

8-7-2008

An Examination: Using Participatory Action Research in a Marginalized Coastal Community at Risk to Natural Hazards

Joselin Simoneaux Landry
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Landry, Joselin Simoneaux, "An Examination: Using Participatory Action Research in a Marginalized Coastal Community at Risk to Natural Hazards" (2008). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 856.

<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/856>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

An Examination: Using Participatory Action Research in a
Marginalized Coastal Community at Risk to Natural Hazards

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
The Department of Sociology
Environmental Sociology

By

Joselin Simoneaux Landry

B.A., University of New Orleans, 2003

August 2008

Acknowledgments

I owe a great deal of thanks to many people who helped make this project possible. To begin, without the community residents of the coastal Louisiana community and their vision of a better social world, this study would not have been possible. Their grassroots organizing and everyday life world views were central to this work.

In the preparation of this thesis, I relied on the expertise of many individuals. In particular my committee, chaired by Dr. Pamela Jenkins, with gracious guidance from Dr. Shirley Laska and Dr. Francis Adeola, all from the Sociology Department at UNO. Additionally, PhD candidate Kristina Peterson, Dr. Brenda Phillips and Dr. Patricia Stukes would prove most helpful. My classmates Elise Chatalain, Sonia Ladha, David Burley, Bill Kappel, Broderick Green, Jenny Eames and Becky Boudreaux were most encouraging and helpful. But without the kindness, support and assistance of colleague Camille Manning-Broome, this thesis would still be unfinished. Many others have contributed, steered and encouraged me in this lengthy process and I thank them all.

Special thanks to my loving, supportive husband John, who always believed in my ability. Thank you for supporting me in my dream of a college degree and on to my Master's. Without your support, this would not have been possible.

I deeply appreciate all who have given me the space to complete this thesis and for allowing me to be a part of this work. Thanks for letting me hang with all of you!

Forward

The event we all knew would come, we just didn't know when, came on August 29, 2005. Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Louisiana and Mississippi coastlines. The community in this study was in the direct path of the storm. This study is a retrospective evaluation of a coastal community before Hurricane Katrina arrived and solidly sets the stage for further research with the community.

Every structure in the community suffered damage and most of the residents are not back in the community three years after the storm. As of mid July 2008, only two homes have been restored and have families living in them. According to residents, electricity was restored in March 2008, just days before one resident returned home with her newborn. Several boats lining the community dock are home to residents who choose not to travel the distance to temporary homes outside the community. Long electrical cords run from the boats to a power source on a light pole near the dock. Residents carry cell phones as home phone service is not available. As before the storm, sewage is still not available, but fresh water is available after numerous leaks were repaired.

Small barges carry large dumpsters with debris from homes that are being demolished. Large cranes that demolish remaining homes sit on top of barges, as they are too heavy for the remaining land and would cause further damage to the property.

Residents talk of five 'new build' homes planned for the area. New government flood plane regulations require the homes to be built 12 feet above ground. Special permits were required for the pilings, foundation, and soil sampling. But residents report that plans for the homes are moving forward thanks to the generosities of faith-based

groups who have stepped in to provide technical advice. These are new conditions of building in the area, however, because they are outside of any levee protection system, insurance on the homes is very expensive or non-existent.

The residents stressed again, as they did at the beginning of this project, their connection to the land and how it is part of them – how they are intimately attached to the seasons, the seafood harvesting and the good and bad conditions of living in this place. If they could not live in this place, the residents estimate it would take two or three generations before they could once again find a place they could attach to – two generations or more would be ‘lost’ without the attachment to the place they live now.

While the residents of this coastal community have had to find temporary places to live, most are desperately trying to return to their home. Hardship is not a stranger to the residents, but they feel they are imposing on others and having to accept the help of others when they have mostly been self-sufficient. They continue in their struggle to ‘Save our land and our heritage’ while working with some of the original project academics.

It is hard not to appreciate the tenacity of the residents and the beauty of the land they live on. They are strong believers in their faith and in the good of humankind. As the PAR literature tells us, challenges are to be welcomed as they usually foster innovative solutions. If anyone can face difficult challenges and produce innovative solutions, it is the residents of this hard-working, appreciative, and insightful community living along the harsh Louisiana coastline.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Study Setting.....	5
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Theoretical Perspective	11
Gaps and Improvement in the Literature.....	13
Change Theory.....	14
Conflict Theory.....	15
Disaster Theory	18
PAR Literature.....	18
Concepts and Assumptions.....	20
1. Commitment	20
2. Development of Organizing.....	22
3. Living the Philosophy	28
4. Leadership Style.....	30
5. Ownership of Knowledge	32
6. Empowerment.....	35
7. Time and use of Time.....	38
8. Power Struggles.....	41
CHAPTER 3 - METHODS AND DATA.....	46
An Extended Case Method.....	46
Qualitative Research.....	48
Data Collection.....	49
1. Documentation.....	50
Communications.....	51
Email.....	51
2. Participant Observations.....	52
3. Interviews.....	54
Practitioner/Researcher In-depth Interviews.....	55
4. Oral Histories.....	55
Interviewee Demographics.....	56
5. Focus Groups.....	61
Data Analysis.....	63

Data Validation.....	65
Role of The Researcher.....	66
CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS.....	67
1. Commitment.....	67
2. Organizing.....	72
Core and Associate Partner Vision of Community Organizing.....	73
Community Resident Vision of Organizing.....	74
3. Living the Philosophy.....	77
4. Leadership Style.....	80
Community Leadership.....	82
Leadership in Communications.....	83
Communications Observations.....	84
5. Ownership of Knowledge	86
6. Empowerment.....	89
7. Time and Use of Time.....	92
8. Power Struggles.....	95
Partner Views of Power Struggles.....	95
Community Views of Power Struggles.....	97
Power Shifts	101
CHAPTER 5 – ANALYSIS.....	105
Commitment.....	106
Organization.....	108
Living the Philosophy.....	110
Leadership Style.....	113
Ownership of Knowledge.....	115
Empowerment.....	118
Time and Use of Time.....	122
Power Struggles.....	124
Analysis Conclusions.....	128
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS.....	130
Social Change.....	132
Appropriate or Inappropriate Approach to Research.....	133
Research Question and Extension of Theory.....	134
Unintended Consequences.....	135
Ethical Considerations.....	137
Limitations.....	137
Recommendations.....	139
Positive Aspects.....	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	144
VITA.....	148

Table of Figures

FIGURE 1-1 COMMUNITY AERIAL.....	8
FIGURE 1-2 PARTNER MEETING.....	10
FIGURE 3-3 REFLEXIVE SCIENCE	47
FIGURE 3-4 SHRIMPING VESSEL.....	53
FIGURE 4-5 BOARD ORGANIZATION.....	75
FIGURE 4-6 EARLY VISIONING MEETING.....	76
FIGURE 4-7 COMMUNITY VISION WHEEL.....	78
FIGURE 6-8 ESTIMATE OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS.....	134

List of Tables

TABLE 1 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS.....	53
TABLE 2 OUTCOMES.....	120
TABLE 3 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.....	121

Abstract

This extended case study examines the appropriateness of using Participatory Action Research (PAR) in a small, marginalized coastal community at risk to natural hazards. PAR is a method of conducting high-quality research to support the social change goals of diverse cultural and ethnic communities, especially as they relate to community involvement, democracy, emancipation, and liberation (Lindsey and McGuinness (1998). PAR is not the typical research methodology for hazards research.

The community's goal was to 'Save our heritage and our land'. They consisted of 75-80 members who primarily make their living by seafood extraction. This community has experienced social oppression and environmental events associated with living in a coastal Louisiana community.

Findings suggest that PAR has its limitations, however, it does appear to be a useful research method for residents, researchers and those who want a more respectful, empowering, ground up approach to multi-user learning and social change.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Using an extended case study method (Burawoy, 1998), this paper analyzes the use of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology by academics, practitioners and the residents of a small rural coastal Louisiana community. PAR is a method of conducting high-quality research to support the social change goals of diverse cultural and ethnic communities, especially as they relate to community involvement, democracy, emancipation, and liberation (Lindsey and McGuinness (1998). PAR is defined as: “a way for researchers and oppressed people to join in solidarity to take collective action, both short and long term, for radical social change. Locally determined and controlled action is a planned consequence of inquiry.” (Maguire, 1987: 29). Furthermore, universities are increasingly encouraged to conduct collaborative research with communities to provide services and learning opportunities (Walsh and Annis, 2003). This paper examines whether the PAR method is an effective strategy for academics and practitioners to work with a population challenged by environmental risks, while supporting social change goals.

Is PAR an appropriate methodology to conduct research within a small rural community? Babbie, (1998) rather than using random sampling survey methods for the study of small subcultures, maintains other field research methods are more appropriate. Taking Babbie’s qualitative perspective as a starting point, this study employs an extended case study through participant observations, face-to-face interviews, documented communications and focus group techniques. The goal is to learn how this marginalized coastal community works within a PAR methodology while being engaged with partner academics and practitioners.

This paper begins with short but separate reviews of change, conflict and disaster theory and how they apply to this study, followed with a discussion of Participatory Action Research. Next the study setting is detailed with rich description of the coastal community involved in this research project. The Literature Review in Chapter 2 presents in depth reviews of change, conflict and disaster theory literatures and how they apply to this study, followed by detailed literature on PAR. Subsequent chapters present a full description of the qualitative methods and data collection as well as significant findings and analysis. Finally the conclusions of this study are presented along with recommendations for future PAR partnerships.

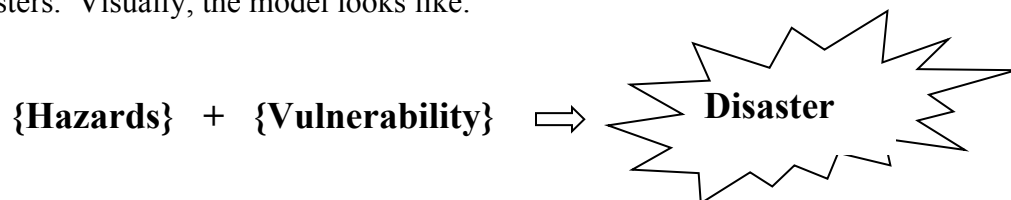
Three theories helped to guide analysis of this research. Change theory helps examine what originally galvanized this coastal community. Conflict theory allows an understanding of why the project stakeholders came together, and theories of disaster improve our understanding of the community's situation.

Lewin (1948) describes change theory in 3 stages – unfreezing, changing and refreezing. An example would be an underrepresented community who would like change. They may take a look around and notice normal, everyday services or protections others receive, but are missing in their community. They decide to take action to bring about change. Once the change takes place (which usually takes bunches of time), the community begins a new life in their new normal conditions.

Conflict theory has driven social change such as the Civil Rights and Feminist movements and similar clashes between the haves and the have-nots. Additionally, Conflict theory joins populations with similar complaints to fight for a cause. As such it is an appropriate basis from which to begin a Participatory Action Research project in a

small rural community. The community in this study lacks adequate local governmental attention and resources, educational or advocacy resources, and faces economic and cultural vulnerabilities. Conflict theory agrees that within functioning societies, stressors, such as access to limited resources, may lead to conflicts. Conflicts can also lead to consensus and integration, bringing unexpected groups such as rural coastal communities, academics and practitioners together (R. Dahrendorf in Ritzer, 2000). Moreover, an expected outcome of conflict is change. Changing circumstances pressure communities to change their social fabric and life worlds.

In Disaster Theory we also find pressures and stressors. Blakie, Cannon, Davis and Wisner (1994) present a Pressure and Release model (which they refer to as PAR). He expresses Disaster Theory as Vulnerability (root causes, unsafe conditions, dynamic pressures) + Hazards (wind, flood, volcanoes, landslides, hurricanes, earthquakes) →= Disasters. Visually, the model looks like:



Vulnerability pressure is the surrounding social environment (Blaikie, et. al, 1994). As well, disaster potential from the threat of hurricanes, land loss, soil subsidence and a shrinking economic wage earning potential add to the pressures of this rural, coastal community. Change, conflict and disaster theory contribute to the theoretical perspective of a PAR methodology and are further discussed in Chapter 2.

Most PAR research methodologies reflect an associated set of notions, and definitions of PAR share basic assumptions. The following are some basic assumptions. PAR states that the community guides the research towards social change and there must

be shared vision, goals and values (Lindsey and McGuinnis, 1998). PAR participants must be mutually respectful and committed, (Santiago-Rivera, Morse and Hunt, 1998) and relationships should be given time to grow (Lindsey and McGuinnis, 1998). The community's ownership of knowledge is engaged in the research, making connections, developing partnerships and promoting effective change (Lindsey and McGuinnis, 1998). PAR is directed toward the discovery of information about an issue or opportunity of community concern, is aided by a facilitator (usually a researcher), and often results in empowerment of the community (Friedlander, 2001), especially in the community's ownership of the research and knowledge gained. Finally PAR advocates a transfer of power (Selener, 1997, Friere 1970) where the power of knowledge production is returned to the ordinary people who "will contribute to the creation of more accurate, critical reflection of social reality, the liberation of human potential, and the mobilization of human resources to solve problems" (Selener, 1997: 28).

Burawoy's (1998) extended case study method contends that intentions require action, which then require reflection. Burawoy also claims that reflexive science not only joins participant and observer, but also knowledge and social situation, the situation and its field of location, and academic and folk theory. This study examines the process of how PAR reflexively combined participants, knowledge and theory, and effectively addressed the community's communication, relationships, community organizing and empowerment.

Participatory Action Research integrates participant and observer, and their reflections on the conducted research. This integration is a challenge, a different approach to customary and accepted social science. PAR allows ordinary people, not just

researchers, to take a dynamic, driving force role in changing the processes of construction of social realities (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Traditionally, methodology guides theory to answer why a phenomenon occurs (Sutton & Straw, 1995). But PAR is about knowing how to act upon a particular phenomenon, and how to put theory into practice. A combination of how and why something occurs results in a more reflective dialogue between all participants. In PAR, because the community's issues, actions and learning are the centerpiece of a study, Friedlander (2001) suggests that PAR should "lead to theory building for both the participants and for the scholarly audience." Friedlander also contends that in a PAR methodology, where community issues are at the center, the community achieves primary learning. This research paper uses Michael Burawoy's 'Extended Case Study' to develop a more complete theory of PAR's ability to be inclusive of action (or change) and implementation. (Friedlander, 2001). This study hopes to lead to a PAR that is inclusive in its origination and reflexively answers how and why the issues of this coastal community occur.

The Study Setting

In early 2004, the National Science Foundation funded a collaborative research project offering a unique, exploratory methodology for hazards research for a small rural Louisiana community¹. The NSF project was designed to address community sustainability, characterized by environmental quality, quality of life, disaster resiliency, vibrant economies, and equity as developed through local consensus building (Mileti,

¹ "Collaborative Research-Small Grant for Exploratory Research: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Coastal Vulnerability and Community Sustainability" Award No: CMS-0408496 Award Date: 2/2/04

1999). The purpose of this NSF research was to explore: (1) cultural heritage; (2) disaster research risk communication, protective actions and participatory community meetings; (3) constructed and physical environment; and (4) the use of PAR within this research context. The project proposed that PAR was a viable and culturally appropriate research strategy for use in this community. Expected methodological outcomes were listed as: (1) exploring PAR as a tool for hazards research; (2) training the next generation of hazards researchers on field work using PAR; (3) assessing the viability of PAR as a strategy to connect researchers with end-users; and (4) examining the process of PAR within a marginalized community rich in cultural diversity. The NSF project proposed incorporating a variety of processes including discussing research opportunities, developing a research agenda and strategy with the community, initiating projects and presenting results to the community for their feedback. The project officially began in January 2004, but some preliminary community work began earlier, such as the formation of the community's non-profit organization in February 2003. Funding ended in December 2004, yet collaborative work continues well past August 2005.

The defense of this thesis was prolonged due to the natural disaster we all feared, 2 hurricanes hit the coast of Louisiana in late summer 2005. The last point of contact with the community was prior to August 29th that year. This document is composed, as it would have been at the last point. All data was collected before the storms and this is a retrospective evaluation of where the community was before the storms. As you read through this setting, understand the community is very different from what I describe, however, this research firmly sets the stage for future investigation.

The research population consisted of a community who overall self-identify as Native American (Atakapas and Houma) and Cajun French. However, some residents independently identify themselves as French, Acadian or Hispanic heritage. The community, accessible only by boat, was composed of about 25 families, with approximately 75-80 people actually living in the community (personal communication with community resident). The adults, age 40 and over, sometimes have less than a high school education. The families are close knit and at times included 3 generations in one household. The community relied upon the assistance of each other for everyday life as well as for recovery from flood events. Their homes were modest and showed signs of deferred maintenance, as well as the damages of several hurricane and flood events.

The community has traditional ecological knowledge, and much of the community earned a living by seafood harvesting and animal trapping. Others found oil-related employment outside the community. Many have a significant faith-based position, beginning and ending most community activities with prayer.

As shown in Figure 1.1 (Community Aerial) this is a coastal, somewhat isolated rural place, south of New Orleans and outside of any hurricane levee protection system. Access to the community is by a single highway; the solitary ingress and egress for the southern portion of the parish (county). The Mississippi River and its levee are to the left of this highway and to the right of the highway is a lower levee protecting it from the Gulf. A one-mile long shell road leads to the community's car parking lot and boat dock. Residents normally kept their boats at their own docks located along the bayou and in front of their homes. They traveled with family members, neighbors, animals, groceries, or other supplies to and from the community dock and their parked cars. Community

phone lines and parish-provided fresh water supply arrived in the early 1990's. As of August 2005, sewer lines run unchecked and unregulated to the back of the properties. Until sewer lines are available and water quality improves, it is illegal to sell oysters harvested from the community.



Figure 1-1 Community Aerial

An associate partner took this community aerial. To the upper right is the Gulf of Mexico. To the left (not shown) are the Mississippi River and the only highway access to the southern part of the parish (county).

The community has struggled to balance the threat of natural hazards, economic development, community and cultural sustainability. However, the residents put forth a great effort to survive in a place that experiences annual natural hazards and the everyday

loss of their coastline due to slow on-set erosion and subsidence (note the land loss in Figure 1.1). The community members report that cattle and crops were raised on the land behind their homes at one time. Additionally, residents were frustrated by staggering threats to their community's economic well-being as well as their traditional, historic cultural sustainability. Economic threats were the increasing cost to operate boats, confounding insurance costs, and the continuous struggle of people whose livelihood relies on the fishing/shrimping/oystering industry. Their livelihoods depended on the conditions of a vulnerable coast. Threats to their historic cultural sustainability come from the influx of 'outsiders' by way of folks who used their docks to fish as if they were public property. Even the influx of researchers and academics working with the community may be viewed as cultural threats.

The residents spoke of the place where they lived as part of them. They believed they had been placed on this land at this time to protect it. One resident states that the bayou has always been giving, he can always throw out a fishing line and catch something to feed his family.

A description of the research partners supplements the understanding of the collaboration employed in this project. Figure 1.2 below, depicts some of the multi-disciplined academics and practitioner partners. The academic partners were also multi-university (from several states) with specialties in community planning, environmental sociology, environmental studies, diversity and women's studies, engineering, architecture, and disaster studies. The academics were mostly PhD's, with 2-3 master's students and usually one undergraduate student. Practitioner partners were from the areas of management, urban planning, disaster relief and recovery, state outreach programs,



Figure 1-2 Partner Meeting

local, state and federal government agencies and also included a healthy faith-based representation. The partners brought important and sometimes essential ideas and skills to the mission for meeting the requests of the community.

The academics and practitioners helped to organize events, provided facilitators and guided the research activities proposed by the community. Events were mostly held in the community, but some activities occurred at the academic campus. The academics and practitioners very much wanted to work on this project, and rarely, with the exception of the graduate students, was compensation provided for their work. Some travel expenses were reimbursed for the academics and practitioners, but every effort was made to keep expenses to a minimum. The partners mostly held strong faith beliefs, which matched well with the community.

This is an introduction to the setting and a brief summary of theory used to guide the analysis. The following chapters detail the literature on PAR, social change, conflict, and disaster theory. The next chapters include the methods and data employed, the findings and analysis and lastly a conclusion of the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

“Action research has been described as a method of participative investigation focused on ‘generating knowledge about a social system while simultaneously trying to change it’” (Lewin, 1948)

The above quote forms a basis for a PAR methodology. PAR is termed a methodology, and can be more deeply described as incorporating theoretical foundations that lend themselves to a particular methodology. The basic assumptions of PAR (such as the community guided research that avoids land loss) allow theory to be put into practice (the community wants change). In this sense PAR is a social idea, linking the theory question of why a phenomenon occurs (land loss), with the methodology of how that phenomenon can be changed (land conservation).

Theoretical Perspective

This study incorporates a theoretical lens or perspective to steer the investigation into the PAR process. This is a micro-level theory, limited to a small interval of time, number of people, and geographical space (Creswell, 2003). Using PAR, a researcher attempts to identify “what is knowledge, how we know it, what values go into it, and how we write about it” (Creswell, 2003: 6). In a PAR process, researchers “proceed collaboratively so as not to further marginalize the participants as a result of the inquiry” (Creswell, 2003: 10). Under PAR, Creswell assumes the voices of the community and the researchers will collaboratively unite for reform and change. This study analyzes whether PAR is the appropriate method to work collaboratively within a marginalized coastal community, to effect changes the community desired.

In using the PAR method, communities are not compelled to find ‘ways of seeing’ their situation that match or neatly fit into established theory. Instead they are able to

freely construct (and reconstruct) theories around their situations, unlike social scientists that work from within a tradition of a more normative social theory. For example, a community realizes or decides a change must be made. Therefore, after critical reflection on the situation, the community assembles a goal to make that change. The community can theorize (construct) how the current situation arose, and from this starting point, can begin to decide how change (reconstruction) might be accomplished. Academics and practitioners participate in this process by offering guidance or assistance in the research.

PAR may be the only methodology that emphasizes that theory is tested in live action contexts (Reason, 1994). PAR research is an approach to inquiry that “may be seen as living processes of coming to know rather than as formal academic method” (Reason, 1994: 325). Reason also raises the question of who owns the knowledge and thus who can define the reality. Basic PAR makes an effort to provide a way for community partners to work with communities to collaboratively define and change knowledge.

What theory do we use to study a PAR methodology? This study began by looking to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) who offer several concepts. The first PAR concept offered by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000: 595) is that “the spiral of self-reflection is best undertaken collaboratively by co-participants in the research process” holding that PAR is best conceptualized in collaborative terms. A second concept is that PAR research is both a social and educational process. It is directed at changing the social, but the change happens through education. A problem is to be researched before an educated solution can be offered. A third concept states “if practices are constituted in social interactions among people, then changing practices is a social process. One person

changing obliges another person to react or respond differently to that individual's changed behavior" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000: 595). PAR suggests an opportunity for communities and researchers to reconstruct their interactions among themselves and among others. A final concept offered by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) is that PAR is a critical reflection of everyday issues which can be negotiated and changed by the collaboration of researchers and the community. Kemmis and McTaggart's concepts guide this research.

Kemmis and McTaggart's concepts suggest PAR is a collaborative undertaking, is both a social and educational process, an opportunity to reconstruct interactions among participants, and provides critical reflection of everyday issues which can be changed by collaborative actions. In a combination of theory and method (see Data and Methods section for more discussion) all of the above assertions can be used to reconstruct "an alternative model of social science and thus [lead] to alternative explanatory and interpretive practices" (Burawoy, 1998: 6).

Gaps and Improvement in the Literature

While there is a large amount of literature on PAR, there is little integration of how or why this process works in communities. The literature is incomplete regarding how best practices can avoid and overcome the inherent differences that occur between community and researcher partners such as our cultural identification of knowledge production, organizing and power. Moreover, there is little understanding in the PAR literature of how minority communities communicate and how researcher partners can identify and adapt to an appropriate method of communication (Reason, 1994, Healy, 2001, Fenge 2002, Stoecker 1999). This study hopes to fill some of these literature gaps.

PAR is not a new practice, but it is a new method in disaster research. It holds simple and valuable best practices, but PAR is not for the 'faint of heart'. From personal experience, it is a difficult methodology to work with and to carry out correctly. The implication of this PAR research is that it will help us better understand a community's oppression and commitment to bring about powerful social change through reflexive social practice; it will advance the understanding of inequality of community and partner researcher relationships; and it will better prepare PAR researchers to value the significant commitment essential to create a successful PAR project.

Change Theory

To place the community's case study into change theory requires some background information. The expression 'social change' is a sociological term used to denote modifications in social relationships (Preston, 2000). Social change is the study of variation and alteration in social 'systems'. Within social change, there are inherent problems of identity and dimensions of change, and rarely does one source produce one effect. Social change occurs in all societies, however, for people of very traditional societies this change may be so incremental that the members of the society are hardly aware of it (Preston, 2000).

Before change occurs according to Kurt Lewin (1948), there are three stages: unfreezing, changing and refreezing. Before there is change, there is the 'unpacking' or denial of previous beliefs, followed by action to make the change, and then the refreezing or situating the change as the 'normal' from now on. These stages are especially relevant in this study where cultural norms are multi-generational as in this community.

