HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

Crit Sociol (Eugene). Author manuscript; available in PMC 2016 November 01.

Published in final edited form as:

Crit Sociol (Eugene). 2015 November ; 41(7-8): 1045–1063. doi:10.1177/0896920513516025.

Reflections on Researcher Identity and Power: The Impact of Positionality on Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Processes and Outcomes

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Abstract

The practice of community based participatory research (CBPR) has evolved over the past 20 years with the recognition that health equity is best achieved when academic researchers form collaborative partnerships with communities. This article theorizes the possibility that core principles of CBPR cannot be realistically applied unless unequal power relations are identified and addressed. It provides theoretical and empirical perspectives for understanding power, privilege, researcher identity and academic research team composition, and their effects on partnering processes and health disparity outcomes. The team's processes of conducting seven case studies of diverse partnerships in a national cross-site CBPR study are analyzed; the multi-disciplinary research team's self-reflections on identity and positionality are analyzed, privileging its combined racial, ethnic, and gendered life experiences, and integrating feminist and post-colonial theory into these reflections. Findings from the inquiry are shared, and incorporating academic researcher team identity is recommended as a core component of equalizing power distribution within CBPR.

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Keywords

sociology; CBPR; community-based participatory research; researcher identity; power sharing; health inequities; social justice

Introduction

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) has evolved over the past 20 years, with the recognition in part that academic researchers can better address structural, socio-economic, and racial/ethnic health inequities by forming collaborative partnerships with communities. These partnerships have provided promise that research can reflect the priorities, insights, and realities of communities, with established CBPR principles of recognizing community identity and strengths, and applying research findings to social action (Israel et al., 1998, 2013; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008).

Although CBPR has gained traction within the research enterprise, the maturing of the field has led to a greater understanding of the inherent challenges of creating research equity among academic and community partners. CBPR practitioners have recognized the potential for reproduction of gender, racial/ethnic and socio-economic inequalities and power differentials within the research process. Academic researchers represent centers of power, privilege, and status within their formal institutions, as well as within the production of scientific knowledge itself. Researchers also may have power and privilege from their class, education, racial/ethnic backgrounds, or other identity positions. Both of these positionalities (power and privilege) have the potential for reproducing systemic health inequities and disadvantaging community partners.

Research equity has been also challenged by the variability of research goals. A recent editorial has raised important concerns regarding a potential schism or, at a minimum, a continuum of CBPR research goals, between CBPR as an ‘instrumental strategy’ or as a broader ‘worldview’, based in social justice and community capacity-building (Trickett, 2011). Reflecting on the growth of community engagement within Community Translational Science Awards (CTSA, see National Center for Research Resources, 2010), Trickett challenges researchers to clarify their own goals and purposes, recognizing that CTSA community engagement processes can range between minimal outreach to shared leadership (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). Trickett raises concerns about how research evidence, developed often through randomized controlled trials, can be translated to the broader community in ways that reflect CBPR core principles – equitable community participation at every research stage. The oft-cited National Institutes of Health (NIH) instrumental goal of engaging community members to recruit minorities into research projects (even if intended to reduce disparities) can also reproduce the power of researchers to assert their agenda, paying only lip service to the ideals of participatory research.

Reflection on these issues of power, identity, and positionality has led our research team at the Center for Participatory Research at the University of New Mexico (UNM-CPR), within a larger NIH-funded partnered study of CBPR facilitators and barriers nationwide (Hicks et al., 2012), to examine in greater detail the need for theoretical frameworks for understanding

power and privilege and their effects on research partnering processes and outcomes. We theorize that power sharing is a major defining factor in building effective academic-community collaborations with implications for the future of CBPR. Power sharing has indeed been stated in core CBPR principles, including within the recently integrated principle of cultural humility, or self-reflexivity around power dynamics (Chavez, 2012; Chavez et al., 2008; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2012).

In this article, we assert the need for more explicit attention to power as it relates to identity and intersectional positionality of researchers, based on gender, sexual orientation, ability, and multiple cultural, racial/ethnic, educational, and other forms of identity. The CBPR attention to community as a unit of *identity* has been important, but lacking has been an equal attention to researcher team *identity* and its importance for effective CBPR practice. We suggest that social identity/location and status of research team members may be some of the more salient, though under-theorized, dimensions of power and privilege within CBPR partnerships. The question of who is on the research team may facilitate or hinder (or act in contradictory ways upon) the capacity to engage with CBPR community partners, may affect knowledge construction and research use, and may ultimately impact the goals of the research itself. In essence, we suggest that CBPR researchers must address not just the 'what' of CBPR, i.e. our research questions and design; but also the 'how' of CBPR, how we engage in partnering; and the 'who' of CBPR – who is on the research team and how our identities intersect with the research.

