

Wilfrid Laurier University

Scholars Commons @ Laurier

Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)

1992

Thesis-making: Reflections on my experience

Cari Michelle Patterson
Wilfrid Laurier University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd>



Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Patterson, Cari Michelle, "Thesis-making: Reflections on my experience" (1992). *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 618.

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/618>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Thesis-Making: Reflections on My Experience

By

Cari Michelle Patterson

Bachelor of Arts with Honours (Psychology), Acadia University, 1989

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the Master of Arts degree

Wilfrid Laurier University

1992

© Cari Michelle Patterson, 1992



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-81532-9

Canada

Acknowledgements

In many ways I find it ironic to be writing a community psychology thesis alone. This document is the story of my journey in which many people have played important roles. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge them here.

When I look at the people at SOSH, I see people with courage, strength, and caring. I see people willingly embracing learning and challenge, and I see a strong commitment to working to improve the organization so people can better support each other in the world. You have opened yourselves to me and accepted me as I am, and together we have engaged in a very enriching experience. I would especially like to thank Bev and Joe, who have helped me learn more about working collaboratively than I even knew there was to learn.

Each person on my thesis committee has made a unique contribution to this project. Geoff, thank you for the knowledge you brought about program evaluation and about working with self help groups. Your questions have challenged me to put the things I have learned into practice. Susan, I especially thank you for pushing me and challenging me, sometimes when I didn't want to be challenged any more. As a woman and as a researcher you have become an important role model for me, and you have helped me begin to develop a new perspective for thinking about the world. Richard, I thank you for your strong commitment to working for a just and respectful research relationship, and for engaging in our student-advisor relationship justly and respectfully. Thank you

also for your caring attention to the process of this experience. You have helped me attend to the experience of others, and you have attended to and validated my experience of working all of this through.

Special thanks to Paul Davock. Paul, you are one of the few people I know who struggles daily to put your values and beliefs into practice. You have been a very skilled and caring facilitator for our thesis support group, and I think you are truly a role model for all of us who are committed to working in community.

My classmates have been my companions on a voyage of learning and discovering. Together we have explored, discussed, debated, questioned, pondered, troubled, changed, and embraced a mutual commitment to working justly and lovingly for social change. You all know how much you have meant to me as I worked through this thesis, and how much you continue to mean to me as we support each other in our post-thesis work. Thank you all so much.

One of my classmates has played a particularly important role in my learning experience and has become a very close friend. Rich, you were always there in our office to help me work through one frustration or another, to brainstorm with me about how to handle a particular situation, to help me look at myself and laugh at myself. You have helped me learn to better respect other people's perspectives when I am thinking about an issue, and you have helped us both learn something from each experience. You have also known exactly when to say "enough work, let's forget about it all for a while and go play!" Thank you Rich.

My final thank you is to my partner, Ross. I am amazed when I think about all of the things we have made it through in the last couple of years. My

decision to move to Ontario to go to school while you lived in Alberta was the beginning of a very challenging time for us. I am grateful for our commitment to supporting each other as individuals and for our commitment to community in our relationship. Now we have made it through another big challenge and I look forward to exploring what lies ahead.

Glory be to creation. Everyday the sun rises and the sun sets. The wind blows, the birds sing, the rain falls. And everyday we live in relationship with the rest of creation. My work is dedicated to the true spirit of living in community.

Abstract

In this thesis I describe my personal journey to come to some understanding about how I do community-oriented research, and why I do it the way I do. I engaged in a collaborative program evaluation with a self-help group for survivors of the mental health system. I describe the research project and the ways I reflected on the project to help me uncover some of the hidden assumptions and influences that have shaped me as a researcher until now. Then I discuss issues that arose for me as I engaged in the evaluation and illustrate them drawing on both my experience as a psychology student and my experience working on this particular project. Finally, I discuss the importance of this kind of learning experience for other community-oriented researchers as we struggle to do our work with integrity and honesty.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
Values - Tenets of Community Psychology with Which I Identify	5
Collaboration	6
Equality	7
Valuing Diversity	7
Empowerment	7
Social/Political Action	8
Values in our Work	9
Methodological Approach	9
The Setting	13
Southern Ontario Self-Help (SOSH)	13
How I Became Involved	13
Survivors	14
Survivors and Self-Help/Mutual Aid	15
The Program	18

Program Evaluation	21
Our Process	21
The Design	23
Learning Tools	31
Reading Relevant Literature	31
Journal	31
Autobiographical Sketch	32
Discussions with Others	32
Letter Writing	33
Discussion	34
Questioning/Critical Self-Reflection	35
The Social Construction of Knowledge	38
Hidden Assumptions	41
Values/Human Dynamics in Research	44
Research as Practice, Intervention, and Documentation	48
Practice	48
Intervention	50
Documentation	51
Learning for Myself, SOSH, and Other Researchers	55
Personal Learning	55
Learning for SOSH	56

Learning for Other Researchers	56
Participatory Action Research	57
The Process of Writing the Thesis	58
Conclusion	60
References	65
Appendix A: Working Agreement	70
Appendix B: Thesis Support Group Informal Interview Format	74

Introduction

Disruptive consequences can follow from drawing people's attention to the basic assumptions on which their social system rests. Basic assumptions provide the meaning and underpinning for social systems precisely to the extent that they are unquestioned. When they are challenged, the possibility of a replacement arises and the system is thereby changed. (Shulamit Reinharz, 1978, p. 99).

I want to learn to look critically at traditional socialization forces in psychology that have helped form my subjectivity as a community psychologist. In other words, what are the influences that pattern and shape me as researcher and determine how I approach research in the community? For that matter, how do I approach community-oriented research?

I have been involved in a collaborative program evaluation with a self-help group for people who are survivors of the mental health system. (For reasons which I will explain later, I will refer to this group as SOSH for Southern Ontario Self-Help.) I plan to reflect on this specific collaborative research experience as a tool for thinking about how, and why, research should be done with community groups and specifically, self-help groups for people who have been through the mental health system. It is my hope that this particular reflection will be a useful contribution to current thinking on alternative research styles and will serve as food for thought for present and future community researchers.

There are many different reasons for approaching this thesis the way I have:

- 1) For myself: I want to know who I am as a researcher. If I understand the influences that I have been exposed to, and why, I can choose which ones I want to shape my actions as a researcher or community worker.
- 2) For the group with whom I worked: A collaborative program evaluation has many potential benefits for the group itself, including validation of the self-help philosophy; support for funding proposals; giving group members a clearer idea of what their program is doing and how it works; a learning opportunity for all of us involved; potential for contributing to the development of a set of ethical guidelines for working with self-help groups; and empowering group members by facilitating learning about program evaluation itself. (The evaluation research project and program will be described shortly.)
- 3) For other community-oriented researchers: I think that my experience as a female psychology student is not uncommon. I sat in classes in which most students were women and most professors were men, and my training was heavily influenced by positivist mainstream science, all embedded within a traditional institution. In order to understand how and why we are influenced and how certain patterns of thinking about research are perpetuated, we must examine the context in which we learn to "do" psychology. Seeing, understanding, and discussing socialization influences/patterns are initial steps in sorting through, claiming, and nurturing those we decide are appropriate as we approach community groups.

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I am becoming more aware that I am only beginning to develop the kind of understanding about the world that allows me to make sense of what influences help form and shape patterns and actions. I believe that the research experience I am reflecting upon holds much more insight than I am presently able to grasp. I will return to this point in the discussion section, where I will attempt to relate my underdeveloped thinking to my training as a psychology student.

In order to make sense of how I have come to understand and engage in research, I am examining the process of how I do research. I believe that looking at my practice will help me see and understand how my training has shaped me as a researcher, and consequently, help me to better understand how it is that I have actually been trained. As Shulamit Reinharz (1978) stated, a person's struggle to understand who s/he is in relation to her/his field (in her case sociology) can be an informative struggle not only for the individual, but also for the field itself. Anne Louise Brookes (1988) observed that the questions we ask set the answers we will arrive at and define the paths along which future generations will be able to advance. I hope that writing about concerns that have arisen for me as a community psychology student will help raise questions for other students and researchers in community psychology who are struggling to improve the way they work.

Before I proceed any further, I think it is necessary for me to outline the paper. First I will discuss community psychology values and methodology that I think are important so readers can get a sense of my frame of reference. Then I

will briefly set the context for SOSH and describe the program in some detail, and outline the program evaluation.

Then I will talk about the ways I reflected on the evaluation and the issues that arose for me as a result of my reflection. I will end the thesis with a discussion about the different layers of learning involved in this project: learning for myself, learning for SOSH, and learning for other researchers. When you are reading the thesis, you will notice that in text I have included both the first and last names of authors whose work I cite. I have done so in an attempt to humanize the research I am writing about.

Values - Tenets of Community Psychology with Which I Identify

When I say that I want to explain the filter through which I see the world, it is because I believe that each person's (or field's) value system informs her/his work. I would like to give a very brief overview of my perspective of community psychology and outline some important values which I think should guide community psychology. Then I will discuss the corresponding research methodological approach informed by those values. Note that the principles stated below are community psychology *ideals*, and are not necessarily *practised* in community psychology. I am discussing them because I think they are important for community psychology.

Some community psychologists are beginning to recognize that knowledge is socially constructed (Walsh, 1987). When we engage in research we involve ourselves in a process in which we construct meaning (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Our interaction with the social world is affected by our gender, class, age, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. All social and cultural relations influence how and what we learn (Bannerji, 1991). As I will discuss later, it is important for us as researchers and community activists to be aware of how we construct meaning about the people with whom we are working and how they construct meaning about us.

Some community psychologists advocate the ecological viewpoint, or the study of the fit between persons and their environments (Rappaport, 1977). Problems and pathologies are not the result of some deficit in an individual; rather the problem is the way mainstream society marginalizes groups of people not defined as "normal" (i.e., everyone except white middle class European-

descent heterosexual Christian males). Societal conditions, not individuals, must change so that there is a better fit between all citizens and their environments.

Ideally, community psychologists help us to think about issues from a broader perspective. In theory we focus on the interaction of societal and individual levels of analysis. We must examine the life conditions of people who have been marginalized, and work with people to change their conditions, as defined by those who are experiencing them. People are their own best experts and understand their experiences in a way we cannot. Seymour Sarason (1974, 1981, 1982) believes that if psychology and social sciences are to be relevant, they must take into account the historical, social, economic, and political contexts in which policies are developed and implemented. This contextual information can be used to help create solutions to problems *in situ* rather than in a vacuum. In reality, however, community psychology focuses on the individual level of analysis from an objectivist perspective (cf. Johnston & Walsh-Bowers, 1992; Peirson & Walsh-Bowers, 1992).