Ritzer (2000) focused on a positive form of social change where change assumes that as society evolves, it generally grows more proficient in coping with its problems. Yet, as new societies evolve and change, they pose new problems to existing societies. The solution according to Ritzer is to include formerly excluded societies in the construction of new societies, thereby including a wider array of skills and abilities. However, this construction of a new society often meets resistance from groups committed to their own narrow value systems and group conflict develops (Ibid). Conflict Theory addresses some of the resistance brought about by new social groups, or as in this study, an existing social group who has made the decision to battle unfair or unbalanced conditions to bring about positive social change for themselves.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is based on the idea of competition and inequality among different groups of people or different groups in society, an imbalance between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. Conflict theorists hypothesize that every society at every point is subject to processes of change and that dissension and conflict are at every point in a social system (Ritzer, 2000, Dahrendorf, 1958, 1959). In Conflict Theory, people of unequal (usually lesser) power or authority take a critical look at their situations and decide to make changes.

Conflict theorists suppose the order or ranking of social arrangements in our societies comes from the coercion of the disadvantaged by the elites of society. An example would be the Civil Rights movement that challenged the situation where whites coerced blacks into situations of submission through intimidation. Ritzer (2000: 259) claims conflict theorists “emphasize the role of power in maintaining order in society”.

Dahrendorf (1959, 1968) reasons that conflict theorists should examine the coercion that holds society together in the face of these stresses [the roles of power and submission]. Coercion is the maintenance of social order, according to Dahrendorf, and allows the status quo to continue.

Frequently, the conflicting argument is raised by the marginalized, the have-nots, those not in power. Conflict, especially over authority or power, arises from a reflexive look at a situation – how did we get here? what happened to put us in this place? what patterns of cause and effect are at the foundation of this situation? Ritzer (2000:259) states “we cannot have conflict unless there is some prior consensus”. In other words, groups of people (sometimes unlikely groups) agree to come together to engage in conflict with a third group. From this reflexive look at the past, societal issue groups can do two things: 1) agree that changes must be made and 2) formulate what and how changes are to be made.

Healey (2001) writes a critical appraisal of the promise of PAR for social workers. Living the PAR philosophy according to Healy (2001) is summarized based on four major assumptions: 1) the original causes of oppression lie in macro-social structures; 2) PAR draws on conflict theory (the haves and have-nots struggling for positions of power and privilege); 3) participatory researchers support a relationship of equality; and 4) PAR emphasizes empowerment of participants to take control of the issues that shape their lives. Through conflict theory, stakeholders can begin to come to an understanding of issues within this PAR project.

Another element in understanding conflict theory is “enforced constraints” or positions in society [that] are delegated power and authority over others (Ritzer, 2000).

Ritzer (2000) follows Dahrendorf in thinking that authority resides in positions, not necessarily in people. Some positions are expected to hold authority roles while other positions hold subjugated or subordinate roles. Societies have institutionalized these authoritative/subjugated roles as generalized norms and values. However, those in subjugated roles may begin to perceive the limitations imposed upon them, realizing they may have unequal access to limited resources. The subjugated begin to ‘unfreeze’ or ‘unpack’ these imposed limitations.

According to Labor Law Talk forum, groups in societies want to maximize their benefits (http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/conflict_theory 5/7/2005). To understand conflict theory is to understand that opposition and rivalry play key roles in maximizing benefits. The following are four primary assumptions of modern conflict theory: 1) competition, 2) structural inequality, 3) revolution, and 4) war. When there are limited resources, there will be competition for these resources. When there is inequality, those in power want to keep their power. With limited resources and unequal power structures, revolution or change can occur as a result of competing interests. In other words, change occurs as societies compete for or clash over power and limited resources. The best practices of PAR can be seen as elements of modern conflict theory’s basic assumptions and precursors for change. Competition, inequality and revolution are fundamentals used in this analysis of the PAR process. War is an unlikely issue in this research and will not be addressed.

Conflict is a natural process which contributes to social evolution (Spencer, 1898) and can effect positive social progress. Conflict theory is used in this study as a guide for examining the goals and assumptions of this PAR project.

Disaster Theory

While many PAR studies have focused on the less advantaged, no specific PAR studies were found in disadvantaged rural communities facing environmental and/or nearly daily disaster challenges such as the one presented in this study.

Damage and economic impacts of natural disasters have been growing exponentially (Mileti 1999) with Louisiana experiencing significant impacts in recent years. Smaller communities, including unincorporated and rural areas, often lack adequate attention, advocacy and resources in facing, responding to or recovering from disasters (Hienz Center 2002). This community represents an appropriate location for generating knowledge about people's vulnerabilities to loss.

This research has generally followed Blakie, Cannon, Davis & Wisner's (2003) Pressure and Release model of disaster theory (this document page 7). Blakie et al, proposes that social vulnerability and natural hazards work together to generate disasters. Pressure builds from social and natural causes, and is released through a disaster. The community in this study suffers daily natural hazards such as salt-water intrusion, subsidence and land loss, as well as the social vulnerabilities of little access to resources and poor physical, social and economic environments. Social stability (or instability) has a role in disaster events.

PAR Literature

The PAR literature is very extensive and has origins from Lewin whose central interest was in how to conceptualize and promote social change (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). According to Greenwood and Levin, Lewin makes a case for a three-stage process of change: existing conditions, intervention, and then return to stable conditions

(unfreezing, change, refreezing). But this is a limiting view of PAR. Greenwood and Levin (1998) maintain PAR should be a continuous participative learning process, often with no absolute final goal. Most PAR studies focus on developing countries, but more are being conducted in North America in publications such as *“Voices of Change”* edited by Peter Park (1993).

Using a PAR methodology as an effective means of doing research in a disaster prone community was the basis for the funding of the NSF Grant to the multi-university, multi-disciplinary team of stakeholders in this paper. For this thesis, PAR studies were obtained from journal articles in the areas of medicine/health/nursing, and a community action research project. Five PAR studies, three of nursing, one of health care, and one of community action research were chosen because they included references to the basic assumptions of PAR and each defined their research unit as a community. In addition to the PAR studies, 21 sources [two books, 19 articles] were chosen for their descriptions of basic PAR assumptions or their conceptual views of PAR. For this study, a PAR project is assumed to include a community and a combined group of researchers/practitioners.

This literature review is organized by basic assumptions common in PAR, beginning with the essential elements of community involvement from Lindsey and McGuinness (1998). Eight basic assumptions of PAR organize this review, mostly taken from Lindsey and McGuinness (1998). Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) present four major assumptions under the umbrella of community involvement (commitment, organizing, philosophy and leadership style); these assumptions can be separate or stand alone and are presented below with similar or contrasting arguments. In addition, Lindsay and McGuinness (1998) mention four more assumptions under the topics of

empowerment, power, ownership of knowledge and time (as a consequence of commitment). Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) article forms the basis for evaluating comparable or divergent literature on PAR.

Concepts and Assumptions

1. Commitment

An essential element for both the community and the partners in a PAR project is a long-term commitment. Lindsey and McGuinness (1998), in their qualitative study of significant elements of community involvement in a PAR project, stress that planning for commitment is necessary for participation. At the beginning of their project, Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) knew that in order to maintain the project plan it was essential to get a commitment from key community stakeholders who would remain involved after the research concluded. Others were motivated to support the project based on the community's initial support. Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) consider a long-term commitment as critical to the success of a PAR project.

In their research of nursing partnerships and collaboration, Titchen and Binnie (1993: 859) state "Where the actor/change agent is the researcher, the commitment to the action has potential implications for the objectivity of the study and for the willingness of participants to disclose information fully". The commitment of the researcher has an effect on the commitment of the participants to be truthful in their discussions of the actions to be taken. Titchen and Binnie's study adds a dimension (that of full disclosure) to the commitment of the participants, extending the basic components of Lindsey and McGuinness (1998).

In a study to explore child care issues and support the development of improved child care, Lax and Gavin (2002) develop commitment as a time constraint. The advance of a shared value base and principles requires alliances and learning to work in an interdisciplinary fashion with researchers and residents to listen and hear each other's perspectives, and acknowledge participant differences. This is essential to the process of commitment, but commitment requires active listening and hearing. In agreement with Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998) Lax and Gavin (2002: 383) perceive another key component of commitment to be the successful reduction of "professional boundaries and power bases through learning from, and with, other professionals to use and build on each other's skills, knowledge and experiences". Additionally, they quote Oliver (1999) who "argues that having a vested interest in the research process and outcomes is a strong motivating factor for lay individuals to participate" (Lax and Gavin 2002: 384). Lax and Gavin consider lay participants as 'inter-professional' (a lay person expert who experiences daily living in the community) who should be regarded as professionals or co-researchers. They claim that the key to success is "commitment at *all* levels of time, resources and support for organizational change to bring about changes in the structures and systems that inhibit or restrict 'inter-professional' workings" (p. 384). Lax and Gavin (2002) conclude that inter-professional workings may prove more challenging than many professionals are prepared to acknowledge (quoting Higgins et al., 1994).

Once commitment and planning of a PAR project is discussed and understood by all participants, development of the community and researcher organization can begin.

2. Development of Organizing

In attempting to address community problems, Beckwith and Lopez (1997) describe community organizing as “organizers [who] organize organizations” (adapted from Heather Booth, founder of the Midwest Academy). Beckwith and Lopez (1997: 2) contend that community organizing is “NOT a technique for problem solving”.

Community organizing is the coming together of those who want change. In order to organize, people must see a potential harm if they do or do not organize. Also, they must believe that organizing will have an impact; otherwise they would just stay home.

Community organizing and PAR are compatible in that they both are components of working towards social change. Beckwith and Lopez (1997) define community organizing as:

“the process of building power through involving a constituency in identifying problems they share and the solutions to those problems that they desire; identifying the people and structures that can make those solutions possible; enlisting those targets in the effort through negotiation and using confrontation and pressure when needed; and building an institution that is democratically controlled by that constituency that can develop the capacity to take on further problems and that embodies the will and the power of that constituency” (<http://comm-org.utoledo.edu/papers97/beckwith.htm> July 7, 2005)

Organization precedes social change. The structural organization of a PAR project in Lindsey and McGuinnis’ (1998) community involvement article considers the development of an organizing unit within the community. The structural framework of an organization includes technology, formal roles and relationships and organizational goals (Selener, 1998). A community organizing unit is a recognized group who have decided to work together – usually for social change. Arranging community organizing meetings, maximizing community involvement and the elements of time and effort

anticipated and expected in the research project are important aspects of organizing. To maintain the commitment of the organization, it is important to acknowledge the organizational progress and to ensure that the project goals have broad acceptance. In the small coastal community represented in this study, ‘organizing’ was a new structure. Not in the logic of organizing to repair a home or a boat, but uncommon in the sense of organizing for social change of the community. In addition, in the Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) study, the organization requested a conclusion to the work, a notification or acknowledgement of completion of the work effecting future change. Putting a conclusion on the Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) study (a report, a summary of the work carried out) aided the organization’s sense of accomplishment.

Organizing under PAR requires respect, equity and empowerment to guide this process (Santiago-Rivera, Morse and Hunt, 1998). The Santiago-Rivera et al. study describes a community-based research partnership in a culturally distinct community. Early on, the researchers realized that in order to build trusting relationships, it would be “necessary to learn about the community’s culture and to take direction from them” (p. 171). The challenge for Santiago-Rivera et al. in conducting their research and building an organizational structure, was to adapt their communication style, establish project parameters and roles, resolve differences, exchange knowledge and to gain acceptance and trust from all participants. Santiago-Rivera et al. realized all of the above actions would affect the structure of the organization and the maintenance of the partnership much like Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998). Organizing partnerships are formed to effect change and improve situations. This principle assumes outside researchers will establish

a collaborative partnership [organization] with the community during the process of conducting research studies.

Fenge (2002), who studied the importance of approaching research with minority groups in an inclusive way, assumes that PAR workers will encourage minority groups to have a 'voice'. In organizing for a PAR research project, 'invisible' populations such as the elderly or those who for some reason may not divulge their true identities in fear of some backlash should be considered (Fenge 2002). Diversity is a key theme in Fenge's research, and ensures an inclusive approach that puts the language of the 'invisible' population on the project's agenda. Incorporating diverse voices early in a PAR project enhances Lindsey and McGuinness' (1998) structural component of developing an organization.

In a study of the chronically ill and their actions to take control of their situations, Koch and Kralick (2001) state that the one of the most important aspects of the PAR process was the chance for the ill to tell their stories, to have their voices heard. Koch and Kralick's (2001: 28) participants "experienced a sense of validation through telling their stories...the experience of being heard for the first time was validating for their sense of self and identity" and that "the sharing of stories provided a potent means for initiating self-reflection and critical action and this aspect should not be underestimated". Koch and Kralick (2001) incorporated an inclusive approach to diversity in their PAR project organization as was suggested by Fenge (2002).

Prior to putting a PAR project into operation, a community should be trained claims Reardon (1998) who writes about using PAR for service learning. He reasons that within PAR, the community should be allowed organizational and community

development training in order to be knowledgeable and responsible for implementing project plans. This allows a better use of time and a better understanding of research processes once the project begins. Reardon' (1998) suggestion also fits Lindsey's and McGuinness's (1998) commitment criteria.

According to Balfour and Clarke (2001), in their study on self-medication, critical reflection is recognized as a key concept in leading and developing change processes. Critical reflection is "one of knowledge and expertise and that innovation [change] is wrapped up in empowering the formerly oppressed and subordinated groups" (Balfour and Clarke 2001: 47). Yet Balfour and Clarke reflect: "action research on its own will not change practice...it requires ownership and a belief by all [participants] that the end result is a shared one" (p. 47). Therefore the concept of 'what's in it for me' belongs in Lindsey and McGuinness' (1998) planning and organizing stages. This concept 'what's in it for me', adds dimension to Lax and Gavin (2002) 'inter-professional' or lay person expert by examining a characteristic of the inter-professional. (this document page 27).

Organizational structures according to Lax and Gavin (2002) were important factors in their study of a housing 'estate'² that explored the improvement of local childcare issues. Lax and Gavin (2002: 383) claim "These [organizational] structures should facilitate local communities in planning, setting agendas and decision-making processes that supported sharing power and responsibility, therefore having a greater impact on influencing the broader determinants of [the child care issues]". These organizational structures work best when facilitated by the lay persons in the project and when flexible services and resources are provided. Flexible services and resources are

² An Estate (or housing estate) (mostly UK) refers to a defined area of housing, usually in a common style or built during the same period. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estate_\(area\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estate_(area))

“achieved through the creation of a single organizational framework, a dedicated project leader, decentralized control of resources and a common budget” (Higgins et al., 1994, as quoted in Lax and Gavin, 2002: 383). Organizational structures developed and supported by the community have greater impact, flexibility and dedication from the community.

Similar to Beckwith and Lopez, Edelman (2000:13) defines a community-based initiative as “social programs that represent a variety of strategies whose shared properties include a focus on the community as a site for delivering comprehensive, integrated services, and the meaningful inclusion of individuals, associations and institutions in the neighborhood in a program planning and implementation”. Edelman’s article questions whether these programs (community –based initiatives) work, because he claims that so many professionals see this approach as promising, only to see it fail. The key to success according to Edleman is evaluation of outcomes. The evaluation of community organizing holds a key to the outcomes of a PAR methodology as an effective strategy in a community and adds another dimension onto the Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998) study.

In their practitioner/researcher relationship study, organizing relationships are explored by McCrystal and Godfrey (2001) and can be applied to the development of partner/community relationships in an organizing scenario. McCrystal and Godfrey (2001) acknowledges that [‘organizing’] partnerships appear in many forms [partner to partner, community resident to partner, community resident to community resident]; that there must be acceptance and addressing of differences among the partners and community residents; the organization or partnership must promote mutual understanding and respect; the organizational relationship should develop practice-based or community-

based research; and it should establish trusting relationships. Moreover, McCrystal and Godfrey claim researchers should let practitioners [or participants] set the research agenda and should acknowledge the participants' professional perspective. Lastly, researchers must maintain the belief that practice-based, research-informed reflection leads to a more effective social practice. McCrystal and Godfrey conclude that 'organizing' relationships [in particular practitioner/researcher relationships] are not well defined in the literature.

It is generally accepted that conflicts occur in any organizing effort. Pettitt and Ayers' (2002) quantitative study examined the relationship between community college organizational climate and the conflict communication styles of individuals and job groups within the college. Pettitt and Ayers (2002) claim conflict should be encouraged rather than extinguished in community organizing. They contend it is better to cultivate open and trusting atmospheres and to celebrate the evolving, diverse nature of information perspectives and involvement by people who are decision-makers. Conflict and the 'organizing relationships' explained by McCrystal and Godfrey (2001) in community organizing are neglected by Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998).

Organizational structure in a PAR project takes careful consideration of all aspects of the project. Conflicts emerge in organizations and should be encouraged for better understanding and ultimately to build stronger relationships and partnerships. Sharing the research agenda between partners and community leads to better social change, allows for greater impact in the community, as well as shared ownership of the research. Once the project is organized, engaging the community and partners in meaningful relationships is vital for the goal of social change.

3. Living the Philosophy

Living the philosophy of PAR according to Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998) involves engaging the community, facilitating research connections, developing partnerships and promoting effective change. In Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998) nursing study, developing a trusting, collaborative relationship was critical to the implementation of PAR and required demonstration of interest and concern, being reliable and inclusive, valuing diversity and being attentive and responsive to community issues.

Another aspect of living the philosophy is communication. Pettitt and Ayers (2002) community college organizational climate study uses a ‘see-saw’ to explain that communication is in trouble when the ride *stops*. They believe encouraging conflict provides responsive and collaborative communication of community issues. Encouraging conflict increases communication and supports Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) idea of living the philosophy of PAR by being attentive and responsive to community issues.

In an effort to engage the community, develop partnerships and promote effective change, Balfour and Clarke (2001) live the philosophy of PAR by exploring nursing staff perceptions surrounding development of the practice of self-administration of medication for patients. Balfour and Clarke (2001: 46) reason that action research “brings researchers and practitioners [and patients] together to identify potential problems, arrive at a new common understanding, and develop new local theories and then plan for initiating change processes”. Balfour and Clarke (2001: 46) judge this ‘bringing together’ as a powerful strategy to use for change models. Action research or PAR is a

collaborative effort for the promotion of social change which engages the community and partners according to Lindsey and McGuinness' (1998) 'living the philosophy'.

Koch and Kralik's (2001: 26) study of the chronically ill found PAR to be "a disciplined inquiry that requires a focused effort to improve the quality of people's lives". This focused effort required development of a trusting, collaborative relationship, being reliable and inclusive, and attentive and responsive to community issues or living the philosophy (Lindsey and McGuinness (1998)). Similar to Balfour and Clark's (2001) study of self-medication, Koch and Kralik (2001: 26) perceived the philosophy of PAR as useful to "enable the participants to set their own agenda and to prioritize issues they wish to discuss...to encourage participants to systematically investigate their problems and issues, formulate experiential accounts of their situations and to devise plans to deal with the issues identified". Living a PAR philosophy according to Koch and Kralik (2001) follows Stringer's (1999: 10) guiding principles of being democratic, equitable, liberating, and life enhancing. These beliefs extend Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) principals of engaging, facilitating, and developing communities to promote change.

Living these philosophies encourage community involvement, ownership and responsibility of issues that promote social change. Effective change is a factor of engaging the community, developing trusting relationships, encouraging open and often conflicting communication, and following democratic, fair and life improving principles. Effective change can be a result of living the PAR philosophy. These philosophies are also essentials of good leadership style to incorporate a PAR methodology.

4. Leadership Style

According to Lindsey and McGuinness' (1998), leadership style was a large part of PAR's success in the community they studied. Lindsey and McGuinness (1998: 10) state that the "leaders built egalitarian relationships while being cognizant of the power relationships inherent in community groups". The participants in the study commented on the researcher's strong interpersonal communication skills, flexibility, willingness to learn, and to admit their [the researchers'] own limitations.

Leadership style when working with communications can be a significant element in a PAR project. Santiago-Rivera, Morse and Hunt (1998) adapted their style of communication to facilitate dialogue, and reevaluated their skills, attitudes, and styles to effectively communicate with the community. They realized communication style of leadership can easily be distorted, and a given social structure may itself be a structure of systematically distorted communicative actions (citing Forester, 1983). They were also aware that their literature capacity may not reflect culture specific values, customs and behaviors and could thus render inaccurate interventions (citing Dana, 1993). It took careful planning to explain concepts or convey messages that would promote dialogue between the project leaders and the community. Had the leaders of this project (Building a Community-Based Research Partnership: Lessons from the Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne) not been aware of the potential difficulties of communication style, their leadership style and project would not have been as effective. Effective, value-aware communications is an important feature of leadership in a PAR project.

Another strong component of PAR leadership involves the type and quality of communication. Communication is defined by Wallace (1999) as a dynamic and continuous progression that involves human interaction and facilitates an exchange of ideas, feelings, messages and information. This process allows the establishment of a relationship with individuals to fulfill a variety of professional roles. According to Wallace (1999), required leadership communication skills are observing and interpreting behavior, listening effectively, matching verbal and non-verbal messages, being able to convey messages in writing and orally, knowing how to respond to perceived messages appropriately, reflecting on the effectiveness of one's communication patterns and adjusting for improvement, and being able to analyze the process of pairs and groups. Leaders who can demonstrate these flexible, egalitarian communication skills would fit well into a PAR project (Lindsey and McGuinness, 1998). Rigorous listening presumes the PAR leadership will 'hear' the 'voice' of the community group.

In PAR, there must be acceptance and addressing of differences among the community and the partners as noted by McCrystal and Godfrey (2001). The partnership must include trust, respect and equity and it must promote mutual understanding. Basically, the leadership style should provide professional courtesy (to all participants – community and otherwise), and continuous self-reflection around all activities of common interest in the project. McCrystal and Godfrey further suggests that reflective communication leads to a more effective social practice which adds a fuller aspect to Lindsey and McGuinness' (1998) egalitarian relationships promoted by leadership style.

Effective leadership is required in PAR research because change is complex, and strategies of effective change are not 'simply linear' (Balfour and Clarke, 2001). Balfour

and Clarke (2001: 48) also state that “effective leadership [is] an essential ingredient of achieving sustained change”. The community is the only viable agent of sustaining change for itself (Balfour and Clarke, 2001: 49), and good leadership skills “are essential if [the community] is to remain dynamic and practice is to change”. Building Lindsey and McGuinness’ (1998) egalitarian relationships from the bottom up improves sustained change in a community and is best managed through leadership style.

5. Ownership of Knowledge

When conducting research with communities, approaches to research that are inclusive, participatory and egalitarian are consistent with PAR (Lindsey and McGuinness, 1998). Yet what is considered legitimate knowledge in a research process is not exactly clear. Lindsey and McGuinness do not consider epistemology as one of their major themes, but they mention ownership of knowledge in their article background, using the work of Paulo Freire (1990).

Freire (1970) set a model whereby participatory research takes a center role in learning through investigation. This creates an alternative for social change outside of normal social theories. Freire contends that the liberation of domesticated education (local expert knowledge) allows for a restructuring of education that could help change political and social domination over the poverty stricken. Allowing the community the ownership of their traditional ecological (or local) knowledge provides a subject-subject relationship in the research process of a PAR methodology. Treating local knowledge and expert knowledge systems as equivalent, promotes equal relationships between researcher partners and the community.

Participatory Action Research is designed to involve a variety of disciplines and expert knowledge levels in order to generate benefits for both research and community partners. Reardon (1998: 57) states: “participatory action research projects in which the local knowledge of community residents is joined with the professional knowledge offered by university faculty and students [could] arrive at innovative solutions to community problems”. Reardon’s statement coincides with Ritzer’s (2000) theory of including formerly excluded societies to embrace additional skills and abilities for problem solving.

A comparative study of participatory research and service learning concludes that knowledge is not imposed from external theory or expertise, but rather emerges through process and takes place through mutual sharing and respect (Blundo (2004)³. This comparative study contends that community residents, as active participants in a research project, invite the research effort into the community where learning occurs among both research and community partners. Blundo (2004:14) states “The play between the experiences and the didactic content was a central learning factor, for the researchers, while the community members recognized the strengths of their community as they began to think of the community in terms of what makes it healthy and what they had already been doing and planning”. Blundo (2004) agrees with Fenge (2002) who states that PAR advocates should acknowledge that participants ‘own’ the research process as well as the outcomes.

As previously noted, Lax and Gavin (2002) state that with the key principles of participation and collaboration of community development, there is a need for service providers to work ‘inter-professionally’ with each other and with local residents to

³ <http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/other/engagement/Journal/Issue2/Blundo.pdf>

achieve [their goals]. While Lax and Gavin (2002: 377) concede that there is no clear definition of ‘inter-professional’, they reason “lay people experiencing daily living in the community that is being ‘researched’ bring their own ‘expertise’ to the research process. Therefore they should be viewed as ‘professionals’ ”. All participants in the research process are regarded as co-researchers according to Lax and Gavin and while lay knowledge is typically regulated as holding the least value, community resident participants’ everyday knowing contributes to all types of knowledge in our modern societies.

