

## Special Section on Action Research

### Methodological Challenges in Participatory Action Research with Undocumented Central American Migrants

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#### Abstract

*An interdisciplinary participatory action research (PAR) project was designed in collaboration with local immigrant organizations to document the impact of deportation policy on Central American immigrant families living in the northeastern U.S. This paper reports on selected methodological challenges of university-based co-researchers in this community-university PAR process which is currently concluding its fourth year. The paper discusses the iterative action-reflection processes focusing on: (1) an overview of the PAR project and its multiple phases within the U.S. and in Guatemala; (2) select challenges and contributions of the PAR approach for participating immigrant families "living in the shadows" and, (3) methodological concerns from the three co-authors, who include a graduate student who joined the early stages of partnership-building; an assistant professor in the early stages of her career; and a senior scholar with many years of experience in activist scholarship. We conclude with thoughts on why, despite these challenges, PAR is "worth the trouble".*

*Keywords:* participatory action research, immigrant, deportation, communities

## **Methodological Challenges in Participatory Action Research with Undocumented Central American Migrants**

United States (U.S.) deportation policies threaten the integrity of immigrant families and pose risks to the emotional wellbeing of immigrant parents and children. An interdisciplinary and participatory action research (PAR) project was designed in collaboration with local immigrant organizations to document the impact of deportation policy, and other oppressive forces, on Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrant families living in the northeastern U.S., with the goal of facilitating collaborative policy-development, advocacy, and actions to disrupt these injustices. Specifically, this project aims to develop shared understandings of detention and deportation as experienced by Latino families in several New England communities. This project, which forms part of the Post-Deportation Human Rights Project (PDHRP), an initiative of the Center for Human Rights & International Justice at Boston College, is currently concluding the fourth year of an ongoing, dynamic PAR process. This paper reports on selected methodological challenges in this interdisciplinary community-university PAR process from the perspectives of three university-based co-researchers. We briefly discuss the iterative action-reflection processes focusing on: (1) an overview of the PAR project and its multiple phases within the U.S. and in Guatemala; (2) select methodological challenges and contributions of the PAR approach for immigrant families “living in the shadows”; and, (3) methodological concerns from the three co-authors, who represent perspectives of a graduate student who joined the early stages of partnership-building; an assistant professor in the early stages of building her career; and a senior scholar with many years of experience in activist scholarship. We conclude with thoughts on why, despite the methodological challenges discussed, PAR is “worth the trouble,” particularly when engaging in research with populations marginalized from power and decision-making such as undocumented immigrant families.

### **Recent Immigration Policies and Practices**

Since the mid-1990s United States (U.S.) immigration legislation, more vigorously implemented by the Bush Administration in a post-9/11 anti-terrorism environment, has targeted non-citizens residing in the U.S., with significant consequences for individual, family and community wellbeing. In the mid-1990s, under the Clinton Administration, the U.S. government passed laws that amplified the authority of the federal government to arrest, detain and deport non-citizens (Hagan, Eschbach, & Rodriguez, 2008). The Illegal Immigrant Reform and Responsibility Act (1996) and the Anti-terrorism Effective Death Penalty Act (1996) expanded the offenses for which a non-citizen could be deported, allowed for retroactive deportation, increased the categories of persons subject to “removal” and eliminated the range of judicial review and due process rights formerly available to immigrants. In 2001, following the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Bush Administration signed the USA PATRIOT Act into law, thus expanding the ability of the government to deport persons deemed “threats to national security” and allowing for use of “secret evidence” in such cases.

As a result, in large part, of the aforementioned legislation, between 2001 and 2010 approximately 2.8 million immigrants have been deported from the United States; a huge majority of whom came from Mexico and Central America (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010). In addition to the strengthening of the wall separating the Mexico and U.S. borders and increased ICE presence, repression has intensified inside the country, that is, social control mechanisms restrict movement

of people in urban and rural communities hundreds of miles from the country's physical border (Kanstroom, 2008). For example, arrest and detention of undocumented immigrants, in particular at places of work, dramatically increased during the Bush Administration; between 2002 and 2006, the number of worksite arrests increased more than sevenfold (U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, 2008). Such workplace raids have been largely replaced by home and street arrests, as well as "silent raids" that entail federal auditing of employer records, under the Obama Administration (Bacon & Hing, 2010).

