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Youth Involvement in Participatory Action Research (PAR): Challenges and Barriers

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Abstract

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been increasingly viewed as an effective strategy to enhance youth, community-based organizations that serve youth, and broader communities. However, young people have not been frequently involved in research and evaluation efforts as co-researchers or partners. This paper explored major challenges and barriers to the active engagement of youth identified in previous PAR projects. This critical literature review revealed relational, scientific, and ethical challenges. The relational challenges included a lack of trust and unequal power relationships between youth participants and adult researchers. The scientific issues were significantly associated with the major components of the PAR, such as transformative purposes, iterative processes, and flexible methods. Finally, significant ethical issues are identified in terms of potential risks to youth, confidentiality, and informed consent. This paper concludes with specific recommendations for effective strategies to deal with the challenges and barriers identified and possible directions for future research.

Keywords: participatory (action) research, community-based participatory research, youth involvement, youth empowerment, research ethics

Significant attention has increasingly been paid to youth participation in research and evaluation efforts. Youth participation is important because young people have a social right to participate in any decision-making processes that affect their lives (Checkoway, 2011). Moreover, many scholars and practitioners have found that youth participation in the research process has positive benefits for youth, community-based organizations that serve youth, and broader communities (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009; Ford, Rasmus, & Allen, 2012; Gosin, Dustman, Drapeau, & Harthun, 2003; McIntyre, 2000; Nygreen, Kwon, & Sanchez, 2006; Suleiman, Soleimanpour, & London, 2006). Such promising benefits of youth participation highlight Participatory Action Research (PAR) as one of the effective strategies to address social problems and social injustice that many youth face. PAR seeks to develop practical knowledge for social change through collaborative partnerships (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Fals-Borda, 2001). However, in comparison to adults, young people have not been frequently involved in such collaborative research as co-researchers or partners (Powers & Tiffany, 2006). Thus, little is understood about the challenges and barriers to the active involvement of youth in PAR.

This paper examines the major challenges and barriers to engaging youth in PAR. To do so, it begins with a theoretical overview of PAR, including its definition, historical origins, and philosophical underpinnings and key principles. Second, it describes general trends in previous PAR projects involving youth and explores their common challenges and barriers. Finally, specific recommendations for improving PAR with youth are presented. This paper is inspired by my personal and professional belief that youth can become active agents who contribute to social transformation for both themselves and their communities. PAR may encourage youth to raise consciousness and take collective action to address social problems that they face. Furthermore, it may provide a useful tool to better understand youth problems from their voices and experiences. In these regards, PAR can be considered as both research method and intervention to enhance youth empowerment and development. Despite its potentials, there are still many unanswered questions about PAR with youth. Critical analysis of challenges to PAR with youth can provide useful insights into how to make PAR more equal, inclusive, and democratic to ensure active youth participation.

What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

Definition of PAR

It may not be easy to define PAR because it is an overarching term that encompasses similar collaborative approaches: participatory research, action research, community-based participatory research, and other collaborative methods (Banks et al., 2013). Traditionally, each approach was developed from different historical origins and involved slightly different purposes and strategies. For instance, participatory (action) research focuses more broadly on increasing participants' voices and power in the research context, while action research is more interested in facilitating social action to solve problems (Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor, & Davis, 2003). On the other hand, community-based participatory research tends to emphasize a community as a group of participants that share common identities and interests (Banks et al., 2013; Israel, Schultz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).

However, current researchers have not clearly distinguished these methods, but used them interchangeably by incorporating their key elements (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Pain & Francis, 2003). Kidd and Kral (2005) contended that participation and action are the key components of PAR. Considering these central elements, the primary goal of PAR is to promote social justice and liberate the oppressed population (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Fals-Borda, 2001; Jason et al., 2003; Park, 1993). PAR is also intended to empower participants through democratic partnerships to enable them to increase control over all aspects of their lives and create their own knowledge for social change (Baum et al., 2006; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Healy, 2001; Reason, 2006). As a result, PAR can be defined as collaborative research designed to promote social change through equal partnerships between researchers and participants in various phases of the research.