Unless there is ownership of a social change project by the insiders or a bottom-up approach to the innovation, it will falter or even cease altogether (Balfour and Clarke, 2001; Titchen and Binnie; 1993). Recommended or suggested community change and its implementation should come from the inside, from those who have intimate knowledge and ownership of the situation. As pointed out by Balfour and Clarke (2001: 44), “change involves many complex issues. It should be worked through from a bottom-up approach and consist of repeated evaluation exercises which are akin to a cyclical strategy and include a reflective process”. In addition or complimentary to the bottom-up approach to change, Balfour and Clarke speculate 3 stages are necessary: the need for change, advocacy for an equilibrium change, and then the support of the change. Balfour and Clarke’s 3 stages are similar to Lewin’s ‘unfreezing, changing and refreezing’.

Legitimate knowledge is not well defined in the PAR literature, but it includes elements of a bottom-up, egalitarian approach. This is knowledge gained “through people’s lived experiences and aims to empower them through a true collaboration, to construct their knowledge to produce further knowledge and action that will benefit them

directly” (Reason, 1994: 378). Participants, who are empowered to know their knowledge is legitimate, are the experts to develop that knowledge.

6. Empowerment

Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) remark upon the differences between empirical (observed) and PAR research. In PAR, the people being studied are not just those who are observed (subject), but are also directly involved in the research process (researcher). Through this involvement, PAR is a social action process that focuses on empowerment (Lindsey and McGuinness, 1998 as quoting Hall 1992). One of the research goals of PAR is empowerment and resembles a subject/subject rather than a researcher/subject project.

The participants in Lindsey and McGuinness (1998: 10) study stated “[we] credit this sense of empowerment to learning about and engaging in research, to breaking down barriers that traditionally exist between various community groups, and to creating partnerships between the community and the university”. Lindsey and McGuinness’ study conclude that their “STEPS” project, a program to create a safer environment for the prevention of falls (especially in older populations), successfully engaged the community in the PAR process. The participants in their study were empowered to effect social change.

Simonson and Bushaw (1993: 36) describe participatory action research, as an alternative methodology for conducting community needs assessment. They claim that it is “difficult to say to what extent [a] community [is] empowered by the research process”. Although some services increased for the small rural community they studied, Simonson and Bushaw (1993) could not claim that these services were connected to the

research team's efforts. However, the changes that did occur could not have been accomplished by simply gathering statistical data. Simonson and Bushaw (1993: 36) conclude "the PAR model offers a method of community needs assessment that is more empowering to the members of the community than the traditional professional expert model". They claim mere involvement of the community in the research process seems more empowering than typical empirical research as predicted by Lindsey and McGuinness (1998). Empowerment is not an easily measured outcome although there are attempts at measuring the magnitude of empowerment. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000: 595) state that the "criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps (of the PAR process) faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice". Kemmis and McTaggart's criterion is a possible measurement to be used in the evaluation of empowerment in the community.

Freidlander (2001: 2) states that PAR is directed towards the discovery of information about an issue or community concern, which is aided by a facilitator and often results in empowerment of the community. The PAR process attempts to identify "what is knowledge, how we know it, what values go into it and how we write about it" (Creswell, 2003: 6). According to Greenwood and Levin (1998: 88), PAR is intended to function "to explicitly disrupt existing power relationships for the purpose of democratizing society". Empowerment increases knowledge and provides egalitarian relationships (Freidlander, 2001; Creswell, 2003; Greenwood and Levin, 1998).

Empowerment through information discovery, identifying knowledge and disrupting power is potentially the single most beneficial quality of PAR.

In a description of the development and implementation of an action research program that focuses on understanding the experiences of living with chronic illness, Koch and Kralick (2001) found that sharing experiences among chronically ill participants was crucial in self-understanding and development. They state that the “outcome of the PAR process is change... and to understand the power relationships and imbalances in the experiences of the participants and then to act to redress them” (Koch and Kralick (2001: 28). The story telling of Koch and Kralick’s participants empowered them to make individual changes in adjusting to their situations. Koch and Kralick argue that individual outcomes are acceptable and integral in the PAR approach to research.

In contrast to Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) nursing study, empowerment is not always achievable in PAR research. Stoecker (1999) in his assessment of the relevance of academics in PAR concludes that sometimes the main accomplishment of PAR is to help the community document their struggles. In the instance of documentation only, there is no empowerment or social change. Stoecker (1999) further concludes that if PAR is done correctly, academics will be irrelevant in community work – but this might be an ideal situation.

Researchers should be sensitive to how the empowerment process may disrupt the community (Reardon, 1998). If the solutions from the project are not implemented, the researchers may be blamed for this issue even though they have no real control over policy implementation by local authorities. The project cannot be seen as a way to garner resources for the campus rather than for the community. PAR seeks to enhance the

problem-solving capacities of the community through involvement and along with the research skills of the partner academics and practitioners. A community that doesn't feel empowered can negatively impact the success of a project.

Healy (2001: 95) states, "PAR is intended to empower participants to take control of the political and economic forces that shape their lives". Empowerment is difficult to measure in any study (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000); however, involvement, development and evolution of the community are possible indicators of empowerment. Empowerment is an important factor of a PAR project and is regarded as a best practice of Participatory Action Research. However, proper empowerment demands time.

7. Time and use of Time

Lindsay and McGuinness (1998) discuss an essential commitment as a desired element from the community for working in a PAR methodology. They also affirm the importance of planning considerable time for developing communication strategies. Lindsey and McGuinness highlight the fundamentals of time and effort anticipated and expected in the research project from the community, but do not address time concerns for researchers.

In agreement with Lindsey and McGuinness (1998), Reardon (1998) in writing about the use of PAR as service learning, discusses the use of time as it relates to the activities of PAR. Expanding the activities too quickly (as enthusiastic researchers and practitioners tend to do) may "overwhelm the small core of seasoned leaders who often hold these neighborhoods together" (Reardon, 1998:63-4). Reardon suggests that faculty and students [researchers] could learn a great deal from "the patience indigenous leaders

bring to their work as agents of social change” (p. 64). Additionally, Balfour and Clarke (2001) agree that combining strategies of a multi-disciplinary group is a better way of facilitating change, but caution that too much change at once can disrupt the stability of an environment. Too much too quickly reinforces Reardon’s (1998) caution of hurriedly expanding activities.

Communities work at a different pace and on a different time schedule than the typical researcher. The community may work day or night, or day and night. The coastal community in this study works seasonally and according to weather conditions because of their traditional seafood harvesting livelihoods. A researcher may also work day or night, but generally their workday is 8:00 to 5:00. It may be difficult to mesh agreeable work schedules of communities and their research partners.

Lax and Gavin (2002: 378) claim, “effective action research takes time, owing to the complexity of multiple activities occurring during the research process and to the nature of participative collaboration”. Community members frequently do not have the time to work on this research and to meet imposed deadlines on research objectives. Other community time constraints such as working more than one job or meeting basic daily needs, take priority over research. Lax and Gavin (2002) extend Lindsey and McGuinness’s (1998) study of the community’s need for time and effort in a PAR research project, but still do not mention researcher time and effort necessary.

Time spent by researchers and practitioners using a PAR methodology is different from the time used by the community. The community members typically do not have much leisure time due to their job or care-taking responsibilities. But Healy (2001: 96) quotes Peter Reason: “paradoxically, many PAR projects could not occur without the

initiative of someone with time, skill and commitment, someone who will almost inevitably be a member of a privileged and educated group”. A researcher may not have more leisure time than a community resident, and may have some of the same care-taking responsibilities, but it is the researcher’s job to produce research – it is expected as part of their salaries. Many of the practitioners are able to volunteer their time as their day job and the support of a spouse allows more leisure time and volunteering has it’s own rewards. Whether paid or not, Peter Reason’s privileged and educated group is better situated to take the time needed to accomplish PAR work.

Too often, academic systems do not promote collaboration with non-academics (Stoecker, 1999). Academic systems reward publishing and conference presentations that promote the name of the institution. The community members sacrifice their time and efforts in the project while academics publish and receive credit for their work in communities, yet little or no social change occurs. Stoecker claims that sometimes the main accomplishment of PAR is that a community was helped in the documentation of its struggles so that others [communities, academics, practitioners] may learn from it – which is a time-saver for future PAR-work researchers, but may leave the community empty handed and with no social change. More and more, institutions are considering the value of community relationships such as in this multi-university, multi-disciplined project (Stoecker, 1999).

A potential difficulty of PAR is “the great personal cost it involves, and the accompanying risk of burnout” assert Tichen and Binnie(1993: 859). Because PAR connects researcher and community member, often, more intimate relationships are formed. Researchers become keenly aware of the daily struggles of the community. The

work with the community can be emotionally draining in addition to time consuming. Some researchers find the personal cost of a PAR project to be more than expected.

8. Power Struggles

While power is not a primary focus of the Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) study, they do mention in their introduction that a fundamental assumption underlying PAR is that knowledge is related to power and that power is related to change, (quoting Couto 1987, Hall 1992 and Henderson 1995).

PAR practitioners feel the production of knowledge is not limited to scientists. Ordinary people are also capable of knowledge production. “Participatory research assumes that returning the power of knowledge generation and use to ordinary, oppressed people will contribute to the creation of more accurate, critical reflection of social reality, the liberation of human potential, and the mobilization of human resources to solve problems” (Selener 1997: 28). This concept is similar to Ritzer’s (2000) solution to change where he asks us to include formerly excluded societies, which incorporates a wider array of skills and abilities. One of the goals of participatory research is to disrupt the balance of power, placing more power in the hands of the oppressed. Placing power in the hands of the oppressed, the marginalized, the disenfranchised, grants them control over the research process, ensures the new knowledge comes from their experiences and is used for their own benefit according to Selener (1997).

Fenge (2002) examines the importance of approaching research with minority groups of older people in an inclusive way. She analyzes the “use of Participatory Action Research as a method of including service users in knowledge and theory development”

(Fenge 2002: 171). Her methodology section focuses on the central elements of power and control in research and the generation of knowledge. “It is important to be aware of issues of power and oppression within any group, and the role of the researcher in maintaining or challenging this” according to Fenge (p. 176). Consistent with most of the literature, Fenge contends that in issues of power and powerlessness, an individual’s voice, ideas and beliefs are important elements of participatory research. Yet she raises a paradox taken from Healy (2001: 176) in that “PAR call[s] upon the power of researchers to initiate projects and promote participant involvement”. Without the power of educated researchers, issues of minorities may remain ‘invisible’. Therefore, “acknowledgement of the researcher’s power is also a vital part of the process, and one which has been absent from PAR to date” (Fenge quoting Healy, 2001: 176). Fenge stresses “it is important to keep sight of the role of researcher and the influence this may have on participants due to the paradox between participatory approaches and underlying research power” (p. 177).

It is not clear why questions of power are rarely addressed in research on partnership states Hastings (1998). Hastings considers how the answer to these questions may start from the idea that transformative relationships are an important expression of the exercise of power within partnerships and explores whether components of transformation really occur during the progress of an actual partnership involving public- and private-sector organizations. Lindsey and McGuinness’s (1998) study could have benefited from the ideas of Hastings (1998) analysis of the exercise of power within PAR partnerships because power and the production of knowledge are substantial basics of a PAR process. The idea is to democratize the creation of knowledge, and to free it from

the strong hold of elites. For academics to let go of the production of knowledge goes against most researchers' method of operation. (Stoecker, 1999)

According to Lofman, Pelkonen and Pietila (2004), participants should be aware of the possibility of power (or perceived power) of researchers, which may be masked as subtle exploitation. An example given is the possibility that a community believes expert knowledge to be ultimate knowledge, overriding their traditional ecological knowledge. It is important to ensure an equal balance of power between researcher and participant (Lofman, et al.). Lofman, et al. conclude that communities are questioning the need for outside researchers and claim that PAR does not do enough for the development of their communities. The significance of power in partnerships is not given enough consideration by Lindsey and McGuinness (1998).

Balfour and Clarke (2001) saw 'see-saw' encounters in the transfer of power among the participants in their study of nursing practices around patient self-medication, particularly between the nurse and pharmacy staff. The transfer of power between the participants caused tension and at times "power issues [were] clearly overriding all other issues" (Balfour and Clark 2001: 48). When a group has power in a situation, there is a reluctance to let go of it (this document page 21). However, these issues were discussed in the Balfour and Clarke focus groups and the power base is now seen as being under 'patient safety' as opposed to residing within any one group. The 'power' in this PAR partnership transferred to 'patient safety' and away from any person-held position.

Another point of Balfour and Clark (2001: 49) is that while the role of practitioners and researchers is vital in a project, "the academics [researchers] need to move on from the 'role of creator and transmitter of generalizable knowledge to that of

enhancing the knowledge creation capacities of individuals and professional communities' (quoting Eraut 1985: 117). Researchers should empower the community to create their own knowledge. If knowledge is power then transfer of knowledge is the transfer of power.

A basic assumption of PAR is that communities have a traditional ecological knowledge base capable of generating knowledge to guide actions for their own benefit (Selener, 1997). But this knowledge is typically given low value because it does not follow formal rules of scientific knowledge developed by academic elites. PAR may work better if there is greater transfer of power from researcher to community.

Primary Research Question

This thesis investigates the process of using PAR among stakeholders of a natural hazards research project to promote social change in a small, rural, coastal community. Specifically, is PAR an appropriate method for effecting social change in an economic and environmentally challenged community that is at risk to natural disasters? This inquiry enhances the ability of university/ practitioner/community partnerships to work in collaboration. Typically universities enter communities with a pre-planned agenda, conduct research and leave; the community is given a multi-page report of recommendations, devoid of any action. A reflexive participatory action research program however, can allow the traditional tensions of educational social order to dissolve, while it strengthens the confidence and knowledge base of all participants. This study aims to uncover the forces at work in a PAR methodology, and clarify tensions among the commitment, organizing, philosophy, leadership styles, knowledge production and ownership, empowerment, time and the power struggle elements of Lindsey and

McGuinness (1998). Participatory Action Research can be progressive and productive research for community and academics/practitioners and lead to theory building for the stakeholders involved (Freidlander, 2001).

Chapter 3 - Methods and Data

A variety of qualitative methods were used in this study including participant observations of the community as well as community/practitioner/academic events, and focus groups and interviews from the community, practitioners and academics. Data include field notes of participant observations, transcriptions of interviews/focus groups, meeting minutes and emails. Multiple and different methods, research, sources and theories (triangulation) are used to investigate emergent patterns or themes (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003).

An Extended Case Method

According to Burawoy (1998: 217), “methodology provides the link between technique and theory. It explores ways of utilizing technique to advance theory”. The extended case method is a way to (re)construct theory out of data collected through participant observation. An extended case method looks for the unexpected and attempts to elaborate the effects of the “macro” on the “micro”, to look at the social situation as an anomaly or irregularity rather than a standard. Yin (2003: 8) declares that “a case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations – beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study”. Field notes, meeting minutes, and emails comprise the bulk of the data collected for this study. Conducting a PAR research process requires a reflexive science, an iterative process of plan, act and observe, according to (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). Because of the unique setting, culture, heritage and situation of the community under investigation, an extended case method is the most appropriate approach to conduct a study of this community/academic/practitioner partnership. The

academics and practitioners are referred to as ‘partners’, while the community is a community resident or a community member.

An extended case method should “lead to an alternative (reflexive) model of social science and thus to alternative explanatory and interpretive practices” (Burawoy, 1998: 6). An extended case method allows this study to dig beneath the binaries of expert vs. local knowledge, to look at whether empowerment is leading the community in the right direction, and whether social change has been achieved.

Burawoy (1998) strongly supports reflexive science in stating that it joining what positive science separates: observer along with participant, knowledge, social situation and location, and academic and folk theory. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, this reflexive science allows a dialogue between researchers and researched, hopefully from their ‘real’ locations of time and space, and provides the reactivity necessary for suitable data

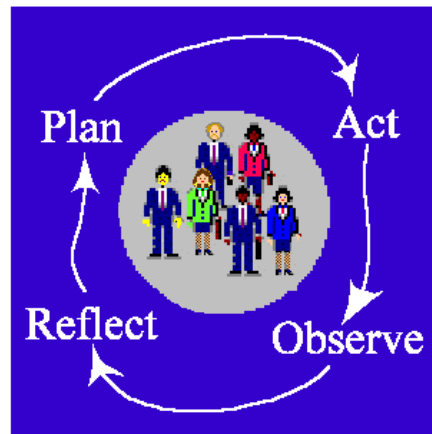


Figure 3-3 Reflexive Science

<http://www.goshen.edu/soan/soan96p.htm>)

collection. The involvement of community participants in different phases of the research process requires a qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991). Fals-Borda and Rahman believe more is gained by using logic of the

heart and sentiments rather than office or laboratory analysis which they term “cold-headed”. This fits well with the PAR process; reflexive science allows for a continued re-construction of local and expert knowledge/science and promotes the joining of the community and research partners.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research can help us understand participants symbolic communication, how their everyday lives are shaped by policy and power, their particular skills and social organization, in this particular time and in this particular location (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). In this study, two- to three-hour participant observations, one- to one-and-a-half-hour oral histories, two- to four-hour community and researcher meetings, one- to three-hour meetings with researchers only, a few minutes to one-hour telephone conversations, and generally short (less than one page) emails comprise the data collected. During the year long project, face-to-face communications occurred at least weekly and sometimes daily between partners and the community. These had an influence on the data, and are considered in this analysis.

Creswell (2003) discusses the advantage of using a qualitative method is that it allows for a rich description of the social situation under study. Oral histories and in-depth interviews give detailed information that is constructive in developing an accurate picture of human activity. Qualitative data is usually abundant and can be hard to categorize. Longer periods of analysis are required to obtain themes from qualitative data and summaries are difficult to create. Often emergent themes are difficult to detect and several passes through the data are required.

Data Collection

Qualitative research accumulates mountains of data. Yin (2003) provides three principal techniques of data collection: 1) use multiple sources of evidence; 2) create a case study database; and 3) maintain a chain of evidence of clear links between questions, data and conclusions drawn. All three are used in the data collection for this analysis.

This investigation includes five qualitative methods to examine eight identified factors of PAR: commitment, organizing, living the philosophy, leadership style, ownership of knowledge, empowerment, time, and power.

(1) The first method of qualitative data collection is documentation such as grant proposals, meeting minutes and email communications from community/researcher and from researcher/participant meetings were collected and analyzed for 8 elements of PAR.

(2) Participant observations from visits, phone calls and one researcher/community meeting were used to identify significant aspects of community organizing and relationships. As both observer and participant, Yin (2003: 93) states, “Participant-observation is a special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer” you are also a participant. Yin also maintains that while PO’s are unusual opportunities for collecting data, access to these opportunities are limited and you are still an ‘outsider’ trying to reproduce the viewpoint of someone on the ‘inside’.

(3) In-depth interviews were conducted with three academics and three practitioners. These six persons were selected as strategic members and key informants of this research, and provided various views and different perspectives. Open-ended questions were used to establish the theme of the interview and permitted unpredicted investigation. Sample questions follow in the sections below.

(4) Oral histories from four community members were chosen based on their quality of content and to ensure all age groups were represented (18 to 50+). The community developed their own oral history questions to be used in the interviews. Sample questions follow in the Oral Histories section below.

(5) Lindsey and McGuinness (1998: 4) state that “focus group interviews have been shown to be effective for the dynamic exploration of differing experiences and perceptions and therefore [are] a valuable inclusion” in this research. Two focus groups were conducted; one on risk perception and also served as a validity and reliability check with seven key members of the community, one university researcher and two graduate students, and a second focus group was held to help the community prepare for the Natural Hazards Workshop where they had been invited to tell their story of how a PAR methodology had worked in their community over the past year. Sample questions follow in the Focus Groups section.

1. Documentation

Documentation in the form of email, meeting minutes, and field notes provide a significant amount of the data collected in this study. Advantages of documentation are that it is stable, unobtrusive, exact, and allows a broad coverage (Yin, 2003). Disadvantages of documentation are access to documents, biased selectivity of the researcher, and reporting bias of the author of the individual documentation piece (Yin, 2003). In this study, all documentation was accessible, however, the researcher did select specific documentation based on its relevance to the process of PAR. Reporting bias of the author of the document is an uncontrolled event, but provides insight into understanding of routine observations from the participants. According to Yin (2003)

documented communications are useful even if they *may not* lack bias and are not always accurate or entirely truthful. Each piece of documentation was written for an objective other than specific documentation for this study and reflects communication among parties attempting to achieve some agenda other than documentation (Yin, 2003).

Communications

Communication is a continuous and dynamic process involving human interaction that facilitates an exchange of ideas, feelings, messages, and information (Wallace, 1999). This process allows the partners to establish a relationship with the community residents. Communication assists the community and the partner productivity in working toward community-established goals.

A total of 111 documented communications were collected over the course of the study and were chosen based on substantive content; those with little information or simple confirmation/information were discarded as they held little or no data about the PAR process. A database was compiled of these 111 communications with each placed into only one category. The database consists of 90 emails described below, seven field notes (three of which are notes of phone conversations), three phone calls, four phone conference summaries, three meeting minutes, two visits, one session (Boulder Natural Hazards Workshop) note, and one elaborate document of an associate partner's viewpoint. An undetermined, unrecorded number of face-to-face conversations are considered relevant and provide insight to this study. All 111 communications are considered in this analysis.

Email

Yin (2003) considers documentation to be letters, meeting minutes, written reports (field notes), and grant proposals. In this study, email provides a significant

amount of documentation of the PAR process. A total of 90 emails have been collected and placed into a database. Emails are from, to and between the researchers, and from, to and between the researchers and the community. The emails are assessed for meaning and significance, considering the context or purpose of the email as it relates to the process of PAR – particularly why it was written and the tone of its message.

2. Participant Observations

In participant observations, the researcher is able to participate as an actor in the every day lives of the people under study. These are opportunities to “perceive reality from the view point of someone ‘inside’ the case study rather than external to it” (Yin, 2003). Through these ‘daily routine’ observations, the researcher develops relationships with the community residents and can get to know the community’s environment and worldview. Participant observations allow researchers to cover events in real time, the context of the event, and provide insightful behavior and motives (Yin, 2003).

Disadvantages to participant observations are they are time-consuming, they have to be carefully selected from other important or relevant events, the observation may be contaminated because it is being observed, and is subject to observer bias (Yin, 2003).

Participant observations (PO’s) were conducted at group meetings, oral histories, in-depth interviews, phone and face-to-face conversations. One PO was acquired during a shrimp expedition one evening aboard a community resident’s boat such as the one pictured in Figure 3.2. A colleague and I were invited as ‘city girls’ to be deck hands for



Figure 3-4 Shrimping Vessel

an evening, experiencing an everyday event and collecting data on the traditional ecological knowledge of the captain, his brother-in-law deck hand, and one community resident who ‘had not done this in 20 years’. PO’s are a written record of the partner’s experiences in and with the community and are summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 1 Participant Observations

Date	Field Work	# hours
01/17/04	Participant observation – group meeting	7 hours
03/23/04	Participant observation – community meeting	6.5 hours
4/10/04	Participant observation -community meeting	5 hours
6/17/04	Participant observation -community meeting	3 hours
06/28/04	Participant observation- community meeting	3 hours
07/26/04	Participant observation and interviews	3 hours
8/6/04	Participant observation and interviews	3 hours
10/16/04	Participant observation- community meeting	3 hours
10/30/04	Participant observation and interviews	3 hours
11/7/04	Participant observation, interview & video ethnography	6 hours
11/29/04	Participant observation, interviews & community meeting	5 hours
12/1/04	Participant observation- community meeting	4 hours
1/18/05	Participant observation -community meeting	3 hours
2/18/05	Participant observation and interviews	3 hours
2/27/05	Participant observation and risk focus group	5.5 hours
6/26/05	Participant observation, PAR focus group, present findings	4 hours

3. Interviews

An interview is a conversation with a community resident, core or associate partner and the interviewing core partner. Open-ended questions are asked to obtain information about the interviewee. The interviews collected for this study were taped and transcribed, allowing analysis and evaluation at a later date. These interviews are a helpful tool for describing features of the social life of the community as well as the partners' description of the community's social life. Interviews are important and essential sources of case study information (Yin 2003), and allow for a fluid rather than rigid or survey type information gathering. The strengths of an interview are that they are focused directly on the case study topic and provide insightful causal inferences (Yin, 2003). The weakness of an interview is mainly due to bias caused by poorly constructed questions, inaccuracies due to poor recall, reflexivity because an event may proceed differently to those observing the event, and the high cost of hours needed by human observers (Yin, 2003). The community in this study determined the interview questions for the oral histories with the assistance of an academic who is experienced in conducting oral histories. The interview questions for the partners were also developed with the assistance of the same academic.

In asking interview questions, the phrasing of the question becomes an important indication of the answer provided. A 'why' question provokes a defensive answer (Becker, 1998), such as why a community resident chooses to live in this rural coastal community threatened by natural hazards, whereas a 'how' question is less constraining and does not insist upon a correct answer, for instance 'tell me how you came to live in this area'. A how question allows the respondent to tell their story. The interview

questions in this project begin with ‘tell me about’ or ‘talk about’ and follow Becker’s suggestions that ‘how’ questions give the respondent more leeway to include the important facts of the story that the interviewee may not have thought of specifically asking about, and are friendly and non-threatening according to Yin (2003). Examples of interview questions follow in the Oral Histories section.