In 2010, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deported approximately 387,242 non-citizens from the U.S. and an additional 476,000 accepted voluntary removal from the US. Among those deported in 2010, 168,532 were "criminal aliens," meaning that over 50% had no criminal record. While 2010 deportations represent a 2% decrease from 2009, more deportations have occurred under the Obama Administration than any previous Administration (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010; Slevin, 2010). Moreover, 2009 was the seventh consecutive high for non-citizen deportations (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010). In many cases, deported parents are separated from U.S. born children; Baum, Jones and Barry (2010) found that between 1997- 2007, 88,000 U.S. citizen children (44,000 of whom were under the age of 5) lost a legal permanent resident parent to deportation. Hence, increasingly, the persons affected by detention and deportation are parents and workers, without criminal records, who migrate from Latin American countries (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010); as a result of the aforementioned legislation, most have scant opportunity for judicial discretion if arrested.

### **Purpose of This PAR Project**

Despite the enormity of the deportation system, little systematic knowledge of the effects of deportation policies and practices on Latino immigrant families has been generated. The current interdisciplinary and participatory action research (PAR) project was designed to create collaborative spaces for bridging the growing chasms between citizens and non-citizens and for deepening a shared understanding of and response to injustices that immigrant families (many of which include U.S.-born citizen children) face. PAR is one of several critical approaches to research and seeks to develop collaborative processes that prioritize the voices and actions of those marginalized from power and resources in educational, advocacy, and organizing activities that contribute to knowledge construction and material social change and/or transformation. Through iterative processes, co-researchers, including local community members, members of activist groups, and students and professors from universities or other institutions identify a problem focus, gather information, critically analyze root causes, and press towards redressing the injustice (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). To realize these aspirations, Fals Borda (2000) calls for the activist researcher to assume a moral and humanistic orientation that includes altruism and solidarity. Thus, he describes PAR as a "life project" (Fals Borda, 1985, 1998) which includes research and actions.

In the PAR project herein described, a team of university-based researchers, professors, and service providers from law, psychology, education, and social work who had been individually working on issues of migration and/or deportation collaborated with local immigrant rights organizations to develop the PDHRP. Several university-based researchers had longstanding ties to local immigrant rights organizations in the greater Boston and southeastern Massachusetts areas and had been facilitating a focus group and engaging in ethnographic research with one of

them. The March 2007 workplace raid in New Bedford, MA, which led to the arrest of over 300 workers, including many Guatemalan Maya and parents, left in its wake increased mobilization of community responses in support – and criticism – of undocumented migrants. Building on these earlier initiatives and political events, the university-based interdisciplinary team convened a series of meetings beginning in September 2007 to discuss the growing threats to and assaults on immigrant communities, particularly on those who had migrated without proper authorization. Together we developed three initial goals: (1) to document how Guatemalan and Salvadoran families experience and respond to detention and deportation; (2) to contextualize current risks to families within a socio-historical, sociopolitical and transnational framework; and, over time, (3) to collaboratively respond to current realities through community-based actions, policy development, advocacy and organizing.

### **Processes and Outcomes of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) Project**

During the first phase of this project, we identified several collaborative activities or “actions,” including, for example, bimonthly support groups, leadership development workshops, and periodic meetings to discuss ongoing concerns about our initial objective and explore multiple aspects of the participatory and action research process. Regular community feedback and planning meetings facilitated an iterative data collection and analysis process. We also developed a series of inter-organizational, community-led *Know Your Rights (KYR)* workshops whose aim was to share information through participatory processes, e.g., through the use of drama and small group exercises and discussions. These collaborative experiences, organized by university-based lawyers and psychologists and community leaders and members, were opportunities for sharing information about migrants’ rights and knowledge of the effects of deportation which informed understandings of the challenges facing participating families in resisting and redressing these injustices.

