

Using Research to Promote Social Justice

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Social Justice Research Is:

**“RESEARCH FROM, BY, AND
WITH THE MARGINS”**

(BROWN & STREGA, 2005)

Part I

THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH IN SOCIAL WORK

Research, Social Justice, & the Social Work Profession

- 1. New views of causation & change**
- 2. ID issues worthy of study and attention**
- 3. Contextualizing conditions of people's lives**
- 4. Challenging underlying & false assumptions**
- 5. Creating alternative solutions to problems**
- 6. Evaluating effectiveness of interventions**

Impact of Social Work Research

- **Pioneered advocacy research**
- **Drew attention to marginalized populations**
- **Created knowledge base for SW profession**
- **Enhanced SW's professional status**
- **Influenced social policies from Progressive Era through War on Poverty**

Progressive Era

- **Synthesized modernist perspective on evidence & causation w/elements of corporatist philosophy**
- **Used language of science, order, & efficiency**
- **Reflected belief in inevitable social progress & static view of human nature**

COS Research

- From environmental approach (Warner, 1894) to “intervention research” (Richmond, 1917)
- Focused on role of morals & culture on behavior
- Focus on individual not social assessment
- Emergence of rational-scientific framework
- By 1920s: Child Guidance Movement infused psychodynamic theory into studies (e.g., delinquency prevention project).

Research by Settlement Movement

- **Focus: Underlying causes of poverty**
- **Combined emphasis on explanation & prediction w/corporate focus on efficiency.**
- **Goal: Use research to produce policies and programs to manage rapid change in an orderly manner. (Ex: research on housing)**

Research on Poverty, Work, & CW

Josephine Goldmark



Mary van Kleeck



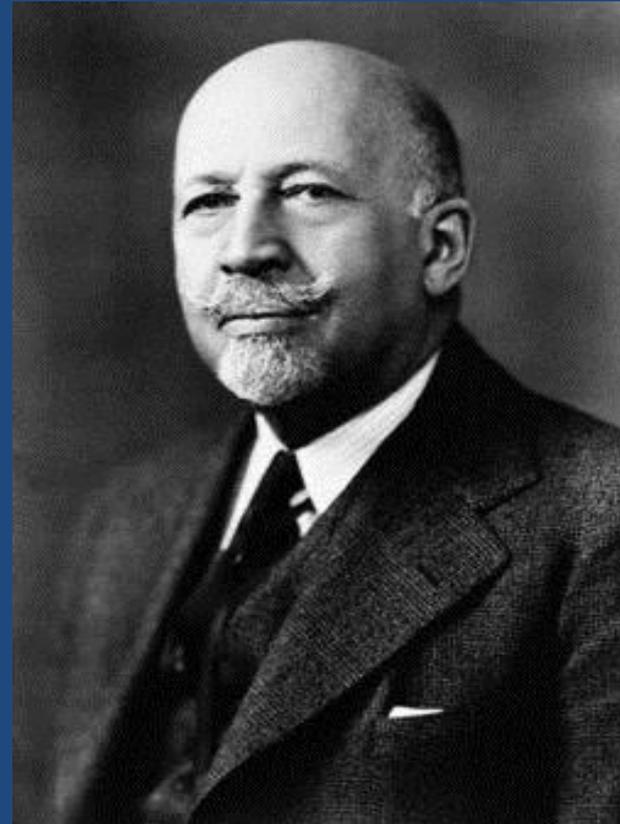
Research on Juvenile Delinquency & Tenement Housing by Abbotts



Ethnographic & Investigative Research by African Americans

Ida Wells-Barnett

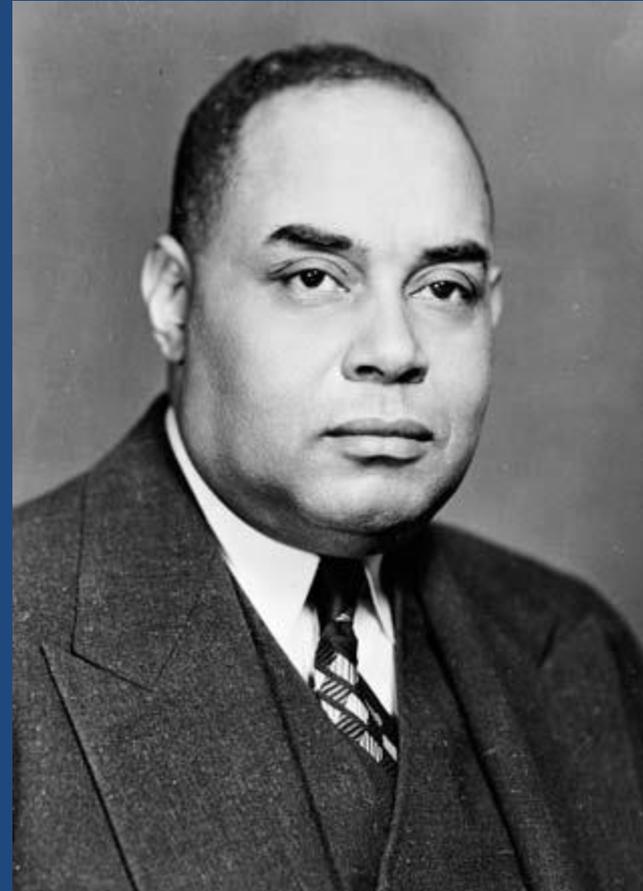
W.E.B. DuBois



Is Racism an Aberration? 2 Views

George E. Haynes

Chandler Owen



3 Different Research Goals in SW Prior to the Great Depression

Health & Welfare Councils:

- Community integration
- Focus on individual/family problems
- Assimilation of immigrants

Community-Oriented Researchers:

- Create industrial democracy
- Enhance civic participation
- Investigate impact of unemployment

African Americans:

- Bring problems into mainstream of social concern

Sum: Early Concept of Research in SW

- Belief in neutrality of scientific expertise & power of immutable historical “laws.”
- Focused on policy change & practice evaluation
- Influenced nature of social reform thru 1930s
- Recognized role of environment, but rarely reflected understanding of structural conditions
- Goal: Create a society free of class conflict
- Contradictory role of Russell Sage Foundation

Why More Inward-Looking Research?

- **WWI's impact on idea of progress & reason**
- **Professionalizing impulse**
- **Use of scientific research to establish professional control of diverse populations**

Two Types of SW Research During the Great Depression

1. Universities & Public Welfare Depts:

- Increased use of statistics
- Use of new qualitative methods, e.g., ethnography
- Used innovative forms of dissemination
- Alternative policy solutions

2. Private Family Service Agencies:

- Inter-generational family conflict
- Emphasize primacy of Individual/family relations

*All overlooked conditions of women
& racial minorities*

But, By the Late 1930s:

“Research in social work is inquiry into the techniques used by social workers in meeting certain human problems, whether these be individual or community-wide” –
Helen R. Jeter, *Social Work Year Book 1937*
(emphasis added)

Post-World War II Research

- Long-term effects of war on individuals & families
- More conservative view of relationship between social research & social change
- From social/community issues to problems of service effectiveness and family conditions
- Greater emphasis on quantitative methodology

Consequently --

“By the end of the 1940s, the connection between research and social policy had largely disappeared” - D. Austin, 1986.

Revival of Social Research in 1960s

- “Opportunity theory” (Cloward & Ohlin)
- *The Other America* (Harrington)
- *Children of the Storm* (Billingsley)
- Challenges to “Culture of Poverty” Thesis

Impact of New Social Movements on Social Work Research

- Specific conditions affecting various groups
- Sources, symptoms, & solutions to oppression & marginalization
- Significance of cultural differences for unequal policies and practices
- Impact of power, language, & domination
- Post-modernism & critical theory (critical race theory, neo-feminism, queer theory)

Resurgent Conservatism: The 1990s & Beyond

- Impact of NIH Funding & Critique of SW Research
- Developments in SW Field (e.g., IASWR, SSWR)

Consequences:

1. Emphasis on methodology, esp. quantitative
2. Heightened specialization & more narrowly focused investigations
3. Growing role of intervention research
4. Implicit acceptance of structural status quo

Part II

SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH TODAY

What is Socially Just Research?

“Being an anti-oppressive researcher means that there is political purpose and action to your research work...one is making an explicit personal commitment to social justice [and] making explicit the political practices of creating knowledge...It is about paying attention to, and shifting, how power relations work in and through the process of doing research.” –

Potts & Brown, 2005

Purposes of Socially Just Research

- Stimulate critical analysis about environmental and interpersonal factors that affect provision of services to people in need. Not only accumulating data or assessing modes of intervention
- Ask “big questions” and assess big ideas
- Focus on ideas that shape methods and their impact on the world NOT on relative value of quantitative or qualitative research
- Interrogate critically how societal institutions construct & reproduce conceptions of “truth”

Prerequisites for Socially Just Research

To engage in social justice-oriented research:

“A scientific community must produce relevant information through a rational deliberative process and groups affected by findings must be aware of and able to use the information.”

-- Clark & Hollander (2005)

Assumptions About Knowledge

- Different forms of knowledge have equal value:
 - Theoretical (hypothesis verification)
 - Craft (“how to” or evaluative)
 - Normative (value-driven)
- Distinguish scholarship of discovery, integration, and application

The Purpose of Knowledge Development

- **Important Q is: What constitutes evidence?**
- **Ultimately, data are filtered through the minds of each person examining the data.**
- **A social justice perspective considers the cultural context & power relationships at the time data were collected, analyzed & reviewed**

Social Justice & Epistemology

- **Assessing whether research methods reflect cultural biases, structural inequities, or unquestioned & potentially false assumptions**
- **Particularly salient when questionnaires or other instruments are translated into another language**
- **Debating the use of qualitative or quantitative measures may pay insufficient attention to how service users perceive their realities**

Criteria for Valid & Useful Knowledge

- Knowledge incorporates the perspectives and interests of the service users.