Practitioner/Researcher In-depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted with university researchers and practitioners involved with the project. The co-principal investigators, a faith-based expert, a practitioner expert in Business Management, and a practitioner who works as the Director of the community’s non-profit board were interviewed. These researchers were integral to the project and have clear details of the project. Interview questions are similar to the ones asked in community oral histories and are designed to elicit opinions of how the PAR process handled communication, relationships or roles, community organizing and empowerment. Sample interview questions were ‘tell me how you became involved in the community project’; ‘talk to me about the strengths and successes of the community’; and ‘tell me about your thoughts for the future of this work’.

4. Oral Histories

Oral Histories were obtained in this study. Early in this project, the community requested oral histories be conducted in an effort to preserve their cultural heritage. A meeting was held in the community with the researchers, the graduate students, and several community members. At this meeting, oral history questions were developed with significant community input. Examples of oral history questions were ‘tell me about

your grandparents’; ‘tell me about being young in the community’; ‘talk about your living’; and ‘talk about what makes you stay in the community’.

The community identified ten residents as ‘priority’ interviews due to their age or health and according to the belief that these residents held valuable information to be captured as soon as possible. In their identification of who should be interviewed first, the community guided sampling for the oral history interviews. The community is small (75-80 residents) and interviews were managed as schedules permitted.

Five official oral histories have been conducted, along with two unofficial tapings of casual conversations. All collected oral histories have been transcribed. Obtaining the oral histories has been difficult as time schedules for both researchers and the community residents are unpredictable.

Yin (2003: 92) reminds us that interviews are “verbal reports only ... they are subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall and poor or inaccurate articulation”. Becker (1998: 118) advises us to look for “places where the stories told do not hold up, for the events and activities [that residents] ignore, cover up or explain away”. It is in these ignored events that we may observe at least two findings: (1) “a wealth of things to include in the body of material from which they (the residents) construct their definitions” (Becker, 1998: 118), and (2) facts not included in their reports such as hidden meaning or historical bias may be discovered.

Interviewee Demographics

The interviews from this project fall into three categories: (1) community resident, (2) core partner, or (3) associate partner. A community resident does not belong to either of the other groups; however, there are instances where an academic or a practitioner belongs to one or the other of the two identified partner groups. The

difference between the two is not the academic level but rather their involvement in the project. A core partner is one who has been actively and intimately involved from the beginning and continues to be involved. An associate partner has been moderately to minimally involved from the beginning of the project, and may have taken a more active role at the end of the project.

The first interview was with a life long community resident, who self-identifies as Cajun French and Native American. She is a homemaker and caregiver and is in the 35-55 age range. She lives in a home in the community with her mother, and her daughter who attends college but is home on weekends and during the summer. She has participated in the project since December 2003 and continues to be involved in the project as the 'voice' of the community members; she sees herself as a representative of the silent community, and wants everyone to be able to come to agreement on the issues the community faces. She was very happy to be interviewed and excited to tell her story. She seemed comfortable talking during the interview. The interview took place at the community center on October 9, 2004, and lasted 42 minutes.

A young community resident in the 18-34 year old range was interviewed. She self-identifies as Cajun French and Native American. She attends college away from the community (approximately 2.5 hours away) and has been a life-long resident of the community. She has participated in this community project since December 2003 and continues to do so, being more active in the summer months when she is not attending college. Her view of the community is one of hope; that the community could be cleaned up, the houses repaired and the land restored so that she can live there in the future. She does not want the community to be washed away. The interview and the taping of it made

her somewhat anxious (she admitted this) and was cautious about choosing her words. This interview took place on November 29, 2004 and was conducted inside the community center located in the community. The interview lasted 27 minutes.

A life-long community resident in the 55+ age range was interviewed. He has been a fisherman most of his life, but did work outside of the community for some time. His answers were short and his view of the community was sort of 'matter of fact'. He remembers a better time in the community and talked about how it has changed over time. He only identified himself as French (his grandfather was French). The interview took place at a donut shop in a nearby town and the interview lasted 20 minutes and was conducted on November 2, 2003.

Another interview was obtained from a community member in the 35-55 age range. He grew up in the community but now lives about 45 miles away, yet has a great love for the community and wants to live in the community when he retires. He self-identifies as Spanish, French and Indian (Native American). He has been a fisherman for most of his life, taking odd jobs in the oil industry between seasons. He now owns his own boat (a self-proclaimed sign that he is moving up in the world) and his son is fishing with him. The interview took place on his boat and lasted 74 minutes.

An interview was conducted with a core partner who has a PhD and is in the 55+ age range. She is an instructor at a local university and has participated in the project since fall 2003 and resides in New Orleans. She provides the community with expertise from her contacts in local, state and federal agencies and her work with the community is on a volunteer basis. The interviewee carefully chose her words and was analytical in her statements. She directs student research on the project and is very conscientious about

doing PAR correctly. The interview was conducted on February 4th, 2005 and took place at a coffee shop in New Orleans and lasted 43 minutes.

An interview with a core partner in the 35-55 age group, who is an out of state resident, was conducted. She has a Masters of Divinity and identifies herself as a resource consultant. She has participated in the community since the 2002 storms (2 storms within a week of each other) and continues to interact with the community at least weekly if not daily. She provides support of all types, but has been instrumental in promoting the community to funders and disaster recovery specialists on a volunteer basis. She has a strong faith base. This interviewee has a very positive view of the community and the process of PAR and is very attached to the community and the work. Her concern for the community and the process of PAR were evident. The interview was conducted on Dec. 9, 2004, in the graduate student office of a local university and lasted approximately 80 minutes.

An associate partner in the 55+ age range who is a local college instructor with a Ph.D. was interviewed. She is a resident of New Orleans and has been minimally involved in the community since Dec. 2003, but took a larger role in the fall of 2004 when a new grant was awarded to the community. She continues contact with the community and provides business development expertise on a volunteer basis. Commonsense language was used to answer interview questions and answers were open and genuine. The interview took place at her office on a university campus in New Orleans on March 10, 2005 and lasted approximately 47 minutes.

An associate partner in the age group of 35-55 was interviewed as a practitioner. At the time of the interview, she was a New Orleans resident and has participated in the

community since Fall 2003, as a community planner. She was not an official part of this project in the beginning, but was introduced to the community through her work as a community planner, and by a nearby resident who knew of the community's issues. The community has continued to call upon her for different local government issues. At the time of the interview, she held the position of director, which fulfilled a requirement of a separate grant (not part of the NSF grant) the community received in Fall 2004. She was very detailed in her answers and explained herself fully. The interview took place at the interviewer's home on March 19, 2005 and lasted nearly 2 hours.

A core partner with a Ph.D. in the 35-55 age bracket, from non-local university was interviewed. He is a department and center director. He has been minimally involved in the project and was introduced to this work by a colleague at his university. His expertise is in built structures. Another graduate student on this project, who reports he was calm and relaxed in the interview, interviewed him. The interview took place in his office, located in the Hurricane Center on Dec. 20, 2004 and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

A Ph.D. from a non-local university in the 55+ age group was interviewed. He is a department director and has been closely involved with the project since fall 2003. He was introduced to the community through the resource consultant mentioned earlier. He continues to work minimally with the community. His interview was candid and to the point. Another graduate student on this project interviewed him and reports he was relaxed, candid and to the point during the interview. He mentioned that working in this PAR methodology has opened his eyes to see things from the community perspective.

The interview took place at his campus office on Dec. 13, 2004 and lasted approximately 35 minutes.

5. Focus Groups

A Focus Group is a gathering of a small group of people (6 to 10) to discuss events in their community (Balfour and Clark, 2001). A focus group can be an informal group of people selected for their relevance to a project. The focus group gathers in order to share insights, ideas, and particular observations, in this case, on risk perceptions and the PAR process. The focus groups were formed for the purpose of simply identifying opinions and feeling on the issue without attempting to resolve the issue. A focus group is characterized by the assortment and variation within it and concentrates on experiences.

Two focus groups were conducted in the community. The first focus group discussed risks in the community, and was conducted by a core partner with a PhD. from the local university along with seven community members. Six of the seven were life long community residents; one has lived there for at least 15 years. All but one of the seven members currently lives in the community. This focus group interview was conducted at the community center, and around the noon meal which was provided by the interviewers. The professor served as the moderator and two graduate students assisted. Questions posed to the group were ‘Please talk about why you like living in this community’, ‘Have you ever thought about living somewhere else?’, ‘What threatens your way of life?’, ‘Do storms change your life permanently or temporarily?’, ‘Why do you think you are losing the land?’, ‘What goes through your mind when you know there is a big storm coming?’, ‘Do you think there will be a time when this place will not be safe for you anymore?’, ‘What do you worry about on a day to day basis?’, ‘Imagine the

community no longer exist, what will you miss the most?’ The various answers and discussions recorded during the focus group gave greater insight into the cognitive ways this group analyzes and frames risks. Additionally, this focus group helped to explain some inconsistencies and confirm key conclusions from preliminary observations and the first face-to-face qualitative interviews. The group was relaxed, often joking with each other and then getting serious about issues (risks) that concerned them. Towards the end of the conversations, the community had questions for the interviewers – basically, what was the purpose of our coming to the community and trying to restore it. The focus group lasted just over 2 hours.

A second focus group concentrated on the process of PAR during the grant period and attempted to uncover specifics about the work in the community. As in the first focus group, the meeting was held at the community center around the noon meal provided by the core partners. Community residents were invited to this focus group through the community non-profit chair, and the husband and wife team who were scheduled to attend an upcoming Natural Hazards Workshop in July 2005. At the conference they represented the community’s voice on the successes and challenges of working a PAR methodology in their community. In addition to the non-profit chair and the husband/wife team, and four community residents, a total of 7 life-long residents, attended the focus group.

This second focus group was co-moderated by the two graduate students on the project. Questions posed were to investigate the community’s perception of the partners and the work in the community. Each community resident was asked ‘could you talk about what it is like for you to have outsiders come into the community?’, ‘could you talk

about your hopes when new people come to the community?', 'if we were to go into another community to do similar work, what would you want to say to that community?', and 'what would you have changed or done differently?'. Their answers re-confirmed some of the information from the first focus group such as in their hopes for the future of their community. The answers corresponded with emergent themes from previously collected documentation and served as a reliability and validity check. The focus group lasted approximately 1-1/2 hours.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2003: 153) "the process of data analysis involves making a detailed description of the case and it's setting". As a compliment to Yin's three data collection principals (multiple sources, create a database, and maintain a chain of evidence), I followed Creswell's steps of data analysis and interpretation: 1) organize and prepare the data for analysis, 2) read all data; 3) begin detailed analysis, coding material into chunks, 4) use the coded material to determine a description about the setting, 5) decide how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and finally 6) make an interpretation. Focusing on the multiple sources of data (Yin, 2003), each data source was analyzed to determine evidence for recurring actions or points in the evolution of the project, within the 8 PAR elements. In order to spotlight coded material, my method of analysis engaged Creswell's (2003) adaptation of Stake's (1995) data analysis and interpretation in case study research.

From the multiple sources of data, the data was first organized by type such as email, field note or interview and all data was read over. Detailed analysis began by coding material into chunks of data. Files were produced to hold the quotes from the data

that mention or included information about the 8 PAR elements. From these 8 files, the data were gathered into smaller topics of interest that focused or refined the description or setting of the elements. For this refinement, I asked Stake's (1995) questions such as how does a PAR process fit into this setting? I searched the data for patterns and then looked for any associations between two or more of the eight elements. I then asked what could be learned from the patterns and associations between the categories.

A database of the communications (emails, phone conversations, face-to-face informal conversations, meeting minutes and field notes) was created. The 111 individual communication items were analyzed for frequency, intensity, type and general topics.

The oral histories, the core and associate partner interviews, meeting minutes, and field notes were analyzed as they related to the eight elements of a PAR methodology. The eight elements were collected using Stake's (1995) questions, paying particular attention for any 'outside' or anomalous themes which developed. According to Becker (1998: 119) "When you find events that are not accounted for ... you have usually found a new element or "variable" that needs to be incorporated into the definition of the phenomenon under study". Becker's (1998) unaccounted events represent the opportunity for reflexive science to reconstruct the possibility of PAR as a successful methodology for working in rural coastal communities facing detrimental environmental and cultural concerns. From Stake (1995), I looked for the emergence of meaning in corroborating and contesting incidents, thinking about these incidents as deeply as possible, with a primary task of understanding the case.

Triangulation, or using different methods, sources and theories were used to investigate and highlight patterns. Through triangulation of observations, interviews and document reviews, confirmation of description and interpretation will emerge (Stake, 1995). To achieve the goals of Burawoy's extended case method, I used the data collection and analytic methods recommended by Yin (2003), Creswell (1998) and Stake (1995). The patterns of observed data are represented in the quotations presented in the 'Findings' chapter, and an interpretation of the data is made in the 'Analysis' chapter.

Data Validation

Using Creswell's (1998: 195) guidelines, "Validity does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative research, nor is it a companion of reliability". Consistent themes emerging from the collection were checked among the team investigators. Emails, face-to-face conversations, field notes, interviews and participant observation were used to validate the data by the researchers and the researched, allowing for correction or clarification of data. Nearly all communication in this project between all participants is rich and thickly documented. Two graduate students were responsible for most of the documentation and have collaborated in their data collection efforts. McTaggart (1998) states that the aim of social inquiry is to expand the concept of validity to engage the social purpose of inquiry. McTaggart (1998) claims that there should be more attention paid to the defensibility of any knowledge claim made and attention given to the changing practice and the conditions and understanding which frame it. PAR research is actually a more committed and participant integrated research than the normal subject-object form of social inquiry.

In addition, a thesis committee, experienced in qualitative research methods, participatory action research, as well as local environmental issues was intimately involved in the preparation of this document. Their comments and suggestions are incorporated in this thesis, and alternative explanations investigated at their recommendation.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the project was mainly one of a planner, involving the coordination of communications, meetings, grants research and writing, facilities, referrals and contacts. Every attempt was made to practice/teach liberation for social change and empowerment of the oppressed. The work is complex and time consuming and does not progress in a linear fashion and rides a fine line between the researchers and the community on contested issues. Data has been collected in a respectful manner, but still adheres to a qualitative scientific method. There has been access to sensitive, yet important data on all sides of the community/academic/practitioner spectrum. A goal has been not to “further marginalize or disempower the study participants” (Creswell, 2003: 63).

In this writing, certain elements of this research were more compelling than others. There is much more data, findings and analysis to report than is included in this thesis. What is written has emerged as the gaps or the anomalous themes or focuses that required expansion. These are observations of the process of PAR working in a small community facing environmental and cultural disruptions.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Using Burawoy's (1998) interventionist, process, structural and reconstruction principles of an extended case study as a guide, observations are divided into the eight basic elements identified in the PAR literature. The interventionist perspective examines the outsider within stance, where the observer becomes the participant, and is able to gain access into the space and time of the subject. The process perspective unpacks participant experiences considering the community's history and current situational knowledge. The surrounding structures of the community are explored for indications of what influences the community, as it exists today. Lastly, the research should extend, expand or contest theory (Burawoy (1998).

Observations, by means of quotations from the data collected, are organized under the factors of commitment, organizing, living the philosophy, leadership style, ownership of knowledge, empowerment, time and use of time, and issues of power. Throughout the eight factors, observations from four units are represented: 1) *community resident* is someone who has lived in the community for most of their lives; 2) the *group* is the group of Friends (the partners) who work with the community; 3) *core partner* is a member of the Group and an original member of the NSF grant team; and 4) *associate partner* is a member of the Group who has taken an active role in the project. A statement about 'the partners' includes core and associate partners. A statement about 'the participants' includes all stakeholders in the project.

1. Commitment

An essential element of a PAR project is commitment from both the community and the partners (Lindsey and McGuiness, 1998). The community and the partners are

important aspects in participant involvement, time management and expected effort for an effective PAR project.

Within the documented data of this project, the topic of commitment appeared often. The value of commitment was evident from all partners. One core partner states her continued commitment in a field note:

“I know that our commitment is to all of the [community]. I stressed to her [a community resident] that I work for [the community’s non-profit], for everyone down there and that I will continue to work with the community. I spent a lot of time on the phone with [an associate partner] trying to organize and make sense of all the projects going on in the community. I was also learning who the participants were and what roles they held.”

In an interview, one of the core partners remarked on the commitment to learning the PAR process that happens before a PAR project is attempted:

“We did a literature search on PAR and we read some of the literature as we proposed the NSF (National Science Foundation) grant, and [you know that] there is extensive literature out there. It would have benefited the project for us to have immersed ourselves in the literature before initiating the project - so that we might have been better informed as to the weight of the responsibility of partnering and of both the positive and the pitfall challenges of the process.”

The community wanted a definition of commitment from the core partners they would be working with. In other words, what was the vision of the Group and how were these people held accountable. A woman community resident asked:

“Who are the Friends (Group) of the Community? What is their structure? What information is given to the Friends as they come on board with the project? Who makes the decisions to let someone join? May we have descriptions of all the friends? How can the community learn more about the Friends as individuals and what their motives are? Do the Friends share the vision of the community? Do they ‘get it’?

The core partners also had concern about commitment from non-partner or non – community members, to the community. From a core partner’s email discussing a Group general meeting:

“We are concerned that people [the Group] support the principles generated in the meeting and are wondering if the facilitator will include discussion about how we stay on task ... some kind of recurrent re-evaluation process or “staying true blue to the community”.

From meeting minutes, a core partner responds to commitment issues during the general meeting:

“The Group is working on how to structure themselves. As this process continues, information will be shared with the community. The Group will decide how to handle a Group member who has lost the vision of the community or one who just doesn’t understand the vision. It is important to keep in mind the PAR model and that the Group is working *with* the community and not *on* the community.”

A core partner’s field note from a general meeting held in the community, indicates how a community resident informs the Group about commitment to place:

“[H]er family had been there for five generations; the community was “Paradise Lost”. All residents indicated a strong desire to stay in the community as one resident said “I’m planning to be here for a while”.

In the same field note, the core partner quotes a community resident’s description of commitment to the community:

“Its all about the heart, most residents have been here in the community all their lives. It’s common for parents and grandparents to live into their nineties ... there is great history here”.

Lack of commitment also appeared with the resignation of some community residents from the board of the non-profit organization. In a core partner’s field notes,

she relays a community resident's sentiment of the board member's resignations and gives a vision of how the community has been treated in the past:

“[resident] was concerned that the [community] people no longer believed that anything was going to happen [in the community such as houses being raised]. She [the community resident] said that they had been passed over and pushed aside so many times and for so long that this seemed like just the same old thing happening again to the residents. [The resident] wants to bring the community back to the table or to the meetings again – she wants their earlier enthusiasm restored and their faith back.”

Sometimes there were strong expressions of non-commitment from the community residents. An email from a community resident indicates the tensions of the community board members and sets up the motivation of board resignations:

“The purpose [names the non-profit] was organized are exclusively charitable and educational. This organization shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on by an organization exempt from Federal income tax. We the board of [names the non-profit] was formed for the sole purpose of making sure that all decisions made are made with the community's best interest and not just for our own personal gain. No one on the board and/or the community can use the [non-profit] name on any personal projects that are made for the sole purpose of personal gain or income. This is both legally and morally wrong. We were entrusted by the community with the hopes that we would make decisions with the whole community's best interest at heart. How can they trust us if we decide to base a decision for our own personal gain? This is not and should not be what the [non-profit] stands for, we should be about unity and not self. I do not feel we are unified and a lot of decisions are being made with selfish reasons in mind. The board does not communicate and cannot even trust each other anymore. I don't feel we should be the board members if there is no unity, no communication or no trust. I think we should either step down and allow others that want to continue the [non-profit] for the reason it was formed or allow God to use us for the reason that has formed us together. If neither can be done then we need to dissolve the non-profit before we do things out of ignorance, greed or anger that can cause trouble for the community. I feel that I have only said what we all have been feeling for a long time and it is time we come together in unity or dissolve. We are not communicating as a board and we really don't talk at all”.

One community resident was upset when all the board members could not attend a scheduled meeting. She was rather firm in her stance on this issue and it indicates her commitment to be inclusive. A core participant's field note after the meeting conveys the resident's commitment to inclusiveness and at the same time the resident's intention to resign at a later date:

“[names resident] is upset that we [the Group] didn't cancel the two meetings last week – not all of the board members were able to attend and she [resident] said she tries very hard to set up meeting times when all board members can attend. We [the Group] should have cancelled the meetings if everyone couldn't attend. [Resident] was very nice to me but also rather firm in her stance on our canceling the meetings. She says as soon as the work she promised is completed [to get the houses raised] she is out of the community organization. I tried to encourage her by reassuring her [resident] of all she has accomplished this far in getting the commitment from the community.”

A core partner's field notes of a community meeting provides a resident's thoughts on the commitment of the Group:

“[Resident] was very complimentary of the Group and their lasting commitment to the community and how that was very encouraging to her. But she also acknowledged that she had met most of the researchers, but the community as a whole rarely has a chance to attend the group meetings or even talk with [or actually see] the partners.”

A core partner shares her vision of the definitions of commitment and relationship and what that meant to the community. From the core partner's email:

“The statement that we will do whatever they [the community] want us to do is not quite the relationship I imagined... we are a partnership ... we work together to build our programs... they [the community] decide what their issues are – and we decide how we can work with them – we build a partnership together. My ‘stand on the hill issue’ is the trust building.”

According to the literature, a responsibility of commitment in a PAR project from all participants has implications for the success of the project. One of the commitments of a PAR project is the organizing effort aimed at the project's social change element.

2. Organizing

Organizing partnerships are formed to effect social change, improve life situations and to solve problems. Community organizing is a process of people coming together to make changes or an impact. According to a community resident, this small, unincorporated community organized to:

“benefit the community...for the purpose of making sure that all decisions made are made [in] the community’s best interest.”

In February 2003, the community formed themselves into a 501c3 non-profit organization. A community resident speaks about organization and commitment in one of the group meetings:

“The [organization] is a non-profit organization formed to benefit a community.” She continues: “We [the board members of the non-profit] were entrusted by the community with the hopes that we would make decisions with the whole community’s best interest at heart.”

The community residents considered their commitment serious and often took responsibility for their own accountability. In a core partner’s field notes of a meeting between researchers and a few residents, a resident states the community’s organizing responsibilities:

“The Board is now responsible for all decisions pertaining to the finances of the [the community]... and will make a decision on the financial systems being put in place. The Board is refocusing on the most important goals of the community, and the Board members are working to improve the structure of how decisions are made.”

Another community resident in the core partner and community resident meeting spoke of how the vision of the non-profit developed to evaluate ideas. The resident states their reason for organizing:

“the [non-profit] elected representatives in order to collect ideas and the entire community will decide what will be for the best interest of [the community].”

Core and Associate Partner Vision of Community Organizing

During the year long project, there were numerous suggestions from the project’s academic and practitioner Group, of ways to ‘help’ the community, such as potential grants, appropriate conferences, and contacts that could be made. Early in the project, a core partner writes in her field notes concerns about the organization of the project:

“Near the beginning of the project we ran into obstacles. The first was how do we teach the PAR method of doing work in the community to the growing number of people who wanted to help with the project. As people heard of the project and our PAR methodology of empowering the community, more Group members joined in the effort. I watched as a small side faction of the Group formed to work on a grant that they [the associate partners] thought the residents of the community wanted. This side group pushed and pulled the community to gather information needed for the grant application. Some if not all community residents were hesitant about this grant as evidenced by an email responding to a request for information. The core partners did not support or disagree with the application, but rather did some ‘cordial foot dragging’ in the effort to help compile this application. I thought the academics/practitioners should have voiced their opinion that this grant was not a good idea – and wasn’t that a part of doing PAR – to be transparent in our thoughts and actions? To offer our expert opinion and then let the community decide their path. Or was it better to just sit back and let the community be almost pushed into this grant application? Or was the right thing done by not saying anything?”

An associate partner questioned ‘where was the organization’ [in the project] and stated that without organization “it would fall apart.” Her following statement, from an in-depth interview, shows evidence of community disorganization and a need for help:

“And it was almost like she [community resident] was pleading for help ... They [the community] just really sounded like they were at a crisis point. But I felt her plea to me, well it really touched me, and I felt as if it was a person drowning... [sigh] someone had to help them.”

During an in-depth interview, an associate partner describes her own mental picture after an early community meeting, of the community organizing:

“when I walked away from the meeting, the thing that stuck out to me the most was that it seemed a little disorganized. And I remember when I left, feeling wow, amazed that this community had assembled all of this help [the Friends of the community], but also wondering where is the organization and how would they follow through with this and knowing that if there wasn’t some type of organized structure in place, many things would end up falling by the way side.”

On the other hand, a core partner thought the community was very organized.