Leaders of the community-based organizations and university-based researchers also met regularly to identify potential families from the community organizations who would participate in the first phase of this PAR process and to design a methodology for initial qualitative interviews with those 18 families (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Project participants were identified (1) for their ability to strengthen the organization’s leadership and organizing potential; (2) because they had been directly or indirectly affected by detention or deportation; and, (3) because they had children between the ages of 5 and 16 who were living with them in the U.S. These criteria reflected the hope that through the PAR process, the participants would assume increased leadership in their organizations and beyond.

While these qualitative interviews aimed specifically to document the threat and consequences of deportation for Guatemalan and Salvadoran undocumented families, a central thesis that emerged through these participatory and action processes was that current experiences of deportation must be understood within the context of related risks to these individuals and families, including economic marginalization (in country of origin and in the U.S.); histories of state-sponsored war and violence; previous and inter-generational internal and external migrations; and resulting divided and mixed status families, that is, families with U.S. citizen children and one or more undocumented parents. Families’ current experiences of detention and deportation can only be understood and effectively responded to in relation to these intersecting historical and

contemporary forces (see Brabeck, Lykes, & Hershberg, 2011, for a detailed report of these analyses).

Based on initial analyses of these data, the co-authors and fellow PAR researchers decided on two additional research endeavors: first, to take an interdisciplinary team of university researchers to Guatemala to interview deportees as well as family members "left behind" after migration, and second, to develop a survey of a larger group of documented and undocumented Latinos/as living in the U.S. The decision to go to Guatemala (versus El Salvador) was based on long-term relationships the first author has in Guatemala as well as the research initiatives of Ricardo Falla, a Guatemalan anthropologist who had visited New England in the fall of 2007 to better understand realities facing undocumented immigrants and with whom the first author agreed to collaborate on research with these populations. A team of law, psychology, and sociology graduate and undergraduate students and faculty – including the three co-authors – conducted over 100 interviews with several generations of multiple families as well as key informants in Zacualpa, Guatemala, and its surrounding villages. This community was deeply affected by 36 years of civil war and one focus of this transnational collaboration is to explore in more depth the connections undocumented Guatemalan Maya within the U.S. draw between that war and what they describe as a "second war" being waged against them currently by the U.S. government. Moreover, many mothers in the U.S. spoke of a "heart divided" between children "left behind" and U.S. born citizen children who form transnational families.

Equally important was the survey in the U.S. both because it afforded us an opportunity to solidify the growing partnership with a third immigrant organization, this one based in Rhode Island, and because we were able to assess findings from the qualitative in-depth interviews with a larger group of immigrants, including those with documentation. The findings from the survey suggested that the threats of detention and deportation are not limited to the undocumented and are strongly associated with parental and childhood stress, as reported by participating parents. We also explored the impact of detention and deportation on families' access to services and the multiple aspects of parent-child communication and silence vis-à-vis these violations of their rights (see Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Xu & Brabeck, in press).

Community feedback sessions have been important throughout all phases in shaping the current and future directions of the project. In these meetings, community members discuss preliminary findings from data analyses, offer alternative interpretations, and engage in debate about, for example, traditional and more contemporary family patterns that constrain or facilitate how undocumented parents face threats posed to their families. Some of these discussions and initiatives are summarized in the Post-Deportation Human Rights Project (PDHRP) Annual Reports (Post-Deportation Human Rights Project, 2009, 2010, 2011).

In addition to law student and lawyer collaboration in the qualitative interviews, the *KYR* workshops, and the Guatemala-based project described previously, a team of attorneys and law students have provided legal consultations for community participants and defense for a small number of clients whose deportation from the U.S. arguably violated U.S. law or due process. A major goal of the PDHRP is to reintroduce legal predictability, proportionality, compassion, and respect for family unity into the deportation laws in the U.S. through successfully defending individual deportees, thereby setting new precedents and creating a new area of legal representation. The PDHRP is the only program in the country providing *pro bono* services for

deportees. We are currently extending this work through establishing a *pro bono* panel of lawyers who the PDHRP legal staff will advise in this work. We continue to seek how best to integrate the activist research of social scientists, efforts of the legal team, and community-based work with deportees and undocumented immigrants within the U.S.

