Research as a Potential Mode for Ecopsychosocial Accompaniment [1]

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Abstract

In this essay, Watkins draws on the chapters in this book in an effort to help clarify how social science research can be a potential mode of liberatory accompaniment, the practices and ethics that are essential to such research, and pedagogical approaches to aid researchers to become ecopsychosocial accompaniers. When a person or team with research skills has made a commitment to a community and their emancipatory aims, the stage is set to see if the members want to partner to help achieve some of the community's desired ends through research. Such accompaniment strives for horizontality and mutuality, including learning by all participants. Research as a mode of accompaniment has the potential to contribute to liberatory ends and to strengthen solidarity in the service of shared emancipatory values and commitments.

This essay draws on the chapters in *Research as Accompaniment: Solidarity and Community Partnerships for Transformative Action* (Rosales et al., 2024) to help clarify how social science research can be a potential mode of liberatory accompaniment, the practices and ethics that are essential to such research, and pedagogical approaches to aid researchers to become ecopsychosocial accompaniers. When a person or team with research skills has made a commitment to a certain group or community and their emancipatory aims, the stage is set to see if members of that community want to partner to help achieve some of their desired ends through research. Such accompaniment strives for horizontality and mutuality, including learning by all participants. Research as a mode of accompaniment has the potential to contribute to liberatory ends and to strengthen solidarity in the service of shared emancipatory values and commitments.

First Step: Exploring One's Positionality

Before United States feminist (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan,1982; Gluck & Patai, 1991) and Latin American critiques (Fals Borda,1995) of mainstream social science research began to emerge in the 1970s, decades of social science research occurred with scant attention to the implications of researchers' positionalities. One's positionality affects what we want to study, whom we include and exclude, how we want to conduct research, what we hear and don't hear, how we interpret what we hear, and what uses we make of our results. As we consider the conjunction of "research" and "accompaniment," we need to set in motion processes for carefully understanding how our social position and power affect our research and our relationships with those we work with. This is not reflection that can be wholly accomplished alone, privately; nor is it reflection that can be accomplished once and for all. As potential accompaniers, we need to speak honestly and openly with those from contexts different from our own to be able to more clearly ascertain the implications of where and how we are located. This requires careful and humble listening for how our location both enables us access to understandings and limits us as well. It is almost inevitable that along the way, we will lose sight

of how our positionality affects others. Only by creating open and honest communication can we authentically welcome critiques that can help us re-orient.

LaShaune Johnson and Sarah Lux (in this volume) remind us that we need to be concerned not only with our personal positionality but also with the history of the institutions we may represent. Unfortunately, too many communities that have faced oppression have been failed by researchers who take up time and resources without delivering benefits. Johnson and Lux give the example of being affiliated with a university whose teaching hospital had a long history of mistreating African Americans. They needed to listen to residents recount this painful history in order to understand community members' reluctance to partner with them as public health researchers. This respectful listening was a necessary step so that community members would trust they were not going to again receive the previous disrespect and harm.

In addition, Martín Rosales (in this volume) introduces us to the concept of "existential positioning"; how closely do researchers situate themselves vis-vis community members they are engaging with. This can range from the distance of a detached researcher who is aiming for "objectivity" to the proximity of a person who is living alongside community members, sharing the context that is being studied. The degree of proximity, he writes, "conveys the level of personal or affective connection and empathy toward others that could move researchers to actions that are out of their comfort zone."

I write this chapter as a "White" or European American cisgendered "professional" woman in my early seventies. I have enjoyed interdependent educational and economic privileges that have been critical to my gaining positions of academic leadership. Until recently, I have largely accompanied groups and communities other than my own, including forced migrants in and outside of detention prisons, prison inmates, and Latino/a neighbors without documents. While I have a doctorate degree, in these contexts I have been a student as surely as I have tried to be an accompanier. When people from these contexts defer to me because of some aspect(s) of my identity—as a psychologist, professor, scholar, or "White" person—I have worked to not accept the power being delivered to me but to return it to those who hold their own knowledge and wisdom from their own life experiences.