When asked about the idea of community organizing during an in-depth interview, her reply was that organization happened:

“immediately, it took no coaching, took no major facilitation at all, it was like that (fingers snap) – [it was] the organizer’s dream, you sit back and they [the community] do it [organize].”

Community Resident Vision of Organizing

Sometime in the summer months of 2004, the board began having differences of opinion. Being organized as a non-profit board was a learning process for the community. In a face-to-face conversation between an academic and three community members, the community members expressed their frustration in working with other board members. The community members mention their doubts about appropriate actions and their perception of the misuse of power of the board positions. One community resident board member states in an email:

“We have allowed the devil to use us all in many areas which just lead us into division.” The same board member believes “we should step down and allow others that want to continue [the non-profit] for the reason it was formed or allow God to use us for the reason that has formed us together. I don’t feel we should be board members if there is no unity, no communication or no trust. Some board members are unwilling to accept limitations of the power [of the board position] and this has led some members to resign. There were misunderstandings of what the board

positions held were responsible to do. A few of us on the board have been very concerned how the [non-profit] has been run in the past as well as in the present. We, the board, never said that we knew how to run an organization; this is why we needed outsiders to help us to learn. And many thanks to many of the ‘friends’ we are growing. With God’s help we are going to get all that [community] deserves and doesn’t deserve.”

A core researcher, in an email, tells other core partners about how some of the community residents mention their doubts [about the running of the board] and the misuse of [the board member’s] power in the community. The core partner’s email tells how the community residents’ report:

“of the unwillingness of some board members to accept any limitations on their power as board members.”

Eventually, three board members resigned over differences. A community resident talks about how the board members were not communicating as board members. A theme of division appeared in the community organization and is best defined by a community resident in an email to the core partners:

“I feel really bad with what has happened but I feel that I had the whole community’s best interest at heart but evidently not everyone felt the same way. What you say to one you should say to all of us.”

The lifecycle of the non-profit board structure in the community is visually expressed in figure 4.1.

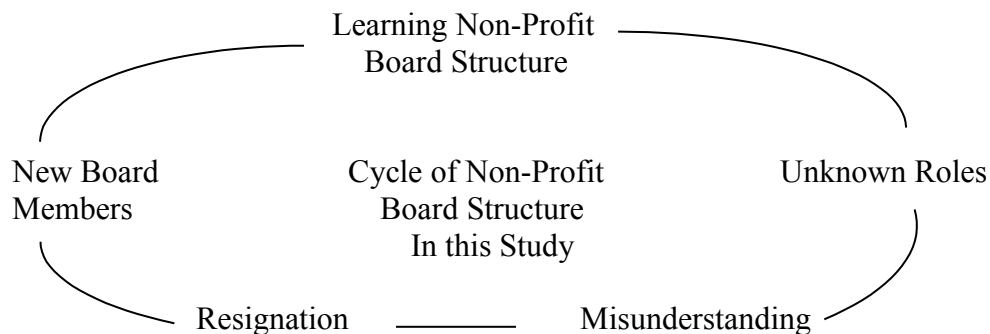


Figure 4-5 Board Organization

Developed by Author

Apparently communication and information were not always spread to all members in the community organization. This caused tension within the community. A community resident expressed her concerns in a group meeting:

“the community is disillusioned about [the non-profit] and its purpose. When community meetings are called, all the [rest of the] community hears about is the Board fighting. The people of the community are kept in the dark about what is happening. When the community does hear about what is happening, it is with the slant of the person telling the story.”

Lastly, with best intentions and as another piece of organization, the academics/practitioners asked the community to hold them [the researchers] accountable:

“the Group is relying on you [the community board] to keep us [the Group] accountable.”

Edelman (2000) claims that the PAR approach to organizing seems so promising to professionals, yet they only see it fail. As depicted in Figure 4.2, an early visioning meeting, the community residents, with the help of the core and associate partners, identified shared problems and structures that originally caused the problems in their community (Beckwith and Lopez, 1997). An attempt was made to clearly identify the solutions, people and structures that could solve problems with the community; a clear

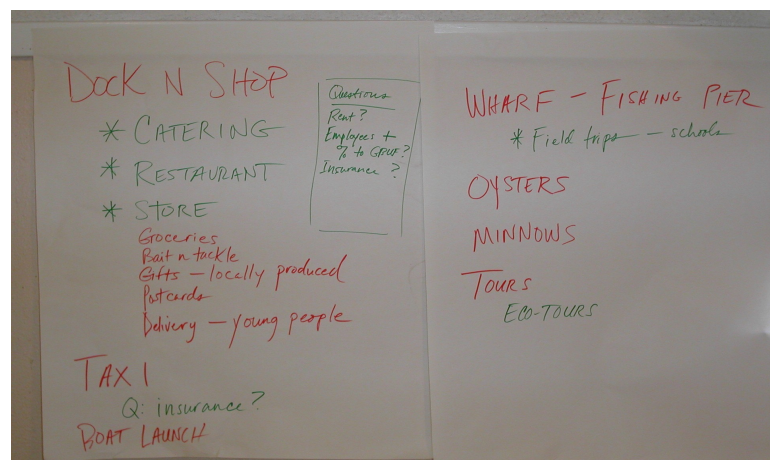


Figure 4-6 Early Visioning Meeting

acceptance and addressing of differences; and the reflecting of actions which could effectively adjust social practice (McCrystal and Godfrey, 2001).

3. Living the Philosophy

Engaging the community residents (and the core and associate partners), facilitating research connections, developing partnerships and working towards promoting useful change are elements of living the philosophy of PAR (Lindsey and McGuinness, 1998). To the partners, an issue vital to the project was developing a trusting, collaborative relationship in order to promote effective change wanted by the community. The researchers needed to demonstrate responsiveness and concern, and at the same time, work to empower the community. Part of the work was to identify potential problems and explore the previous issues of trust and isolation, and to arrive at a common understanding of the work to be accomplished in order to improve the lives of the community residents. This effort of building trust and improving and empowering lives relied on the leadership styles of both the researchers and the community members.

One of the core partners drew a graphic ‘’ (Figure 4.3) of the items she envisioned as the communities issues. She presented it to the community for their approval and it was accepted. She talks about the ‘wheel’ in an in-depth interview:

“I pictured it as a picture to [show] back to the community to see whether I was hearing, what it was they were saying – you know to honor their story and then to get feedback to see if we were on target. Not in words but in that drawing. And they [the community] were all shaking their heads – like yeah.”

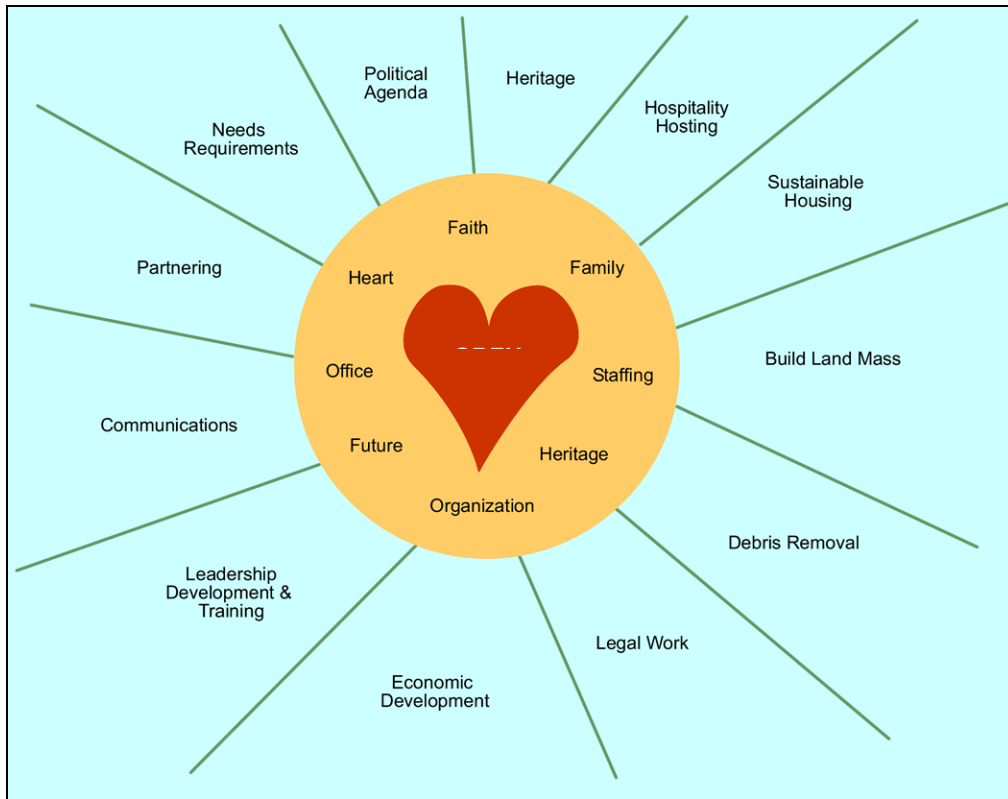


Figure 4-7 Community Vision Wheel

A core partner, when introducing new scientists to the project, explained the work in the community by email:

“As with the current NSF (National Science Foundation) project, this is a bottom-up effort where we will work with the local residents of the community to examine the threats associated with hazards. One of the things I am learning from our work with the sociologists is that the local community must be involved in our research and that their future actions will be likely impacted by more interface with our team members. I must say that looking at hazards from the eyes of community members is quite a contrast from my past experience.”

One of the challenges of the community was explained by a core partner in an in-depth interview, and showed understanding and empathy for what the community’s connections and partnership experiences had been:

“[the community has to follow] The Western value structure that constantly pushes them to be at odds with both who they are and what they

want to keep, but yet have to go in and out of [the Western value structure].”

The community members were divided around the issue of continued isolation. Historically, the community philosophy was to maintain their traditional ways of life without the tainting of the outside world, but recently have come to realize that the outside has many opportunities to offer the community towards sustainability of their community. Today there is a road that leads to the point of access to the waterway where their homes are located – in their childhoods the roadway was not there. From the risk perception focus group a community resident relates:

“I can tell you my mother’s point of view. We have traditional values and we also have heritage and morals and they [our parents] saw the influx of inviting the outside world into our small community as corrupting the community on some level. And that is why my mother was against building the road. Because she saw that as outsiders coming in with replacing our own traditional values with that of a more worldly mindset and its like, well my dad was for the convenience of the road you know, access to the stores and to the hospital and to the modern conveniences, my mother saw the more tangible where it would affect the person on a more spiritual level. That’s why she was against the road.”

Issues of isolation were found in the partner interview descriptions of the community, and built upon the issues of trust or actually distrust of outsiders. A core partner in an in-depth interview describes the historical community philosophy:

“...but when you look at it they are part to blame for where they are right now because they wanted to live in such isolation. They never did any bridge to understanding the outside encroachment upon them. So by keeping an isolation, they were part of the problem that is there today. When a community is so isolated, it keeps to themselves, the outside world is the one then that draws their own conclusions about who and what defines the people [of the isolated community].”

Building trusting partnerships with the community was a task for the partners to address. But this trust building had to consider the previous history of the community and its isolation. In a core partner interview, trust issues were noteworthy:

“Some people [of the community] who were at the [group] meeting, wanted nothing to do with a bunch of outsiders ... racism, denial of services, the having to beg for anything they did get, like water lines, telephones lines [water and telephones became available in the mid 1990’s to the community]...they are the last ones to be restored electricity when it goes out – not being able to attend public schools⁴, because of who they were and are – [they, the community] were very separate and not very equal. We [the Group] are in a relationship with equals [the community] in a community that is absolutely remarkable - we have an opportunity to set up something that is even more than us [greater than we are]”

A core researcher talks about the mission of the project in an email to the core partners as it relates to a PAR philosophy:

“Our mission with these folks is to build trust. I think we should ask them what they want to cover during the day [a group meeting] and make do on how to address their concerns in the time they are with us. An issue for me is to address their concerns, especially about disorganization and grants... so we need to see what their concerns are and offer ours.”

The core group worked at building trust, understanding the community’s issues, ways to bring about social change that the community wanted. Learning to live the philosophy of PAR was incorporated into this project.

4. Leadership Style

Leadership style entails multiple dimensions such as communication, strategy, acceptance and difference issues, but most importantly mutual respect, trust and understanding. According to Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) the leaders [researchers]

⁴ “Well into the 1960’s, the state’s [Louisiana] segregated educational system was so thoroughly racist that it simply did not accommodate Native Americans beyond the eighth grade” (Schwab, J. 1994: p. 230)

should build egalitarian relationships while being cognizant of the power relationships inherent in community groups.

At the beginning of the project, a meeting was held for the Group without community residents present. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the Group to the basic assumptions of PAR and how the core partners envisioned working with the community residents. From this meeting, 21 assumptions were captured. Some of the assumptions gathered at that meeting were that we are all learners, we will listen for opportunities, we will be conscious of doing what we say we will do, this process will take time, we will work through all possible conflicts between all parties, and we will consider the implications of empowerment. These Group assumptions were a good format for leadership style in a PAR methodology project. From the meeting minutes of the first Group meeting the facilitator summarizes the meeting:

“We all make both good and bad assumptions, but we need to articulate them in order to understand how they will shape our work. Additionally, we must know what assumptions can interfere with the good work we want to do in the community. It was suggested that we keep our personal assumptions with us throughout our work with the community and use them as a guide.”

The following quote from a core partner’s email to the community incorporates Lindsey and McGuinness’ building egalitarian relationships as she explains the university role:

“I thought that I should catch you up on some of the grants. We got really lucky and got two grants from the National Science Foundation in Washington, DC. They are based on things we heard you talk about last April at the meeting in the church... I guess that you can see that things take time when you are writing grants. This one started last April and just got funded as of Feb. 15... patience is a virtue yes? Faculty at the universities do not get paid on these NSF grants, it is considered part of our university obligations. We are delighted that we get to do this project with ya’ll and hope it is the start of a long friendship. What the NSF grant does for university faculty is to help us justify our time to the boss, so we can come and work with you... Having the money from National Science

Foundation should make [the community] look really good to others that fund grants, cause it is such hard money to get and carries a lot of prestige. We [the universities] would not have gotten this money if the people at the National Science Foundation did not think you were worthwhile. So well done to all!”

Core partners guided the Group as well as students who worked on the project.

The core partner’s leadership style among the partners was also of interest in this project.

The following quote was used earlier to illustrate the commitment involved in the project, but also describes a core partner’s perception of the leadership relationship she imagined in this project. From an email to the core partners:

“the statement that we will do whatever they [the community] wants us to do is not quite the relationship I imagined...we are a partnership...we work together to build our programs... they [the community] decide what their issues are ... and we decide how we can work with them – we build a partnership together.”

The community residents had a reflexive view of the leadership style of the partners in this project. A community resident was very complimentary of the leadership style of the core partners in an email. This view is typical of the community residents:

“I have to say you are truly a blessing to all you have stretched your hand out to. You did not have to do any of it but you truly are an extension of God’s hand, the hand of love. Thank you for your kindness and love. You truly have a big reward in heaven waiting for you. We love you.”

The leadership style of the Group considered mutual respect, trust and understanding.

Community Leadership

Community leadership reflected a more visionary perspective. A core partner, in a field note, describes the leadership style of a community member:

“This community resident has this hope in her heart and a dream in her head that allows her to network and find ways to help the community. Yet, when help does come, she pushes them away. If she understands her situation [the severity of the community’s location] why does she continue to hope and dream?”

A community resident expresses a concern regarding leadership style of the community residents, but this also reflects somewhat on the researchers. The community member needed tangible evidence of the work in the community. A core researcher’s field notes conveys his concern:

“[The community member] says the community wants to see something happening from the efforts of the non-profit; there is nothing tangible that the community can see. [He] says the community knows that community members went to conferences in California, Boulder and Texas, but what has all this done for the community?”

While the community held a solid vision of what they wanted, their leadership style may have been lacking.

Leadership in Communications

If leadership style in PAR is to build egalitarian relationships (Lindsay and McGuinnis, 1998), partners should adapt their style of communication to facilitate dialogue (Santiago-Rivera, Morse and Hunt, 1998).

From the field notes of a core partner, unease is shown over methods of communication:

“Another concern was method of communication. Academics/practitioners are accustomed to email and immediately introduced this method into the community. However, the community seemed to prefer face-to-face or phone conversations. Also it was unclear in this project who was responsible for which parts of the project. Responsibilities could have been better organized at the beginning of the project and would have solved several communication issues. It also took time to realize that the words of one community member did not necessarily reflect the whole community’s view. Also when information was sent to one community member, it often did not get to the rest of the community.”

The community's leadership in communications can be garnered by previous quotes. The community's communications leadership was not fixed and came from different directions at different times of the project.

Communications Observations

The project's communication analysis is included here as it relates to leadership style, the development of partnerships, engaging the community and facilitating research connections. Communication is the exchange of ideas, information, thoughts and messages between interacting parties who readily understand the meaning behind their surrounding reality. Communication implies understanding of definitions, frames, norms and worldviews.

Various forms of communication were collected from December 2003 through February 21, 2005. Emails, meeting minutes, field notes, phone conference summaries, certain key phone conversations, as well as recollections of visits and a session note from the Natural Hazards Workshop held in Boulder, Co, comprise 111 items of communication collected. Communications were selected based on their content and relevance to the process of PAR. Not all items collected were useful, but most provided a glimpse of the process.

The following observations were made from the collection of documented communications. Core partners generated 57 articles of communication, followed by 41 from associate partners and 13 from community residents. Of the communications generated, 78 were directed to core partners or some combination of core and associate partners; 20 were directed to community residents exclusively; 12 were directed to

partners or some combination of partners and community residents; and 1 communication was directed to the Group. The communications were in the form of 90 emails, 1 evaluation, 7 field notes (3 of which were from phone conversations), 3 meeting minutes, 3 phone calls, 4 phone conference summaries, 2 were visits and one was a session note. The phone conversations were between the core partners and one of five central community residents. The phone conferences were between the core partners for the purpose of 'staying in the loop'. The meeting minutes were from a meeting of the Group, a meeting between core partners and community residents held at the local university, and the third one was held in the community and attended by the central community residents, and core partners.

The communications were categorized as information sharing, personal communications, reports, requests and responses. There were 50 information sharing communications, 3 were informational and personal, 9 were personal communications, 25 were reports, 17 were requests and 7 were responses.

The 111 communications were also sorted by intensity. High intensity meant urgent, medium meant in need of attention, and low meant no action, wait till later or informational. There were 16 high intensity communications, 27 medium and 68 were of low intensity. Of the 16 high intensity communications, 6 were from core partners, 6 were from one community resident, and 4 were from associate partners. Of the low intensity communications, 36 were from core partners, 6 were from community residents and 26 were from associate partners.

To summarize, the partners generated 88% of communications. Emails formed the majority of the documented communication, comprising 81% of the total collected

communications. Most of the communications were general information sharing items (45%), and most were low intensity (61%).

5. Ownership of Knowledge

Reardon (1998) claims that the joining of the local knowledge of community residents with the professional knowledge of researchers and practitioners could produce novel solutions to community problems.

The residents of the community acknowledged they needed help to accomplish their goals of community sustainability; that their knowledge was lacking. The community knowledge alone is not enough to accomplish the sustainability goals of saving their land and their heritage. In a focus group, the subject of a continuing existence in the community [due to many factors such as coastal, cultural and economic erosion] was exchanged between two community residents. The conversation was about the long-term knowledge and the monetary investment needed for future generations to remain in the community. A community residents begins:

“look in your bank account – there is no money in there and money talks. Where are you going to get the money [to build a lasting community]?”

Another community resident responds:

“I’m sending that kid [points to her daughter] to go to become a pharmacist”.

First community resident: “And how long will that take?”

The residents realize they will need more knowledge to save their community and that it will take money and time to get the knowledge needed to accomplish their goals.

A community resident in the same focus group envisions the value of their local knowledge and wants to further the sustainability of the community with their own knowledge. But realizes it cannot be done in isolation:

“in the current existence in the way we are, your fatalistic point of view [about money in your bank account] is accurate, I can find no fault with your point of view. But what I’m saying is we have to continue to fight... because we have nowhere to go but into extinction and that’s why we have to reach out to whatever means and whatever organization we can in order to educate ourselves. I believe that if our parents and our grandparents had been knowledgeable of the situation of how to go about marketing their catch [seafood harvest] we would not be faced with what we are now. So that’s why the need for knowledge is all important.”

Part of understanding the local knowledge is appreciating their system of knowledge. It can be seen in a description from an interview with a core partner who talked about the relationships in the community:

“The relationship they had between the families, the care for the whole community, the understanding of the integrated-ness of the families, the ecology, the faith... not the separation like some - separate play, work, whatever - they have a system that really integrates everything together. We [the researchers] have that to learn. So we [the researchers] are going in as the broken people, into a people [community] that is whole. They are a village. We have that unique opportunity to learn what they know and how they do it. Their whole thing is to leave no person behind”

The core partner goes on to talk about the challenge of the community to go between the Western culture and their own and how they negotiate this path. She provides a view of equality of knowledge believing the community’s knowledge is as valuable as the academic/practitioner knowledge.

Another issue of knowledge ownership is the level of community knowledge and how motivated are they to learn. The level of ‘outside’ knowledge (other than traditional ways) in the community evolved over time, but was not readily known at the beginning

of this project. In an in-depth interview, an associate partner describes the community's level of knowledge:

“the strengths of the community are that they are various people certainly of strength. They are motivated but in some ways discouraged. I see some signs of what I almost call learned helplessness. They just feel like there is just no way they can do everything that is before them [the challenges and goals of community sustainability]. We [the partners] assume that they know how to do things that indeed they do not know. At the moment, they are somewhat along about what the status is of the grants that they've [received], what they are supposed to be doing on them and they really did not seem [like] they have a clear idea of how you follow up on a grant. It is surprising to me that a number of folks in the community have never had a bank account before.”

One of the factors of PAR is to create alternative means of knowledge outside of normal social theories (Friere, 1970). An associate partner, in an in-depth interview, talked about the construction of knowledge in this manner:

“In terms of what I think is required of me it's just a lot of patience and trying to understand where somebody else is when I'm not there [in their place]. And then to try to get inside somebody else's skin and imagine how that person would feel if they really didn't know how to do something like balance a checkbook.”

This associate partner realized she had to take a step outside her normal social situation and step into the community residents' knowledge level. This allowed her to envision an alternative means of knowledge; knowledge based on a low level of state education standards, and a high level of traditional ecological knowledge.

During the project year, a single official training was held. The community residents attended a technology training held mid summer by three associate partners and one core partner. However, core partners often in face-to-face conversations or personal phone calls offered assistance with technology, grant writing skills and supporting information such as who to call for services.

Mutual learning occurred through the collaborative efforts of the partners and the community members. The community residents and the partners learned how much the community did and did not know. The partners gained knowledge of seafood harvesting, coastal erosion and a deeper appreciation of the multiple oppressions residents live with.

6. Empowerment

Measuring empowerment is not an easy task according to Simonson and Bushaw (1993) and can therefore be an uncertain dimension. For empowerment to flourish it begins with individuals; then spreads to the community. Much of the empowerment that took place in the community came in the form of the establishment of the non-profit, which grew out of the community's desire to save their land and their heritage. The community feels a strong attachment to their place... and a strong feeling of responsibility to that place. They also have expressed a belief that they have been placed in this time and in this place to be protectors of the land they have been made responsible for. Those community resident members of the non-profit board found new avenues of expressing themselves and new or renewed purpose for being involved in their community. A core partner, in her in-depth interview, described and compared the community resident's newfound empowerment:

“They feel that God has called them there [to the community] for that time and that purpose... like Martin Luther [King] said “here I stand, these are my principles – I won’t be pushed any further”. That’s what I hear from the folks there [in the community]. It is because of who and what they are in God’s eyes that they feel committed to this time and place. What has come to fruition in the last 2 years is remarkable for any community. It’s certainly not enough given the circumstances the people [of the community] are in, but it’s both awesome and also very humbling. A community member is writing like Amy Tan of the community – I’m starting to see some of the folks coming into their own of realizing the

power they have. It's kind of like when folks get power it also [she makes a gesture like 'taking off'].

Another core partner thought the community had come a long way in the articulation of their issues and had been empowered. In her in-depth interview she acknowledges:

"I think that one of the successes has been that ... how they deal with the challenges... they are now comfortable articulating those challenges and issues in ways that enable others to appreciate what they are going through. [This] allows them to practice the public presentation of the issues that they have, those that have limited them [in the past], this has given them more opportunity to have more of a public forum as they choose to."

The non-profit board is the most-documented area of empowerment. The non-profit board structure has allowed community residents to find an avenue to control their lives and to take action that would benefit them and their community (Turnbull and Turnbull, 2001). A community resident board member defends the board's actions in choosing new board members (although it is unclear who previously picked board members) in the following email:

"we just wanted to be able to pick someone from our own choosing because we, the board, did not [previously] pick or had a chance to pick who we felt we could trust to be on the board."