Historical Origins

Current theories and practices of PAR have been derived from many scholars in different disciplines. However, PAR was developed mainly from two historical traditions: the northern tradition and the southern tradition (Healy, 2001). The northern tradition can be traced back to Kurt Lewin (1946) who coined the term *action research*. He defined it as “comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action” (p. 203). He argued that traditional social science does not provide direct benefits to research participants as well as valid knowledge by separating participants from the research. Accordingly, action, research, and training should be kept together to create practical knowledge and maximize its effects on participants’ well-being (Lewin & Grabbe, 1945).

Lewin (1946) also proposed an iterative process in conducting action research. This circular process includes three basic steps: planning, acting, and evaluating. The planning starts with assessing problems, identifying useful means to address problems, and then making a plan for solving the problem. The next step is to implement the plan with participants after a careful consideration of priorities. Finally, the participants evaluate the success of the action for the next step. This circular process encourages researchers to be flexible and responsive in conducting the research, leading to the best solution (McTaggart, 1991).

PAR also originated from the southern tradition, which is committed to working with oppressed groups for social transformation (Healy, 2001). Paulo Freire (1970) predominantly influenced the southern tradition. Freire proposed two important concepts that shape fundamental principles of PAR: conscientization (critical consciousness) and praxis. Freire (1998) emphasized critical consciousness as an effective means of promoting action for social change. Critical consciousness includes a process of analyzing the root causes of the problems from socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts (Freire, 1998). Freire posited that critical consciousness encourages the oppressed to be aware of their situations, which, in turn, enhances their willingness to take collective action against the oppression. From his notion, developing critical consciousness is one of the essential purposes of PAR.

The concept of praxis suggested by Freire (1970) is also close to the key principles of PAR. He contended that action and reflection should be taken place simultaneously. “Reflection without action is sheer verbalism or armchair revolution and action without reflection is pure

activism or action for action's sake" (Freire, 1970, p. 149). This notion implies that focusing merely on either action or reflection cannot promote actual transformation. Throughout the process of praxis, critical consciousness can be developed continuously, which can lead to further social action (Baum et al., 2006). This repeated circle of action and reflection is a central process of knowledge generation in PAR.

Philosophical Underpinnings and Key Principles

PAR tends not to rely on a single paradigm. Many scholars acknowledge that it has been largely derived from a combination of critical theory, constructivism, or pragmatism (Israel et al., 1998; Park, 1993; Reason, 2006; Reza, 2007). This section identifies philosophical underpinnings of PAR by answering three philosophical questions suggested by Guba (1990): ontology (i.e., what is the nature of knowledge?); epistemology (i.e., what is the nature of the relationship between the knower and the known?); and methodology (i.e., how should the inquirer find or create knowledge?).

Ontologically, PAR assumes the interactions between subjective and objective realities (Baum et al., 2006; Heron & Reason, 1997). In general, its ontological perspective is similar to constructivist viewpoints because participatory action researchers generally believe that multiple realities exist in people's minds (Reza, 2007). However, they recognize that subjectivity cannot be separated from objectivity (Heron & Reason, 1997; Reza, 2007). In other words, "world [objectivity] and human beings [subjectivity] do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction" (Freire, 1970, p. 50). People's perception of their realities is affected by the objective world where they live, but the objective world is also reconstructed simultaneously by the results of individual consciousness. From the subjective-objective dualism, PAR pays attention to understanding how particular actors define their present situations. At the same time, they seek to examine the historical and social contexts that affect people's understanding of their reality.

The epistemological perspective of PAR can be characterized as critical subjectivity (Heron & Reason, 1997; Reason, 1994). Similar to the constructivist perspective, PAR emphasizes a mutual interaction between researchers and participants in creating knowledge. Given the central importance of participants' values, beliefs, and intentions in PAR, reality can be constructed through shared experiences, dialogue, feedback, and exchange between people (Heron & Reason, 1997; Park, 1993). However, PAR shares with critical theorists the assumption that generating knowledge is not neutral and value-free, but political and value-based (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Small & Uttal, 2005). Therefore, participatory action researchers critically examine power structures in the process of knowledge production (Fals-Borda, 2001; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). They also underscore the participants' empowerment to allow them to define their own understanding of their lives (Reason, 1994).

