promise too much? In our enthusiasm, do we risk assigning greater powers to the communities we research than is commensurate with their actual resources?

These are all questions that might instructively be debated in a sociology journal devoted to participatory research. Nevertheless, they are still issues insular to participatory research itself and do not strongly speak to the larger body of sociologists. Sociologists in the wider community will take an interest in issues relating to participatory methods only if those methods yield theory and substance that interest them apart from the particular methods used. We may conclude that for the mutual engagement or UCA models to be well received in sociology, innovative theory and substance must take the lead.

Here, because of its greater theoretical underpinnings, the UCA model may have the advantage over the mutual engagement model of participatory research. In particular, as we have seen, one of the basic premises of the UCA model is

the epistemic privilege of the poor and oppressed. If that premise is sound, then, speaking in their own voices, the poor and oppressed do have something to teach the discipline. Certainly, a better understanding of their experience of poverty and oppression is something the discipline as whole genuinely needs. Just as certainly is there a need to know what alternative vision of justice emanates from the poor and oppressed. Documenting local forms of poverty and oppression in our institutional backyards is also an activity that could potentially yield new substantive knowledge as it has in El Salvador. If the poor and oppressed are in fact epistemically privileged, then they ought to generate knowledge and insights that grab disciplinary attention independent of the way those insights were gained.

If the theory side of the theory/praxis fusion is to be upheld as well as the praxis side, then researchers following the mutual engagement or UCA model will have to be strategic in the participatory projects they undertake, and guided by theory. Not just any application of social science research to community organizing will yield a disciplinary result distinct from mere activism. Recall that according to the UCA model, the collaboration between the university and the outside community is supposed to be an equal one, where each party brings its own strengths. If the university is not supposed to be the voice of the poor, it is supposed to be its theoretical reason. Theoretical reason is what the participatory researcher should bring to any project. That means that even before a project is undertaken, there should be an examination of its potential for generating substantive and theoretical knowledge useful to the academic discipline. While academic intellectuals should of course be encouraged to be more inclusive when they are acting in a purely service capacity, insofar as they are doing participatory research that aspires to be scholarship as well as service, they should choose their projects carefully. Since in the mutual engagement and UCA models, the outside community is supposed to play a major role in determining the research agenda, participatory sociologists who follow those models will have to exercise considerable theoretical acumen to determine in advance whether the likely agendas that emerge from a particular project will also serve the cause of theory.

Should all research aspire ultimately to correspond to the mutual engagement or UCA models? Here, we return to the question with which we began. According to the UCA model, the whole world is to be turned into a school. If this is possible, if the consciousness of the general public can be raised to the point where local community members begin to ask theoretical questions that are farther removed from their immediate concerns, then perhaps the answer should be yes. In that case, as is implicit in the UCA model, participatory research becomes an integral part of democratic social transformation. Furthermore, as communities grow and interlink, their research questions will begin to assume a more macrosocial focus. If this is possible, then, perhaps, there is merit in refraining from the pursuit of such macrosocial questions on our own and waiting for the communities with which we research to develop to the point where they begin asking such questions themselves as part of a growing movement.

Whether possible or not, such community development is in any case a very long process. Are we academic intellectuals really to wait before pursuing broader substantive and theoretical questions on our own? Is there not research such as Marx's, done in the solitude of a library, that is invaluable without being very participatory? We, the two authors of this paper, are greatly attracted to the vision of participatory research represented by the mutual engagement and UCA models, and at our own university, the sociology major is currently being transformed with that vision in mind. Nevertheless, we do not believe that all scholarly research should necessarily aspire to that form. Accordingly, we prefer a broader understanding of research that sees community participation as a matter of degree.

If we think of community participation as a matter of degree, then participatory research spans a wide spectrum. Not all research that is important to do can or should be participatory, and not all participatory research need be participatory to the same degree. At the moment, some important social science research—whether it be substantive, methodological or theoretical—will be done, if it is done at all, entirely from and within the academy. Other research will involve local communities and attempt to give something back to those communities but with an agenda that is still set by the academy. Finally, there will be research that yields the agenda to the needs of local community empowerment.

At different times, one and the same sociologist may engage in research that is participatory at each of these different levels. The point is not to abandon nonparticipatory or less participatory kinds of research but to begin doing more research that is more participatory. As we observed before, there is an integral connection between less and more participatory kinds of research. Even nonparticipatory research, whether it contributes methods, theory or substance, can inform research that is highly participatory. If so, then perhaps it is misleading for a discussion of participatory research to focus exclusively on the individual research project. The goal is for sociology as an entire field to become more participatory, not by abandoning what it now does but by incorporating a greater orientation in the direction of research that is participatory.

Notes

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1. These comments are not intended to define participatory research within disciplinary boundaries since social problems are not compartmentalized neatly in this fashion. Further, it is in the nature of what we are advocating, especially in the UCA model, that solidarity with the struggles of the excluded take primacy over the needs and interests of the individual academic. Since we are sociologists addressing sociologists, however, we will pose our comments accordingly.
2. In this section we have tried to capture something of the flavor of the theoretical paradigm represented by the UCA model. Since in contrast with our treatment of the other two models, we are dealing here with issues of a highly theoretical nature, this section may strike some readers as much more abstract. It is important to see, however, that participatory research can hold its own theoretically in comparison with the nonparticipatory paradigms current in sociology.
3. As inspiring as the UCA model may be to us in North America, it is not without its sympathetic critics in the south. Almeida and Sanchez (1993), for example, warn against manicheist and vanguardist elements in the UCA perspective, which distort the analysis of Latin American reality. They argue that although unjust

social arrangements certainly do oppress the poor, not all of the obstacles to a better society are externally imposed. At the same time, the common people themselves have theoretical and methodological abilities if they are only given the chance to express them. Thus, according to Almeida and Sanchez, the task of participatory research may not be so much to be the reason of the poor as to be co-creators with them of the conditions that allow them to speak and theorize on their own.

Such criticisms need to be taken seriously. Yet, as Almeida and Sanchez acknowledge, they are sympathetic criticisms aimed at improving an already important vision. As such, they exemplify the type of theoretical debate that could develop around participatory sociology.

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