From a group meeting minutes, the community resident board members continue their assertion over their board:

"April 1 begins a new financial quarter and at this time the board will be responsible for its bookkeeping. A community member mentioned that she wanted to be sure that the day-to-day systems for handling the finances were put into place, including forms, budgets and all necessary data, so that the members working with the finances would have a set structure to follow. The information needs to be easy enough for all community members to grasp, so as to account for times when some members are not available to do record keeping. The Board members are

working to improve the structure of how decisions are made. The board is now responsible for all decisions pertaining to the finances of the community and therefore the board will meet next week to make a decision on the financial systems that are being put in place.”

A community resident in the same meeting articulately expressed the needs of the community stating:

”The board is refocusing on the most important goals of the community. While grants pertaining to the restaurant, pier, bungalows, etc., are helpful, it is most important to remember that hurricane season is fast approaching and therefore the most important needs deal with sewage, litter, lifting homes, addressing bulkheads, rebuilding homes that are still damaged from previous storms, addressing flood risks, roofs and the issues that deal with the basic issues of comfort, safety and sanitation. The restaurant would then qualify for a long term goal.”

The board was a good example of grasping the experiences of the community and their self-understanding of social change. They begin to re-balance the power relationships and adjust their situation. However, encouraging empowerment in the community was sometimes difficult and an associate partner sounds uncomfortable in her interview:

“We wanted to get training to the community that would let them manage their own lives and the things that were going on in the community, where they would feel that they were adequately trained to take over, and they would not simply have to have other people take care of them. It’s a very independent group of people [in the community] *and we felt like that seemed to be the kind of thing they wanted to have happen in their lives.*”

The above statement seems to begin as an empowering statement, but then ends with an assumption of “what they [the community] wanted to have happen.”

When working with the community on writing a grant, instead of asking the community for a report, this associate partner directed a request to a core partner:

“Do you have a summary report of all the activity happening in the community? Can you provide me with a summary report of what is happening and who are the entities making it happen? I want to be sure efforts are coordinated to increase tourism and economic development with the individual efforts of each community. This would make the entire parish alluring for tourists.”

Asking the community for this information and concentrating on tourism and economic development of the community would have been more empowering.

One of the most revealing moments about empowerment came during one of the focus groups held in the community on risk perception. Towards the end of the session, a community resident stated he had a question for the core partners who facilitated the focus group. He turns the table and asks the following question:

“Let me ask you a question, you three ladies [the core partners conducting and recording the focus group], what is the purpose of ya’ll coming to the community and trying to restore it? What is the purpose of your being here?”

Empowerment in this community is hard to measure (Simonson and Bushaw, 1993). Some community members seemed to be empowered such as the ones on the non-profit board, but the community as a whole did not achieve individual empowerment characteristically indicated in PAR projects. Not everyone in the community was able to make individual changes to adjust their situations. But effective change is a time consuming proposition as discussed in the following section.

7. Time and Use of Time

The community residents rarely spoke of time and the effort of working with the partners. Sometimes in casual conversations, a community resident would mention that

we should remember that shrimping season opens next week and that most of the community would be busy preparing their boats and nets for the new season. Often in phone calls or face-to-face conversations, the partners were told that we were always welcome to come to the community at our leisure – a phone call requesting a scheduled time to visit was not necessary. The community residents claimed they always had their doors open and had time for a cup of coffee.

Time for a cup of coffee is somewhat of a contradiction for the community residents. In discussions between the partners, a core partner often asked the researchers to be mindful of the time taken from the community residents when we ask for interviews or group meetings. This is time the community residents could be working on their boats that are their major sources of income. The core partner was hinting at Lax and Gavin (2002) issue of community resident time constraints such as working more than one job and the daily responsibilities of care-taking, which often take priority over research. The community always offered us a cup of coffee even if they didn't have the time to spend with us.

Other discussions among the partners involved the difference in time in a partner's schedule as opposed to the time of a community resident. Partners generally work 8 to 5 pm, while the community residents follow the schedule of sun rising and setting or of the changes of seasons. A core partner talked about the time of the community:

“When you have a community struggling with so many issues, how do you help on the issues that they articulate as being the most pressing and realize that they only have so much time, so much personal time, and so much community time to interact with us to add to these outcomes. So how much - how can you as a professional, by asking them to take time, how much can you assist them cooperatively and productively for them.

This may mean going back and becoming part of the process of working with the community – taking more preplanning and to think through what paths might be fruitful. Then you aren't always sure which paths will be right – but you can look at what time it will take, how many practitioners will have to be involved, how many community members will be involved – we'll have to do a number of meetings. Is this now going to work for the community and what is the likelihood that there will be an outcome [after spending all this time].”

There were few references to partner's time and use of time in the emails, interviews, field notes or oral histories. However, a core partner was candid about her time in a field note:

“I may talk about how I've skinned my knees and elbows...how we've learned about communication with the community – if we do PAR right – communication can be tricky. And time – the time it takes to do this right – how we consult each other [the other partners on the project] over everything we do in the community and also the time it takes from the community when they could be doing other things like earning a living.”

In a casual conversation, a core partner talked about how the work of PAR was somewhat paralyzing to academics. Academics tend to analyze things before they act upon them. And since PAR was a new methodology for this core partner, she often stopped her work process in order to be certain she was acting in an appropriate PAR manner.

There were almost as many partners on this project as there were community residents. At times the scope of the work seemed overwhelming because of all the ideas being presented and tossed about of how to help the community and how the community could be taught to help themselves. The overwhelming ideas fit Reardon's (1998) caution of expanding activities too quickly. Time spent on this project by partners and community residents was significant. A graduate student was assigned 20 hours per week to work with the community residents and on issues the community specified. The

community residents never kept time sheets, however, the 20 hours per week worked by the graduate student is a good estimate of the time invested by the community residents. Time invested by other core and associate partners was never specifically documented. However, 5 group meetings (including travel from out of state), 4 conference calls, and 3 lengthy phone conversations with community residents are documented by the core researchers. Over the course of a year, it can be estimated that at least one graduate student worked 20 hours per week for the year or 1040 hours, and if 2 community members worked that amount or 2080 hours, then if 2 researchers or practitioners worked the same amount, another 2080 hours, a conservative estimate of time in this project would be 5200 hours or approximately 2.5 years of one person working full time. A PAR project takes lots of time and separately, the community or the partners alone could not have made significant progress toward their specified goals.

8. Power Struggles

Handling issues of power are key in a PAR project. This is a delicate factor in working with disenfranchised communities who have preconceived notions of ‘outsiders’ especially educated ones. Almost contradictory to the process of PAR which holds that researchers work with communities, is the fact that researchers are the ones who have the time and resources to work on PAR or community projects (Healy’s (2001). Additionally, in this study, some anti-PAR strategies and opportunities entered the community. The partners struggled to handle these situations.

Partner Views of Power Struggles

While it is not well documented in this project, many of the partners struggled with power issues. Some researchers constantly struggled to be aware of power and

oppression, while it seems that others held little concern for the community's past situation of oppression and distribution of power. The core partner who cited the past struggles of "racism, denial of services, the having to beg for anything they got" saw the community as becoming more powerful when she spoke of the learning of the community as:

"brilliant, absolutely brilliant people...who want a chance to be able to do it [things] for themselves. But mainly how to do it themselves. They need some people to be bridges. They are a pretty self-determined people [the community]. Very self-determined yet very, very loving people and considering everything they have been through, just amazingly compassionate people."

In an email to associate partners, another core partner appears to give a confusing message about PAR and presents a view of the subtle issues of perceived power relations:

"The community would like to meet with us on Saturday to discuss their impressions of hazards in the community. A big part of this meeting would be to allow residents to ask us questions about the hazards (wind, storm surge and flooding and possibly other hazards). This meeting is an opportunity for you to meet the residents and hear their concerns about the sustainability of their community... just listen – learn and be available to respond to their concerns."

The above quoted message is double edged; it attempts to be PAR-like, but an underlying message is that the core and associate partners are the "experts" who the community can ask questions of – we can listen to the residents concerns, but then we as experts can answer their questions. A better way would have been to phrase this as an exchange of information rather than a one sided response to their concerns – the residents may have responses to partner concerns.

Contrast the above message with an email message from an associate partner to the core partners. The message below gives importance to the existing traditional knowledge of the community residents:

“These folks know so much about their environment – marshscapes, biota, hunting, fishing, trapping, boats, etc. We really need to collect interviews focusing upon the environmental knowledge of people from the community, especially the old folks.”

About mid-way during this year-long project, the core partners submitted a grant request to a natural hazards watch group requesting funds for travel to the community in the event of a flood or hurricane. The request was granted and minimal funds will be provided for the researchers to travel to the community if an event occurs so that research may be collected as soon as possible after the event. In a casual phone conversation with a community resident to a core partner about traveling to the community after a flood, the resident clearly questions the relevance of the research as she states:

“Why would you want to come here during a flood? It will look just like it did last time. What could you do anyway? There won’t be anything different to study.”

The resident’s comment presents a dilemma as to who is in power in this situation – the resident seems to think the grant and the travel would be a waste, but had no input over the grant being written. There are several issues in this statement including that the message was communicated by email, a lack of discussion about what research can be or should be conducted and possibly a power struggle between researcher and resident over what can be or should be brought into the community and at what time.

Community Views of Power Struggles

This community resident could not see the importance of studying a flood just like the one before and the one that will almost certainly happen again in the near future. She could tell you all that would happen over the phone. This is a possible example of the core partner’s unintentional, but subtle mistreatment of those less educated. The core

partner didn't ask the community their thoughts before applying for this small quick-response grant. The community resident asserts that her traditional ecological knowledge may be as good as the knowledge of the academic partners (Lofman, Pelkonen and Pietila, 2004).

Sometimes the community took great offense to the perceived power of the partners and their roles. In an email about how a non-profit board is to be operated, one community resident responds to the supposition that an associate partner had superior knowledge:

“Are you not supposed to educate us on the things that we don't know instead of threaten us as you did. I take offense in how you feel... that for almost a year you felt you only had to consult with one person [on the board] and now you want to ask questions and advise [the rest of the board] but in a threatening manner. Then you once again fail to involve the rest of the board members...you know they all have [email addresses] so why do you address this [email] to me?”

The past history of the community impacted how the community perceived power. This perception caused tension between the partners and the community residents as the residents learned more about power structures outside their isolated community. Yet, this community resident uncovers in her email the difference she saw in some partners who operated under PAR assumptions as she continues:

“Just so you know we did consult with someone from the outside. [Names partners] were and are very helpful in that area, so you see we don't need to have someone from outside the community to be on the board.”

Many residents spoke of the powers outside of the community such as the power of the government regarding shrimping regulations, specifically TEDs (Turtle Excluder Devices) and how it negatively affected the amount of shrimp one could catch. In an oral history interview, a community residents states:

“This community is a fishing village and when the government stepped in and said, ‘Well, let’s save a special species, we’ll save the turtle’ – this community is based on the livelihood of shrimping. It was a little shrimping – it still is a shrimping village some of the families say. We can’t make it, we going to move on, find our self another job. My Dad – he died of cancer – but all his life was shrimping, trapping and during the oyster season, catching oysters. That’s all he ever did. And when I grew up, that’s how I was raised – how to run a boat. So I wouldn’t get me a job, because I could make it [because you could still make a living shrimping back then].”

Government regulations made it difficult for this resident to provide for his family. It should be noted that residents don’t call fishing or shrimping a ‘job’ – a job to them is working in the oilfield or for the school board or parish (county).

Yet this same resident also reflects on the power of an outsider (God) or his own powerlessness of living in the community. From his oral history interview the community resident continues:

“God has called me for this test. The family, the elderly, they need somebody. I didn’t ask to be right here, but I’m here. I’m gonna live here, I’m gonna fight for the community. Anytime I have the chance to voice my opinion, it makes a difference, not just for me but for the whole parish [county], this whole parish needs someone to do something about it. Because other than that, we in bad shape. If a storm comes, it won’t be nothing nice. God protects the community, this little place. When you can’t go anywhere or find a job, like me right now, you can always find a crab or fish in the bayou. Something to feed your family or something to sell. Our way of life is beyond the levee protection [levees have been built to keep flood waters out of most coastal residential areas, but this community is not protected by any levee system], but still in all there’s people, there’s human life. God placed them there to help out somebody else and somebody else helps you out. Everybody needs one another.”

The residents of this community have a strong faith-based point of view and acknowledge the existence of a higher power.

Strength of power in the community was also obtained from their connectedness of family. Both the community residents and the partners spoke of the strength or the

power of the family. A community resident talks about her grandparent's home and how it was often the hub of activity after school or around holidays:

“The fun times were the holidays, we had big dinners, the whole families – one big family gathering. They [the grandparents] were the head of the clan, the whole family got together at their place and we had a big family dinner. We were big on family...raising us and we were very family oriented – a close-knit family.”

Fenge (2002) states that in issues of power and powerlessness, an individual's voice, ideas and beliefs are important elements of participatory research. The partners realized the power of the family in this research. In an interview an associate partner states:

“I think I'm getting a little bit of a notion of the INCREDIBLE web of interconnections and the way we just have to very patiently work through that web. It looks to me that the social support systems in the community are the family and the church ... and the activities that they join in together. It is just a fascinating community and my concern is just to help them get where they want to build it.”

The power of expert knowledge sometimes lead the partners to believe they knew what was best for the community as well as what was beneficial for the partners. Such an incident appeared when an outside academic researcher wanted to write a journal article about the community. From a core researcher's email to other core researchers:

“Suggestion of an article seems extremely appropriate and could be included in our processing of the data from the community. Stress and the family is just one component of how they [the community] have coped while facing so many challenges. The focus group may include some information from the older residents on their perspective on the role that hazards have had on stress and their families.”

While the researcher thought the article was a great idea, the community declined to have the article researched or written, explaining that it was not their focus at this time, and there were other pressing issues such as the board resignations to deal with.

Power Shifts

Power shifted among the community residents, among the community and the partners, and among the partners.

Power struggles were evident in the community when, during the summer months, several of the board members resigned over questions of the use or misuse of the community resident's positions as board members. In an email, a core partner describes the power struggles of community board members:

“Resident 1, 2 and 3 spoke of their frustration in working with Resident 4 and 5. All [first 3 residents] agreed that a mediator would be most helpful but doubted that Resident 4 would agree. The first 3 residents mentioned their doubts about the appropriate use of funds associated with the non-profit and gave several examples of their perceived misuse of funds. The first 3 residents agreed that it was their perception that neither Resident 4 nor 5 would discuss any limitations on the use of non-profit funds. The first 3 residents described Resident 5's unwillingness to accept any limitations on her power from the board and that is what lead them [the first 3 residents] to resign.”

The core partner made a specific visit to the community in hopes of mediating the power struggles of the residents. Community residents 4 and 5 from the above quote refused the aid of a mediator.

Power tensions emerged among the partners and the community over the submission of a grant. The writing of a large grant [pseudonym of ABC] was undertaken by an associate partner on behalf of the community. There was no access to written documentation of a decision by the community non-profit board to apply or not apply for the ABC. The associate partner, with good intentions of helping the community write the ABC grant, caused agitation among the board. An email from a community resident board member responds to the grant writer:

“With all due respect, I don’t believe we know what you are talking about, what grant? And it won’t be that easy to get together to answer questions that we don’t understand. We will need more information as to what exactly you are talking about, please clarify, also please note that whenever you have questions/concerns with the board we feel that all members should be contacted, of course if you are dealing with one in particular then you can contact just that person but in the mean time please contact all members of the board. Please give us more information on your grant proposal.”

The ABC grant also caused concern among the partners. The grant seemed to clearly override other issues (Balfour and Clarke, 2001). When a group has power in a situation, they want to keep that power rather than give it up. In the beginning of this project, there were two players: the community and the core partners. With the writing and subsequent granting of the ABC grant, a third player, with added associate partners and more resources, entered the community. An associate partner composed an elaborate and detailed document about the writing and application of the ABC grant. The document questions what effects the awarding of this grant will have on the community and on the PAR process in this project. The document states:

“The ABC grant writing process, itself, seems to be way out of line, done in secret, [refer to above quote from resident board member] and with little regard for the operating procedures that had been agreed upon by the community and the researchers. This, in and of itself, is a serious violation of the PAR principles. (This may be an indication that the PAR principles are 1) not well understood, 2) have not been ‘institutionalized’, or 3) have been rejected at some level by some people or some of the researchers)⁵. The politics of the ABC grant seeking process raise serious questions about the intent and commitment of some of those (particularly among some of the researchers) involved in its writing of the grant have to the agreed upon PAR process. There are several possible explanations that might explain this divergence of the PAR process. One possible explanation relates to the exercise of ‘power’ – personal vs. social power.”

The associate partner’s document goes on to discuss reasons why people would exercise power, levels of reasons for conflict and therefore levels of resolution, and

⁵ Parenthesis copied from original document writer.

differences in organizational structures. The associate partner sees the application of the ABC grant as ‘changing horses in mid-stream’. The document states:

“The design of the non-profit and the Group is best understood as designed to be an incubator and support group – the ABC grant seeks to create a machine/bureaucratic organization. The community organization is designed to be an innovative organization and is not really a business organization and to change it to a business organization means significant change in all areas of community life – particularly in power arrangements, values and lifestyle. The community board is not a corporation and is not really a collective or a group of stockholders. The community board should not be thought of as the board of directors of a company or a collective. The board can best be understood and should function in a liaison role – communicating with the people, the friends, and the outside. This proposal [the ABC grant] changes the basic nature of the board from a coordinating and problem solving body to a body that is making economic, political and lifestyle decisions that it has not been empowered to make.”

The associate partner who wrote this document remarks on the PAR process:

“This [ABC] grant shows a poor or no understanding of or concern for the culture and values of the people, the ethical principles of intervention, the nature of participatory action, and the realities of livelihood development in settings like the community. My professional prediction is that this proposal will fail to produce livelihood generation for the people of the community (it will help the income of some outsiders). The proposal will damage an already vulnerable social/cultural system and will exacerbate the already existing divisive behavior of some of the board and some who consider themselves as part of the friends group.”

The same associate partner recommends in his document:

“the grant be rejected and that the partners of the community refuse to work with the community if this grant is accepted as written. At least four major changes are necessary before the partners agree to participate:

1. A taskforce of the board and partners of the community is formed and given authority to ‘oversee’ the contract, hire consultants and staff as needed.
2. The consultants and directors and all staff and staffing patterns as presented are removed from the grant and no one is hired until the taskforce has an opportunity to review the situation and make a staffing proposal.
3. Design the training with CES and HPI (author doesn’t clarify)

4. Develop a consensus decision-making process that involves the community.

If these 4 are not agreed to, the friends [the researchers] of the community should withdraw all support and funding and inform the grantor and other granting agencies, and ALL of the residents of their actions and the reason for their withdrawal – which include the grant writers actions without board and friends advice and consent and that the friends [researchers] take no responsibility for the outcomes and that none of the friends [researchers] names or institutions can be named or used.”

In the associate partner’s article conclusion, he recommends that this grant be rejected, emphasizing “information given does not equal information received, understood and owned “. On one hand, some in the community agreed to this grant because eventually the information requested was provided and the grant was submitted. In this power struggle that illustrated community division, PAR provided little guidance.

Chapter 5 – Analysis

The intent of this study is to examine the use of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology by academics, practitioners and the residents of a small, coastal, Louisiana community facing threats from natural hazards. In this section, the findings of this study will be incorporated into the theory and literature presented in earlier sections. The accounts of the participant voices in this project describe the appropriateness of using PAR. This study is a contribution to the PAR methodology that affords a better understanding of participants in a social situation, and supplies an enhanced explanation of the issues of using this methodology, particularly in communities such as in this extended case study.

The unit of analysis in this project was a diverse population of community residents, several universities, disciplined academics and states; also multi-disciplined and specialist practitioners who worked with or lived in a rural coastal community.

Accounts of participants reveal that the eight elements of PAR discussed in this study were not completely understood by the community residents, the core partners, or the associate partners. New structures such as the non-profit board, grant writing and grant management capacity, computer technology (email) and working with researchers were all introduced to the community residents in a short period of time (less than 2 years). As the group of core and associate partners talked with outsiders (non partners, non residents) about the project, more professionals wanted to offer their skills to help the community achieve their goals.

The result of the project's large scope affected its organization, commitment, philosophy, time, ownership of knowledge, empowerment of the community residents

and struggles of power and control. Through out the project, these eight elements challenged project partners and the existence of the partner and community organizations. The efforts to face these challenges are illustrated in the following examples arranged by the eight elements associated with basic PAR assumptions.

Commitment

Commitment is necessary for participation in a PAR project, however, PAR was not completely understood by all project partners. This can be seen in the interview account of an academic core partner who talked about how the core partners could have immersed themselves in the reading of the literature:

“we might have been better informed of the weight of the responsibility of partnering and of both the positive and the pitfall challenges of the process.”

The community expressed its concerns of commitment from the partners by the account of one of the more vocal community residents:

“Who are the [Group of] Friends of the Community? What is their structure? Do the Friends share the vision of the community?”

An academic core partner responded to the above question during a meeting:

“The Group will decide how to handle a friend who has lost the vision of the community or one who just doesn’t understand the vision. It is important to keep in mind the PAR model and that the Group works *with* the community and not *on* the community.”

Sometimes lack of commitment appeared in the project. Lack of commitment especially shook the community when some of the residents resigned over differences of the organization of the community. Conflict is to be expected in organizing efforts according to Pettitt and Ayers (2002), but with the resignations, the ‘see saw’ stopped. The project seemed to lose the concept of “Living the philosophy of PAR”. In an

academic core partner's field note she relates the community resident's fear of losing the community's commitment. The community resident states:

"I am concerned that the community no longer believes that anything is going to happen. We have just been passed over and pushed aside so many times and for so long that this just seems like just the same old thing happening to the residents."

A core partner, in an email after the resignation of three community board members and the suggestion of bringing in a mediator to the community, describes her phone conversation with a community resident:

"this is a process we are all stumbling through and that it is the commitment to the community that keeps us vested. We [the Group partners] all committed a long time ago to the fact that this was not going to be fixed in a day, a week or even 5 years. I also explained that we [the partners] hoped they [the community] could stay committed to each other but we [the partners] can't control that."

Commitment was defined by an academic core partner in an email to all the core partners. She talks about commitment of the relationships between the core partners and the community residents:

"we are a partnership...we work together to build our programs.. they [the community residents] decide what their issues are – and we decide how we can work with them – we build a partnership together."

PAR and its principle of commitment were not well understood or defined in this project as is recommended by Lindsey and McGuinness (1998). The community residents specifically asked for a definition of commitment - a clear indication that PAR was not explained in detail. The core partners did not have a complete knowledge of PAR and its commitment responsibilities as quoted in the 'process we are stumbling through'. There was a commitment to share knowledge as evidenced by the communications, meetings, phone calls and visits between the community and the

partners, however, the meaning of that shared knowledge was not adequately conveyed. The commitment of this project was to a vision – not to a process. When the vision seemed to be weakening, the community was shaken, the partners stumbled, and the organizations hesitated. PAR's literature provides a process in which to address social change for equality, but doesn't implement hopes, dreams and visions of participants.

Organization

Early in the project (January 2004) an organizational meeting was arranged by the core partners for the whole group of partners (academics and practitioners) interested in working with the community. This meeting did not include any community residents because it was a meeting for the academics/practitioners to discuss how they would work together with the community. The mission of the meeting was to explain PAR and to come to an understanding of the way in which the work was to be accomplished with the community. The Group discussed the structures (roles/organization/goals) by which the partners would manage and organize themselves (Selener, 1998). The meeting minutes captured the Group's diversity of learners, listeners, opportunity seekers (to watch for opportunities where the Group would be helpful), how to go about empowering the community and resolving conflict, the basic assumptions of the Group and their work in this community. The facilitator stated:

“we all make both good and bad assumptions, but we need to articulate them in order to understand how they will shape our work.”

The community residents also worked on their own organization. The community residents had not previously organized into a formal, institutionalized relationship before the establishment of their non-profit in February 2003. The community clearly articulated that they wanted to improve their situation and solve problems, but may not

have fully understood that organizing under PAR requires respect, equity and empowerment to guide the process (Santiago-Rivera, Morse and Hunt, 1998). The lack of understanding of how a non-profit (or any formal organization) operates and what responsibility accompanies which roles, contributed to frustration and accusations of misuse of power among the community resident board members.

A core partner, in an email, describes the existing frustrations she sees in the community, added to the frustrations of the non-profit organization:

“These are also damages of disaster. The pressure (of the non-profit board) on the community is tearing at the fabric of their social relations.”

A professional mediator was not brought into the community after the resignation of the three board members. However, a core partner visited the community in hopes of meeting with the differing sides of the community organization. His intention was to attempt to mediate the misunderstandings or disagreements of the community resident board members. He was able to meet with some community resident board member's, and their frustrations were relayed in an email produced by the core partner. The email mentions doubts about the misuse of power in the community organization and communicates the words of three community residents:

“The community members spoke of their frustration in working with other board members... [there is] unwillingness of some board members to accept any limitations on their power as board members.”