Recently, I have been accompanying privileged European Americans, like myself, as we work on accountability for our ancestral ties to chattel slavery, Indigenous genocide, and White supremacy and the work of divesting excess resources of land, power, privilege, and money for the sake of racial reparations (Watkins, 2023). Historically, accompaniment has focused on a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized and for those suffering from and valiantly resisting injustice. In the future, more attention needs to be placed on the accompaniment of perpetrators of injustice who are ready to shift their priorities of personally accumulating excess land, privilege, power, and money to divesting excess resources for the common good.

The Mutuality of Accompaniment

In both cases—accompanying as a member within a group and accompanying from outside a group—I have come to experience accompaniment as mutual or reciprocal (Watkins, 2019a; Watkins, 2019b). If one conceives of accompaniment as something one person does for another or for a group, power differentials are reinscribed. One is overtly or covertly focusing on what

they have to give, too often constituting others as passive receivers and oneself as possessing superior knowledge. This is disempowering for those placed in the receiving position, and it is falsely empowering those who may have greater social power already but have a lot to learn from those they seek to accompany. Kathleen Clark (in this volume) cautions her nursing students who are unfamiliar with a given setting not to prematurely set about fixing problems they perceive. First, be present, listen, and learn.

Mutual accompaniment strives for what Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire called "cultural synthesis." In cultural synthesis, Freire (2008) says, people "do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world" (p. 180). There is a synthesis of worlds through efforts of mutual understanding. Sriprakash (2022) describes this as epistemic reparation, a process in which, through our relationships with each other, we seek —on level ground—"to envision what justice looks like and then [work] collectively toward those ends" (Johnson & Lux, in this volume).

Nevertheless, many who will come to experience the mutuality of accompaniment begin by wanting to be of "service." Hopefully, they will soon discover the lessons of "reverse service"—how *their* lives are enriched by their relationships and "service" activities—and be able to acknowledge, reflect back, and share gratitude for what they are learning and experiencing. As much as we—as aspiring accompaniers—may speak of walking alongside others and of aiming for horizontal relationships, we must remember that in most research situations asymmetries of power and privilege persist. Their distorting effects need to be acknowledged and addressed rather than wished away.

Why Accompaniment as a Foundation for Research?

The Critique Against Extractive Community Research: Epistemic Arrogance

The authors of this volume largely agree on a critique of research that does not have a foundation of accompaniment. This critique rejects community research that is extractive, i.e., primarily for the benefit of researchers and their institutions, not for the community and its members. It argues against practices that center power in the role of outside researchers, leading to their determining the focus of the research, the methods of research, the data analysis, the writing up, and the dissemination of the research. These research practices tend to focus primarily on the problems of a community and not enough on their assets, i.e., their strengths, knowledge, wisdom, history of resistance, and vision.

Community members and groups may have devoted time and resources to building a relationship with researchers that in the end never substantially benefited them. Unfortunately, communities that are struggling under the burdens of racism, poverty, marginalization, and injustices can—if researchers are willing to listen—recount multiple instances of being used by researchers who may have parachuted in and then walked away with fatter resumes and greater institutional power, without making sure that the research was of use to the community and its members. The cornerstone of extractive research is epistemic arrogance, an assumption of possessing or being able to develop superior knowledge because of one's privileged social roles, such as being a professional researcher.

Correcting the Extractive Nature of Research: Cultivating Epistemic Humility

Orlando Fals Borda (1995), a Colombian sociologist and co-founder of participatory action research (PAR), underlined that a cornerstone of the practice of research as a form of accompaniment is the cultivation of epistemic humility, a clear understanding that every participant has contributions to make to the development of knowledge:

> Do not monopolise your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them. Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organisations. Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals (Fals Borda, 1995).

Researchers may be in a privileged social position, but if they do not realize the partialness of their knowledge and their potential for biases and assumptions that obscure understanding, their research will be impaired.

Over the last forty years, PAR has emerged from action research as an important corrective. PAR occurs on a continuum from limited participation of stakeholders to full participation, as the variety of research in these chapters illustrates. Ideally, PAR research includes community members and stakeholders from the inception of their work together (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). The research is oriented to the issues community members feel are important to address. Community members are key members of the research team in formulating the research question(s), the analysis of the data, and the communication and dissemination of the study. Further, the emphasis is on setting into motion “actions” indicated by the research results that can address the issues the community is concerned about. The results of these actions are then assessed to see if the intended effects indeed happened and to examine any unintended negative consequences. While PAR is often utilized around issues of social justice, this is not always the case. Sensitive PAR practitioners understand that issues of power between researchers from outside the community and research team members from within a community can be thorny, particularly arising from different life experiences, such as race, socioeconomic class, educational level, etc. One also needs to become aware of differences and conflicts within a community or group that may bear on the research. PAR is one approach to research that is consistent with the ethics of accompaniment. It is possible, however, for accompaniers to use other approaches to research with community members’ approval.