Based on the epistemology of PAR, participatory action researchers stress dialogue as their main methodological strategy (Boog, 2003; Park, 1993; Reason, 2006). However, they tend not to use dialogue simply to understand the lived experience of participants as constructivists do. In PAR, the dialogue is used to critically analyze social problems from their lived experiences in order to raise critical consciousness (Park, 1993). PAR also emphasizes

collaborative partnerships between researchers and participants in the design and implementation of research (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; Reason, 1994). A critical theory perspective can explain this co-operative approach. Critical theorists consider participation as a basic human right that allows participants to take control over their lives (Heron & Reason, 1997; Jason et al., 2003). This political participation in PAR is different from constructivism (Reza, 2007). Boog (2003) noted that although constructivists emphasize mutual relationships between researchers and participants, they tend not to actively involve their participants in formulating the research design, analysis, and dissemination.

Finally, PAR involves an iterative or circular process as well as flexible methods in conducting the research. This emphasis is based on the premise that such pragmatic approaches are beneficial to discover the best practices for social change (Reason, 2006). According to Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2007), the basic procedures of PAR include “planning a change with the community; acting and observing the process and consequences; reflecting on their processes and consequences; and further cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting” (p. 335). In addition, PAR applies diverse methods of data collection, including qualitative (e.g., interviews, observation), quantitative (e.g., surveys, existing data), or even mixed methods (Pain & Francis, 2003; Reza, 2007; Small & Uttal, 2005). More specifically, participatory action researchers often use visual techniques, such as video, photos, mapping, and drawing. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) pointed out that visual methods are useful for local people to explore and express their perspective in their own language. These methods enable people to choose particular symbols that represent their lives and share them with others to identify common themes in an easy and accessible manner (Wang, Burris, & Ping 1996).

Methodology

To investigate general aspects and particular challenges to PAR with youth, a review of the literature was conducted using the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis' WorldCat that provided multiple databases simultaneously (e.g., ERIC, EBSCO Host, JSTOR, SocINDEX, Social Work Abstracts, etc.). Search terms included “participatory action research,” “action research,” and “community-based participatory research” in combination with “youth,” “adolescents,” and “children.” The initial search identified more than 570 items (e.g., articles, books, dissertations, and other materials), but only 179 peer-reviewed articles published in English were further reviewed to be included in the literature review of this paper. Through a careful review, 11 articles were finally selected as actual examples of PAR with youth. The 168 articles were excluded because they did not meet at least one of the selection criteria: (a) providing empirical evidence or actual cases (56%); (b) engaging youth in the research process as active partners (27%); or (c) offering sufficient information about research procedures, the extent of youth participation, outcomes, and lessons learned from a PAR project (17%). Although these articles were not involved in the following literature section, some of which that examined specific issues of PAR with youth, in terms of youth-adult relationships, methodology, and ethical issues, were used in the discussions of the challenges and barriers to youth participation in the PAR.

A Literature Review: PAR with Youth

This section provides the general trends in PAR addressing youth issues. The reviewed studies are specific examples of the PAR involving youth in the research process and provide their research topic, design and methods, levels of youth participation, and the impacts of the project (see Table 1). In these studies, a wide range of topics and issues were addressed. These included health and mental health (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Ford et al., 2012; Suleiman et al., 2006); violence (McIntyre, 2000); drug and tobacco use (Berg et al., 2009; Ross, 2011); family, school, community-based problems (Nygreen et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007); and program/service/ measurement development (Chen, Poland, & Skinner, 2007; Cross et al., 2011; Gosin et al., 2003).

PAR projects usually engaged young people from underserved and marginalized populations, such as the low-income students, immigrants, women, people of color, or youth in disadvantaged communities (Berg et al., 2009; Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Cross et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2012; Gosin et al., 2003; McIntyre, 2000; Ross, 2011; Suleiman et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). Most youth participants were under 18 years of age, but the range of age varied depending on the goals and contexts of the PAR projects. For instance, McIntyre (2000) and Wilson et al. (2007) engaged elementary school students in their projects, while Bostock and Freeman (2003) and Ross (2011) worked with middle and high school students.

Most of the PAR projects reviewed involved youth, adult researchers, and other adult community members in implementing the projects (Berg et al., 2009; Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Ford et al., 2012; McIntyre, 2000; Ross, 2011; Suleiman et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). In fact, it is uncommon for youth to conduct PAR projects alone. In addition, many projects provided youth with training to increase their research skills (Berg et al., 2009; Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Chen et al., 2007; Ford et al., 2012; McIntyre, 2000; Ross, 2011; Suleiman et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). Some projects offered youth incentives to encourage and sustain their participation (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Gosin et al., 2003; Ross, 2011; Suleiman et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). The previous studies also tended to use a wide range of research methods in collecting data although they were more likely to use qualitative methods (e.g., focus group and interview) and visual techniques (e.g., video, pictures, drawing, and writing).