The misunderstandings and the accusations of power misuse stem from the alleged printing of t-shirts by one board member, with the intention to sell them for a profit. Some of the t-shirts included the initials of the non-profit. A few board members thought that using the non-profit for a profit making business (selling t-shirts) was not appropriate under the roles of a board member. Three board members became upset and

resigned over this for-profit issue. A clear definition of a community non-profit organization would have provided guidance to the community board members (Reardon, 1998). No one from the Group partners, the ‘organizers who organize’ (Beckwith and Lopez, 1997) stepped in to help clarify the roles of organization board members. This inaction probably caused confusion among the board members who probably would have appreciated guidance. Part of this disorganization was poor communication and is expressed by a community resident in a phone conversation with a core partner:

“there are too many misunderstandings and very poor communication.”

The vision of this work was significant to both the partners and the community residents. Action research on its own will not change practice, it requires ownership and a belief by all [participants] that the end result is a shared one (Balfour and Clarke (2001). This project was a vision of the community. The process to achieve the vision was difficult.

Living the Philosophy

Living the philosophy of PAR means developing trusting partnerships and promoting effective change (Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998). The community residents have a guarded trust of outsiders which relates to Healey’s (2001) assumption that original causes of oppression lie in macro-social structures, and secondly, that PAR draws on conflict theory where the oppressed struggle for positions of power and privilege. The community negotiates two worlds according to a core partner – theirs and the Western or outside world. Distrust (rightfully earned by the community over years of oppression) affected the building of trusting relationships, which in turn affected useful, positive change in the community.

A system of trust had been established between and among core partners prior to the inception of this project. The group of core participants agreed to assemble to write this multi-university, multi-disciplinary and collaborative effort grant (the NSF). The core partners and the community each had their own set of understandings, shared norms and values, and trust among each other prior to the beginning of this project. Shared trust and understanding were built between the two groups over the course of the project and continues after the official end of the NSF grant and is evidenced by a resident's quote "the partners are no longer friends, they are now family". This research "brings partners and community together to identify potential problems, arrive at new common understandings and develop new local theories and then plan for initiating change processes" (Balfour and Clarke, 2001: 46).

The community, in the past, chose to remain an isolated community. In conflict theory, the haves and the have-nots struggle for positions of power and privilege (Healey, 2001). Tied to this conflict theory assumption, the community thought it had power to control their traditional ways within their ranks as long as they stayed isolated. A core partner in an interview makes a statement about the community isolation:

"But when you look at it they are part to blame for where they are right now because they wanted to live in such isolation. They never did any bridge to understanding the outside encroachment upon them. So by keeping an isolation, they were part of the problem that is there today. When a community is so isolated, it keeps to themselves, the outside world is the one then that draws their own conclusions about who and what defines the people [of the isolated community]".

Working with an outside entity was a break from the traditions of the community's distrust of outsiders. This was a community that was accustomed to being outside the mainstream, so even to get attention from the outsiders, was a new event and

an unaccustomed position. Also, the core and associate partners struggled to support a relationship of equity (Healy 2001) when they did not understand the traditional ways of the community. In an interview, an associate partner describes her view of inequality:

“In terms of what I think is required of me - it is just a lot of patience and trying to understand where somebody else is when I’m not there [in the community’s place].”

Building trust among the partners and the community was significant in this project. Yet, one community resident explained building trust in terms of tangible material such as hammers and nails:

“I can take hammer and nails and build something. You see, when you go into a community, you don’t tell them everything you are going to do for them, you tell them some. Then you do more than you told them. This is how you build trust. The people trust you more when you do more than you say you will, than they do when you tell them you gonna do all this and then nothing is done”

Living the philosophy of PAR was complicated by an incomplete understanding of the basic assumptions of the PAR methodology by the partners and the community. Also, to the community, issues of trust had a historical perspective which was difficult to overcome. Yet, some of the Group partners and community residents have built strong trusting relationships. The community is very polite to outsiders, but some appear guarded in their relationships. Also, while many of the partners had good intentions, this process of living the philosophy of PAR takes time and a commitment, which was not possible for many partners to make. Living the philosophy of PAR was difficult because it is an intangible process (‘to understand somebody else when I’m not there’) and the community wanted tangible results such as ‘taking a hammer and nails and building something’.

Leadership Style

A large factor of the success of a PAR project is building understanding, trust and mutual respect while being aware of power relationships when outsiders work with community groups (Lindsey and McGuinnis, 1998). While the partners never intended to lead the research, in many ways they had some types of control. The community wanted change to save their land and heritage, while rapid natural environmental changes were taking place. The community realized they did not have the capacity to coordinate the project or to understand the multiple and dynamic forces which impacted their goals (at least not at the start of the project). Due in part to the non-linear aspects of the position of the community, leadership fell largely to the partners.

Leadership on the partner side was unclear or difficult to negotiate and was seen by the community as not tangible. The community asked who in the partner group does what – and suggested the idea of point persons for the exchange of information. An initial January 2004 meeting attempted to organize the partner Group and determine the ways in which the members might be associated with the community – to identify what each partner member had to offer to the project. The tentative mission of the partner Group is taken from the January meeting minutes: “to gain an understanding of the relationship between the Group and the community and to discuss the organization of the group for further action.”

In the beginning, the leadership in the community was clear. The leader was a resident who had lived most of her life in the community, only living outside the community with family for approximately a year (personal conversation). Her leadership came as a result of a self-described epiphany while watching flood waters rise to near

window height of a nearby house and as the prairie turned into a lake. It was the third time in nine months that the homes in the community were flooded. The resident galvanized the community to organize; she saw that change needed to happen if her community was to survive. She explains how she began the process of getting help for her community:

“I said we’ve got to do something, something has got to give. Where do I go, who do I talk to? I don’t have the education to know what to do.”

The resident initially handled most of the contacts and appeared to understand the workings of the community better than any other resident. She was verbal in her leadership role and often unwavering.

One measurement of leadership style can be seen by the analysis of the communications in this project, starting with the documented communications. The core or associate partners generated 88% of documented communications, and emails comprised 81% of the communications. To the Group (core and associate partners), email is an efficient method of communication. Email was the generally accepted communication of the partner Group and it was assumed that the community would automatically accept the partner’s method of communication. Only one community resident was proficient with email communication and she had access to a computer and the Internet at her place of work. Inside the community center, the community shared a single donated laptop connected to the Internet through an elderly resident’s phone line. Unlike the partners who have computers on their desk and at their homes, the community residents had to travel by boat to the community center to use the single laptop. Communication implies understanding of definitions and worldviews; however, the

Group partners did not fully understand the best method of communication with the community. From the field notes of a core researcher:

“Academics/practitioners are accustomed to email and immediately introduced this method into the community. However, the community seemed to prefer face-to-face or phone conversations. It took time to realize that the words of one community member did not necessarily reflect the whole community’s view. Also, when information was sent to only one community member, it often did not get to the rest of the community.”

In examining the process of communication, leadership style failed in the community and within the partners. Neither group realized the gap in communication styles until well into the project.

A product of the leadership styles (or lack of) in this project is that core and associate partners have moved on to other projects. Yet, some core partners remain very involved in the community; one has taken the role of a consultant on the newer ABC grant. The leadership and leadership style in the community seemed clear and steady at the beginning, but towards the end is developing and shifting.

Ownership of Knowledge

PAR suggests a building of knowledge from the bottom up (Reason, 1994). Social change can come from the ownership and acknowledgement of everyday experience. The community’s knowledge is of family, God and seafood harvesting; outside of these institutions the community claimed little other knowledge. Community residents have at times spoken of their as 6th or 8th grade (personal conversation) education level.

The community readily acknowledges the belief that they don’t own the correct knowledge to help themselves with policy change issues. They do know that ‘we got to do something’. A community resident describes the time consuming work of knowledge

sharing by the board members and partners to another community resident during a focus group:

“You have to write letters, attend meetings, do petitions, all the paperwork, that is what we’ve been doing... it’s been a mountain of paperwork. And we are not dealing with the federal, state or local governments, they are [the core partners] and they take it back here and explain it to us. The hard work is putting in the time, nobody [in the community] can see this”.

One of the community residents attending the focus group talks about the knowledge sharing the core partners have done for the community:

“They [the core partners] are going all over the world and helping us. We not talking, we just kicking back and relaxing us, they doing all the work for us.”

A community resident in the focus group responds that this work is interactive – but that the core partners are doing the hard work. She talks about the ‘hard work’ associated with the project and how the core partners carry the voices of the community:

“they [the core partners] are the people that’s going out into the places - dealing with the state and government officials, they are taking our needs and our concerns and what we have told to them [to the core partners] they are taking it from here and they’re putting it into a written format and passing it on to other people saying, you know what, there is a group of people that can benefit because they are trying to preserve their way of life, their cultural heritage. You will also help to maintain the coastal lands of Louisiana.”

A different community resident attending the focus group talks about not knowing how to start doing something about the community’s issues of flooding, but eventually recognizes how to get started. She watched as the community flooded during an early 2004 tropical storm. She describes the event:

“before, we didn’t have all the help from Red Cross or from FEMA... I sat down and I videoed the hurricane looking at a resident’s house. I watched the water come up in the yard and it was just about an inch, and just

daydreaming about the water coming up, and time went by and I noticed the water was almost a foot on the side of the house. And then I started thinking, Lord we are going to wash away [her voice lowers]. And I just kept thinking and praying about it and saying NO! if you start now, it won't happen, but if you don't start, this is what you've got to look forward to. And I opened my eyes, it was only water, the resident's house had water up to the window. The prairie – there was no more grass, it was just solid water. And at that point, I said we've got to do something, something has got to give. Where do I go, who do I talk to? I don't have the education to know what to do. I said OK call the Red Cross. I didn't even have any numbers, I don't know how to call the Red Cross, I don't have their number. I called, they gave me New Orleans, they knew nothing about this community, where is this place? Well, I explain to them where I'm at and they said well mame, we don't know what to do for you. I called Amos [a mental health representative who had found the community because he was lost looking for another community] back and he gave me the number for the Red Cross in this parish [county]. I got a lady down here [in the correct parish], and she started calling me and we got everything started. They sent us supplies, they gave us lunch, breakfast and supper everyday for three weeks. I delivered lunch to the people [of the community] everyday for 3 weeks – we were supposed to get it for one week and we got it for three. Because we had the disadvantage of having no road to our homes, we got the advantage of extra meals from Red Cross ... now I can pick up the phone and call Red Cross, I can call any of the Emergency Preparedness people and they know the community's situation, we are outside the levee, matter of fact, *they call us*, the minute the tide starts changing, the water is coming up, they call right away – [asking] is the tide coming up? how high is it?, is it above normal? they call me right away. Because they know now. Before the Sheriff boat would come through [and announce] Evacuate!. But that was it, you know, they didn't care if you stayed or evacuated. Now they are obligated because the state knows we out here and the state has to know how many stay and how many go [leave or evacuate].”

The community residents are learning to live in two worlds, their traditional world and the world outside. The partners have begun to learn how a small community creates knowledge. There has been a sharing of knowledge and carrying of ‘voice’ that could help change the political and social domination of the poverty stricken (Friere, 1970). The knowledge of the core and associate partners has been joined with that of the community residents which may result in innovative solutions to community problems

(Reardon, 1998). However, the ownership of the knowledge has not been clear, inclusive and egalitarian – more knowledge was produced by the academics (see Table of Outcomes page 129). There are still barriers to be lowered when considering the ownership of knowledge, especially the production of knowledge.

Empowerment

Empowerment can be difficult to measure (Simonson & Bushaw, 1993). It is also difficult to measure how successful the PAR process was in creating the opportunities for empowerment. Many of the partners and the community residents think the community has increased their levels of empowerment, especially the board. The Group partners conclude the community has ‘taken their stand and will be pushed no further’, and that the community is ‘more successful in articulating their challenges’. Some services to the community have increased such as the attention of the Red Cross, the local government, and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). Some of the increase in these services is connected to the Group partner’s efforts (Simonson and Bushaw, 1993); some of the increase was due to the community’s own agency for their situation. The community board members have been the most vocal in this project.

In terms of empowering messages, Group partners often gave double sided ones like ‘you can do this and here is how you do it’. In one instance, an associate partner requesting information for the ABC grant, begins her email:

“Now this is tricky...be patient. Now this is what I think you have...and you can email these back to me... I think...but keep a copy for security... you know how to write on and return documents...you should have... [she lists the documents requested]”

Sometimes partners told the community how to do the work without asking the community how they wanted to go about accomplishing the work or the partner actually does the work for the community (personal phone conversations). Occasionally, some partners thought they had to or could speak for the community such as in the case of the ABC grant. Files document at least 25 emails from a partner strongly ‘telling’ the community what information to provide for the grant application (see above quote). This was work *on* the community, not *with* the community.

Conference attending is an indication of community involvement, development and evolution (Healy, 2001) and could be considered indicators of empowerment. The board members and three other community residents, a husband and wife team and a vocal homemaker, have asserted their roles during this study and have been the ones to speak and attend conferences outside the community (14 events). If we use ‘increased knowledge and egalitarian relationships’ (Freidlander, 2001; Creswell, 2003; Greenwood and Levin, 1998) as a measurement of empowerment, some community members have experienced increased knowledge and were introduced as co-researchers at conferences and seminars.

An examination of the process documentation, conferences and seminars fails to indicate egalitarian relationships. An analysis of the presentations made or conferences attended in Table 5.1 Table of Outcomes reveals 52 attended by partners and 14 by community residents – almost four partner conferences to the community’s one.

The community being studied has participated in this research – not quite as subjects, but not as equal researchers. The community has generated knowledge by sharing their popular knowledge with the core partners, and this knowledge is being well

promoted by the community and partners. The 52 presentations by partners introduced the community's issues to the public, but the public typically views the presenter as gathering the data and doing the work, even though partners presented the issues as working with the community. The presenting partner's name and college or organization is now associated with the work done with the community. However, 14 presentations by community residents over the year-long project is significant considering the residents rarely to never made presentations before. These outcomes support change theory in that the community has found human agency to present their issues to the public beyond their community borders. Yet, the partners' presentations tend to adhere to the more acceptable standard institutional structures of academics generating knowledge and in so doing, somewhat moderate the progress of self-change in the community.

To further the imbalance, three non-community students will finish their thesis or dissertation based on the work in the community. This thesis is included in that number.

Table 2 Outcomes

Outcomes	Community	Partners
Grants Funded	10	1
Grants Written (15 total) (Community approved all applications & includes ABC)	4 in collaboration with the partners	7 benefit the community 4 benefit the partners
Thesis/Dissertation	0	3
Conferences/Presentations Totals	14	52
National Conference	2	4
Regional Conference A	0	1
Regional Conference B	0	1
State Conference	1	1
Local Conference	1	1
Alliance Conference	2	3
ABC Grant	2	2
Applied Society	0	2
Global Climate Change	0	1

National Disaster Asst. Mtg.	0	3
National Judicatory meetings	0	3
State Interchurch Conference	0	1
Aqua Culture Meeting	1	1
International Project Meeting	1	3
Faith Groups – Various	0	5
Funders & Potential Funders	0	7
Focus groups – land stewardship	0	7
Federal Engineers Group	2	1
State Senator meeting	1	0
Congressional Delegations	0	2
Remote Video Class	0	1
Graduate Student Presentation	0	1
International Presentation	0	1
Small Business Presentation	1	0

In Table 5.2, community involvement is estimated by how many community members have been vocal and regularly interacted with the academics/practitioners during this study. Only 24% of an average of 77 residents were very or moderately vocal.

Table 3 Community Involvement

Very Vocal	Moderately Vocal	Interacted	Little or No Involvement	Total
5	13	11	48	77
7%	17%	14%	62%	100%

Empowerment was accomplished in the community, but the magnitude of the empowerment is questionable. Some community residents (particularly the board members) were empowered, but the majority of the residents are not active in the project, so it cannot be said the community has been empowered according to Turnbull and Turnbull (2001). Because there is little interaction with the community other than the board and a few other community members, the empowerment of the whole community during the year long research effort is tentative. Reardon (1998) states that researchers

should be sensitive to how empowerment may disrupt the community. It is possible that empowerment may not have been good as in the situation of the power struggles or misunderstandings of the board member's roles and the subsequent resignations. See 'Power Struggles' page 95.

Time and Use of Time

Partners have an institutionalized schedule (8:00 am to 5:00 pm) while the community has a seasonal or all day and all night schedules. The community appears to work all the time – as is common in marginalized communities and those who work in 'extractive' industries such as natural resource or seafood harvesting. Partners are the ones with 'leisure' time or the privileged time to work on this project.

In an early field note, a core partner notes:

"let's try not to overwhelm them, it seems we are always presenting new ideas and new grant proposals. We are always calling them, sometimes at their places of work, and asking them for information I'm sure they've given out several times before to other outsiders, researchers or well wishers. I'm just concerned we are asking too much of their time and throwing too much information at them."

The partners' concern supports Reardon's (1998), and Balfour and Clark's (2001) cautions of too much too quickly. The community residents know their situation and are the best decision makers of the social change they want. However, the community rarely turned down any of the ideas or suggestions of the partners. Usually they gladly listened to the suggestions of new ideas, grants, conferences and information from the partners. This may have been because the community, after having been so neglected for so long, was afraid to turn down any chance of help, no matter how much time it might take away from their daily activities. In a few casual conversations, mention was made by

community residents of taking time away from the community's seafood harvesting responsibility to work on the community's social change issues. Sometimes the community clearly decided to return to their original focus of the next approaching hurricane season, which includes the issues cited by a community resident:

“litter, lifting homes, addressing bulkheads, rebuilding homes that are still damaged from previous storms, addressing flood risks, roofs and the issues that deal with the basic issues of comfort, safety and sanitation.”

Doing PAR takes time and emotional energy. Tichen and Binnie (1993) talk about the personal cost of PAR work and the accompanying risk of burnout. Partners, in casual conversations, often questioned and struggled over how to handle even the simplest requests from the community. A lack of a common language took time for both the community and the partners to decipher requests such as what grants could be used for what purposes. Much time was spent on undocumented phone conversations discussing grants and grant objectives. Because the community had never been responsible for grant accounting, this was a new skill to be learned. Also, it took time to read through the grants (usually written by the partners in academic terms), and then more time to understand what the grants were meant to do. One core partner wondered if the influx of grants could have been handled differently - such as working and completing one grant before another is applied for.

A successful PAR project requires scheduled time because of the collaborative work and the complex and multiple activities around this work (Lax and Gavin, 2002). This particular project of multi-university, multi-disciplined partners added to the time necessary for this work to take place as well as the 'distance' time it took to get to a meeting (the partners and universities were in different cities and states). The partners

took time to come to an understanding of the work and how to proceed with the community – not all were well versed on PAR practices. The community also required time to understand the work and to learn how to proceed with the process. Time and the use of time were noteworthy prerequisites of this project.

Power Struggles

Issues of power between the partners and the community were rarely mentioned among the two (Hastings, 1998) – but being sensitive to power inequality does not remove it (Burawoy, 1991). Issues of power were informally discussed among the partners. The core partners understood the concept of not using ‘white, educated’ power ‘over’ the community, but sometimes had difficulty keeping egalitarian relationships at the forefront of their work. An email example from a core partner held an indication that researchers knew better than the community, when he stated that the researchers should be available to answer the community’s questions. This was an assumption that the community would have only questions, while the research partners would have the answers. An underlying supposition of PAR is that knowledge is related to power and that power is related to change (Couto, 1987; Hall, 1992; and Henderson, 1995 in Lindsey and McGuinness, 1998). The community’s and the partner’s knowledge were expected to be channeled towards making social changes that benefited the community and increased the knowledge of all participants.

The past history of the community was a factor of how the community viewed power – as in they believed they had little power or control (Fenge, 2002) over their lives before the project began. One community resident talks about her concern that the

community no longer believed anything was going to happen – that this work with the Group partners was for nothing – their homes have not been raised and there had been no fill⁶ brought into the community – there were no physical effects from the efforts of the partners. To the community, having power would mean having a tangible item. Without the power of the researchers, the issues of the community may remain invisible (Healy, 2001). Without tangible items, the community could not visualize the power they or the partner's held in this project and therefore a majority of residents believed they remained invisible and as powerless as before the project.

From time to time, core partners attempted to remind the community of the power they (the community) already held (personal conversations), usually when a resident commented that nothing would happen. The community and some partners had difficulty remembering the role of the research partners (who were seen as educated therefore powerful) and the influence this may have on the community (Fenge, 2002). The community does not consider their local knowledge skills as valuable based on the past treatment (being overlooked) from local government and somewhat from state and federal governments. Control over the production of knowledge would place power in the hands of the community, ensuring the knowledge is used to their benefit. One of the unexpected issues in this project around power were the intra-community power struggles - such as among the community residents when issues of the board member roles were called into question and the ultimate resignations. This board member power struggle caused a rift in the community and residents 'took sides'. The partners were unprepared for this rift as they thought the community had a communal decision-making process.

⁶ Dirt or sand placed to build up low lying, subsiding land or to stabilize water edges.

‘Emergency’ phone conversations and a plan for the partners to visit the community were arranged in hopes of helping the community over this rift.

In the view of some residents, the power struggle of the community board members in time materialized into a power struggle between the community and the partners. One core partner made preparations to visit with the existing board members in an attempt to mediate the situation. Upon arriving in the community, he was met by some board members who voiced their frustrations about misuse of power, and possibly grant funds, by some board members. Later during that same visit, he was met with great hostility by other board members and was told to leave the community and that the Group partners were no longer welcome in the community (personal phone conversation). This exchange greatly unsettled the relationships that had been built between the community and the partners. The power struggle in the community originated from the possible misunderstanding of events surrounding the resignation of three board members. The partners were given one version, the core partner went down to attempt mediation, then was given a different version. The visit by the core partner was seen by some residents as attempting to control both the research and the community – something the community was told would not happen under a PAR process. The partners and community residents did come together in a group meeting to discuss this event, and some agreements were made to work smarter together, but no concrete resolutions emerged. The community and its board members eventually settled the power struggle and decided to continue the work, and replaced the three resigning board members. Ultimately the majority of the community decided that disagreement with the project’s direction did not mean exclusion of any community member from the potential benefits of the project.

A second intra-community power struggle was concerning the ABC grant. The associate partners who wrote the grant struggled to gather information because the community was slow to respond to the requests for information needed to submit the grant. This time, the power struggle was about which grants were appropriate for the community. Some residents didn't believe the ABC grant was appropriate or that the community was ready for this grant (personal conversations). Again, this confrontation supports the question of who is in control of the knowledge, the knowledge of what is good for the community. Best intentions were behind this struggle for control, but implied that the associate partners knew what was best for the community. The liberation of domesticated education allows for a restructuring of education that could help change political and social domination over the poverty stricken (Friere, 1970). A few associate partners had decided this grant was what the community needed and wanted and continued to pressure the community for the needed information. These actions, while well meaning, did little to change the social domination of the community. The ABC grant was awarded to the community.

In this event over the application of the ABC grant, the core partners remained silent and let the community decide how to proceed and handle the information requests. But it took much intra-effort and turmoil for this silence to be held. The core partners passively disputed the application of the grant, but never said this to the associate partner or the community.

The core partners realized the introduction of this grant would launch a third party into the equation of partner and community – an amalgamated partner of sorts. This

‘compound’ or ‘complex’ party was not quite as studied on the PAR process as the core partners and held a different agenda – appropriately, one that fit the new grant. The new grant compelled the community to deal with two kinds of partners, those under the PAR methodology and those under the ABC grant guidelines. Since the awarding of the new grant, the partners settled into working together with the common goal of following the community’s wishes.

There were power struggles among the board members (the resignations) and power struggles among the partners (ABC grant). Power struggles, back and forth, can be damaging to a project, but they can also strengthen the project. The power struggles, like communication, are most damaging to a project when they stop. This ‘see-saw’ of power (Pettitt and Ayers, 2002) allowed the project to discover where the weaknesses of the project were hidden and exposed them. The community and the partners learned from these struggles and continued to move forward with the project.

Analysis Conclusions

In this PAR project there was and still is commitment from the community and the partners. The usefulness and efficiency of the community organization has improved. Living the philosophy of PAR has affected all the participants in this project – all have a new knowledge of this methodology. Emerging leadership style has developed in the community residents, with some residents assuming unexpected roles. The leadership style of the partners has also developed into a more egalitarian one just from knowing the PAR methodology as an alternative to the normal rigors of natural and social science. Ownership of knowledge has become an item of awareness for both partners and community members. Empowerment of the community residents has been hard to

quantify, but their accounts suggest some believe they have been empowered. Recently, both the community and the partners have come to realize that successful PAR projects take time and energy – just how much was unanticipated at the beginning of the project. The acknowledgement of power and its inherent struggles became a weighty element of this project with the introduction of the ABC grant. Finally, this study extends an understanding of the PAR process of working with communities and academic/practitioner partners in this particular hazards research.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

Participatory Action Research may be the most promising methodology to use for universities and communities working together, but it is difficult work. This project attempted to determine if PAR was an appropriate methodology for doing research in a rural coastal community facing a multitude of oppressions and natural hazards challenges. The community wanted to find a system to save their land and their heritage in a way appropriate to their needs and specifications and the academics/ practitioners wanted to help with this goal. The data produced several emergent themes in this research that include time, visions, assumptions, power, empowerment, knowledge generation, and understanding PAR.