Centering the Means *and* the Ends

Freire described the importance of “annunciation.” In addition to critiquing and denouncing social structures and systems that generate social suffering, he understood the importance of envisioning the kinds of communities and social and political relationships we deeply desire. When these visions, born of desire, are allowed to take center stage in our lives, they order our priorities and our commitments. For Freire (2008), the ultimate goal of developing critical

consciousness is "humanization." By this, he meant not only the claiming of agency, but using that sense of agency to orient one's life and actions to justice. He asserted that we become "authentic" as we are "engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (p. 84). The situations he was intent on transforming were colonial structures that have dehumanized millions. Racism and rapacious capitalism are the pillars of not only colonialism itself but of ongoing coloniality, the structures of power that have remained in the wake of colonialism.

The use of the term *accompaniment* arose in liberation theology's response to the social miseries born of colonialism. In liberation theology and psychology (Martín-Baró, 1994), it is linked as a practice with enacting a preferential option for the poor in social justice work. To accompany in this context does not indicate only coming alongside others who are in the headwinds of the brutality of colonialism, racism, and capitalism but doing so in order to disrupt together the systems perpetuating injustice. It also entails co-creating alternative modes of dignified living together. From this vantage point, accompaniment is a practice dedicated to an end, a telosf justice, and—in the present unfolding catastrophe of climate change—environmental sustainability.

Authors in this volume describe and define accompaniment in various ways. Alexander Rödlach (in this volume) likens accompaniment to a journey that is not only scholarly and professional but is also deeply personal. For this reason, it relies not just on "research-related skills but also on the particular characteristics, interests, and skills" of the accompanier. Indeed, Martín Rosales (in this volume) describes how accompaniment is "an expression of [our] personal and professional commitment to address the causes and consequences" of an unjust situation, such as political conflict and violence. Casey Burkholder and her colleagues (in this volume) propose accompaniment as research that "seeks to witness and stand alongside." "Witnessing" is, indeed, an action that is often needed. We must ask as well what are the ethical implications for action of what has been witnessed and then engage in those actions. Alexander Rödlach (in this volume) and Rebecca Davis (in this volume) understand accompaniment as a commitment of the researcher to share skills and resources with the community in order to address social problems. As we engage in this effort, we need to make sure we are not reinscribing a unidirectional flow from giver to receiver, falling short of the cultural humility needed to invite a rich and effective "sharing" of skills and resources in all directions and across participants. Casey Burkholder and her colleagues' ultimate aim is to co-create "futures that seek to address and disrupt systemic injustices" (in this volume). Care needs to be taken that these "futures" are arrived at through dialogue across stakeholders and not imported by researchers alone. A goal for research as a modality for accompaniment is for the processes of the research to mirror the ends desired. If we want a world where people do walk alongside one another with respect and dignity, we need to challenge ourselves to accomplish each stage of our research in this fashion.

Accompaniment is not inconsistent with life in academia-- with earning a salary, publishing research, and filling out one's CV--but it goes beyond these professional goals. Its aims are more ambitious. They do not fit neatly into the time limitations of grants. It would be more fitting to think of an academic or professional position helping to support one's life efforts of accompaniment, rather than efforts at accompaniment supporting one's professional or academic life. When one's primary intention is not simply to do research but to accompany using research as a potential contribution, the usual academic goals—adding to academic knowledge, professional development, publishing, teaching, and gaining tenure—are decentered. One cleaves instead to walking with others to create social, economic, racial, and environmental justice, using whatever skills one has that may be useful. The walking together is not

only a means to these ends but a prefigurative creation that points to the kinds of relational solidarity that we need and can enjoy.