Some important stated community psychology principles include collaboration, equality, valuing diversity, empowerment, acknowledging values in our work, and political/social action. I will briefly describe each one below.

Collaboration

Ideally, community psychologists focus on people's abilities rather than on their deficits (Albee, 1980). We should be working to help draw on the skills and talents of all members of groups with whom we are working together on research and social change projects. Doing this accomplishes several things: it gives people a sense of ownership - and therefore a say - over the project in which they are

involved; it acknowledges that everyone can make a valuable contribution to the project; and it improves the meaning and usefulness of a project. Unfortunately, as Forest Tyler, Kenneth Pargament and Margaret Gatz (1983) point out, community psychology's collaborative model has fallen short of establishing a model that is a complete alternative to traditional helping models.

Equality

Social sciences - and social scientists - have no particular ability to solve social problems (Sarason, 1978). As citizens trained in social sciences have unique knowledge to contribute to a research or social change project, so do those not trained in social sciences. Julian Rappaport and Catherine Cleary (1980) state that it is important for us as community psychologists to define our role relationships not as helper-helpee, but as collegial so that we will be better able to focus on strengths, assets, competencies, and skills, and to better understand and facilitate the natural processes of help inherent in any community.

Valuing Diversity

Ideally, community psychologists recognize that each person has a unique understanding and experience of the world, and that we can learn from each other (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Community psychology can facilitate the exchange of these ideas, and thereby help enrich the understanding of all.

Empowerment

Ira Goldenberg (1978) describes a constructed meaning of our society in which there is an overabundance of people constantly vying for a limited amount of goods and power (the ultimate goals). Society, he says, constructs a myth that says that everyone has equal opportunity to acquire them. The myth is

perpetuated through the media (which Goldenberg says transmit society's view continually and efficiently); through the notion that people start from comparable positions and have equal chances in the race for goods and power; and through social institutions, whose primary tasks are socializing the citizens and inhibiting their access to the goods and power they have been taught to covet. Control of the numbers and speed with which people gain access to the system's rewards and resources is maintained by the status quo.

It is the job of community psychologists to help empower citizens to work for a more equitable sharing of knowledge and distribution of power so as to end oppression (Rappaport, 1981). As community psychologists it is our job to facilitate the collective use of people's power for political/social action to achieve the (societal) changes desired by the people. We can do this by listening to what people say they want changed, and by facilitating them using their power to make the changes. In reality though, community psychologists do and have done very little social action.

Social/Political Action

Collective social and political action is necessary to end oppression. Sylvia Scribner (1970) states that "social movement psychologists," whom she considers part of community psychology, believe that fundamental changes in society will come about through the organized political struggle of different sectors of the population. Community psychologists, she says, should be committed to supporting this struggle. In a similar vein, Jane Knitzer (1980) comments that advocacy is consonant with and useful to community psychology. Indeed, our own code of ethics (Canadian Psychological Association, 1988) states that we have a social

responsibility to advocate for change to occur as quickly as possible if social structures ignore or oppose the principle of respect for the dignity of persons.

My personal belief is that as community psychologists we should be engaging in feminist action research, which the Women's Research Centre (1987) defines as "the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of informing political action and social change" (p. A4).

Values in our Work

Some community-oriented researchers have adapted a qualitative approach to research, and have moved away from the notion of doing research in some sort of vacuum in which our personal values do not influence us as we do psychology (e.g., Walsh-Bowers, 1992b; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Reinhartz, 1978). Rather, we should endeavour to be aware of our values, monitor, and document how they influence the work we do.

I have attempted to give readers an understanding of stated values which motivate the actions of some community-oriented researchers. Now I would like to discuss the methodological approach which I think supports an attempt to put our values into practice.

Methodological Approach

Part of my personal struggle as a psychology student has been leaving traditional ways of doing research behind, and carefully examining alternatives presented by community psychology. I would like to explain the positivist research methodology I learned in my undergraduate training in psychology and then contrast it with the community-oriented research methodology I have learned in graduate training.

Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985) describe the traditional positivist paradigm as one that stresses the search for general laws, formal and a priori hypotheses, neutrality with regard to moral issues, standardized assessment devices, reduction of observed reality into constituent parts, and the establishment of distance and noninteraction between the investigator and the field of study. The positivist paradigm assumes the possibility of separation between the knower and the known, and also makes the assumption of the temporal and contextual independence of observations.

This kind of positivist research rests on fundamentally undemocratic research relationships. Richard Walsh-Bowers (1992a) states that the traditional research relationship has an inherent power imbalance, with psychologists as experts and citizens as subordinates whose fundamental liberties are muted.

Traditional research also helps perpetuate societal myths by including only a dominant mainstream perspective, and thus contributes to the perpetuation of the status quo (Gergen, 1982). If we do not expose our methods and work to people from non-dominant groups, we are not accountable to anyone but ourselves. The danger is that it is in the best interests of those who control our society for the status quo to remain unchanged. Unless we leave the more traditional paradigm behind us in favour of a more naturalistic paradigm of inquiry (see below), research will continue to reflect the perspective of mainstream society.

To the extent that community members are involved in the ownership and control of the research and community work we do, to that extent the meaningfulness of the work is enriched. Richard Walsh-Bowers (1992a) advocates

for a research relationship for community psychology in which citizens and scientists contribute as equal partners in a mutual exchange of resources throughout the research process.

Maria Mies (1983) states that "research, which so far has been largely the instrument of dominance and legitimation of power elites, must be brought to serve the interests of dominated, exploited, and oppressed groups (p. 123)."

Along a similar vein, researchers at the Women's Research Centre (1987) say that analysis of issues must be based on a description of how issues are actually experienced by women as essential to the development of effective strategies for social and political action. I am saying that the experiences of people in all marginalized groups must be included in any analysis of an issue.

The Women's Research Centre (1987) states that traditionally, the majority of research and methodologies has excluded women's perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary to develop methods, structures, and research processes that will include women's perspectives. I agree with this statement, and would like to expand it to say that within the traditional perspective of psychology, the positivist paradigm, the voices of people of marginalized groups have not been heard.

I am interested in ways that people can participate in research such that their perspective is reflected in the research process as well as the research findings. Ideally, naturalistic inquiry (which is one name of the methodology used by some community psychologists) differs from positivist inquiry in that it is typically qualitative in nature; acknowledges and attempts to include the various multiple, constructed, and holistic realities of people; assumes that the knower and the known are interactive, inseparable; attempts to generate only working

hypotheses for settings with similar contexts; assumes that all entities continually influence each other such that effects cannot be distinguished from causes; and acknowledges that inquiry is value-laden (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I think community psychologists must work to create a practice consistent with our values. Richard Walsh-Bowers (1992b) states that community psychologists should practice a moral imperative of social ethics when engaging in psychology activities, and that in order to do so we must incorporate values of relationality, distributive justice, empowerment, and popular participation in decision-making.

I have explained what I hope to accomplish in this thesis and have briefly described community psychology ideals and methodology. Next I would like to give you some sense of how I got involved with the particular group with whom I worked, what the group is about, and what they do, all in the context of the survivor movement in which SOSH is embedded.

The Setting

Southern Ontario Self-Help (SOSH)

How I Became Involved

I first became involved with this group in September 1991, after I decided to withdraw from another setting where I had been working and to re-involve myself in mental health issues. I approached various groups working on issues in mental health in the area and we discussed the possibility of working together on projects I could do which they needed to have done. With this particular group, it was clear that our values and philosophies were similar, and that a working relationship could be mutually beneficial and become a rich learning opportunity for everyone; so we agreed to work together on a program evaluation. We negotiated a collective working agreement, which made explicit our research approach, the time frame for the evaluation, time and role expectations during the evaluation process, the extent of membership and staff involvement desired, follow-up, expenses, and uses of the information. (A copy of our working agreement is included in Appendix A.) We agreed to create the evaluation design, process, and questions together; they are described below. As you will see in the section describing our research process, we also did the data analysis together and collaboratively developed a set of recommendations for SOSH.

For the purposes of this thesis, and also due to confidentiality issues, I am not including a copy of the evaluation report in this document. Because of fierce competition for limited funds, SOSH requested that, in order to ensure that they control the use of the evaluation information, the report not be made public. I

will not discuss any of the results of the evaluation; I will discuss the evaluation at SOSH only as it relates to the process of carrying out the research.

Survivors

People who have had experience with the mental health system refer to themselves as *survivors* or *consumer/survivors*. Mental health professionals who offer "services" refer to people who use the services as "consumers" or clients or patients. Judi Chamberlain and Joseph Rogers (1990) point out the dubiousness of the term "consumer", noting that it implies that service recipients are like consumers in a marketplace, free to choose among many products. In reality, most people have only one affordable alternative: the mental health system.

I personally do not like calling people by a label, and began by referring to people at SOSH as "people who have been through the mental health system" when it was necessary to give some reference point. After having read some antipsychiatry literature (e.g., Burstow & Weitz, 1988; Chamberlain, 1978) and talking with people who are working to change the psychiatric system, I have come to use the term "survivors" as a political statement. People have survived a system which can be very oppressive, marginalizing, and even harmful, despite the good intentions of many and the critical analysis by some (e.g., Walsh-Bowers & Nelson, 1992).

I believe it is important for me to describe the context of the antipsychiatry/psychiatric inmates liberation movement, which began across Canada and the United States in the 1970s (Chamberlain, 1978). The survivor movement has become the framework through which I view the mental health

system, and affects my approach to research: I am working with survivors to change an oppressive system.

In a recent anthology of writings by Canadian survivors, Bonnie Burstow and Don Weitz (1988) describe the Canadian psychiatric system:

Behavioral control lies behind spatial control or incarceration. This control points to an authoritarian society which empowers the psychiatrist to act as judge-jailer-executioner. Incarceration or forced hospitalization is society's response to people who break its rules or exhibit non-conformist behaviour, such as being too emotional or loud, showing the wrong sexual preference, seeing what others do not see, hearing what others do not hear, believing what others do not believe.....In short, psychiatric imprisonment is a political and repressive act intended to protect the power of the psychiatrist/oppressor, and, even more significantly, the oppressive state (p. 24).

Survivors and Self-Help/Mutual Aid

Given the above perspective, in efforts to support each other and work collectively to end oppression in the mental health system, by changing the public attitude and conditions which define them as "deviant" (Sagarin, 1969), groups of survivors have formed self-help or mutual aid groups across Canada and the United States, and indeed, internationally. For example, GROW is a self-help group for "formal mental sufferers" which started in Australia in 1957, and has spread to New Zealand, Ireland, the U.S., England, and Singapore (GROW, 1982). Other U.S. groups include Project Release in New York, the Network Against Psychiatric Assault in San Francisco, and the Mental Patients' Liberation Front in Boston (Chamberlain, 1978).