To briefly summarize the forthcoming PDHRP PAR initiatives, we have undertaken a process evaluation of the project and our new directions will include several new partnerships with groups who have learned of this work and initiated collaborations, more bi-lateral activities, and less centrally organized work. Additionally, we have collaborated with local community leaders and church-based workers in the development of a Human Rights and Migration Project in Zacualpa, Guatemala, which serves as a resource and site for organizing and advocacy for and with families and communities affected by immigration, detention, and deportation. A team of psychologists traveled there for a month in the summer of 2010 for additional field work and collaboration with local community organizers; a law student spent spring semester 2011 working one week per month with the project; and the local team there is an educational and advocacy resource for deportees and families of U.S.-based migrants. BC-based researchers and the Guatemala team also recently completed a community survey exploring in more detail the factors that continue to push migrants north as well as the consequences for those left behind. Finally, the BC-based legal team consults regularly with the Zacualpa project vis-à-vis U.S.-based migrants from the region.

We next discuss several of the methodological challenges that emerged throughout these ongoing collaborations. The first section is focused on the community participants' and our perceptions of what it has meant for many of them to "leave the shadows" through collaborating in this work. The second section focuses on specific challenges we have encountered working within and beyond the academy, that is, what it has been like for us as senior and junior faculty and a PhD student in three sub-disciplines of psychology to immerse ourselves in PAR alongside undocumented migrants.

### **Emerging from the Shadows: Undocumented Migrants Engage in PAR**

One of the goals of PAR is to create audiences – within the academy and in the wider U.S. public – wherein the voices of those marginalized from power and resources, once lifted up, can be heard and become the basis for actions. As suggested above, such research often involves participants in vulnerable situations, whose voices are typically absent from dominant academic discourse. Undocumented migrants have an added level of threat and vulnerability due to their legal statuses and the multiple "circuits of dispossession" (Fine & Ruglis, 2009) resultant from structures of "illegality" and social control in which they live and work, as described briefly above. The precarious legal statuses of undocumented migrants who participate in this project and ongoing systems of threat and repression make this collaboration even more challenging. Most community participants confront daily fear of ICE, local police forces, and multiple other U.S. institutions where they risk being stopped, asked for documents which they do not possess, and, in many cases detained and then deported.

A decision to join university-based researchers required many to "manage" these fears. Moreover they have to balance demanding work and family-related responsibilities in order to attend ongoing PAR meetings, trainings, and workshops. This is particularly complicated for mothers of young children, which contributed to the underrepresentation of women in some organizing

efforts. Despite how hard the academic and community organization project coordinators worked to take into consideration participants' obligations in scheduling meetings, invariably community-based participants would not show up or arrived hours after an event had begun due to day-day obligations and stresses. Additionally, as this is a multi-site project that involves immigrant communities in Greater Boston, New Bedford, and Providence, transportation is a constant challenge. Most of the Boston-based academic participants do not have cars, and for community-based participants, driving has become particularly dangerous over the last few years. Most are prevented from securing drivers' licenses due to their status and thus community-based participants run the risk of being pulled over for "driving while being Latino".

Additionally, the community organizations and academic-based participants are dealing with tensions between collective organizing for community-wide change and the priorities of individual asylum-seekers whose cases are currently being argued in immigration courts. Specifically, recent political events in New England, including the workplace raid on Bianco in New Bedford in 2007, contributed to one of the participating community-based organizations assuming primary responsibility for identifying lawyers to defend those arrested and supporting the defendants as their cases move through immigration courts. The requirements of these complex cases constrain participants' time availability, their capacity to collaborate openly in telling their stories for a participatory research process, and their ability to engage in a collective struggle for comprehensive immigration reform. As a result of these challenges, "coming out of the shadows" takes significantly different shape and form for some immigrants in these communities.

