What Role does Political Power Play in PAR?

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PAR seeks to disrupt social power imbalances through the process of collaboration between researchers (“friendly outsiders”) and community groups (“insiders”). Power imbalances are dependent on social hierarchy and are negotiated through relationships and action. Researchers derive power from their educational attainment, socio-economic status, institutional affiliations, and the greater value placed on expert knowledge. Race, gender and other demographic attributes can also come into play.

Research outsiders and the community with whom they are collaborating should address the nature of the relationship in which they find themselves and work to disrupt traditional dynamics of inequality. Disparities in social and political status should be acknowledged and addressed in each PAR process. The PAR process can help collaborators recognize and deploy multiple sources of knowledge in a social change process. Additional political power can be gained by the community group through its involvement. The usual power of the insiders and the outsiders can be altered by the way they work together.