There have been self-help/mutual aid groups formed in Canada for psychiatric survivors. On Our Own began in Toronto and closed down after some

years. It has recently re-opened with core funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health. There is also a group called the Mental Patients' Association in Vancouver. In Ontario the Ontario Psychiatric Survivors' Alliance (OPSA), funded by the Ontario Office for Disabled Persons, provides outreach, support, advocacy, education, and networking to self-help groups for psychiatric survivors (Ontario Psychiatric Survivors Alliance, 1991). SOSH is a member of OPSA.

Mutual aid groups such as these are an important alternative to hospitalization for people who experience mental "illness" (Salem, Seidman, & Rappaport, 1988). Deborah Salem, Edward Seidman, and Julian Rappaport suggest that components of

successful programs for those who are candidates for deinstitutionalization involve assertive, ongoing, long-term support which is individually tailored to provide the particular skills and supports each person requires. The program must be flexible so that individuals can develop their own resources without counterproductive, overdependence on the mental health system (p. 3).

Many people who are members of self-help groups may feel a permanent sense of isolation and marginalization from mainstream society (Levine & Perkins, 1987). Self-help groups provide them with a place to rest and recuperate - people can be themselves, and know that they will be understood and accepted by people who have similar life experiences (Levine & Perkins, 1987). The self-help group may become a foundation for personal identity, as well as a critical reference group for its members. People give and receive help, and share weaknesses and strengths, which help them feel good about themselves and others.

Levine and Perkins (1987) outline six aspects of self-help groups that serve members' interests:

- 1) They promote a sense of community - members no longer feel isolated.
- 2) They provide a shared ideology or sense of values that may be used to interpret daily life experiences.
- 3) They provide an opportunity for confession, catharsis, and mutual criticism, and for group solidarity through sharing.
- 4) They provide role models for members - roles are reciprocal.
- 5) People can learn effective coping strategies for dealing with daily problems.
- 6) Self-help groups provide a network of social relationships.

Survivor initiatives are often sponsored by social agencies such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). In what is referred to as the *partnership* model (Chamberlain, 1978), survivors work with support (financial and otherwise) from professionals within the mental health system. While it is true that people in these social agencies may have good intentions, it is also true that any organization sponsored by a paternalistic agency becomes accountable to that agency and faces the danger of being co-opted by social institutions perpetuating societal myths (Goldenberg, 1978).

In the *separatist* model, survivor groups work autonomously from mental health professionals (Chamberlain, 1978) and are accountable only to their members. SOSH prides itself in its autonomy: The program runs not only on a self-help philosophy, it also runs somewhat independently of any paternalistic

sponsoring body. Funds to this point have been administered directly from various government ministries.

Now that I have described the context of the survivor movement in which SOSH is embedded, I will describe the program specifically, discuss my approach to program evaluation, and finally, describe the process of carrying out the evaluation itself.

The Program

SOSH is a self-help group for people who have experienced or are experiencing mental health problems. The group has its own meeting space in a building located on the main street in a small southern Ontario city. The group has been in existence since 1987, and has received funding from the Office for Disability Issues (through the Ministry of Citizenship), the Ministry of Health, the Trillium Foundation, the United Way, and several community service agencies. SOSH has not at this point secured permanent funding.

SOSH is open Monday to Friday all day, Monday evenings, and Saturday afternoons. Last year, 130 people used SOSH, 78 of whom are formal members. Membership is voluntary, and no outside referral is required. The only criterion for membership is that one has experienced or is experiencing mental health difficulties and has had experience with the mental health system.

SOSH has three program components: an outreach and peer support program, an education and awareness program, and a work co-operative (ceramics) program. The programs have been created based on the needs of the membership and on the philosophy that:

by becoming actively involved in the development of programs and employment opportunities, individuals are able to focus on their strengths and abilities rather than their limitations and the barriers to a sense of personal and communal achievement. Active participation provides them with the opportunity to develop or improve coping and problem-solving skills, to practice current skills, and learn new ones (excerpt from funding proposal; 1991, p. 5).

The three programs are accessible and flexible to meet the changing needs of the membership (see Salem et al. 1988). The purpose of the programs is to provide members with the activities and information they want. The overriding focus of the group is mutual support, learning from each other, and working together.

There are three full-time and two part-time paid staff members at SOSH. Their roles are considered facilitative and supportive, rather than as expert or therapist. The group takes its direction from the membership. There is a board of directors, which acts as an advisory group. The board is made up of four community members and five members of SOSH. The board of directors is elected each year at the Annual General Meeting. The membership has decreed that staff and board members are group members and, as such have a vote when the board makes a decision. All decisions about the group affecting the members are taken to a membership vote.

At the time the evaluation was conducted, the makeup of SOSH was as follows. To date in this fiscal year (December 1, 1991 to May 20, 1992) there are 85 paid memberships. Thirty-six of the members are women, and 49 are men. The ages range from 17 to 62; however, the overwhelming majority is in the 25-45 year old range. Average daily attendance during the entire past calendar year

(May 1991 to April 1992) was 20 people. Since the beginning of this fiscal year (December 1991), the average daily attendance is 25 people.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a useful tool for reflecting upon and reviewing whether or not an organization is meeting its goals (Women's Research Centre, 1990), it can give a sense of how people think the organization can improve (Patton, 1990), and it can help improve decision-making for the future benefit of a program (Thompson, 1982). When done collaboratively, program evaluation can also validate and demonstrate principles of self-help philosophy in action. Specifically, in relation to doing research with people in self-help groups, Mark Chesler (1991) describes what he calls Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is characterized by a "highly participative membership, a professional leadership, localist and grassroots orientation, and respect for experienced-based knowledge" (p.757). Citizen participation improves the researchers' knowledge base, helps citizens to learn new skills in gathering and analyzing information (and thus improves their strategic decision making), often raises consciousness, and can be empowering to those who are involved.

The goals of this program evaluation were to obtain a sense of the overall picture of SOSH and to reflect that picture back to the organization, to help SOSH make use of this information, to demonstrate self-help and empowerment principles in action, and to learn about doing research collaboratively.

Our Process

David and Karen (not their real names), who are members of SOSH, and I made up the team that conducted the evaluation. We consulted with a steering committee made up of representatives from the different groups or stakeholders (Weiss, 1983), who have a staked interest in the evaluation: one staff member (a

woman), two general members (one man and one woman), and one board member (a man). The steering committee was formed as the advisory committee for the evaluation to ensure that the interests of all stakeholder groups would be met throughout the evaluation process.

As an evaluation team, we met weekly to discuss the evaluation process, discuss work we had each done, and exchange feedback, comments, and questions. We met periodically with the steering committee to update them and ask for assistance and approval at each stage of the evaluation. We kept the membership informed through informal communication lines, reports at membership meetings, through the group's monthly newsletter, via notices on the bulletin board at SOSH, and by updates distributed for members to keep in evaluation folders. Partway through the evaluation process we realized that even if we had nothing new to tell the members about the evaluation, it was still important for us to talk with them about it. Discussing it on a regular basis helped people feel involved and have a sense of ownership over the evaluation process.

We paid special attention to our experience as the evaluation team. We agreed that because we wanted to learn about doing research collaboratively, we would attend to and monitor the process and content of what we did. We asked the program co-ordinator (who has had training in psychology research methods) to interview each of us halfway through and at the end of the evaluation process about our experience of working together on the evaluation team. We used the information from the interviews to adapt our process as a team.

The Design

In our approach to the evaluation, we considered both **process** (*how* the programs work or do not work) and **outcome** (*whether* the programs work or do not work) issues (Patton, 1990). We wanted to ensure that the evaluation was *participation-focused* (Women's Research Centre, 1990), that is, that the evaluation focused on the needs of group members, that we recognized their knowledge and expertise, and that they were as involved as much as possible in the project. We also wanted the evaluation to be *utilization-focused* (Patton, 1990), that is, conducted in such a way that findings would be meaningful and would be used rather than sitting in a report gathering dust. Findings of an evaluation are most likely to be used if everyone affected has a sense of what the evaluation is about, has the opportunity to give input and feedback about - how and whether - the evaluation is done, and is involved in deciding how to use the information found by the evaluation (Patton, 1990). We thought that a participation-utilization-focused evaluation would help us make the process empowering for us as an evaluation team, and also for SOSH as a group.

In keeping with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations about the importance of using multiple methods for data gathering, we used three different methods in our evaluation design: interviews, questionnaires, and focus-group interviews. Before the research began, we created several workshop sessions to introduce the team members to evaluation research. Issues we covered included: the team's process, creating the evaluation schedule, ways of approaching people to participate in research, confidentiality, types of evaluation, attending skills,

recording information, field notes, data analysis, power issues in research, and the process of conducting research.

Once we had completed the workshop sessions, David and Karen distributed a letter to present and past staff, board members, and members of the group explaining the research. David and Karen made follow-up phonecalls and asked people to give their consent to participate in interviews. We used verbal, rather than written, consent because of the negative connotations of signing forms for those who are survivors of the mental health system. (If people wished to, they could give written consent at the beginning of the interviews.) David and Karen shared this list with me once it was compiled.

From that list, we selected our sample (13 members, three staff and three board members). We selected our sample this way to ensure that people from all groups at SOSH were proportionately represented in the evaluation. We contacted the people whose names we selected and made arrangements for personal interviews. We each conducted one pilot interview as part of our training/orientation to the evaluation. After conducting the pilot interviews, we revised some of the questions that were repetitive or that people thought were unnecessary. Over the next month we conducted the rest of the interviews. We met very frequently during the interview phase of the evaluation, so that as a team we could discuss the interviews we were each conducting, to share both content and process information, and to provide each other with support and insight.

We gave the people we interviewed a copy of the interview questions before the interview. We asked them whether they wished to be interviewed

alone or with someone else present; where they wished to be interviewed (e.g., their home, at SOSH, at a coffee shop); whether they wished to be interviewed by a man or a woman; and whether or not they wished to have the interview tape-recorded. Then we scheduled each interview. David and Karen helped me recognize the importance of understanding the setting when conducting research interviews. For example, they told me that if they had scheduled an interview with someone and that person was not having a good day, they would simply reschedule the interview for another time. David and Karen's knowledge about the setting allowed them to sense when a particular person was not having a good day.

At the beginning of each interview, we reminded people that it was the program, and not they, being evaluated; that their input about their program was highly valued; that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question; that only we (the evaluation team) would see their comments and responses; and that the information would be summarized with others' responses and presented to the entire membership with no names used and any perceived identifiers removed. Members see and talk with each other regularly, and as such, are very familiar with each other's speech mannerisms and even each other's opinions. We changed phrases to protect confidentiality. Many members said that they did not care if others could identify their comments. We told people that if they wanted to tell others what they said they could, but that we as a research team would not.