The reviewed studies showed the three types of participation: (a) adult-driven; (b) youth-adult partnership; and (c) youth-driven research, although the youth-adult partnership studies were more frequently identified. Gosin et al. (2003) study can be categorized as adult-driven research. In this project, adult researchers and teachers developed a research design and facilitated activities to create an effective drug prevention curriculum. The youth participants participated partially in some activities, such as logo design and video production, but they were excluded from the decision-making process for the curriculum creation. For the youth-adult partnership research, Ford et al. (2012) study is a good example. In this project, youth participants were involved in a local steering committee with adult researchers, tribal leaders, and older people to choose a research topic. The youth then participated in all phases of the research, as key decision makers, from choosing a research topic to dissemination. On the other hand, Suleiman et al. (2006) study can be considered an example of youth-driven research. The youth participants in this study selected topics based on their interests and played a leading role

in conducting research. The adult researchers usually provided technical assistance in gathering and interpreting the data, if needed.

From PAR projects involving youth, many researchers examined its effectiveness at multidimensional levels. First, some studies indicated that PAR contributed to the development of youth participants, including: (a) strengthening leadership and empowerment; (b) increasing research and communication skills; (c) improving critical awareness about social problems; and (d) expanding social networks in their communities (Berg et al., 2009; Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Ford et al., 2012; McIntyre, 2000; Nygreen et al., 2006; Ross, 2011; Suleiman et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). In addition to the individual benefits, some PAR projects produced positive outcomes for organizations and broader communities (Chen et al., 2007; Cross et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2012; Gosin et al., 2003; McIntyre, 2000). Cross et al. (2011) indicated that their PAR project helped the youth participants develop a culturally responsive measurement to examine the effectiveness of services for Native American youth. Gosin et al. (2011) reported that youth participation in developing a program allowed the organization to develop a more effective intervention responsive to the youth's needs and situations. Ford et al. (2012) showed that their youth project enhanced community capacity by taking collective action to clean their community.

Table 1. A Summary of PAR with Youth Included in the Review

Authors	Topic	Age of youth	Design/Methods	Levels of youth participation	Positive Outcomes
Berg et al., 2009	Drug and tobacco use	14-17 years	Community ethnography	Youth-adult partnerships	-Communication and research skills -Peer norms, collective empowerment, and self-efficacy
Bostock & Freeman, 2003	Youth health needs	14-18 years	Focus group, survey	Youth-adult partnerships	-Decreased participants' substance use -Youth empowerment -Supportive relationships -Research skills -Social change
Chen et al., 2007	PAR project evaluation	12-22 years	Mixed methods	Youth-led or adult-led depending on a phase	-Developed the workbook for the PAR project with youth
Cross et al., 2011	Service evaluation	Middle/high school youth	Focus group	Adult-led	-Developed indicators of success to measure the effectiveness of services for Native American youth
Ford et al., 2012	Health promotion	11-18 years	Interview	Youth-adult partnership	-Developed a youth-action group -Community development
Gosin et al., 2003	Program development	7th graders	Visual methods	Adult-led	-Developed an effective prevention curriculum
McIntyre, 2000	Youth violence	6th graders	Visual methods	Youth-adult partnerships	-Consciousness-raising -Developed teaching pedagogies about youth violence
Nygreen et al., 2006	Community change	13-19 years	Mixed, visual methods	Youth-led	-Consciousness-raising
Ross, 2011	Tobacco use	15-18 years	Mixed methods	Youth-adult partnerships	-Consciousness-raising -Communication and research skills -Youth empowerment -Created a new bill
Suleiman et al., 2006	Health promotion	High school students	Mixed methods	Youth-led	-Consciousness-raising -Communication and research skills -Organizational improvement to engage youth
Wilson et al., 2007	Community change	9-12 years	Visual methods	Youth-adult partnerships	-Consciousness-raising -Youth development and learning

Challenges and Barriers in PAR with Youth

Relational Challenges

Mutual trust between researchers and youth participants is a significant factor for the successful outcomes of PAR (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Ford et al., 2012). If youth participants did not trust their adult researchers and allies, they would be hesitant to participate actively in collaboration with adult researchers. Israel and colleagues (1998) stated that trustful relationships

require a large amount of time and effort. However, young people tend not to have enough time for fully engaging in the research due to their school schedule and other commitments (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Powers & Tiffany, 2006). For example, Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) revealed that their meetings were frequently canceled due to the youth participants' schoolwork. This insufficient time discouraged youth participants to build mutual trust with adult researchers as well as their peers (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Similarly, Bostock and Freeman (2003) reported that some youth participants withdrew from the project because they had different commitments and schedules. Repeatedly changing the research group could hinder the participants from building and maintaining trust among project members.