Finally, ethnic and linguistic diversities complicate collaboration within and across our community- and university-based participants, who include Guatemalan Ladinos of European descent, Maya, Euro-Americans, Latin Americans, U.S. Latinos/as, and a Chinese immigrant. Discrimination between Ladinos and Maya has a history of over 500 years (Adams & Bastos, 2003; Taracena Arriola, 2002, 2004) and the history of racism in the U.S. is briefer but no less contentious (see Takaki, 1994, among many others). Ethnic and racial tensions that reflect these historical realities as well as contemporary U.S. "illegality" surfaced within and across programs particularly in the early stages of our collaborations. These diversities and challenges are also reflected in the three primary languages spoken by project collaborators: English, Spanish, and K'iche'. While we made a decision early on to conduct joint meetings in Spanish, as this is the language that the majority of participants can speak, not everyone was fluent in Spanish. The lines of inclusion and exclusion often fell along gender lines; for example, several of the K'iche' women from one of the organizations did not speak fluent Spanish and this contributed to the over-representation of male participants in the process. We continue to dialogue about these issues in community meetings and beyond, seeking to better understand and reflexively engage how language both democratizes power hierarchies, e.g., those that typically prioritize English, but can, *de facto*, generate new, perhaps less powerful but nonetheless problematic, systems of inclusion and exclusion.

### **Methodological Dilemmas for University-based PAR Collaborators: Why It's Worth the Trouble**

As university-based PAR partners and co-researchers we face institutional obstacles, as well as additional challenges based on our individual academic trajectories. Restrictions created by university-based Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), for example, have arisen at multiple points in the project, significantly slowing the process. It is well documented that community-based and

participatory approaches, including PAR, which require open-ended, collaborative, and iterative research designs and methodologies, incite concern in IRBs (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006; Flicker, Travers, Guta, McDonald, & Meagher, 2007; Malone, Yerger, McGruder, & Froelicher, 2006). As scholars have pointed out, review boards are often wary of unorthodox, participatory approaches despite their characteristic values of democratic collaboration and co-generation of knowledge, which may in fact be more likely to protect participants and co-researchers than top-down and positivist methodologies (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006).

We are, thus, challenged to “develop facility in communicating with two audiences”, that of the local practitioner or community, and the community of scholars who set many of the standards for what constitutes rigorous, ethical and/or publishable work (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p. 99; see also Flicker et al., 2007). We sometimes find the goals of engaging in advocacy and/or social change efforts *and* securing a PhD or tenure “[to] be at odds with each other, especially when other academics perceive PAR to be inferior to other more mainstream ethnographic methodologies” (Sánchez, 2009, p. 93). We negotiate our goals about community-university partnership with our professional requirements and adjust to the reality that PAR requires “serving two [or more] different masters” (Sánchez, 2009, p. 92). In the next section, we explore how we are navigating these goals in our respective PAR researcher’s journeys through academia.

As a fourth year doctoral student in a research-focused PhD program in Applied Developmental and Educational Psychology, I, Rachel, have faced many philosophical and practical dilemmas throughout my engagement in the PDHRP. First among them has been deciding what type of research I want to conduct, and what epistemological lens I will bring to and develop within that research. Much of the research that dominates current psychology is positivist or postpositivist, deductive, and hypothesis-testing, and views research as a set of tools for capturing an objective reality and/or identifying universal processes. Further, such research does not typically concern itself with directly changing this reality and the social conditions that oppress or marginalize individuals and communities who participate in research. The critical lens central to PAR is not easily compatible with a positivist research lens and although I am supported by my colleagues, I have often felt isolated in choosing to pursue research at the intersection of psychology and social justice. This experience is further complicated by my choice of participatory research, which engages with communities as partners, as experts of their own experiences and social situations, and not simply as objects of an empirical or authorial gaze.

In addition, developmental psychology is often interested in measuring change on an individual level. However, PAR is about collective change and sociopolitical change in the case of this project. Although one hopes that individuals are positively impacted by working toward consciousness raising and immigration reform, the outcome for this project, or what we hope to be able to measure one day, is whether material sociopolitical changes follow from it.