This article seeks to answer two questions: how experiences of social-cultural identities express themselves within a CBPR framework; and how dimensions of power and privilege conferred by these identities impact our capacity to co-create effective CBPR. We bring multiple perspectives to these questions:

1. our experiences from our national CBPR cross-site research, including seven case studies of diverse populations;
2. our collective reflections as a team and within a panel discussion on the role of researcher identity at UNM's 2011 Summer Institute on CBPR; and
3. integration of feminist and post-colonial theory into our reflections.

We start with a brief overview of research team identity, intersectionality, and issues of power and CBPR; present our methods of reflexive auto-ethnography within the context of our national research; share findings from our inquiry; and conclude with recommendations and implications for CBPR practice in reducing health disparities.

Role of Research Team Identity and Intersectionality in CBPR

Identity is a complex, multi-layered, and dynamic phenomenon that is both fluid and situational, yet retaining core characteristics. Each of us has multiple identities, influenced by our ascribed characteristics (e.g. our race/ethnicity, cultural background, skin color, sexual orientation, ability, and most often, gender); our achieved characteristics (e.g. our education, job, social position, and for some, gender shifts); how we view our identities; and

how others see us (Oetzel, 2009). It is shaped through our social location within society and reinforced through interactions with others relative to that position (Collier and Thomas, 1988; Nance and Foeman, 1998; Spellers, 1998; Yep, 1998); and its shaping differs based on whether one is from the dominant or a subordinate group (Oetzel, 2009).

Intersectionality, posited by legal scholar Crenshaw (1991), suggests that our multiple identities can be simultaneous, inter-related and sometimes contradictory; and that oppressions shaped by these identities, i.e. sexism, racism, and homophobia, are interlocking in their contribution to systems of oppression and social inequities. Studies on intersectionality in the CBPR research process illuminate these intersecting sources of researcher identity and how they may shape methodologic, epistemologic and ethical decision points encountered at each phase of the endeavor (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991; Herr and Anderson, 2005; Kerstetter, 2012; King, 1988; Serrant-Green, 2002). Adding the concept of positionality directly incorporates ideas of power and privilege and seeks to describe researcher identity in terms of an insider-outsider perspective, based on the researchers' relationship to the specific research setting and community (Collins, 1999a).

Early writings in sociology and anthropology started from a dichotomous doctrine of outsider vs insider, with each position having benefits and challenges, such as outsider neutrality vs inability to truly understand; or insider capacity for greater access vs potential for bias (Merton, 1972; Pike, 1967). Newer writing however has recognized the complexity of researcher relationships to the specific research project and population to explore what Dwyer and Buckle (2009) have named a multi-dimensional and dynamic 'space between', with relationships and belief systems mediating researcher positions of status or difference, such as from their education level or race/ethnicity (Bourdieu, 1977; Cargo and Mercer, 2008; Merriam et al., 2001; Serrant-Green, 2002). For scholars of color, 'insider-outsider' has been posited for people working within their own communities; or 'outsider-within' when operating within the academy (Collins, 1999b; Smith, 1999). Banks (1998) has captured a more complex range of positionalities: indigenous-insider, indigenous-outsider, external-insider, and external-outsider, based on differences in researcher socialization within specific ethnic/racial/cultural communities. This approach mirrors intercultural communication scholars who point to more interpretative and critical perspectives of identity as being less fixed, with sex, race or other categories also shaped by shared meanings and practices within specific historical or power contexts (Mendoza et al., 2002).

Reflection on collaborative insider-outsider teams provides the possibility of understanding the effects of multiple identities and positionalities on research validity, processes and outcomes (Herr and Anderson, 2005). In an in-depth analysis of researcher identity, Kerstetter (2012) interviewed research partners from four CBPR projects in Mississippi. She found that most identified as both outsider and insider, though university researchers were more identified as outsiders. Insider researchers were seen as mitigating the distancing effects of the outsiders, even while community partners stated they valued the long-term commitment outsider researchers had to the area. Despite the importance of this inquiry, missing was a recognition of the role of power and privilege, and their impact on CBPR processes and outcomes.