Another barrier to developing trustful relationships is a significant difference in beliefs, culture, or interests between adult researchers and youth participants. When youth participants perceive adult researchers as members who have similar identities and interests, they are more likely to build bonding relationships with the adults. For example, in the project of Nygreen et al., (2006), Asian youth participants easily accepted the adult researcher because the researcher was from the same ethnic group. Based on their findings, they concluded that the shared identities promoted trust and reduced conflict between adult researchers and youth participants. Furthermore, it is crucial to incorporate youth's interests into research not only for establishing trust, but also for encouraging active participation. Perkins et al. (2007) found that the most important interest of youth in attending community youth programs was fun and enjoyable activities. In this study, when youth considered the program fun and responsive to their interests, they were highly motivated to attend the programs and build trustful relationships with adult researchers.

Many researchers also identify an unequal power relationship between adult researchers and youth participants as a significant challenge to PAR with youth (Nygreen et al., 2006; Ross, 2011; Suleiman et al., 2006; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998; Wilson et al., 2007). Equal and democratic participation in decision-making processes is a central element of PAR (Healy, 2001; Kidd & Kral, 2005). However, some PAR projects involving youth tended to be heavily directed by adult researchers in developing research and action plans. In particular, this issue was more prevalent when participatory action researchers work with younger adolescents (Wilson et al., 2007).

The power inequalities in PAR with youth are closely related to the negative beliefs about their ability to engage in scientific reasoning. Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) found that adult's negative perception of the youth's abilities was a substantial obstacle to ensuring equal participation in the research. These negative beliefs can increase the likelihood that youth participants receive tokenistic roles, or they are manipulated by adult allies (Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). Furthermore, insufficient research skills of youth can cause adult researchers to take more control over the research process. Reason (1994) argued that there are inevitable unequal power relationships in conducting a PAR project because it tends to be initiated by the members of the educated group with sufficient time, skills, and commitment. This notion implies that young people who are not familiar with the research process may follow adults' instructions passively in implementing their projects (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Nygreen et al. (2006) presented similar results. In their project, the struggle between youth leadership and adult control occurred when the youth did not have adequate research knowledge and skills.

Scientific and Methodological Challenges

Scientific and methodological challenges can arise when PAR confronts the question about whether it produces scientifically valid results or not. The methodological aspects of PAR make it difficult to be considered as a scientifically rigorous approach emphasized by traditional research (Jason et al., 2003). For example, PAR does not apply any fixed methods to the research because the research methods are decided by mutual agreement between researchers and participants (Israel et al., 1998). Furthermore, PAR projects with youth frequently use visual methods, such as pictures, photos, videos, or performance (Gosin et al., 2003; McIntyre, 2000; Wilson et al., 2007). Thomas and O’Kane (1998) pointed out that young people prefer communicating with such visual methods because they are more interested and skilled in these approaches than adults. Nevertheless, proponents of traditional research may not consider these flexible research techniques as objective methods, which can ensure scientific rigor.

Additionally, PAR necessitates iterative and cyclical processes for the success of projects. This process-oriented approach requires a tremendous commitment of time and resources (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Israel et al., 1998). However, previous studies involving youth tended to have fixed tasks within a relatively short period and provide limited resources and training opportunities for youth participants (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Ford et al., 2012; Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Suleiman et al., 2006). For example, Powers and Tiffany (2006) reviewed four PAR projects with youth and concluded that the training that aimed to help youth develop their analytical skills were not effective due to extremely limited resources. They also indicated that time constraints led youth participants to collect and interpret data quickly, resulting in less in-depth results. Similarly, Suleiman et al. (2006) found that the youth participants involved in PAR were frequently unable to attend scheduled meetings and activities due to the short timeline of the project. This time constraint did not allow the youth participants to complete their research on time, and ultimately did not accomplish their social action.