I have faced a more personal dilemma in this project, that of situating myself in the community. I have found it difficult to spend as much time as I would like with community participants. Academic or university-based obligations, such as teaching commitments, course and syllabi preparation, and manuscript revisions and publications, have kept me on campus or in colleagues’ offices, creating barriers to my establishing stronger relationships and partnerships with community-based participants. Over time, I have found ways to better balance university obligations with community engagement, and gained confidence in my developing relationships



with community members, but this obstacle persists in our ongoing PAR work. Finally, as a doctoral student one needs stamina to continue with an ongoing PAR process, to stay committed to community work and partnership building, and to stay connected to the long-term nature of a process whose goals continue to develop over time.

As an Assistant Professor trained as a Counseling Psychologist I, Kalina, have experienced multiple methodological challenges as a co-researcher in this ongoing and long-term PAR process. My professional activities include clinical practice and consultation as well as full time teaching and research. Thus the goals of community organizing and social change are, for me, always in tension with my commitments to personal change and transformation as well as a desire to provide direct services for immigrant communities when those are needed. I have found the clinical legal context a venue for the latter and have provided clinical assessments and expert testimony for individual clients who the PDHRP lawyers are defending. However, the clinical lens, which prioritizes individual change, can seem at odds with the PAR emphasis on collective advocacy, organizing, and efforts toward social change, and this tension at times has led to my own confusion with regards to professional identity and assumptions. This is underscored by the fact that some of the community-based participants expect and even request direct individual services and are often less persuaded by the longer-term, more ambiguous PAR goals of social action and political change. A second challenge, which frequently manifests itself as a methodological dilemma, echoes Rachel's concerns about epistemology and positioning as a researcher. Specifically, the contemporary university is increasingly a "publish or perish" environment and working within a collaborative and long-term community-based initiative constrains one's capacity to generate empirical research within a short-term framework. Additionally, social science researchers who argue that their work "creates change" are compelled to identify measurable outcomes. This suggests quantitative indicators that, as Rachel suggests above, are more aligned with a positivist epistemology. Moreover, legislative and judicial bodies, many of which have significant control over the lived experiences of undocumented immigrants, are sometimes more persuaded by quantitative indicators than by "life stories". The latter may attract their attention or make a good byline but the data that compel policy change often involve large samples, longitudinal data, and statistical significance – not the grist of many PAR processes.

As a senior scholar and long-time activist and PARer, I, Brinton, have found this project challenging in some familiar and some new ways. The familiar have to do with frequent tensions I have experienced between Euro-American knowledge systems and political positionality and "traditional" or indigenous cultural beliefs and practices (see also Cammarota, 2009, 2010, for a discussion of cultural and historical challenges in PAR). As a feminist researcher and activist, my work with women and children in war zones and post-conflict societies has focused on human rights violations at the intersection of gender, class, and racial oppressions. Despite this "personal" lens, gender stratification has cast a persistent yet mobile shadow over the PAR processes of the PDHRP, challenging community-based participants' varied understandings of maleness, femaleness and participation (see Lykes & Hershberg, 2012, for a discussion of feminist PAR). One of the partner community organizations was developed to serve as a cultural organization for Maya living in the Northeast over a decade ago. As discussed above, recent political events (e.g., the New Bedford raid) contributed to the organization's transformation and increasing focus on advocacy and the defense of immigrants' rights and to the emergence of a small women's self-help group among survivors of the raid. Yet, the all-male leadership shows limited interest in interrogating persistent traditional gender arrangements that marginalize women from leadership and more

active participation in this PAR process. In sharp contrast, another of the partner community organizations with a long history of community advocacy and activism has majority-female leadership. The third partner organization's leadership is almost exclusively young, single and male. Community-based women migrants seldom participate in the organization's activities and programming, which has made it challenging to recruit women into the leadership development aspects of PDHRP. Moreover, tensions that have arisen within and between organizations arguably reflect underlying gender assumptions; yet, although recognized by women leaders in one organization and those of us in the university, they are experienced as "culturally consonant" by many others and therefore not problematic.