As soon as possible after each interview (usually the next day), we gave each person a summary of her or his interview, and asked each to check it for

accuracy, to ensure that it was *her or his* responses, and not the *interviewer's impression* of the responses, that we recorded.

Throughout the interviews, we recorded additional questions we might like to ask. We synthesized these and questions generated by the interview data and at membership and steering committee meetings into a questionnaire, which we shared with the steering committee before distributing it to members, staff, and the board of directors. When we had a draft of the questionnaire prepared, we discussed it at a membership meeting and then adapted it according to members' input. The questionnaire was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. An example of a quantitative question we asked is "how many times a week do you come to SOSH?" Qualitative questions we asked focused on people's comments/ideas about SOSH's three programs.

Due to concerns about the length of the questionnaire and about literacy, members wanted to have the choice of completing the questionnaire alone, with a member of the evaluation team, with a staff member, or in groups organized by other members. The language we used in the interviews and questionnaires was clear and straightforward to ensure that it was accessible to everyone. David and Karen helped determine whether the wording of the questions was appropriate. We also discussed the questionnaires with people at membership meetings before they were distributed.

Staff and members helped us address and stamp return-envelopes, and we mailed or handed out 81 questionnaires to the general membership, staff members, and the board of directors. According to their responses about the questionnaire itself, there was some difficulty completing the questionnaires.

Some people found it lengthy, the questions sometimes not applicable, and sometimes had some difficulty understanding the questions. One staff person who helped a lot of members complete the questionnaire said that she had to take time to help people understand what the questions meant and had to do a lot of prompting to help people to respond. When we realized how much she had helped members, I approached her to ask about how she recorded people's responses. She assured me that, although she had to help people understand some of the questions, she recorded their response in their own words. When we looked over the questionnaires, we recognized some people's particular mannerisms and phrases reflected in the responses, so we felt comfortable accepting that the responses recorded were their own. Later we revised the questionnaire based on people's feedback about it, so that SOSH can make use of it in the future.

When the questionnaires were returned we summarized the information and combined it with summaries of the interview data. We received 31: 23 from members, three from staff, one from a board member, one from a person who fit multiple categories, and three unidentified. The summaries included both a) people's general impressions of SOSH and its specific programs, and b) their sense of future goals for SOSH and its programs. We invited all group members, staff, and the board of directors to attend focus-group interviews in which we shared the information gathered and invited people's comments and feedback. We held a group for the staff, one for the board of directors, and three at different times for the members. We held the focus-groups at several different times to make sure that as many people as possible could attend. In the sessions

we asked people about ways SOSH could work towards the future vision they had described in the questionnaires and interviews. We integrated people's ideas and comments into a set of recommendations for SOSH. Once the focus-groups were concluded, we drafted the evaluation report, shared it with members of the steering committee, and presented a summary of our findings and recommendations at a general membership meeting. Nineteen people attended the feedback session (16 members and three staff). We also attended a board meeting to provide board members with the summary and recommendations. When we had received everyone's feedback and incorporated her or his comments into the report, we finalized the formal report for SOSH, and prepared a brief (one page) summary of our findings and recommendations to distribute to members, staff, and board members. We also spent some time at a membership meeting discussing the evaluation as an intervention in the organization, that is, how SOSH had changed as a result of us having done the evaluation, which changes were positive, which were not necessarily desirable, and how the effects could be managed.

Besides holding the focus-groups, I approached staff members to ask them to consider the possibility of holding a consultation session to discuss issues relevant to inter-staff dynamics (such as role responsibilities). I met with the staff members twice to support them dealing with their own issues.

When the evaluation was complete and it was time for me to leave the setting, we arranged a date for a follow-up session and we discussed ways that David and Karen could provide support to the group for implementing (and adapting if necessary) the recommendations on an ongoing basis. We agreed that

I would visit SOSH in September (we completed the evaluation in May) to discuss how implementation of the recommendations was going. Follow-up provides support, acknowledges that I have an ethical obligation to attend to the effects of the research I conducted in the organization, makes the organization accountable so that the recommendations are more likely to be acted upon, and provides some continuity between the research process and the future of the organization.

In September I attended a membership meeting at SOSH, in which we discussed the implementation of the recommendations from the evaluation. Over the summer there was a number of internal matters to be dealt with: one staff member was asked to leave and a new one was hired, and funding had to be secured beyond September. Because of these issues and because of less regular attendance during summer months when the weather was warm, not much work was done in terms of implementing the recommendations. We decided to spend the follow-up session reviewing the recommendations and discussing whether they were still relevant, which members decided they were, and then making plans for implementation. We again discussed ways that David and Karen as well as other members could support SOSH making the changes the members desired. The members decided that it was not necessary for me to arrange further follow-up, that they could handle implementing the recommendations on their own. The fact that they do not need me to continue along with the evaluation process makes me feel good. It shows me that the work was truly collaborative - I and my skills are not indispensable to SOSH. Instead, members have developed the skills they need to help themselves.

In my struggle to come to some kind of understanding about who I am as a community-oriented researcher and activist and how I got to be that way, I used several "tools," or methods, for gaining insight, which I will describe in the next section.

Learning Tools

The evaluation at SOSH is a rich tool for reflection; thinking about the experience has helped me begin to understand who I am as a community-oriented researcher. I am including a brief description of the tools that I used to learn how to recognize hidden assumptions that influence my work. I invite readers to critique the methods I have used and to think about other tools that might be helpful for making sense of our training in psychology.

Reading Relevant Literature

This is an obvious method of learning. I am including it here to underscore the importance of other people's work to my experience. I read two pieces that influenced my whole way of thinking about the world, helped shape my thesis, and started me on a new journey in my personal development. The first important piece was Shulamit Reinharz's (1978) On Becoming a Social Scientist, which is an example of how to critique one's own research experiences, as well as how to develop a personal research process which allows one to act on her/his own human values while engaging in research.

The other work that was important to me was Anne Louise Brookes's (1988) doctoral dissertation, which demonstrates the importance of examining one's own experience to find patterns and influences which shape us.

Journal

Journal writing and journal exercises, in addition to discussion groups, can be very useful for helping us uncover our blind spots or hidden assumptions (Burns, 1992). Writing about thoughts and experiences is a way of preserving them for reflection. For my thesis, I kept a content journal, which some people

call a log, and a process journal. The content journal is a record of what happened each day in relation to the program evaluation. In the process journal I wrote about my thoughts and feelings of what was happening. I learned to recognize patterns and begin to make sense of their meaning through a variety of journal exercises.

Autobiographical Sketch

Madeleine Grumet (1981) talks about using personal autobiographical sketches as a way of learning about and untangling our socialization and learning experiences. I began by writing about each of the experiences that I felt were important to me in terms of my training in psychology and research, and re-reading and reworking my thoughts so that I could begin to see patterns of influence. Thinking about experiences in my training helped me make sense of some of my actions at SOSH, which helped me recognize some of my hidden assumptions.

Discussions with Others

Anne Louise Brookes (1988) noted in her experience that discussions with others often help writers break the patterns which organize their social experience. I had a weekly discussion session with my thesis advisor; I had regular discussions with my other thesis committee members; I met regularly with the evaluation team conducting the research with SOSH and periodically with a steering committee made up of people representing different interests in the program. My classmates and I met weekly to discuss our research, to consult, to ask each other questions, and to help each other discover our blind spots. In fact, we decided to informally interview one another about our research as a way of

discovering and accounting for our "conceptual baggage" (Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, 1989) in our research experiences.

Letter Writing

In a similar vein, one of my colleagues and I, who struggle with similar research issues, agreed to work on a series of letters to each other. In these letters we planned to work collectively on understanding the influences which organize our lives, and consequently, who we are as researchers. We wanted to address our struggle to understand and claim the influences, rather than them shaping and claiming us. This exercise is like a combination journal/discussion session, in which we work collaboratively rather than individually. It is our struggle to break through the individualism of writing a thesis alone.

I believe that this learning tool can be very powerful. I regret that in this case due to time constraints and heavy workloads we were not able to use it more than we did. To the extent that I was able to use it, I felt that I was not alone in facing the issues and problems of being a student coming from a traditional psychology background, based in a traditional institution trying to do community work from an alternative orientation.

Now that you, the reader, have some sense of this specific research project, I invite you to step back with me and examine the process in terms of understanding what influences and assumptions prevailed when I engaged in this particular project, and think about how we as researchers engage in community-oriented research projects generally.

Discussion

In this section I would like to share and discuss some of the important issues and questions that arose from my experience at SOSH. It is not a "results" section as such. The usual expectation is to present results in a neat, complete package. My experience at SOSH has validated that for me research is evolving and cannot be captured at one moment in time. So here I will present my thoughts about the research experience, with the acknowledgement that with more thought and experience, my understanding will change. Using the research tools I just described, I plan to relate my experience at SOSH to insights about community psychology that I am developing.

It has been important for me to engage in this personal research experience as a way of developing my own understanding of community psychology's vision. To be true to community psychology's stated values, I believe we must incorporate the visions of the people with whom we are working. In other words, our research and actions must reflect the thoughts of all citizens involved (Walsh-Bowers, 1992b; Reinharz, 1978). Ideally speaking then, community psychology is constantly changing, fluid. I think the process of writing this thesis has helped to better prepare me for the fluidity I face in my future work as a community-oriented researcher and activist.

In the section that follows, I will discuss several themes that arose for me and illustrate them by drawing on my experience as a psychology student and my research experience at SOSH, and suggest possible issues for community psychologists to consider. The themes that I will discuss are questioning/critical self-reflection; the social construction of knowledge; hidden assumptions which

affect our work; values/human dynamics in research; and research as practice, intervention, and documentation. After that I will attempt to relate the points I have raised to the three levels of learning about this project that I identified in the introduction section: my own personal learning, learning for SOSH, and learning for community-oriented researchers.

Questioning/Critical Self-Reflection

At the undergraduate level, we are taught how to "do" psychology. With regard to research, we sit through classes in statistics and quantitative research methods, and read traditional, mainstream (positivist) textbooks. Those of us who do extremely well may be appointed teaching assistantships, and will be paid to reinforce traditional ideas about how to do research from a position of status and power, at least relative to other students.

