

Questions posed to the editorial and advisory boards of the new Journal of Action Research:

Why do you choose to do action research? What brought you to this practice? What keeps you involved? Do you have particular stories that illustrate why you practice action research? What issues, values, experiences, personal characteristics or other factors underlie your commitment to action research and shape your practice?

***I have daughters and men have gender:
What keeps me involved in action research***

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It was well after midnight on a New Year's Eve. I sat across the table from my long time friend, Kat. She was telling me the details of her most recent badly ended marriage. She shared one painful incident after another of her soon-to-be third ex-husband's wormy behavior. There was a lull in her story telling. Leaning forward, I asked, in reference to her three divorces, "Did you ever feel suicidal?" She looked straight at me over the top of her near empty wine glass, and replied, "No. Never." Pause. "Homicidal was more like it. Know what I mean? "

Over twenty years later, well into the part of my adult life committed to feminist-informed activism and action research, and on the cooler side of menopause, I know exactly what she means. It's one of the things that keeps me involved in action research.

Recently Yoland Wadsworth e-mailed around an article on action research published in 2001 in the *Social Science Update* (<http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU34.html>) The author of the article proclaimed that the two main principles of action research are "democratization of the knowledge process, and social change." Then I skip down to his reference list, which serves to codify the legitimate knowledge base of action research. Men, men, men, men. Reading it was like being pulled into a time warp. This could have been one of those articles I referred to fifteen years ago, when I exposed the androcentric, sexist nature of much of the ground breaking participatory action research. Where's the work of Mary Brydon-Miller, Alice McIntyre, Brinton Lykes, Yoland Wadsworth, Michele Fine, Patti Lather, Penny Barnett, Jan Barnsley and Diana Ellis, Francesca Cancian, Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah, Korrie De Koning and Marion Martin, Renu Khanna, Susan Noffke

and Marie Brennan, Britt-Marie Berge and Hildur Ve, Sandra Hollingsworth, Marie Mies. There are so many others. We're not even on his radar screen.

Democratization and social change for exactly who and from whose perspectives? It's not that male action researchers can't articulate an understanding of gender dynamics and how multiple identities and positionalities influence knowledge creation. It's just that there are too few who do. There are too still few who even acknowledge what feminisms brings to the conversation of how and what action researchers can contribute to the creation of a more just, democratic, and loving world.

Referring to the *Social Science Update* article, Yoland Wadsworth noted that the life work of feminist and women action researchers "is being "disappeared" before our eyes (Personal Communication, 8/26/02). I know exactly what she means. Fighting that disappearance is part of what sustains my involvement in feminist-informed action research.

I first learned of participatory action research along with others at the Center for International Education in the early 1980's. We realized that our approaches to research and evaluation were incongruent with the values of the empowering, non-formal education we espoused in our work outside the academy. I nearly drown in Habermas and hermeneutics on the way to PAR. At the same time, through the women of the center, I got active in local reproductive rights work and organizing in support of the equal rights amendment. The juxtaposition of everyday activism in the women's movement with theorizing action research lead me to feminist critiques of traditional social science research as well as feminist critiques of international development assistance. It didn't take long to superimpose feminist critiques on participatory action research. Men, men, men, men. Social justice talking, liberation slinging guys. Didn't any of them know feminists or know of feminist scholarship or feminist activism. Could they really be talking social transformation without acknowledging gendering mechanisms, gender inequities, the ways gender informs the social construction of knowledge, or even the ways gender influences how we each experience everyday life?

Then Paulo Freire came to the Center a time or two. A few women, doctoral students at the time, Jenny Campos, Rema Pai, and Mary Brydon-Miller, organized his workshops and lectures. Some of the action research, liberationist guys flew in to be with and be seen with Freire. Some quibbled among themselves about who would be seated where on the dais with Paulo. Hmmm. Kind of makes you feel homicidal.

Fast forward fifteen years to the 1994 Cartagena World Congress on Action Research and Participatory Action Research. At the opening night ceremonies, the lone woman official on the dais must read someone else's words because she replaces a more senior man who cannot attend. His words came out of her mouth. It was down hill from there. Somewhere along the second or third day the

women erupted on the congress floor, speaking out about the marginalization of women and gender and feminist perspectives at the liberationist gathering.

Sometimes I just want to quit speaking up about feminisms and action research. We women action researchers get tired and sometimes even fearful it sounds like the "whining" women get accused of. "What about gender. What about women. Men have gender too." But to quit speaking up, that's suicidal. I don't stay involved to keep prodding, or worse, some of the sexist men in action research. I'm not homicidal.

I stay involved in action research because I truly need this whole community of scholar practitioners to push me toward greater congruency between my beliefs and actions. I stay involved because without the encouragement and work of the whole action research community, it's too easy for me to choose the comfort of theorizing over the discomforts of taking meaningful collaborative actions in my more immediate surroundings. I stay involved because all the theorizing in the world, feminist or otherwise, is of little use without the doing. And action researchers are doers. I stay involved because we are all gendered beings whose gender gets played out in relationship to our other identities. And this community helps me keep those multiple identities in focus as well. I stay involved because we, women and men, need each other to work toward creating a world where my daughters and your sons can have full access to the full range of human characteristics. I stay involved so we can work for a world in which all our sons and daughters, all our nieces and nephews, have equitable access to and benefit of the full range of resources and opportunities. That's what keeps me involved. Know what I mean?