There are many modalities for ecopsychosocial accompaniment, such as providing international protective accompaniment, public health partnerships, building of health infrastructure, and human rights support. Social science research should be nestled alongside these as one modality of accompaniment among others. In the editing of this book, there was discernment regarding whether one should speak of accompaniment as research or of research as accompaniment. The latter signals that the researcher has a commitment to accompaniment for liberatory ends that is rooted not only in their professional identity as a researcher but in their personal commitments. Such an accompanier is using research as a mode of accompaniment when a given community desires this as a means to accomplish some of its emancipatory goals, such as the provision of healthcare.

Accompanying for the purposes of social, economic, racial, or environmental justice exceeds the borders of a given research project. It spills over the walls of the university, the library, the study, the ethics laid out by one's discipline and institution, and often past the confines of "public" life into "private" life. Martín Rosales reminds us that "accompaniment is not simply a professional requirement demanded under certain circumstances but an empathetic response of solidarity that researchers are asked to give at the most conscientious level, to the reality of suffering and the limitations that many of their fellow humans experience in their daily lives" (in this volume). It does not return monetary profit according to years of education and experience.

Accompaniment may place us at odds with our university, workplace, or larger society, as Barbara Dilly (in this volume) found when her university bulldozed the community garden the university had previously supported. Barbara Dilly found herself emboldened by her relationships to emerge fully into a position of accomplicing or being a comrade, ready to stand with the community members even if this damaged her own standing in the university. Rather than accept the undermining of community efforts, she bargained for the university to give a piece of land to the community group, thus ensuring such undermining could not happen again in that context. The Indigenous Action Media (2014) distinguishes allyship which may be performative and short-term from accomplicing. "Accomplices are realized through mutual consent and build trust. They don't just have our backs, they are at our side, or in their own spaces confronting and unsettling colonialism. As accomplices, we are compelled to become accountable and responsible to each other, that is the nature of trust" (Indigenous Action Media, 2014). Accomplices, like Barbara Dilly, take on and share risk shouldered by community members. Martín Rosales (in this volume), who has studied accompaniment in the context of political violence, warns of the sometimes even deadly consequences to accompaniers who have used research to document genocide and human rights abuses, as they struggled for social change.

Maria Starzmann and Hadley Friedland speak to the "fundamental tension between the reality and urgency of immediate needs and long-term research outcomes" (in this volume). If, for instance, there is the probability that the research outcomes are the best way the accompanier has to positively help affect the ultimate well-being of the community, completing the research may be more important than decentering from this objective and attempting to meet immediate needs of community members. When one is accompanying communities that are suffering on multiple fronts, one may need to bear a shared sense of limited power to meet all the needs of community members in the present (Starzmann & Friedland, in this volume).

Alexander Rödlach (in this volume) advocates for educating our academic institutions and disciplinary associations on the nature of research as accompaniment so that it can be valued and evaluated appropriately. Too often, faculty are penalized for building time-consuming relationships with a community when it does not yield enough publications, neglecting the enhanced value of the publications that are created and the benefits generated for the community.

Pathways to Accompaniment

One may embark on a professional path with a clear desire to accompany others who have need of their professional skills and resources. For instance, “guerilla historian” Staughton Lynd (2013) realized that he deeply desired to accompany poor and working people. While trained as a historian, he wanted to develop a skillset that he believed would be more practically useful to accompany working-class people. He decided to become a people’s lawyer. He and his wife, Alice Lynd, understood that where they lived mattered.They moved to Youngstown, Ohio in the heart of the Rust Belt. If they wanted to be useful to a community, they believed they needed to become members of that community. Through daily relations, trust can be developed. When crises strike, relationships are already in place.

Alternatively, one may be ensconced in a profession or training in a profession and be called to embody that profession through the practice of accompaniment. I suspect that accompaniers from both paths have converged together to write their chapters for this book. What they share in common are skills for accomplishing research in their varied disciplines and an interest or commitment to accompaniment. Alexander Rödlach (in this volume) points out that the completion of a given research project may well not be the end of the journey together but the beginning.

While some professions, such as nursing and social work, have a rich history of accompaniment, others do not. But whether or not such a history exists, those who determine that their primary commitment is to accompaniment often find this calling alters how they practice their profession. Indeed, it may “deform” aspects of their professional identity. They will need to seek out mentors and colleagues whose lives can be taken as models, who can accompany them as fledgling accompaniers. Embarking on accompaniment as a researcher has the potential for accompaniment to burst through the walls of one’s professional life and discipline to become a way of living more generally.