Example

(A study of a family violence prevention program)

- Families determined whether family observations were appropriate
- Where, when, & how observations would occur
- How the data obtained are interpreted
- What conclusions & implications are derived.

Addressing Power Relationships

- Investigators have power by virtue of their knowledge, organizational sanction, & linkage to a university or sponsoring organization (eg, govt)
- Research subjects may fear that their responses will cause harm to themselves even if the investigator pledges confidentiality
- Address researcher's social location & political commitments to make overt how power relations permeate the construction and legitimation of knowledge

Democratizing Social Work Research

- **Measures & measurement tools used**
- **Data collection process – e.g., potential biases & time**
- **Who will have access to the data**
- **How data will be analyzed**
- **What the consequences will be if their responses reflect negatively on the service providers**
- **How responses will affect future services**

Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methodology is False Choice

Real Issues:

1. Establishing relationship with subjects
 2. Applying cultural consciousness & reflexivity
 3. Allowing groups studied to have a voice
- Advantages of “mixed methods”:
Some aspects of views & experiences of people are identified thru quantitative methods while the personal meaning of these findings is discovered thru qualitative methods.

Social Justice & Evidence Based Practice (EBP)

- Issue is NOT over the importance of evidence, but how it is sometimes interpreted & applied

Issues:

- 1. What constitutes evidence? Who decides?**
- 2. Discounting of “practice wisdom,” thus negating the power of the practitioner**
- 3. Ignoring service users in selection & evaluation of evidence, thus negating their power**
- 4. Factoring in diversity in selecting evidence**

Participatory Action Research

- Origin: “To resist the intellectual colonialism of Western social research into the 3rd world development process” – Gouin, et al, 2011
- Central Concern: Production & ownership of knowledge by oppressed groups to enable them to define their own realities & mobilize for action
- Stakeholders are full partners in all phases

Phases of Socially Just Research

- 1. Planning:** In choosing what is worthy of study, the input of participants goes beyond “informed consent.”
- 2. Data Collection:** Ensuring that sample is unbiased
- 3. Data Analysis**
- 4. Dissemination:** Report findings in a form that is readable & understandable to all persons to whom research is relevant

2 Aspects of Data Analysis

1. “Facts do not speak for themselves but are at the mercy of whoever chooses to give them meaning” – Montague, 1964.
2. The data we do not have & the questions we do not ask deprive various publics of relevant life-giving and life-saving information” – Clark & Hollander, 2005

Evaluation Research

- Any evaluation raises power issues.
- Evaluation process can empower or dis-empower service users.
- Need to create more level “playing field.”
- Evaluate outcomes & processes

Key Questions in Evaluation

To what extent & how were participants' voices heard & heeded in:

1. Designing & implementing the evaluation?
2. Interpreting the data that were collected?
3. The dissemination of the results?
4. Efforts to achieve social and personal change, as a result of the evaluation?
5. Planning future research to carry the process of change forward?

Tenets of Socially Just Research

- Marginalized groups should have a role in all aspects of the research, especially when the research has specific relevance for these groups
- Researchers should draw on insights from critical approaches to knowledge development
- When people of different cultures are involved in the research, their ways of knowing should be incorporated in the research process.
- Research processes should explicitly and implicitly challenge relations of domination/subordination.
- Apply praxis to research as you would to practice.

Summary

1. Recognize the socio-political context of research
2. Maintain a community-based orientation
3. Be aware of contingencies affecting practice
4. Adapt research instruments to culture studied
5. Be flexible about researchers' roles
6. Be aware how participants cope w/oppression
7. Be sensitive to cultural norms of participants & take extra steps to protect them from harm
8. Regularly consult codes of ethics for guidance

By Doing So... We Can

- Clarify meaning of social justice in the 21st C
- Reorient goals of profession and society
- Challenge assumptions about poverty, a market economy, and nature of evidence
- Be more open to alternative conceptual frameworks, policies, programs, & theories
- Form new alliances with clients & potential allies to pursue social justice goals
- Redefine meaning of social welfare & concept of service to meet 21st century realities

Potential Subjects for Inquiry

- Impact of economic globalization
- Effects of changing character of work
- Future roles of gov't, NGOs, private sector
- Impact of demographic trends on:
 - What social services will be needed?
 - For whom?
 - Who will provide them?
 - How will we pay for them?

Importance of Dissemination

- **Beyond publishing in “high impact” journals**
- **Catalyst of change & arena of social struggle**
- **Strong partnerships with service consumers, constituents, & community agencies are critical to having an impact with research**

A Last Word

“Exclusively maintaining a sole focus on strong science can become a sophisticated oppressive tool for scientific imperialism ... [However] ...delivering strong science by listening to ... [people’s] voices ... and sharing their struggles constitutes a bona fide strategy to help them increase their quality of life.”

– Bauman, et al, 2011

Thank You for Your Attention

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