We are coached by an experienced researcher through an honours thesis which for many of us means quantitative, expert-oriented research. I worked with a well-known and respected community psychologist in the traditional positivist paradigm. I felt that he knew how to do community psychology and that I should follow his lead. Positivism does not leave much room for questioning. When I finished my thesis, I took away the knowledge that I had extracted from my research participants, and I never thought much about what purpose the research served other than my own. There was no talk about what responsibility I had for taking some sort of action with my new knowledge. My power and ego as Researcher were reinforced - I even won an award for outstanding achievement in undergraduate psychology for the province. Ironically, my B.A. thesis was about ethics in the practice of psychological research. And the unspoken assumptions

about what makes research were perpetuated for me and for my fellow students. We were *internalizing* the values of psychology.

Shulamit Reinharz (1978) states that to become a full-fledged member of a society, one must internalize its values. Problems arise, she says, when that society's values are ridden with conflict and are inconsistent with corresponding behaviour. I began to understand some of the problems I had been sensing about psychology when I started graduate school in community psychology. I began to question more and think more critically about the way we do research. In my graduate program we were exposed to a more naturalistic form of inquiry, and we learned to question traditional research methodology. We addressed issues of power and control (at least conceptually, as we are embedded in a sea of power hierarchies within the university institution). We worked through a practicum placement and a thesis as a way of practising the concepts we discussed and debated in our classes.

In terms of my research experience with SOSH, only by recognizing that my assumptions did not match up with the assumptions of the people with whom I was doing the research did I realize: 1) that I was making some assumptions 2) what some of them were, and 3) that they would have to be questioned. For instance, we (members of the evaluation team) had very different assumptions about timelines; flexibility around showing up for meetings; and adapting the research process around what was going on in our personal lives and the personal lives of the people who participated in the research. When I became aware of these inconsistencies, I began to question my own assumptions, the assumptions of the others, and to speculate about reasons for the differences.

I went into the evaluation project with an idea in my head about what research is and with some experience doing research using traditional research methodology. When I got to the setting, I began to explore what research really means. When we were thinking about doing a program evaluation at SOSH, we necessarily had to think about what doing the research would accomplish. The research ethics committee at the university was helpful in providing a structure to think carefully about the implications of conducting the research. We thought about gathering information for the purpose of informing change; we thought about the risks, which are often unmeasured, and the benefits, which are often intangible, for the organization, (Mitchell, 1992); and about ways the research could be done that were congruent with values of self-help. We had to talk about who "owned" the research and who could use the information we gathered. In the process of developing a working agreement (or contract), we engaged in the process of defining research together. We served as co-investigators (Walsh-Bowers, 1992b) in the research setting by together defining the meaning of the research. For this particular group, at this particular time, research meant us working together on a program evaluation for SOSH, using participatory methods congruent with the self-help values of the group, sharing information with everyone who had a stake and a say in whether and in the way any research would be conducted, and together deciding how research findings could be used.

How is this principle of questioning as I have described it important for community psychology? I believe that the questions present students and researchers are asking can help inform the training of present and future students and researchers. I suggest that we develop some sort of structure so that feedback

about our training (e.g., what do we need to learn that we did not learn?) can be incorporated into psychology programs. This feedback would allow for new ideas and new understandings (fluidity) of community psychology's vision. Teaching students about questioning is very important. It is critical for us to be able to take action on the issues our questions raise.

The Social Construction of Knowledge

In the undergraduate psychology tradition, most of us learn facts, the kind of knowledge Himani Bannerji (1991) refers to as "consumer knowledge." For example, we may take an abnormal psychology course and learn to diagnose people using the DSM III-R. We feel powerful in our ability to slot others, perhaps without even realizing that is what we are doing. We do not learn to question whether people *should* be diagnosed, we do not ask "Who am I to diagnose anyone?", we do not talk about what social meaning a diagnosis has.

In my graduate training, we learned to look at labels as constructed meanings, and to question and deconstruct the meanings. We talked a lot about different "isms" (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, professionalism, ageism) that affect us all. I think we need to learn more about examining the implications for ourselves in terms of where we fit in the "isms". For example, what does it really *mean* for me as a woman to not have any women faculty in my program as role models? What does that mean for the men who are teaching in the program? How do we look at power positions and dynamics and take ownership for our privileges while working for a more equitable distribution of privileges? How do we as women students and male professors relate to each other from our relative positions of power? Simply because we do not want a power differential does not

mean one does not exist. We have to come to terms with our positions before we can work for change. And how do the "isms" get worked out when we engage in community psychology activities in the world?

In my previous work experience (with a social-recreational club for survivors) I connected well with someone who is a survivor of the mental health system. He was angry, he was talking about his experience, I was hearing what he had to say. We got involved together in a social action project. Through this experience I began to recognize the constructions in which he lived, and to see myself as a white, middle class, non-survivor, woman whom people assume to be heterosexual, and I began to question these constructions of me. I began to think about the implications of my position in relation to my friend's position. What was it about the way meaning was constructed about me that allowed me so many more privileges than him?

At SOSH I started thinking again about the privileges I enjoy because of my physical ability, my "mental health" (i.e., I have not been defined as "mentally ill"). I also started to think a lot about my privilege as a graduate student. Because SOSH is located in another city from Waterloo, I had to drive my car, or in good weather ride my high-quality expensive bicycle to get there. Schedules had to be planned around when I was going to be away for Christmas break, etc. I began to hear people's observations and understand how in some people's constructed meaning of me I was very privileged. Relative to SOSH members' lives, my life is stable (e.g., I do not have to move as often as they might); affluent - as a graduate student I might see myself as "poor", but relative to people living on "disability" pensions I am quite wealthy; unstigmatized - I do not

carry around a label of "mental illness" when I apply for jobs or look for an apartment or meet new people; full of potential - I am about to graduate from a masters program in university, and my education greatly increases the likelihood that I will get a good job that I enjoy and that pays well.

In her dissertation about understanding how having been sexually abused has affected her educational socialization, Anne Louise Brookes (1988) analyzes the abuses:

through the writing of stories which would connect the events to a theoretical analysis of how I came to learn and develop in specific ways, ways which prevented me from viewing ideology as socially constructed. In working through these experiences I am better able to see the implications of specific ideologies at work in my own social history, and thus better choose if and how I want to do particular social practices (p. 186).

Writing my own autobiographical sketch helped me begin to recognize the social construction of how I came to learn and develop in certain ways and how SOSH members might see me. Once I recognized how SOSH members might see me, I began to understand and monitor how that particular meaning might affect the research. As I will discuss later, I realized that it is quite possible in a research relationship to perpetuate oppressor-oppressed relationships dominant in mainstream society.

The same exercise helped me *begin* to be able to recognize hidden assumptions and ideologies which have helped to shape and determine my actions and beliefs. (I will talk more specifically about some of these hidden assumptions next.) I believe that individuals within psychology and community psychology as a field must continually struggle to understand and monitor how the meaning assigned to us affects the work we do.

Hidden Assumptions

By recognizing our thoughts, experiences, and assumptions and making them explicit, we are exposing another layer of data for investigation (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). In beginning to recognize some of my underlying thoughts and assumptions, I have learned more about the way I as a person interact with the research in which I am engaged.

In my employment experience in Nova Scotia several years ago as a vocational counsellor for survivors of the mental health system, I wanted to work collaboratively and in an egalitarian approach with the people for whom I was supposedly supporting. When things did not go the way I expected (people did not participate to the extent I thought they would) I began to recognize that I was making some assumptions about people in the community and about the way we could work together. For example, I was assuming that because I thought collaboration was a good idea, survivors would rise up and work with me in the spirit of collaboration. I continued to make that assumption at SOSH. I expected that because people had the opportunity to participate, they would do so if they wanted. In the summary of my final interview about our team process, the coordinator noted that

Cari's assumptions about self help stopped her from seeing that people were not as involved or feeling as much ownership as she thought they were. She feels now that she has a better idea of how to listen to her instincts about involving individuals and how to better facilitate their involvement ... If she had it to do over again, she would work harder to get members involved in the process in a concrete way -- in a particular area in which they felt most comfortable.

One of the things that I have come to a greater understanding about in the way I approach any research project, and this one specifically, is that I look at the world from a very judgemental perspective. That is, I have very high expectations of other people. While I knew this before, I had segmented this knowledge into something that affects my personal self, but not my research self. I now realize that this judgmental framework does indeed influence how I see the research project and how I relate with the people I interact with in carrying out the project. I was assuming (partly) that who I am as a person stays at home or with my friends or even at school when I go out into the community to do my work. My thesis support group helped me to realize that I had to be aware of my judgemental perspective as one of my blind spots when I was thinking about the evaluation at SOSH. When I made observations about the group, I could check myself to see if my frustration about a particular experience could be a result of judging others. For example, we had a particularly difficult steering committee meeting at SOSH. One of the members repeated the same question many different ways throughout the meeting despite the fact that I had just answered him and he had indicated that he had understood. I was getting very frustrated with him and thought that he was being purposely difficult. When I read over my field notes about the meeting and checked my assumptions about his participation, I realized that I was expecting him to share his strengths with me because I was looking for his strengths. Checking my filter helped me to understand explicitly that, just because we are focusing on people's strengths, does not mean we do not also have to deal with people's weaknesses, including our own!

In the positivist tradition in which my undergraduate training was steeped, I learned that research/knowledge is something separate from me and that I should keep it that way. (I will discuss how I learned to believe that when I discuss research as practice and as documentation.) In reality, we are part of the work we do; not acknowledging this fact does not mean it is not true. It is our job as responsible social scientists to recognize and monitor how our personal beliefs influence research (Reinharz, 1978).

In the practicum class in my graduate program, students met weekly to discuss issues we each faced in our community settings. Coming from a traditional, mainstream, undergraduate psychology program the discussions seemed to me like a waste of time at first - I thought we should be doing some real work; instead we were just sitting there talking. Gradually I began to realize just how helpful these consultation sessions were. Others with different perspectives can provide insight, help us recognize our hidden assumptions, and help us understand the meaning behind them. Now I advocate strongly that we as students should be learning how to create similar consultation/support structures for ourselves and each other when we head into the working world as community psychologists (Rossiter, Barnes, Orr, Razack, Scollay, & Willette, 1992).

I think that we as community psychologists have to help each other see ourselves and also help our field see itself. Because community psychology rhetoric is "radically" different from mainstream psychology we are in danger of looking only at what we are leaving behind and assuming that our own practice is "good" because we want it to be different. In fact, community psychologists strive to remain in the mainstream (Tolan, et al., 1990).

Awareness of our hidden assumptions can help us check them and adapt our research practice accordingly. I realize now that I was assuming it was enough for a researcher to have good intentions and want to work with people who have been marginalized to improve societal conditions. Now, reflecting on my experience at SOSH and talking with others, I am realizing that, as a member of dominant society working with people who have been marginalized, I can help perpetuate structures in research that reflect the larger society (Mitchell, 1992). Indeed, these structures can be perpetuated in any relationship (e.g., a woman's relationship with her male partner can perpetuate society's sexist patterns), if we fail to acknowledge the meanings that define us and do not attempt to understand how the meanings relate to our research actions.