Issues of Power and Privilege within CBPR Research

The need for theoretical models describing the relationship of researcher identities within communities is made clearer with an understanding of social determinants and power structures long identified by social epidemiology, i.e. poverty, status hierarchies, racism, and corporate-industrial policies, among others (Berkman, 2009; Krieger, 2004; Marmot, 2009; Navarro, 2009; Phelan et al., 2010; Wallerstein et al., 2011; Williams, 2012). Post-colonial theory has added explanatory models for communities of color, the particular histories of genocide, forced migrations, appropriation of lands, and attempted assimilations of indigenous cultures and languages (Duran and Duran, 1995; King et al., 2009); as well as the more hidden micro-aggressions (Walters et al., 2009) and hegemonic discourse that reinforces internalized oppression (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008).

Under CBPR research processes, these external and internalized power dimensions are the underlying context for academic and community collaboration (Wallerstein and Duran, 2008). CBPR partnerships face additional forms of power hierarchy: that which is most described, the relationships between academics and community partners; and that which may exist within the academic team of principal investigator (often still from a white and more privileged background) and other investigators or research staff (Lingard et al., 2007). Research staff and students, often hired because they share cultural or racial/ethnic identities with community members, may often act as knowledge brokers or ‘bridge’ people who have differential access to community knowledge, resources, and sources of power, and therefore, in a twist to the dynamics, may have both less (in terms of decision-making) and more (in terms of access to information) power than outsider researchers.

Feminist and post-colonial scholars, reflecting on power dimensions within research relationships, have identified the importance of unpacking the ‘space-between’ academic and community relationships (Fine, 2004; Sandoval, 1991, 2000). Close colleagues (academic white ‘outsiders’ with ‘insider’ indigenous colleagues) have written about their collaborative challenges (Swadener and Mutua, 2008); and reflexive academics have explored whether they are co-constructing or appropriating knowledge (Cruz, 2008; Luttrell, 2000). In recognizing how entangled academic-community relationships are, Michelle Fine (1994) proposes that we ‘work the hyphen’, negotiating what our relationship is or is not; and embracing the contradictions to confront power hierarchies of who tells the story or who creates knowledge. Critical race (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001) and decolonizing theorists (Smith, 1999) have embraced personal narratives as ‘counter-storytelling’ to assure minority voices are heard, and not re-interpreted through over-analysis by researchers, which might silence community. Indigenous researchers have promoted the recognition of tribal sovereignty and the growth of regulation over research as critical for shifting power, enabling tribal leaders to direct research for their people’s benefit (Atalay, 2012; Becenti-Pigman et al., 2008; Martin, 2008; Smith, 1999).

Despite these developments, power structures remain the hegemonic societal context, and disadvantage cannot be confronted unless mechanisms of privilege are unpacked and understood (Wildman and Davis, 1996). Feminist theorist Diane Wolf (1996) presents three

perspectives on *power* within research that may shift depending on one's positionality of outsider, insider-outsider, or outsider-within:

(1) the positionality of the researcher to the communities being researched and to their academic setting – the extent of privilege of identity(or identities) within societal norms and within the specific community and academic relationship;

(2) the research process itself – who defines the research design, decision making processes, and levels of power sharing; and

(3) the representation and writing of the findings – whose voices are privileged and being heard.

To these three, we add a fourth perspective:

(4) the epistemology of power – how power is exerted in the construction of knowledge.

Awareness and reflexivity of one's identity (or identities), as one of the more salient constructs of positionality, therefore can provide a guide to researchers in each of these four issues. The more researchers share 'insider' status, for example, the more they may draw from their family and cultural backgrounds in seeking equity in knowledge creation (Martin, 2008). Our ascribed or achieved identities may impact our capacities to share power, even with our ideals to collaboratively produce and disseminate knowledge for community benefit. The shared process of research, however, may set in motion bidirectional educational processes of empowerment and critical consciousness, which ultimately can shift the research conversation altogether. It is this hope that has led our research team to embark on this inquiry of how our multiple and intersecting identities have impacted power relationships and the processes and outcomes of our own CBPR research.

Methods

We have utilized auto-ethnography as the principal approach through which to gain access into the contours of our university team members' identities. Several team members have been working together in CBPR research for over a decade and auto-ethnography has long characterized our collective reflection on research practice. This form of inquiry is particularly well suited to achieving insights into identity issues as it involves 'turning the ethnographic gaze inward on the self, while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1997: 227). Our reflection processes have enabled the team to regularly engage in discussions about

1. our internal motivations and goals regarding involvement and conduct of CBPR; and

2. linking our own constructions of identity to both data collection and analytic efforts.