When one is accompanying people who have been marginalized, accompaniment often requires stepping past artificial borders that have been constructed between groups. I have called this “reverse osmosis,” flowing into situations that others may be trying to escape (Watkins, 2015; Watkins, 2019). As challenging as this can be, it can be even more challenging to work with members of one’s own group, particularly if they and the systems they are involved in are perpetrating the kinds of harm you are working with others to eliminate.

One may be part of the community one accompanies or be outside of it. In both cases, but especially when one is outside of it, one needs to be aware of one’s positionality and its possible effects on others. And one needs to invite ongoing feedback and critique.

Radical Empathy and the Moral Obligation for Responsive Action

Maria Starzmann and Hadley Friedland (in this volume) remind us that "accompaniment creates proximity. We enter relationships that bind us to local people, landscapes, places, and stories in ways that generate political, social, and moral obligations." Placing oneself alongside those who request accompaniment requires at least a fledgling radical empathy. Developing mutually respectful relationships builds radical empathy as one gradually learns how others experience their worlds. Understanding, however, is not an endpoint for accompaniment. Givens (2022) places it in a larger and necessary context: "1) a willingness to be vulnerable, 2) becoming grounded in who you are, 3) opening yourself to the experience of others, 4) practicing empathy, 5) taking action, and 6) creating change and building trust" (2022, p. 20).

The feminist research of Carol Gilligan and her colleagues (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995) underscored that empathically grounded research has ethical or moral implications for the researchers. For instance, while interviewing adolescent girls at risk for early and unwanted pregnancies and dropping out of school, they discovered how many of these girls had been victims of statutory rape. They realized they could not simply leave that as a new understanding. They needed to find ways of intervening that redressed this egregious situation. Being accountable to one's findings will probably not be funded by a grant. When accompaniment is a primary thrust behind one's living and research, the path of action calls us to be accountable, nevertheless.

Pedagogy for Research as a Mode of Accompaniment

Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz (2013) underscore that we "cannot learn accompaniment only by imagining or asserting it; [we] have to inhabit it and practice it through the embodied learning experiences that emanate from walking down a road with other people" (p. 13). They see accompaniment as a "disposition, a sensibility, and a pattern of behavior. It is both a commitment and a capacity that can be cultivated (Tomlinson & Lipsitz, 2013, p. 9).

As educators, we face the challenge of educating for accompaniment within a given professional curriculum (Davis, 2024). As researchers, we may need to educate research team members on the ethics and practice of accompaniment. What is needed is not only to bring accompaniment into conversation but to create opportunities for students and team members to learn how to be "genuinely authentic" in the ways they show up and interact with community members of a given group. As Rebecca Davis asserts (in this volume), "accompaniment… needs practice," and although it may be difficult to include it in a highly technical curriculum, it is essential.

Preliminary and Ongoing Footwork: Investigation into the History of a Community

Accompaniment unfolds in a particular context with people who have been affected by a particular history that has impacted them and the place(s) where they live. As the fledgling accompanier become clearer about their own positionality, it is necessary to learn about this

history. This investigation should seek to understand how to address not only the needs that have arisen from this history but the systems of oppression that are still in place, generating more social misery. Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994) called such a deep exploration “psychosocial accompaniment.” He cautioned us to be an eye and an ear for “the people’s virtues,” for the strengths that have been exhibited over time and that are valuable resources for resistance and for forging more desirable futures. Kathleen Clark (in this volume) encourages student nurses “to listen to each individual's experience, not only empathizing with the particular story but also identifying the ways that systems of oppression have contributed to their circumstance.” One listens as well for histories of resistance and resilience that contribute to ongoing community assets.

One is not accompanying in the present as if there were no history and future. One is sensitive to the historical context and its impact on present challenges and future dreams. LaShaune Johnson and Sarah Lux (in this volume) underscore the importance of “decoding the inner life of a community” by diving deep into the “rabbit hole” of available documents to research the history of a community or group. This kind of dive helps one learn about the context that people are speaking from and about.