Values/Human Dynamics in Research

As I have already stated, naturalistic and qualitative research methods acknowledge that as human beings relating with other human beings in research settings, our values affect our work (Patton, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

At SOSH, my values about collaboration, about self-help, about drawing on the skills and resources of all the people involved, and my philosophy/ideology about how a program evaluation could be conducted, all affected the way the research was done. I was a very powerful person in terms of knowledge about program evaluation when I walked into the setting - I chose what information to share. I remained powerful as the filter through which people (including myself) experienced program evaluation for the first time.

Throughout undergraduate training, to some extent in graduate training, and certainly in the way research is documented (which I will discuss in greater detail in the next section), there is no acknowledgement of values. In addition, we are taught that **research is important because of what results tell us and how they can be used**. Results are published in scholarly journals with just enough information about what was done so the results make sense and can be replicated. If we acknowledge the human dynamic component of research, we acknowledge that research is a process of inter-relating at many levels (individual, group, organizational) to find meaning on an issue determined by the group. Community psychology ideals are that the research process has meaning. My understanding of feminist community-oriented research (e.g., Whitmore, 1991) says the process is meaning. Using a community-oriented approach, we must attend to issues of power, collaboration, sharing knowledge, prolonged engagement in the setting, qualitative inquiry, and research as an intervention in an organization. Historically though, psychologists have engaged in depersonalized, decontextualized research reporting practices (Walsh-Bowers, 1992a.)

While involved in a research process, it is necessary for us to engage in the rest of our lives. We do not talk about non-school events much in classes except in extenuating circumstances because there is limited time and we must discuss more "relevant" issues. I have just acknowledged that who we are as people affects the way we do research. Now I am saying that during the research process we need some way to acknowledge and deal with other events that occur. The implicit assumption in a psychology research Project is that the Project comes

first, and unless something very serious occurs, we should put aside whatever else is going on and attend to the Project. For example, the university system is structured and resources are distributed in such a way that regardless of whether I am going through relationship issues with my partner, regardless of the fact that my very close friend died, I should be done my thesis work within the prescribed time so that limited resources may be used to support a new student.

The people at SOSH simply do not operate this way. They have not been trained to do it, do not want to do it, cannot do it. If something came up during the evaluation - even something which might not have seemed so important to me - the rest could wait; meetings were rescheduled, and sometimes cancelled because people did not show up. We did not all have our crises at the same time; "Crisis" meant different things to different people. We were all working with different expectations, assumptions, and experience. I realized that we are people with very different life circumstances (and privileges!) and very different assumptions about what is a crisis and what is a priority.

In order for this research project to proceed, we as an evaluation team had to acknowledge that people's life experience and issues have an impact on the research. We had to adapt our work around people's life circumstances. In an interview about our experience working on the evaluation, one of the team members commented:

I also think that without the flexibility that we had in our own schedules and in our meetings the evaluation would not have progressed to where it is now, nor in fact do I think it would be "do-able" as it was originally conceived. If the schedule had been more rigid then Cari would have probably ended up doing most of the work, with [us] doing work sporadically as we were able. But because we were flexible enough to adapt and re-adapt our schedules so that team members could deal with

their personal problems the team was able to continue to function as a unit.....anyone who wants to be involved in a similar type of [evaluation team] process ought to know that such flexibility and adaptability, as well as staying out of people's private spaces, are necessary requirements to see the process through to successful completion.

In order to adapt our work around each other's life circumstances, we need an atmosphere of trust, safety, understanding, similar values, and a common desire to examine issues of working collaboratively (Whitmore, 1990). At SOSH we worked hard to create this space. Each of our evaluation team meetings began with time for each person to tell the others how things were going; occasionally, our entire meeting time would be devoted to socializing. One of the evaluation team members noted in the midpoint interview that our regular team meetings were a positive part of the process:

I really liked the fact that before our meetings we have time to talk about what's going on in our personal lives so that we can help each other. For example, at one meeting we hadn't seen each other for a while and it was really good to find out what had been happening with each other.

We also developed a telephone check-in system based on feedback from evaluation team interviews midway through the evaluation process for days when we did not see each other.

The human relationship aspect of research that I have just described is typically not reported in research (Reinharz, 1978; Walsh-Bowers, 1992). In the next section I will talk about the way community-oriented research is practised and documented, and how effects of the research in the setting can be recognized and monitored.

Research as Practice, Intervention, and Documentation

Practice

The research methods used and the importance of attention to the human dynamics aspect of research are crucial for community psychology. Because I have already described both the methodological approach and the importance of human dynamics in research, I will not repeat myself here. Suffice it to say that community psychology methodology is (ideally) naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and participatory (Chesler, 1991), with focus on the research as a process (Walsh-Bowers, 1992a). In this section I will discuss other issues related to research as practice.

Throughout the evaluation process at SOSH, I was writing a master's thesis: The people at SOSH saw me as having a lot of knowledge/expertise. In fact even though SOSH is a grassroots self-help group, people were initially reluctant to conduct the program evaluation as a team, because they did not see members as knowledgeable or expert in conducting research. They had been socialized to believe that they needed an expert to do research for them.

We as researchers and as community workers face the danger of tokenism if we are "condescending" to work with people in marginalized groups without examining our differences in power and privilege. I came to SOSH with knowledge (power), privilege, and status to work "with" people with different knowledge, very little privilege, and no status. Many survivors of the mental health system have a not unjustified stereotype of psychologists. By identifying myself as a community psychology student, I was identifying myself with a profession which manipulates and disempowers the people it "serves" (Burstow &

Weitz, 1988). Because some people associated me with the mental health system they had experienced, problems arose. For example, there was some concern about what my ulterior motives might be or how people I worked closely with might be adversely affected.

In order to counter psychologists' image as expert, and to practice research democratically, we must engage in research collaboratively (Walsh-Bowers, 1992).

One of the evaluation team members noted in an interview that

The facilitative format of the meetings and the consensual decision making process made each member of the team an equal partner in the work. Even though Cari brought more academic skills and knowledge to the process of the evaluation, this did not create a sense of dependency of the other team members on her, nor did it cause anyone to feel less important. I feel that my input and the work that I did reflected my abilities and efforts rather than the fulfilling of guidelines and procedures established by some sort of objective, "scientific" methodology.

I think students have to learn about ways we can actually put concrete structures into place to facilitate participation. For example, in the evaluation at SOSH, we (the evaluation team) invited anyone who wished to give us feedback at any time. I thought that was collaborative. We assumed that if people had some feedback for us, they would share it - after all, this was a self-help group, right?. What we did not take into consideration was: 1) people's experience with the mental health system in which feedback about even themselves was excluded; 2) people may not have felt safe about sharing their feedback -and why should they?; 3) people may not have the skills/knowledge to carry out such an action even if they want to. We realized that in our hopes of having each person participate in whatever way that felt comfortable to her or him, we created no concrete structure in which people could do so. When the light bulb came on, so

to speak, we asked one of the group members to make a suggestion box and tell others about it. We also restated that we wanted people's ideas and comments, and reminded them about the different ways they could share their thoughts/concerns with us, such as using the suggestion box, at regular meeting updates, talking with one of us on the evaluation team, talking to steering committee members, talking to staff members.

Intervention

Throughout the evaluation at SOSH, we placed a lot of importance on attention to process. We acknowledged that research is an intervention in an organization, and we were therefore responsible as ethical researchers to be sensitive to the way research affected people in the organization. An example from my early involvement at SOSH demonstrates that my mere presence affected the organization. During a membership meeting which I attended, one of the members became very upset with another member and started yelling and got very worked up. I was very aware that a lot of people were watching me to see what my reaction to this would be. In my previous work experience it would have been my responsibility to deal with the group dynamics. In this case though, I knew that I was an outsider and that it was not my job to interfere with what was going on. I was also conscious that some people were worried that I would be upset. One person came over to me and whispered "Don't worry about him, he gets like that sometimes." I was not upset by the experience, and did not want people to think I was. I wanted to show that I was aware it was not my responsibility to handle it. *I was aware that people were watching me.* As it turned out, the staff person who handled the incident told another staff person (who was

not present during the incident) that she was concerned that I had looked displeased and wondered if she'd done something *wrong*, thus my mere presence influenced people in the organization.

During the evaluation we attempted to monitor how the research was affecting SOSH. When the evaluation was finished, we talked with the general membership about both the intended and unintended effects of the evaluation. Some of the issues that we dealt with included leaving the tools for SOSH to conduct another evaluation in future; arranging for follow-up, which acknowledged that both SOSH members and myself had a responsibility to see that the recommendations would be implemented; whether David and Karen felt more empowered after the evaluation experience and how that affected their status and relationships at SOSH; how to deal with some negative opinions about SOSH; and also how a researcher exits from an organization after having been heavily involved for several months - not only what it meant for the organization, but also what it meant for the evaluation team that worked so closely together. It was important for us as a group to have the opportunity to process and make sense of our experience together. Discussing how people were affected by the experience validated the human element of the research we did.

Documentation

In addition to being aware of and attending to research as process, it is important that we **document** research as a process. Historically, psychologists have engaged in nondemocratic research practice and depersonalized, decontextualized documentation (Walsh-Bowers, 1992a). If we document our research processes,

we are exposing our methods to ethical scrutiny, and we become accountable for more than simply the results of our research (Reinharz, 1978).

Fuller documentation of the realities of research would demystify the research and rehumanize the researcher. Dorothy Smith (1987; cited in Brookes, 1988) talks about the effect of leaving *ourselves* out of research documentation. Our absence keeps us from knowing and talking about illusions, assumptions, learned values, and *bifurcates* our consciousness. For example, I realized through my autobiographical sketch that I had buried my feelings about my upsetting/disturbing experiences as an undergraduate student in psychology because there was no place for them to come out. This burial kept me from working the issues through, and kept me under the influence of traditional guidelines for thinking about and doing psychology. In other words, not including myself and my "gut reactions" to the work I was doing served to maintain the psychology status quo. Making our presence explicit in our research documentation allows us to claim ourselves as people in the work we do.

At SOSH we documented the evaluation process as well as the design and findings. The evaluation report included a section about our experience as a research team; information about how decisions were made; a discussion about specific ways members participated; an acknowledgement of feedback from the members about the evaluation design and how we adapted it; a discussion of how we as human beings gathered, analyzed, and handled information; a description of how we as a group generated a set of recommendations; and a description of how we documented the evaluation.