Ethical Issues

PAR may unintentionally result in potential harm to youth participants, such as social exclusion, political violence, or emotional distress, because it often consists of social action that challenges existing power structures (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Ross, 2011; Suleiman et al., 2006). This effort tends to engender resistance from dominant groups who hold power or increase interpersonal conflicts between participants with different interests in researching consensual decisions. In Ross’s (2011) project, youth participants felt intimidated by storeowners when they discussed reducing tobacco advertisements at their stores. Wilson et al. (2007) also identified serious conflict and hostility between some group members during group discussions. Some youth participants denigrated other’s ideas and verbally attacked their members when they had different ideas and opinions.

Another ethical issue identified is that PAR may not be free from a breach of confidentiality given that it engages participants in data management, frequently uses group activities, and shares the findings with community members. In a PAR project with youth, they can become both researchers and participants, and research participants are often their peers whom they know well (Chen et al., 2007). This collaborative work conducted in a relatively open

manner can increase the risk of exposing participants' identities (Minkler, 2005). PAR projects conducted in a relatively small community are more vulnerable to compromising confidentiality and anonymity. Ford et al. (2012) noted that their project failed to protect confidentiality because youth participants shared their personal experiences with their peers in the indigenous community where most residents knew each other well.

Finally, participatory action researchers can face some challenges in obtaining informed consent because parental permission is usually required when youth want to participate in research. In general, it would be beneficial to engage parents or caretakers who are responsible for youth development in the research process. However, adult permission can sometimes prevent youth from active engagement, especially when there is a serious conflict between the youth and adult about the interests and benefits of participating in the research (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). For instance, in Suleiman et al.'s (2006) project, many teachers and parents strongly disagreed with the students' ideas about assessing condom accessibility in their community as their research topic. Thus, the youth participants had to delay their project in order to receive parental consent.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper discusses the challenges and barriers of PAR with youth by reviewing previous studies. Overall, PAR appeared to be effective in improving youth's individual development, empowerment, and critical awareness about social issues. Previous studies also found that youth participation in PAR increased program effectiveness as well as community capacity building to promote social change. Thus, PAR can become a useful framework for social work researchers and practitioners in addressing a wide range of issues that youth face because its main purposes and principles are consistent with social workers' commitment to social justice and social change (Healy, 2001).

However, some challenges of the PAR with youth were identified in three categories: relational, scientific, and ethical challenges. First, relational challenges included a lack of trust between adult participants and youth participants. Youth's busy school schedules and different interests than adult researchers and allies often accompanied the lack of trust. To enhance trust, participatory action researchers should share their personal beliefs, values, and culture with youth participants (Jason et al., 2003). Furthermore, they should provide various activities and environments that fit youth culture and interests to promote active engagement (Chen et al., 2007; Nygreen et al., 2006; Perkins et al., 2007; Ross, 2011; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

Another significant concern in this category was the power imbalance between youth and adults. In fact, the unequal power relationships were commonly identified by previous studies as the most serious challenge that impedes youth's full participation in the research. Few studies involved youth as equal partners in all phases of the research process. This issue often stems from adults' negative perception of youth abilities and youth's skills that are required for scientific reasoning in the research process. Thus, many participatory action researchers would agree that adult researchers should respect youth's ideas in making decisions on the research and provide training opportunities to improve their research skills (Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

Despite the common agreement, a significant tension remains regarding the extent to which youth should be involved in the research process. Ideally, PAR should be initiated and led by youth rather than adults to promote their sense of ownership and empowerment. However, Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) showed that although the youth-driven approach benefited in enhancing empowerment and leadership for youth participants, it often involved unclear directions and higher levels of ambiguity in implementing the project due to their lack of research experience, which, in turn, led to declines in their motivation and commitment. In this case, the project was more successful when adult members played more of a leading role in the project. This result implies that both youth-driven and adult-driven approaches may have different strengths and limitations. However, much uncertainty still exists about “when, where, and how these two approaches should be implemented” (Larson et al., 2005, p. 71). As a result, further research is needed to clarify the degree of youth-adult partnerships and their specific roles in order to strengthen youth involvement and optimize the benefits of PAR.