I have appended *eco* to psychosocial accompaniment for two reasons. In this period of human history, places, animal and plant communities, and whole ecosystems are critically oppressed and threatened. Practices of accompaniment and research as accompaniment are being extended to animal and plant communities, to rivers and mountains (Barnwell et al., 2022; Watkins, 2019). Our well-being is intimately tied to the place where our lives unfold, including the ecological health or illness of its plants, animals, soil, air, and water. Ecopsychosocial accompaniment signals a need to be attentive to these interdependent relations.

Being Present and Building Relationships

In my experience, accompanying graduate students in the Community, Liberation, Indigenous, and Eco-Psychologies doctoral specialization at Pacifica Graduate Institute, it was essential to build time into each year for students to develop relationships with a particular group, often in a particular place, that shares with them a common social or environmental concern (see Community and Ecological Fieldwork and Research Handbook, 2020). In the initial phase, students are asked to seek an invitation from the group they have in mind, so that they can be clear if they are wanted or not. Maria Starzmann and Hadley Friedland (in this volume) underline the importance of accepting and learning from a given group or community’s refusal to participate. Hopefully, the student who is not welcomed in will, instead, learn about the history of that community and the reasons why they seek the integrity born of keeping borders to protect themselves from outsiders.

If invited to join the ongoing work of the group, they are counseled by their mentors to be helpful in whatever ways they can but *not* to usurp the leadership or preach lessons from their burgeoning disciplinary learning. Their stance is that of listening, learning, and building relationships. It is beneficial for both the students and the groups accompanied to have the students continue their participation over the multiple years of their studies, and, hopefully, afterward. It takes time and energy for community members to get to know a student or new researcher and to ascertain how to make room for and best make use of them. Often the

newcomer's contribution is scant compared to the investment of the community in them. Short-term projects are not good grounds for exploring accompaniment. Too often, fulfilling the terms of the project dwarf building the relationships that are key to accompaniment.

When Barbara Dilly's (in this volume) students were planning to support community members who were building a garden, she learned that some of them were fearful about the location because their parents had told them never to enter "that neighborhood." She underlined that potential accompaniers may need to spend time in a given context with support from a mentor to become comfortable in a given setting.

Participatory Practices

If, in the context of a relationship with community members, a consensual desire for a given piece of research emerges, one has the opportunity to practice participatory approaches to the generation of a research problem and each of the subsequent phases of research. At times, community members may not have the time and energy to be full partners in PAR, given the other demands and commitments in their lives. Nevertheless, care can be taken to work out the key junctions where their guidance and input are crucial in order for the research to potentially serve their community. At other times, full participation may be both desired and possible at each stage of research. If the researcher's primary commitment is to accompaniment rather than to research itself, there may be times when the research—in part or whole—may need to be sacrificed if it turns out it is not in the best interests of the community to proceed. This can be problematic and inconvenient for graduate students and professional researchers alike, who are often operating under commitments and deadlines for deliverables.

As the research unfolds, spaces need to be created to reflect together on how the process is going. Critical feedback may be disappointing, but it is crucial to carefully listen to it so that necessary adjustments can be made. This is particularly true with regard to holding ongoing discussions about the ethics of accompaniment in a particular situation. Accompaniment requires ethical discernment that surpasses the ethical concerns of review boards and given professions' ethical guidelines. This discernment must attend closely to the nature of the relationships that support the research. It is all too easy to fall back into undemocratic and non-collaborative forms of interacting (Johnson & Lux, in this volume; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Zsuzsanna Mirnics and Zsuzsanna Kövi (in this volume) underline the importance of a retrospective analysis, so that one can learn from how work may have fallen short of one's intentions or even failed.