We also made an effort to acknowledge our mistakes. In our final report we included a section about what we would do differently if we were doing the evaluation again. We included not only our perceptions of how the evaluation process could be improved, but also the perceptions of the evaluation participants. For example, as I mentioned earlier, some people had difficulty completing the questionnaire because of its length and because of literacy concerns. In the report we explained these difficulties, described how we dealt with them (by incorporating one member's suggestion for people to complete them in groups), and included a revised edition of the questionnaire in an appendix of the report. It is important that we discuss our failed attempts at research so that other researchers can learn from our mistakes. Shulamit Reinharz (1978) says that because revelations about the experience of researching are scarce, researchers modify their activities to fit the impressions created by most published studies.

We attempted to expose our methods to scrutiny so that people could learn from our mistakes. People at SOSH may choose to carry out another program evaluation in the future. Because we carried out the evaluation as a team, members at SOSH are left with tools to conduct another evaluation. By exposing our methods to the scrutiny of members throughout the evaluation process, and by acknowledging in the final report that there are some things we would do differently, I believe we created the space to say that we were open to the input and suggestions of others in terms of research methodology and process. The position of researcher as privileged scientist with power is challenged when knowledge about how research is carried out is shared (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

Thinking about all of the issues I have just discussed has been meaningful for me, for SOSH, and I hope will add to current discussion about community-oriented research styles. In the next sections I will discuss specific learning that I think has taken (and is taking) place as a result of the evaluation at SOSH.

Learning for Myself, SOSH, and Other Researchers

Personal Learning

Most importantly, I have had the opportunity to start thinking about the world in a new way. I am beginning to look for hidden assumptions (in myself and others) and I am more able now to see the world as it is socially constructed. Specific personal learning from this research experience includes: a deeper understanding of how my personal as well as research values influence the work I do; how to attend to, monitor, and adapt the research process to appropriately reflect the needs of the people with whom I am working; a better working knowledge of how collaborative research can be practised; more understanding about survivors in relation to the mental health system and working for change; new political connections in the antipsychiatry movement in Ontario; an Ontario Psychiatric Survivors Alliance (OPSA) membership; a revised personal definition of self-help; and a deeper understanding of the importance of collective action for social change.

My participation in this research project has freed me from my previous positivist expectations of myself as expert. No one in the setting expected me to know everything about how to do a program evaluation. As such, we were able to explore together the meaning of doing a program evaluation in this particular setting.

Jim Kelly (1988) says we have to consciously blur the status differences between "expert" and "client", and combine our abilities collaboratively. I had to learn that while I am not an expert, I do have to own my own skills while attempting to facilitate a collaborative research project. I brought unique skills

and knowledge to the setting. Just as I tried to facilitate drawing out the skills and talents of others, I had to take ownership for and draw upon my skills and talents.

Because I was also the filter through which people at SOSH gained information about program evaluation, I had to acknowledge my own filter to myself in my journal reflections and through my discussions with others, to the setting, to my support group, and in my research documentation. Looking through my autobiographical sketch helped me to recognize hidden assumptions in my journal reflections about SOSH. When I acknowledged my blind spots I could monitor my beliefs and actions and be aware of their effect on the evaluation.

Learning for SOSH

The evaluation at SOSH yielded benefits for the group itself, as well as potential benefits for other community-oriented researchers. In a membership meeting we discussed the benefits of the evaluation for SOSH: helping members develop a stronger sense of ownership of the program (by soliciting their involvement throughout the research experience); material to support funding applications; giving group members an awareness of the "big picture" of what is happening in their organization; validation of the self-help philosophy which guides their program; and tools to conduct future evaluations and adapt the program to meet members' changing needs.

Learning for Other Researchers

In terms of other community-oriented researchers, I believe that documentation of both the participatory nature of the evaluation process and this

thesis itself can be beneficial. In the next two sections I will discuss the benefits in more detail.

Participatory Action Research

I think the documentation of the evaluation process in which we engaged can make a supportive contribution to the developing body of knowledge/ideas about what Mark Chesler (1991) refers to as Participatory Action Research (PAR). It is important for us to engage in this type of community-oriented research, because as people doing work in the community we have a responsibility to work collectively with people for the purpose of informing political action and social change (Women's Research Centre, 1987; Kirby & McKenna, 1989). The research relationship itself can help us explore the potential for social change in society (Walsh-Bowers, 1992a).

Throughout the evaluation process we acknowledged that SOSH members are the world's very best experts about themselves and their experience of the program. The primarily qualitative nature of the evaluation validated the experiences of participants and not just facts about them (Patton, 1986). The evaluation was *participant-focused*: People took part in the project to the extent that their needs were reflected in the evaluation design, the questions that we asked, the data we gathered, and in the decision about how to use the findings. Our approach was *collaborative* and *democratic*: there were no distinctions between me as Researcher and the others as Participants (Kelly, 1988); we engaged in the project together and everyone made a unique contribution. The information we gathered was specific to the setting in which we worked and not generalizable across all settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The evaluation was

conducted for the direct benefit of SOSH; any knowledge that other groups can draw from this experience will be about the process of doing research with a self-help group and not about the findings themselves. I believe that by validating the principles on which SOSH is based, we have helped work toward empowering members in their struggle for social change.

The Process of Writing the Thesis

Engaging in this thesis has been my most meaningful experience in graduate school. The work that I have done in putting this thesis together has involved wading through community psychology principles and concepts and creating my own set of research values; sorting through qualitative, naturalistic, and feminist research methodology; engagement in a collaborative research project with a community group working for social change; the opportunity to reflect upon and begin to make some sense of my training in psychology, my work experience in the community, and about my conceptual knowledge; the opportunity to reflect upon my attempts to put my values into practice; and finally, the opportunity to integrate and document the whole learning experience.

It is exactly the whole process of having created this thesis which I think can be most informative to other community psychologists. My approach to meeting the thesis requirement in this program has been somewhat unusual; typically students document only the particular research experience in which they have been involved. For example, I could have incorporated SOSH's evaluation report into a thesis proposal and literature review and made that into a thesis.

I do not mean to imply that my learning experience has been better than that of my classmates whose theses have followed the format I just described. My

point is that *reflection* about the research experience and integration of new understanding (and a new self) with the previous understanding is **crucial** to one's personal formation as a community psychologist.

Conclusion

I think it would be useful to close the thesis by critiquing my experience of creating it in relation to the quotation I used to begin the thesis:

Disruptive consequences can follow from drawing people's attention to the basic assumptions on which their social system rests. Basic assumptions provide the meaning and underpinning for social systems precisely to the extent that they are unquestioned. When they are challenged, the possibility of a replacement arises and the system is thereby changed. (Shulamit Reinharz, 1978, p.99).

Disruptive consequences can follow from drawing people's attention to the basic assumptions on which their social system rests.

I was recently visiting the town where I did my undergraduate training in psychology. I walked into the natural food store one day and saw someone I had not see for quite a while. She asked me what I was doing. Somewhat self-consciously (knowing that she is a long-time activist) I told her that I was studying community psychology. When she asked me what that was, I told her that it was really the same old thing a lot of people had been doing for a long time, but psychology came along and gave it a name. She and the man beside me had a good chuckle. When she asked me what my partner was doing these days I responded "taking environmental resource studies". She and the man roared with laughter and she said "Welcome to the nineties!" It was quite a low-key friendly conversation, but it really left me with something to think about. Is community psychology simply trendy? How serious, well-grounded, and critical are we of the work we are doing? I came away from the conversation with an even firmer

resolve that we as community psychologists have to grapple with the issue of **praxis**. Our reflections and actions must be unified - or at least we must be making a genuine attempt to ensure this happens. Within the academic paradigm, where we are trained to be community psychologists, we discuss theories and concepts. In order for the status quo to remain unchanged, we do not examine issues of praxis (Mies, 1983). Kirby and McKenna (1989) note that, within academia, there is seldom talk of how to act responsibly on what we have learned. They emphasize the importance of translating insights about the political nature of knowledge creation into research practices. In my particular community psychology program I think some of us have seriously grappled with questions of how we can go forward with what we have learned and act responsibly for social change. This struggle has been absolutely crucial to my formation as a community psychologist.

I am beginning to understand now that if too many people were to step back and critique their training in psychology, and if they were to organize based upon their understanding, psychology would be in for some fundamental changes. Engaging in this thesis journey the way I have chosen to has raised several disruptive consequences, both to me and to the university. The way I have chosen to approach this thesis is very time-consuming; I have taken much longer to complete my work than I or the university anticipated. I have had to give up my office space for incoming students, and I am aware that I am taxing the demands of already overworked professors because I am in the program an extra term beyond the prescribed "schedule." In addition to working to complete the thesis, I

have had to work to deal with the pressures resulting from the way I have done my work.

Basic assumptions provide the meaning and underpinning for social systems precisely to the extent that they are unquestioned.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) assert that universities, which are "still largely the domain of white, middle and upper class males" control research methodology and funding to help "construct and legitimate their power and maintain current social relations" (p. 27). This community psychology program is embedded in the university as a social institution. While community psychologists pride ourselves in our "alternative" values and research methodology, in reality we cannot practice much differently than other psychologists. There is no more time, there are no more resources, there is too much to do, the university administration would not approve any radical departures from mainstream research.

Professors in my department have had to deal with the fact that this thesis is so different from others they have experienced. At times they have not known how to respond to my work. The process of understanding what my process is about has been arduous and at times confusing. I think that only now, at the end of my thesis experience, are we as a committee beginning to have a common understanding of what I am doing.

When I applied to graduate studies for funding to discuss my thesis experience at a national psychology conference, I was informed by the dean that my funding was an **exception**, because students are required to present **research findings** when participating in presentations. I was also encouraged to think about

writing a **scholarly** paper in the future. If I had written a typical thesis that conformed to institutional expectations, I would have had no problem obtaining funding for the conference.

When they (basic assumptions) are challenged, the possibility of a replacement arises and the system is thereby changed.

Questioning my own assumptions has forced me to re-think my whole frame of reference. I am no longer blind to the hidden assumptions that have claimed and shaped me until now. My personal social system has been radically changed as a result of my new understanding about hidden assumptions (my own and others').

The process of radically changing one's social system while working full time, trying to complete a graduate program, maintaining a personal life, *and* dealing with pressures to conform (such as time and funding constraints) is extremely draining. Mustering up the energy to complete the process is very challenging at times, and particularly at the end of the thesis when I just want to be finished.

Institutional pressures, busy schedules, time and money constraints, and the relatively less complicated route of not questioning what we are doing are very real dangers for community psychology. Unless we gather ourselves together and examine the framework through which we are doing our work and commit ourselves to critical self-reflection and action on an ongoing basis, we will be swallowed by the university institution and be no different from the system we want to change.