The second issue is more practical and has to do with responsibilities of "managing" a complex PAR process with limited resources and a commitment to mentor students and junior faculty, in hopes of ensuring a new generation of PAR praxis. Thus much of my time is spent in coordination, administration, and facilitating the work of others. I often long for earlier days when I participated with local co-researchers in generating knowledge through, for example, participatory photography and creative techniques for reflecting on and critically interrogating community-generated data (Women of PhotoVoice/ADMI & Lykes, 2000). Although these experiences were not without their contradictions and challenges (Lykes, 2010), I sometimes wish we could reduce the project's complexity and *administrivia* and have more time for cross-community intellectual engagement and political activism.

### **Shared Methodological Tensions**

Within the university-based team, there have also been debates about the underlying definition of change and transformation that informs our work. As suggested above, some of us are drawn to providing services, thereby temporarily changing some conditions for individuals in under-resourced organizations, and understand this type of individual level change as part of what constitutes partnership in this PAR project. Others among us situate individual change in consciousness-raising processes through which participants and collectivities develop agency that sometimes leads to wider efforts towards social change and transformation. These differing emphases contribute to alternative priorities at decision-making points about, for example, actions that we may take as a PDHRP PAR project. We continue to discuss these differences, seeking not to be immobilized by conflict but to respect our diverse priorities and be guided by our partnerships with local communities.

A final methodological and ethical challenge that we have confronted throughout this project concerns the issue of who benefits from the PDHRP PAR processes and outcomes. As mentioned previously, we have developed several professional publications from this work. While community-based participants in NGO partner organizations have continuously discussed and debated preliminary findings from the data analyses, their participation in those processes has consisted of offering feedback which we have incorporated into analyses. The analyses have been conducted primarily by university-based researchers. Thus our data analysis processes have neither transcended the traditional research hierarchy nor transferred these skills to community participants in a way that they could engage in similar work "on their own". As significantly, it is clear that with academic publications, the immediate benefits are reaped by academics. Additionally, while community-based participants and community leaders have joined the academic participants at conferences and co-presented some of this work to academic audiences, and in the

process, educated those in attendance about their experiences and unique perspectives, the immediate benefits of conference attendance and presentations are enjoyed by academics who enhance their CVs with every additional conference presentation (Nygreen, 2009/2010).

One programmatic response to this challenge has been our decision to publish a bilingual PDHRP annual report, *Keeping Families Connected/ Manteniendo a Las Familias Conectadas*, with articles authored by participants from all partner organizations (Post-Deportation Human Rights Project, 2009, 2010, 2011). A notable "growing edge" in this process is reflected in the articles contributed by community partners. In the first annual report, the community perspective was presented in an article authored by the chair of the board of one of the community organization partners, whereas in the second and third annual reports the community perspective were authored or co-authored by community leaders and activists. We seek additional ways to democratize these processes and continue to develop actions that render direct benefits to community participants as they define their needs. In addition to our KYR workshops, the university-based collaborators (including two of the co-authors) have volunteered our time to facilitate PAR and Undoing Racism workshops with members of one of the community-based partner organizations whose leadership requested these resources for leadership training and development, a direct organizational benefit.

### **Preliminary Conclusions and Commitments**

Despite these challenges, it is clear to us that PAR is very much "worth the trouble". Most importantly, when done with commitment and constant striving for transparency, PAR is a resource for reweaving knowledge and threading community-based participants' voices, understandings, and meanings with those from the university. As argued above, academic knowledge is often privileged over local or community-based knowledge. Although PAR seeks a more democratic knowledge construction process, it often falls short of these goals as discussed herein. Yet, when it succeeds, however partially, community-university knowledge or "a third voice" (Lykes, TerreBlanche, & Hamber, 2003) has a higher probability of effecting changes in policies and practices that marginalize communities, including undocumented migrants and their families. PAR also has the potential to develop organizing and activism among and between academic and community participants. Through PAR, community-based and academic-based participants agree on collective steps to strive for, and sometimes arrive at, social change. Additionally, meaningful relationships develop in ongoing PAR projects, wherein academic and community participants express authentic commitment toward shared goals. Finally, PAR is "worth the trouble" because working with and, to some extent, in communities, has afforded each of us a more nuanced, richer, albeit more complicated understanding of injustices in our society and what they mean for differently situated individuals and communities. The PAR process and lens has also illuminated the challenges we face in addressing and redressing those injustices.

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