As we describe below, our conduct of auto-ethnography is not an insular team-based process but is instead continually informed through research engagement with diverse CBPR partnerships nationwide.

Auto-ethnography has grown out of the sociology and anthropology crises of representation in the 1980s as a post-modern critique of objective positive science, that outsiders could understand and interpret cultures different from them, or that any lens could be universal, e.g. that a single ‘feminist lens’, most often white middle-class at the time, could interpret the experiences of lesbian women, working class women, or women of color (Behar and Gordon, 1995). As a reflexive ethnographer who emerged from the crisis of representation, Wendy Luttrell has recognized differences between researchers and researched, but states that this does not have to translate into dominant versus subordinate relationships, a stance that embraces contradictions and which CBPR could profit from. She calls for a ‘good enough’ reflexive relationship, meaning that researchers need to be aware of their own personal investments, interests, and frustrations; ‘accept rather than defend against healthy tensions in fieldwork’; and be attuned to ‘questions of relationship, position, social complexities, and how to turn resulting tensions into data’.

Our current University of New Mexico CBPR team reflects many positions (faculty, staff, students) and ethnic/racial and gender identities, and recognizes the tensions of trying to create a democratic team within the context of power hierarchies within and outside the university. With a shared value of CBPR as a ‘social justice’ project, the team has struggled over the years to create a safe environment to tackle these challenges of creating both democratic and authentic research relationships. Mentorship and changing the face of the academy has been a major team goal, in supporting students and scientists of color and community partners to further their research careers. The findings presented here derive from the long-term collective dialogue of the team but, more specifically, from several primary sources. For the past seven years, we have been involved in a study of CBPR processes and outcomes nationwide, first as leads (2006–8) and then as co-Principal Investigators to ‘Research for Improved Health: A Study of Community and Academic Partnerships’ funded by the NIH-Native American Research Centers for Health (2009–13) in partnership with the National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center, the University of Washington, and a national advisory committee of CBPR academic and community experts (narch.ncaiprc.org). We conducted an internet survey of 294 federally funded research partnerships; and seven case studies to test our conceptual CBPR model (http://fcm.unm.edu/cpr/cbpr_project.htm), with newly developed metrics and measures of partnering process and outcome variables (Hicks et al., 2012; Wallerstein et al., 2008).

As the lead for the case studies, UNM was responsible for identifying and selecting the case studies to reflect diverse populations and health conditions. We invited established CBPR projects to examine similarities and differences across key contexts, partnering processes and outcomes; and to deepen our knowledge of the variability of meaning and interpretation of facilitators and barriers to CBPR research. Our research activities included per case: 13–18 semi-structured individual interviews, 1–2 focus groups, a brief close-ended survey to a wider group of partners, document review, and development of a partnership timeline. Each case study led to discussions of who from our team would travel to the site, including

reflections on how our identities would be most appropriate for the particular partnership. We were fortunate in that we had a diverse team allowing for participation by all members.

In addition to our case study decisions, we also draw from a panel conducted at the 2011 University of New Mexico CBPR for Health Institute. The UNM CBPR summer institute has been held annually since 2010 as a week-long intensive co-learning environment to explore how CBPR intersects with indigenous and critical methodologies, including how partners can co-construct knowledge for improved community health. The reflections from the panel, entitled 'Insider/Outsider: Our Ascribed and Achieved Identities as Researchers', serve as additional data on the impact of identity on CBPR.

Our case study research and our informal and structured dialogues have led to 'iterative loops'; that is, the team regularly has built in discussions (mostly informal, some taped) allowing individual members to explore aspects of identity, apply these perspectives to research design and implementation, and then reflect on how features of identity influence our individual and collective interpretations of data. Considerations of auto-ethnography have been cyclical as the arrival of new team members, team members' evolving education and job positions, and our case study decisions have led to ongoing reflections on identity and power in the research process.

Findings

To answer our inquiry into how our social and cultural identities and the power and privilege embodied in these identities have affected our CBPR research, we return to the categories of impact articulated by Diane Wolf and extended by our team:

1. our positionality or positionalities as researchers with intersectional identities between the academy and the community, and the effects of these positionalities on:
2. research decision-making and processes;
3. knowledge creation; and
4. publication and representation of voice.