My fear is that we are already being swallowed. My hope is that there is enough energy, idealism, and support to motivate community-oriented researchers in the struggle to be true to the communities with whom we work.

References

- Albee, George. W. (1980). A competency model to replace the deficit model. In Margaret Gibbs, Juliana Rasic Lachenmeyer, & Janet Sigal (Eds.). Community psychology: Theoretical and empirical approaches. New York: Gardner Press Inc.
- Bannerji, Himani. (1991). But who speaks for us? Experience and agency in conventional feminist paradigms. In Himani Bannerji, Linda Carty, Kari Dehli, Susan Heald, & Kate McKenna. Unsettling relations: The university as a site of feminist struggles. Women's Press: Toronto.
- Brookes, Anne Louise. (1988). Feminist pedagogy: A subject in/formation. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Toronto: Toronto.
- Burns, Melinda. (1992, May). Considering our lives: Women and journal writing. Workshop presentation at the Women and Therapy: Healing and Social Change conference. Guelph, Ontario.
- Burstow, Bonnie & Weitz, Don (Eds.). (1988). Shrink-resistant: The struggle against psychiatry in Canada. Vancouver, B.C.: New Star Books.
- Canadian Psychological Association (1988). Canadian code of ethics for psychologists: Companion manual. Old Chelsea: Canadian Psychological Association.
- Chamberlain, Judi (1978). On our own: patient-controlled alternatives to the mental health system. Toronto: McGraw-Hill.
- Chamberlain, Judi & Rogers, Joseph A. (1990). Planning a community-based mental health system: Perspectives of service recipients. American Psychologist, 45, 1241-1244.

- Chesler, Mark (1991). Participatory action research with self-help groups: An alternative paradigm for inquiry in action. American Journal of Community Psychology, 19, 757-768.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. (1982). Toward transformation in social knowledge. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Goldenberg, Ira (1978). Oppression and social intervention. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- GROW (1982). GROW world community mental health movement: The program of growth to maturity. Sydney: GROW Publications.
- Grumet, Madeleine (1981). Autobiography and reconceptualization. In H. Giroux, A. N. Penna, & W. Pinar (Eds.), Curriculum and instruction. Berkeley, McCutchan.
- Johnston, Corrine, & Walsh-Bowers, Richard (1992, June). A content analysis of research in community psychology journals: 1980-1989. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Canadian Psychological Association. Quebec, Quebec.
- Kelly, James G. (1988). A guide to conducting prevention research in the community: First steps. New York: Haworth Press.
- Kirby, Sandra, & McKenna, Kate (1989). Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Knitzer, Jane (1980). Advocacy and community psychology. In Margaret S. Gibbs, Juliana Rasic Lachenmeyer, & Janet Sigal (Eds.), Community psychology: Theoretical and empirical approaches. New York: Gardner Press Inc.

- Levine, Murray, & Perkins, David V. (1987). Principles of community psychology: Perspectives and applications. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Yvonna, & Guba, Egon (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Mies, Maria (1983). Towards a methodology for feminist research. In G. Bowles & R. Duelli Klein (Eds.). Theories of women's studies. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mitchell, Terry (1992, June). When the dominant group researches those they dominate: Reflections of an outsider working inside a Yukon First Nation community. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Canadian Psychological Association. Quebec, Quebec.
- Patton, Michael (1986). Utilization-focused evaluation (2nd edition). Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Patton, Michael (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd edition). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Peirson, Leslea, & Walsh-Bowers, Richard (1992, June). The Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health: A critical evaluation. Poster presentation at the annual convention of the Canadian Psychological Association. Quebec, Quebec.
- Rappaport, Julian (1977). Community psychology: Values, research and action. New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston.
- Rappaport, Julian (1981). In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention. American Journal of Community Psychology, 9, 1-26.

- Rappaport, Julian, & Cleary, Catherine (1980). Labeling (sic) theory and the social psychology of experts and helpers. In Margaret S. Gibbs, Juliana Rasic Lachenmeyer, & Janet Sigal (Eds.). Community psychology: Theoretical and empirical approaches. New York: Gardner Press Inc.
- Reinharz, Shulamit (1979). On becoming a social scientist. Washington: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Sagarin, Edward. (1969). Odd man in: Societies of deviants in America. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
- Sarason, Seymour (1978). The nature of problem solving in social action. American Psychologist, 33, 371-380.
- Scribner, Sylvia (1980). What is community psychology made of? In Margaret S. Gibbs, Juliana Rasic Lachenmeyer, & Janet Sigal (Eds.). Community psychology: Theoretical and empirical approaches. New York: Gardner Press Inc.
- Salem, Deborah, Seidman, Edward, & Rappaport, Julian (1988). Community treatment of the mentally ill: The promise of mutual-help organizations. Social Work, 33, 403-408.
- Strauss, Anselm & Corbin, Juliet (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Thompson, Mark S. (1982). Decision analysis for program evaluation. Cambridge, MA.: Ballinger.
- Tolan, Paul, Keys, Christopher, Chertok, Fran, & Jason, Leonard (1990). Researching community psychology: Issues of theory and methods. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

- Tyler, Forest B., Pargament, Kenneth I., & Gatz, M. Margaret (1983). The resource collaborator role: A model for interactions involving psychologists. American Psychologist, 38, 388-398.
- Walsh, Richard T. (1987). The evolution of the research relationship in community psychology. American Journal of Community Psychology, 15, 773-788.
- Walsh-Bowers, Richard (1992a, August). Democracy in American psychological research practice. paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.
- Walsh-Bowers, Richard (1992b, manuscript under review). The reporting and practice of the research relationship in modern interpersonal psychology.
- Walsh-Bowers, Richard T. & Nelson, Geoff (1992). An empowerment model of community support for ex-psychiatric patients. Unpublished manuscript.
- Weiss, Carol (1983). The stakeholder approach to evaluation: Origins and promise. In A.S. Bryk (Ed.), Stakeholder-based evaluation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Whitmore, Elizabeth (1990). Empowerment in program evaluation: A case example. Canadian Social Work Review, 7, 215-229.
- Whitmore, Elizabeth (1991). Evaluation and empowerment: It's the process that counts. Networking Bulletin: Empowerment and Family Support, 2, 1-7.
- Women's Research Centre (1987). Action research for women's groups. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers.
- Women's Research Centre (1990). Keeping on track: An evaluation guide for community groups. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers.

Appendix A: Working Agreement

The Project:

We will be working together on a program evaluation for SOSH. I will be writing about the process of doing the research as my community psychology master's thesis.

Approach:

Each of us has unique knowledge and skills. In this research process, we hope to draw out the skills and resources of each person involved, so that our collaboration reflects more than the sum of our individual efforts. Our aim is to share our experiences and opinions in such a way that the research carried out meets the needs of SOSH, and most importantly, is *carried out* in a manner appropriate to the philosophy of the group as well as to me.

SOSH members will be involved throughout the research process, both in terms of giving input and making decisions about how and what will be done; and also in terms of my reporting to them what information is being gathered. The evaluation is being done for the betterment of the program, and only those involved in the program have a true understanding of what is best for the program. Knowledge is power, and we believe it should be shared. Therefore, information gathered will be shared with SOSH members at regular feedback sessions, in a way that makes sense and is understandable. I will be open to questions and critical thinking about the research and research process throughout, and will present myself in such a way that people feel comfortable approaching me.

I acknowledge that the research process will have to be flexible, because different people have different needs, which may change. On the other hand, the research must also be "doable". That is, it can't be so flexible that it takes an unreasonable amount of time to complete.

Time frame:

While I am working on the evaluation, I am also working on my master's thesis. My goal is to complete my thesis in the spring of 1992, with an absolute outside completion date of summer, 1992. The evaluation will have to be completed at least a couple of months before the thesis is written, so the evaluation will be completed absolutely no later than spring 1992.

Time Expectations:

The co-ordinator and I will meet weekly for one hour to discuss how things are progressing. I will be spending two days a week at SOSH, initially getting to know the setting, and then working on the actual evaluation. When the time comes to begin asking questions, my time will have to be more flexible (e.g., may involve some evening or weekend work).

Working group/ Steering committee:

Stakeholders in the program will be asked to form a small working committee, to which I will be directly responsible. Committee representation will be solicited from SOSH members, the board of directors, SOSH staff, and from the funding source. I will report to this committee regularly, and we will discuss content, actions and process throughout the research process. In addition to providing feedback to the committee, feedback will be provided regularly to the larger groups represented on the committee.

Decision-making will be consensual. This group will also discuss ways to resolve or manage conflict consensually if the need arises.

Membership Involvement:

Group meetings will take place to discuss evaluation issues such as methodology, content, and participation. Feedback sessions will be held regularly throughout the research process to keep the membership informed. Once all the information has been gathered and discussed, stakeholders together will generate program recommendations and methods of implementing them.

Follow-up:

I will not drop out of sight when the research process has been completed. I will provide follow-up after a period of time to be determined later.

Expenses:

All possible efforts will be made to keep expenses to a minimum. Photocopying and printing may be done at SOSH. If necessary, this may be done elsewhere, and I will be reimbursed by SOSH.

Uses of the Information:

All information gathered will respect the rights of individuals to privacy. Identifiers will be removed and information will be shared and discussed without revealing the names of the sources of information.

The evaluation report will be for use by SOSH. I will be referring to the report in my thesis, and may include a copy of the report in my thesis. I may also write about the evaluation, or talk about my experience doing the evaluation at

psychology gatherings or conferences. If this happens, SOSH will be described in a way agreed upon by the steering committee.

October 21, 1991

Appendix B: Thesis Support Group Informal Interview Format

Open Discussion: Individualized Priorities

We will work on one interview per meeting for the next several meetings. The person who is being interviewed will provide a 5-10 minute summary, then inform the others as to what s/he would like to focus on, then the rest of the group will ask questions and reflect.

Summary:

- * activities and experience
- * here's what happened, here are the issues it raises, here's how I responded
- * telling the group what kind of feedback you would like (e.g., needs, blind spots)

Questions/Issues (we brainstormed to come up with this list)

- * How have you changed? a) conceptually (e.g., what is empowerment? what is community?) b) personally
- * Experience of community compared to ideology of community
- * What biases and assumptions seemed key in the work you are doing?
- * What are blind spots (potential to do exercises here)
- * Balancing thesis work and personal life: tensions between separating them and integrating them
- * Ownership of the research
- * How are you going to use the information from the interview?
- * How do personal issues show up in thesis work? How do they get played out?

- Gut responses to doing work-dilemmas, and ALL THE OTHER STUFF
- Why this topic? Effects of topic on you
- Reactions from other people - impact on relationships