Second, PAR with youth often faces scientific challenges regarding the validity and reliability of the research. These issues were closely tied to the major principles of PAR, including emancipatory purposes, iterative processes, and flexible research methods. In this regard, it would be inappropriate to evaluate the quality of PAR based on traditional scientific criteria (Susman & Evered, 1978). The evaluation criteria for qualitative research may be useful in evaluating the validity of PAR because of the similar philosophical perspectives (Kidd & Kral, 2005). Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2007) suggested that the validity of PAR could be examined by trustworthiness proposed by qualitative research; this concept is concerned with how much the findings represent the true meanings of the research participants. Trustworthiness of PAR could be increased using various strategies, such as triangulation, prolonged engagement, and thick description of the participants’ contexts (Israel et al., 1998; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007).

However, the criteria examining qualitative research may not fully reflect the unique characteristics of PAR. Additional criteria for evaluating the quality of PAR should be developed with respect to its core principles. For example, meaningful and equal participation in all phases of the research could be an important standard to measure the quality of PAR because the full involvement of participants can enhance the possibility of obtaining valid and reliable knowledge from diverse participants’ experiences (Fals-Borda, 2001; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Furthermore, actual social change or participant empowerment can be used as an additional standard for assessing the quality of PAR projects (Francisco & Butterfoss, 2007; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; Reason, 2006). Francisco and Butterfoss (2007) argued that in addition to methodological judgments, scientific merits should be evaluated by social validity, which evaluates how research affects the lives of participants.

In addition, a lack of resources and time to carry out PAR can prevent youth participants from generating valid knowledge because participatory projects need enormous resources and time to accomplish their main goals. In particular, youth-led research often takes a longer time, and its process is more complex and dynamic than the adult-led research (Suleiman et al., 2006). Consequently, participatory researchers should provide adequate time to collect and analyze data collectively (Bostock & Freeman, 2003; Suleiman et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). It is also necessary to support youth with sufficient human, financial, and logistical resources in

organizing their projects (Powers & Tiffany, 2006). Wilson et al. (2007) recommended that the training of appropriate adult facilitators and development of specified curriculum/techniques be required for successfully engaging youth in the research process.

In this regard, careful attention should be paid to the development of youth-friendly research methods to gain valid and reliable knowledge from their understanding and interpretation. Visual or arts-based techniques can be used as potential alternatives that are particularly of interest to youth. For instance, Chonody, Ferman, Amitrani-Welsh, and Martin (2013) showed that photovoice methodology designed to document participants' everyday realities using cameras was a useful tool to better understand violence from the voices of youth affected by this issue. Furthermore, Conrad (2004) proposed that popular theatre could be an effective tool for youth to analyze community issues that affect their lives. This method begins with group building. Next, participants share their lived experiences, identify a common issue as a priority concern, and finally create a performance that represents the findings in order to raise their awareness and take collective action (Conrad, 2004).

Finally, this paper found several ethical challenges and dilemmas in conducting PAR projects with youth. For example, PAR may have potential risks to youth participants caused by action components and group dynamics in the process of PAR. Suleiman et al. (2006) suggested that participatory action researchers prepare youth participants for better understanding the complex realities and contexts of social action at the beginning of the project so that they effectively address and negotiate the challenges that may occur during this research. In addition, the collaborative work in PAR can increase the possibility of violating confidentiality. In order to address this ethical issue, researchers can create an advisory group, which is ideally comprised of experts, practitioners, and community members to receive helpful input on ethical issues (Glesne, 2006). In addition to the outside support group, it is also critical to offer youth participants human subjects training in an effort to adequately address ethical issues (Powers & Tiffany, 2006).

Informed consent was another ethical dilemma in PAR with youth because the adult's disagreement, sometimes, kept youth from active participation in the research. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggested that youth and children should have more autonomy to determine how they participate in research based on the principle of "*active* agreement on the part of the child, and *passive* agreement on the part of caretakers" (p. 339). Consequently, participatory action researchers should provide sufficient information about research for both potential youth participants and their parents, and then come to a consensus on overall directions for research prior to beginning the study.

In conclusion, most challenges identified were quite similar to those of PAR involving adults. However, there were important differences, and certain issues were more serious in PAR with youth. Furthermore, the challenges of PAR with youth may differ according to different research areas (e.g., health, crime, educational, gender, or cultural issues), participants' characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, or class), or community contexts (e.g., rural and urban communities or cultural communities). Therefore, additional studies should be conducted to better understand the unique challenges that arise from different social and cultural contexts in conducting a PAR project with youth.

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