This type of research takes a significant amount of time and emotional energy to work well. Is one year adequate to accomplish the goals of this community considering the havoc time has already wreaked? The residents would tell you they don't see any progress. However, this research continues, with some participants leaving the project, while others are renewed and continue. The PAR process may not work quickly enough to see the community achieve its goals before the unthinkable natural hazard occurs and makes human living in this geographic area impossible. It will take large amounts of emotional and physical energy to rebuild the community in the event of a major natural disaster.

The community had a vision and the academics/practitioners had a process. This project may have started with different agendas. The community's vision during this project was to achieve tangible goals such as preserving their heritage, protecting their land from further erosion and elevating their homes. The academics/practitioners focused

on the PAR process to effect social change so the community could meet their goals. All stakeholders wanted to see change, but the academics understood the process of change and the community saw the vision of a sustainable community. This project could have been better if the difference between a vision and a process were understood and explained.

Assumptions were made by academics/practitioners such as the appropriate way to communicate and the actual level of community knowledge of outside structures, for example nonprofit board organization and general accounting procedures. Late into the research year, academics and practitioners realized the best communication was face-to-face or by phone, and not by email as academics are more accustomed to. The community had never operated under an organizational board system. Some residents budgeting systems consisted plainly of the cash on hand. As is the case for most working class, the residents had only been accountable for family funds, but probably never for organizational funds. The lack of email communication and knowledge of common ‘outsider’ practices such as accounting and board structures, as outsiders had established them, impeded the progress of project goals.

In this study, it was important to understand who was involved and what the power dynamics were within the partnership. As demonstrated by the ABC grant matter and the resignation of resident board members, what worked for some partnership members, didn’t for others. Partnership and power dynamics will be part of any project, but being more aware of potential power dynamics might have provided the ability to identify possible problems in this project and to devise a plan to address them.

Some, but not all, community members have become more empowered and vocal in their assertions of saving their land and their heritage. They have been invited and have spoken to several groups regarding this project; a space has been created for the residents to speak in a world of structures that has tended to silence them. However, from the outcomes table, we see that the production and ownership of knowledge is weighted in favor of the academics. The community has attended and/or presented at least 14 times between July 2004 and July 2005. Many of these presentations came about due to partner promotion of the project. Partners' presentations tend to adhere to the standard institutional structure of academics generating knowledge – because this is our academic system of judging progress or promotion. In doing so, we may have been moderating or overshadowing the progress of self-change in the community.

PAR methodology became most clear to the community only when they did not see it present when interacting with some of the partners. When the writing and implementation of the ABC grant took place, the residents noticed the different approaches some partners took to the work in the community. The residents were able to take a critical look at the possibilities of why this grant looked and felt different than other community/partner work, and it was through *not* seeing PAR, that they began to better understand the PAR methodology of working in communities.

Social Change

Has the project accomplished its goals? Or has it put a band-aid on the problem? The progress of the community has moved along, but has not been able to accomplish the goals of community sustainability within this project time frame. Band-aids have helped get the word out about the community and have gotten many outside folks to consider the

community's predicament and what could assist their ability to maintain their life world. The seeds of social change have been planted both inside and outside the community. The community's voice is being heard outside of the parish (county), State of Louisiana and the country. The community residents are promoting themselves, and have become articulate and well versed in how to present their life world and systems of knowledge. The community and academics/practitioners have worked collaboratively to raise the debate over limited resources and the right to live in a sustainable place without fear of more or continued oppressions. The community's voice is being spread.

Appropriate or Inappropriate Approach to Research

This study evaluates the success of Participatory Action Research as an appropriate methodology for academics/practitioners/community residents to conduct hazards research in a small coastal community. Using an extended case method, I attempted to demonstrate how Participatory Action Research could be modified into a more complete conceptual framework, to be used in communities facing environmental challenges and natural disasters. While complex issues of power struggles, communication and organization slowed the progress of this project, the social change process is in motion. PAR has its limitations, however, it does appear to be a useful research method for residents, researchers and those who want a more respectful, empowering, ground-up approach to multi-user learning and social change. Residents are beginning to establish themselves as co-researchers, but have effortlessly established themselves as equal partners to bring about social change in a collaborative way. The community residents were able to learn new ways of seeing their life world, to critically think about their situation, and to strategize on how to change or maintain it to their

specifications. Academics and practitioners gained valuable knowledge of everyday life issues and struggles of the community and of their vast knowledge of the ecosystem.

The graphic below is an estimate of accomplishment of the eight elements used to guide this study. Some were accomplished well, some not so well. This is a visual estimate and not an exact measurement.

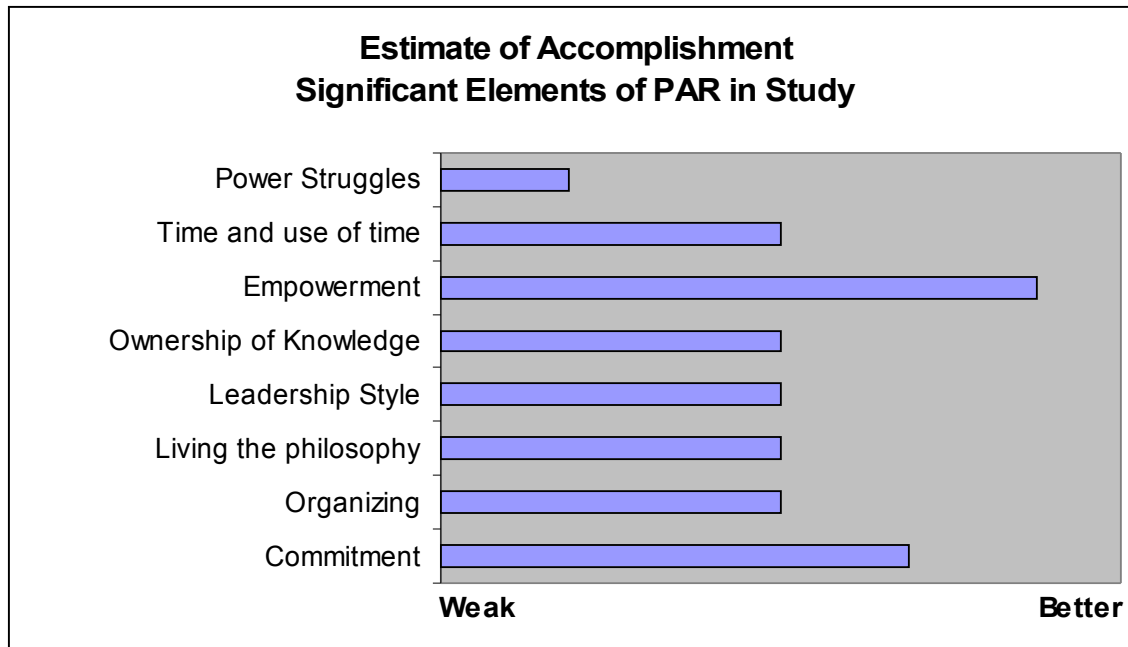


Figure 6-8 Estimate of Accomplishments

Research Question and Extension of Theory

PAR is not just a method it is also theory. It is a marriage of how and why social phenomena occur. As such it is difficult to directly answer the research question of whether PAR is an appropriate methodology to use in marginalized communities facing well known oppressions and an increasing potential of natural hazards. However, through Burawoy's extended case method, we can expand a PAR method/theory using Kemmis and McTaggart's concepts (see page 12) to hypothesize a more complete PAR. PAR can be the conceptual framework for academics and practitioners to use in hazards

research with marginalized coastal communities facing natural hazards, if all participants can use collaborative self-reflection to promote social and educational processes through shared negotiation and can exercise unhurried minor changes of everyday issues, while being aware of partnership power dynamics. Using PAR in a community facing multiple oppressions and wanting major social changes is a challenge. A good Participatory Action Research project builds time for partnerships to be developed and explored, an exchange of knowledge, critical examination (or see-saw) of power, theory, and ultimately social change.

Unintended Consequences

Part of the goal of this project was that all stakeholders have a good understanding of PAR practices. The community realized what PAR was when they did not see it in some of the partners. The illustration of this is while writing the ABC grant, the community did not see PAR in the associate partners who did not completely embrace or incorporate PAR principles. The community began to realize their best allies were the core partners who were more PAR-like in their philosophy than a small number of associate partners. This realization of not seeing PAR in a partner supports the change theory. The community is changing, it is learning to look at a situation, demand change, and then begin to work with outsiders in a way they are comfortable with (Lewin's unfreeze, change, refreeze). The community is also growing more proficient in coping with their problems (Ritzer, 2000), and including a wider array of skills and abilities by incorporating formerly excluded societies (the partners) (Ibid). But not seeing PAR in a partner also reflects conflict theory in that the community realizes the competition for

limited resources, the resources being the partners that exemplify PAR qualities of community empowerment, commitment, and appropriate leadership style.

In the focus group, the community residents referred to the core partners as their ‘life line’. The work accomplished by the partners seems small in comparison to the appreciation of the core community residents. Paying attention to the community, listening to them, has far greater value than the ‘business’ side or the eight elements PAR work seeks to accomplish. This puts a significant amount of responsibility on the core partners to continue their work in the community. The core partners have pledged their continued commitment to the community, and continue to bring other resource partners including grant funders to sustain the work that has begun. The core partners did more than listen to the community residents, we heard them.

However, reliance of the community on the ‘life-line’ partners does not necessarily promote social change – it may mask it. It may in fact trade relying on the local government for help in their situation, with relying on their new ‘lifeline’. This dependency may delay or hinder the possible conflict that arises from the have-nots that stimulates the process of social change. In this case, the have-nots have the partners, a resource the community has mobilized in hopes of positive social change. We have not helped this community overcome institutional strictness, nor have we assisted the community to transform any structures such as elimination of oppression; genuine acceptance of their traditional knowledge production or ownership of that knowledge. The community still struggles with achieving the agency they recognize is mandatory to make them a community able to accomplish social change on their own. However, the

work of the partnership and stakeholders seems to refuse to go away and continues to move forward. Long-term commitment is a tenant of PAR.

An unintended consequence of forming the non-profit board is that it caused rifts among the community residents. While a non-profit status allows the community to obtain grants and attract funders to further their goals, the expense of severing long term family and community ties is heartbreaking to the community and to the partners. With good intentions, and in order to help the community obtain their own funding, the partners assisted and guided the community in the formation of their non-profit. However, the partners did not realize or follow up on assisting and guiding the community with the roles and responsibilities of board membership. This is one of the many details PAR practitioners must be aware of when entering into a partnership.

Ethical Considerations

From this partner's perspective, an ethical issue is that of 'do no harm'. While only best intentions and strict adherence to the tenets of PAR serve the project participants well, there is a question as to whether some harm may be done. With such an isolated community, the introduction of technology and research procedures can serve to enhance skills, but also to isolate participating individuals into separated and less communal roles.

Limitations

In almost any project between university and community, the university has much to gain and the community has much to lose. With a one-year project, universities are more proficient at being successful and at learning lessons in a semester or two. Students are much better suited to gain from lessons learned in a successful or failed project. A

community has much more at stake and one year is not long enough for a community to effect lasting change. Good PAR requires more than a one year project.

Email communication in the community is not efficient; there is only one computer shared among the residents. Before this project began, many of the residents were unfamiliar with computers and the Internet and this could be the reason for the lack of email communication from the community.

It takes time to achieve a true PAR methodology, and time has already ravaged the community. Some of the community has moved on because it is too expensive to repair their homes or they were just tired of dealing with the flooding, having to constantly struggle with keeping old boats running to go back and forth to their homes and other inconveniences of living in the community. It is expensive to elevate the homes and/or have dirt or sand hauled onto the remaining land [to build it up above sea level] – and tangible results take time. The PAR process may not work quickly enough to see the community achieve its sustainability goals.

This study provided a chance to work with a small rural community. The lessons learned could be used to work in similar communities facing racism, classism and major environmental destruction. Likewise the findings in this study may fill the gaps in the literature on how best practices can avoid and overcome the inherent differences that occur between communities and practitioners/academics. Hopefully this study will serve to better equip researchers who want to use a PAR methodology and to help researchers understand the commitment it takes to accomplish good PAR work.

This project was a year long National Science Foundation funded endeavor, with two co-Principal Investigators and a long list of specialists from several fields across

several universities and states. I was a learner in this process and had a student's input into the project. The thesis is my work, I wrote it. I was well guided, but I had concerns in the writing of this document, that I did not see in my classmates as they wrote their theses on much different research. This thesis is about people who are my friends and companions, and I often struggled with what may be considered negative reporting. This is emotional work.

Lastly, it may have been better to organize the chapters of this thesis differently. Placing the Analysis and Findings ahead of the literature review and the data collection and methodology would have allowed a more prominent place for the 'voice' of the community residents, and may be a better practice than the more traditional academic guidelines for a master's thesis.

Recommendations

There was much to be learned in this project and all of these recommendations lead back to Lindsey and McGuinnis (1998) – plan better, allow more time, read more literature, make a stronger commitment and be aware of power dynamics. Lastly, continue to use reflexive science (Burawoy, 1998).

PAR is time consuming and emotional work because of the close involvement among PAR partners. We were not prepared to have our hearts taken away by the community. So when rifts or divisions came, we were emotionally stunned. All participants experienced frustration with the pace of the project. The partners did gain an enhanced view of how much the community had been “passed over and pushed aside so many times”. The PAR literature did not prepare all the partners for this lengthy and emotional experience.

Be ready to spend a lot of time preparing for this work. Had we read Stoecker (1999) who claims that academics are so concerned with doing the right thing, and so trained to evaluate everything from every angle before making any commitment to action, we could have addressed the need for preparation before the project began. One of the project academics reported how ‘paralyzing’ this work was for her because we tried to carefully analyze every point in this work.

Prepare to grow the project at a pace manageable by the stakeholders. When we talked about the research to those outside the project, people were interested and wanted to be a part of it. We grew too fast and in the process, disappointed several well-meaning people who had great support to offer, but we just did not have the time to coordinate all the offers, Reardon’s (1998) point of overwhelming seasoned leaders. Fewer researchers would have made the project easier to manage, but would not have afforded the many ideas and networks formed as a result of the multi-university, multi-disciplined group.

Some of the partners did not know how to handle the division in the community over the resignation of some board members and over the ABC grant – some did nothing to handle the division. In thinking if we do not look at it, talk about it, interact with it, it will go away, we did a disservice to the community. The PAR literature provided little to no useful guidance on the issue of division. More detail on community organizing can be researched prior to another PAR study.

As researchers using a PAR methodology, we did not always acknowledge our power. For example, there is the possibility that those with more education both within the community and those from outside will have more control. To expose the possibility of power issues, one of the first exercises could have been to ask why do we engage in

partnerships? Our motives influence the partnerships and who and how someone benefits from the partnership. Community residents commented on the different educational levels within the community, and how some community residents thought they were better than those without higher educations. There were no discussions with the community about the educational level of the academics/practitioners. Holding a frank discussion about educational status as partners could ease some of the differences between community and researchers. The community held a high respect for the partners and we did not always consider that our educational level might be regarded as a form of power in the thoughts of the community. Many times I reassured community members that our education was not better than theirs, it was simply different. At the beginning of a PAR project, involve the community and the academics/practitioners in self-assessment of roles, responsibilities and expectations, as well as individual resources such as level of education.

Positive Aspects

The community has learned new skills and has been introduced to thinking in new, different and ‘other’ ways. The partners experienced a learning curve on the process of PAR. The partners’ and a new generation of student hazard researchers have been impacted and their future work will genuinely consider seeing things “through the eyes of the people who live in the community.” Stakeholders in this research learned the potential value of research accomplished *with* community people. Because this project was multi-disciplinary, each discipline has informed another. This experience is being transferred to the classrooms of the academics and allows better science in all disciplines.

PAR is designed to involve a variety of disciplines and expert knowledge levels in order to generate benefits for all participants.

The community is very appreciative of the work put forth in this project. They have thanked us verbally and have always been very hospitable. One of their favorite ways of showing their appreciation (and ours too) is by cooking feasts for us when we come for a meeting. Several personal emails and phone calls had indicated that friendships rather than just partnerships have been built. At the final focus group, we were told that we are no longer friends, we are now considered family.

Community empowerment is hard to quantify. If we use Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) who state that empowerment is “increasing control over one’s life and taking action to get what one wants and this occurs when there is a transaction between one or more individuals and in the context in which they are taking action”, then yes, empowerment has occurred in the community. Additionally, empowerment of a community is accomplished when individuals are empowered. Within the community individuals were empowered by learning their voice is important, their requests are being heard and they have somewhat increased control over their lives by using their voices. Unfortunately, voicing your issue does not equate with action. The community has voiced their concerns of elevating their homes, stopping their land loss, and saving their heritage. As of this writing, these goals are in process, but none have been accomplished. We have heard many times from the community that they want something tangible; they want to return to the original goals of the non-profit organization. What the partners have provided is the process to obtain these goals.

Through the partner networks, more nonprofits, project funders, local, state and federal government officials, as well as many and multi-disciplined researchers have heard the story of the community and their social injustice issues. Coastal restoration in Louisiana is garnering headlines, and the community is a poster child for this movement. Interest in the community and its issues of sustainability is spreading. Awareness is a stepping stone towards policy change, although there has been no policy changes introduced regarding any of the community's concerns during the project. The community is realizing that policy change takes time; unfortunately time is running out for them. But they also know that social structures took years to put into place, and it will take years to change those structures. They also realize the possibility that their lives could change overnight if the unthinkable natural disaster occurs in their community.

Bibliography

- Babbie, E.** (1998) *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Balfour, Mags and Charlotte Clark.** (2001) "Searching for sustainable change" *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 2001; 10: 44-50
- Beckwith, Dave, Christina Lopez** (1997) "Community Organizing: People Power from the Grassroots" Center for Community Change, University of Toledo
- Blaikie, Piers M., Terry Cannon, Ian Davis, & Ben Wisner** (2003) *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*. Routledge, New York, NY
- Burawoy, Michael** (1998) "The Extended Case Method" *Sociological Theory* 16:1 p 4-33, American Sociological Association, Washington, D.C.
- Cornwall A. & Jewkes R.** (1995) "What is participatory research?" *Social Science and Medicine* 41(21) 1667-1676.
- Creswell, John W.** (2003) *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Creswell, John W.** (1998) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Dana, R. H.** (1993) *Multicultural assessment perspectives for professional psychology*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Edelman, Ira.** (2000) "Evaluation and Community Based-Initiatives" *Social Policy*: Winter 2000, p. 13-23
- Fals-Borda, Orlando and Muhammad Anisur Rahman.** (1991) *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research*. New York: Apex Press
- Fenge, Lee- Ann.** (2002) "Practising partnership – participative inquiry with older people" *Social Work Education*, Vol. 21, No2, 2002
- Fisher, Robert** (1995) "Neighborhood Organizing: The importance of a historical context" *Revitalizing Urban Neighborhoods*, Keating, Krumholz, and Star (Eds.) University Press of Kansas
- Foster, J.** (1983) "Critical theory and organizational analysis" in G. Morgan (Ed.) *Beyond method: Strategies for social research* (pp. 234-246). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Friedlander, Frank.** (2001) "Participatory Action Research as a Means of Integrating Theory and Practice" in Proceedings, Fielding Graduate Institute, Action Research Symposium, Alexandria, VA July 23-24, 2001
- Freire, Palo.** (1970) *Pedogagy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum Publishing Group, Inc.
- Freire, Palo.** (1993) Foreword, Park et al (ed) *Voices of Change*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group
- Greenwood, Daavydd J. and Morten Levin.** (1998) *Introduction to Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Hastings, Annette** (1999) "Analysing Power Relations in Partnerships: Is There a Role for Discourse Analysis?" *Urban Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 91-105
- Hall, B.L.** (1992) "From margins to center: The development and purpose of participatory research." *American Sociologist* 23(4), 15-28
- Healy, Karen** (2001) "Participatory action research and social work: a critical appraisal", *International Social Work*, Vol: 44 No:1, January 2001, pg 93-105
- Henderson, D.J. (1995)** "Conscious raising in participatory research: method and methodology for emancipatory nursing inquiry" *Advances in Nursing Science* 17(3), 58-69.
- Herrick, James** (1995) Empowerment practice and social change: the place for new social movement theory" A working paper prepared for The New Social Movement and Community Organizing Conference, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. November 1-3, 1995
- Kelly, D. & S. Simpson** (2001) "Action research in action: reflections on a project to introduce Clinical Practice Facilitators to an acute hospital setting" in *Journal of Advanced Nursing* Vol. 33, p.652-9
- Kemmis, Stephen and Robin McTaggart.** (2000) "Participatory Action Research" in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Second Edition (Denzin and Lincoln, eds.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Lewin, Kurt.** (1948) *Resolving Social Conflicts*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers
- Lindsay, Elizabeth, Liza McGuinness** (1998) "Significant elements of community involvement in participatory action research: evidence from a community project" *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Nov98, Vol. 28, Issue 3, p1106, 9p

Locke, L. F., Spirduso, W. W., & Silverman, S. J. (1998). The oral presentation. In L. F. Locke & W. W. Spirduso & S. J. Silverman (Eds.), *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals* (3rd ed., pp. 130-144). Newbury Park: Sage.

Lofman, Paivi; Pelkonen, Marjaana; Pietila, Anna-Maija. (2004) "Ethical issues participatory action research" *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*. Vol: 18 No: 3, September 2004, Pg 333-340

Maguire, P. (1987) *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach*, University of Massachusetts: The Center for International Education

McCrystal and Godfrey, Patrick, and Ann Godfrey. (2001) "Developing a researcher-practitioner partnership for the effective evaluation of professional social work training" *Social Work Education*, Vol., 20, No. 5, p 539-549

Mileti, Dennis. (1999) *Disasters by Design: A Reassessment of Natural Hazards in the United States (Natural Hazards and Disasters: Reducing Loss and Building Sustainability in a Hazardous World: A Series*, Washington, DC, Joseph Henry Press

Park, Peter. (1992) "The Discovery of Participatory Research as a new Scientific paradigm: Personal and Intellectual Accounts". *American Sociologist*, Winter 92, Vol. 23 Issue 4, p 29; 14 p.

Parsons, Talcott. (1966) *Societies*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Pettitt, John M., David F. Ayers (2002) "Understanding Conflict and Climate in a Community College" *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 26: 105-120

Preston, Christine. (2000) *Social Continuity and Change, and Social Theory*, for Society and Culture Inservice, Nagle College 12th August

Reardon, Kenneth. (1998) "Participatory Action Research as Service Learning" *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, No. 73, Spring 1998: Jossey-Bass Publishers

Reason, Peter. (2003) *Choice and Quality in Action Research Practice*, Keynote address, ALARPM 6th World Congress, PAR 10th World Congress, Pretoria, September

Reason, Peter., Editor (1994) *Participation in Human Inquiry*, London: Sage

Schwab, J. (1994) *Deeper Shades of Green: The Rise of Blue-Collar and Minority Environmentalism in America*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Selener, D. (1997). *Participatory Action Research and Social Change*. The Cornell Participatory Action Research Network. Ithica, New York; Cornell University

Spencer, Herbert. (1898). *The Principles of Biology*. Vol. I. New York: D. Appleton.

- Stake, Robert.** (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Sutton, R. & Staw, B.** (1995) "What Theory is Not" *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 371-384
- Santiago-Rivera, Asara L., Gayle Skawennio Morse, Anne Hunt, Henry Lickers** (1998), "Building a community-based research partnership: lessons from the Mohawk nation of Akwesasne" *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 163-174
- Stoecker, R.** (1999) Are Academics Irrelevant? Roles for Scholars in Participatory Research. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42 (5), pp. 834-848.
- Stringer, Ernest T.** (1999) *Action Research 2nd Edition* London: Sage Publications
- Turnbull, Ann and Rud Turnbull.** (2001) *Families, Professional, and Exceptionality: Collaborating for Empowerment*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Prentice Hall
- Wallace, Lurleen B.** (1999) Faculty/Staff Handbook, College of Nursing and Health Sciences
- Yin, Robert K.** (2003) *Case Study Research Design and Methods 3rd Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Vita

Joselin Simoneaux Landry was born in Crowley, Louisiana, on March 5. She is the daughter of Jerome and Hilda Simoneaux of Rayne, Louisiana and is married to John Landry of Gretna, Louisiana. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with minors in Women's Studies and Management Information Systems in May 2003 from the University of New Orleans.

During her senior year, she was approached by the Director of the Center for Hazards Assessment, Research and Technology (CHART) about a graduate assistanceship working in an environmental sociology program. She began working at CHART the Fall of 2003 for Dr. Shirley Laska. During her graduate studies, she presented at several conferences: twice at the Boulder, CO Natural Hazards Workshop (July 2004 and 2005), two presentations at the Mid-South Sociological Association (Oct. 2004), and the Southwestern Sociological Society (March 2005).

She has worked on Louisiana coastal issues as a graduate assistant, for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a Long Term Recovery Specialist and an Environmental Specialist, and as a Project Manager for a New Orleans recovery nonprofit.

Upon graduation in August 2008, she plans to continue her work in disaster and natural hazards recovery and research.