Learning from Cultural Workers and Practiced Accompaniers

On my path of learning about accompaniment, I carefully studied people who, from my perspective, had been able to live their lives as accompaniers full heartedly: Jane Addams, a founder of the settlement house movement in the United States; Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement; Paul Farmer, a co-founder of Partners in Health; Ignacio Martín-Baró, a Jesuit and social psychologist who accompanied Salvadoran people during the 1980s before he was assassinated by a US-trained Salvadoran death squad (Watkins, 2019). The authors of this volume educated me about others whose lives taught and inspired them, such as nurse Lilliane Wald (Davis, in this volume), who founded public health nursing, Sister

Barbara Cavanaugh (Stark, in Rödlach & Rosales, in this volume) who accompanied Aymara people in the Altiplano of Peru, and Ricardo Falla and Myrna Mack (Rosales, in this volume) who helped to bring world attention to the genocide in Guatemala through their research. There is so much to learn from their lives if we can keep ourselves from being deflated by our own feelings of falling short. In each of these cases, the individual was able to place accompaniment at the center of their lives. Many of us have made additional life commitments that place constraints on the fullness of our ecopsychosocial accompaniment, and this may result in accompaniment being one among other life commitments. In some cases, while we aspire to accompaniment, we need to honestly acknowledge that we did not have the time to achieve mutual accompaniment, while reminding ourselves that we can accomplish many useful tasks that do not require accompaniment.

Turning the Gaze of "White" or Hyper-Privileged Accompaniers Back to Their Own Communities

As a "White" person who has listened over the years to marginalized communities I am involved with through mutual accompaniment, I have had to face the fact over and over again that many of the communities I have membership in—in the present and ancestrally—have created the harms from which my accompaniers suffer. In some cases, I have been sincerely surprised. For instance, I assumed Quakers, known to have been abolitionists, had steered clear of involvement in enslaving and the slave trade. In doing justice genealogy on my own family, genealogy that focuses on ancestral contributions to injustice, I discovered that Quakers both enslaved and profited from slave trading for one hundred years (1657-1776) before they outlawed it in their own communities and became leaders of the abolitionist movement. Some of my ancestors are members of this enslaving group. This type of discovery has caused me to more deeply realize that, for the sake of contributing to movements dedicated to racial reparations, there is a need for ecopsychosocial accompaniment of "White" people who have excess power and privileges.

For academic researchers, one place to start is one's institution. Many of our institutions are not concerned with authentically aligning themselves with emancipatory social transformation. Administrators may use news of our work to gain positive publicity, but when it comes to funding initiatives that can assist surrounding communities, long waits and denials are too frequently experienced. Sadly, even institutions that hold values consistent with accompaniment fail to adequately support research as accompaniment that is aligned with their mission. Brave truth-telling and steadfast advocacy are often called for to challenge the hypocrisy and shortsightedness of these kinds of situations. I found that taking the time and effort to knit oneself into the decision-making bodies of the academy can later pay off in gaining curricular space and the ears of decision-makers and policy setters.

Robyn Eversole (in this volume) argues against research as a mode for accompaniment being reduced by one's department or university to "volunteer service" or community outreach. Were research as a mode for accompaniment to be better recognized and supported in colleges and universities, it would be a way for these institutions (Rödlach, in this volume) to fulfill their oft stated goals: on the one hand, to educate students to become transformative change agents in a multicultural society and, on the other, for the institution itself to work together with neighboring communities to support rather than to undermine their capacity to meet the needs

of their members. Work within one's faith group and workplace, community affiliations, and family all provide opportunities to address systemic injustice and the need for extensive reparative efforts (Watkins, 2023).

In Conclusion

A commitment to mutual or reciprocal accompaniment shapes the lives of accompaniers, causing them to live differently from how they might otherwise. To partner with others to transform oppressive and unjust contexts is to live creatively askew from what is simply given. It not only requires us to think critically and systemically, but to imagine otherwise with others. It often entails a rejection of the artificial, yet normalized, borders between those who have been born into social, economic, racial, and political privileges and those who have been largely locked out of opportunity. Proximity is favored over "objective" distancing. Research as a mode of mutual accompaniment can be profoundly prefigurative, living in the present in the ways one most desires the future to embody.

Tomlinson and Lipsitz (2013) remind us of the musical sense of accompaniment. To accompany others as a musician is to resist always taking center stage. It entails the cultivation of a respectful standing back so that others can come forward. It requires attentive listening so that what one plays supports the development of the emerging melody. Sometimes you can observe a tenderness, as one highly gifted musician supports others to co-create something stunning and stirring. There is no doubt that social science research as a mode of accompaniment is labor intensive, requiring more of the researcher than other forms of research without accompaniment. We mustn't forget, however, the strength and beauty of what can sometimes emerge to inspire us further.

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