Our Research Positionalities

Research positionality encompasses both societal ascribed and achieved identities that confer status on an individual researcher, such as race/ethnicity, or level of education attained. It also encompasses the specific relationships between academics and community members, which are mediated by personal life experiences, motivations and connections (e.g. a Latina scholar working in her own community vs working in one very different in history or origin); and extent of commitment and shared values. As we have seen, identity is not a static concept, and insider-outsider boundaries are ever shifting with tensions continually navigated. Insiders may have access to different forms of information, especially with shared experiences of discrimination, yet this 'insider' status confers an additional responsibility to be more accountable, whether to actual family and friends or to those who assume this relationship. Outsiders with long-term relationships may face a similar

accountability. We seek here to unpack the experience of different members of our team through our own personal identity lens: the view of CBPR from scholars of color as an intrinsic lens and a mirror and support to their personal lives; the view as a white outsider working in Indian country; and the conflicts and challenges when accountability becomes too burdensome.

From the panel, MA, a Chicana scholar, speaks to the inextricable link between her personal and professional identities:

> For me CBPR is a way of life; it has the principles that guide my life. It was very much an organic process, and it's a process that requires all of us in this room to get out of the vehicles that you come in literally and to deconstruct them. In terms of how it affects my identity, both professionally and personally, I don't see CBPR as a construct, but a way of life … It is a research culture that goes hand in hand with the community. It doesn't develop without the community in hand, so you can't just use the textbook and say I really developed CBPR; it challenges you.

LB, a Native scholar, shares this view but from a slightly different perspective. As she progressed in her academic training, encountering the CBPR team approach enabled her to more seamlessly bridge core identity beliefs with her research:

> You know I've always said that CBPR allowed me to be who I am … I haven't had to be someone else in the research process. For those of us who come more from a collectivist background, it only made sense for us. I can see that research being a more individual effort, it's hard to do, but this being a group effort, made the process make sense.

These quotes not only confirm the literature asserting that insiders might better understand and share community knowledge and beliefs, but also offer unique insight into the ways that CBPR enables them to forge a mutually reinforcing link between core identity and research practice as a way of life. Despite the expectation that insiders may then treat the knowledge shared with greater respect, this expectation can also come with the message of accountability. As one of our native research scientists' cautions, 'If you're out there operating in CBPR and you're not genuine … you're going to be called out, you're going to be found out. Because community is going to call you out … that's the ultimate boss, those are our bosses.'

The importance of CBPR research reinforcing the life experiences of scholars of color does not necessarily extend to researchers from more outside identities. As a white researcher from an academic middle class background, NW would never claim similar life experiences to the tribes she works with, though she has developed long-term relationships and friendships with tribal partners. She has used a 'guest analogy' to inform her work:

> I'm not sure how I fell into CBPR … I had a Jewish ethical, social justice orientation, with Paulo Freirian popular education as a core philosophy. When I became a researcher, it was natural to try and find a way to do things collectively; and so participatory work was what I had to do. I've had to learn how to be an ally, to accept that I'm white, and yes I've got privilege. My question has always been,

> how can I do participatory research in a way with meaning and use the resources and power that I have to work with communities in a positive way … I began to ask how can I work as a guest on this land? That perception has kept me able to be myself, to say, this is what I can offer, these are the skills I have, and to seek to be a good guest … then I can work with integrity.

For Wallerstein, the guest analogy has several connotations. It has meant that the community owns and has authority over its own geographic and cultural territory. Academics must therefore request permission to enter, or be invited and offered entry into the community or research space. It is also customary in many cultures for guests to bring offerings or gifts as a symbol that one accepts guest status and conducts oneself accordingly by recognizing 'house rules', or social norms of the community one has been invited into. Though showing respect is more complex, in our case studies, in addition to the participant incentives, we brought gifts of New Mexican chile or coffee as a small appreciation for their time and willingness to share their stories.

Even acknowledging that we have multiple and simultaneous identities, formed by shared identity or relationships, dilemmas still occur because these identities may be in flux or even at times in opposition. It takes personal integrity as a trusted partner to gain access to knowledge that one knows should not be shared with outsiders on the one hand, but is considered legitimate and valuable data within the academic research setting and should be included as research findings. Violation of insider status or knowledge can do irreparable harm to researcher or university reputations in the community, and can undermine the core principles of CBPR. CBPR researchers must account for the potential conflicts stemming from navigating multiple identities during the research process. In the following quote, LB frames her identity challenge, including the specifics of clan relationships (which can impact her accountability), along with presenting a strategy to manage these tensions,

> For me I think – working with different native communities in the state – really it's having to manage and struggle with multiple identities … One, this process of finally accepting I'm a researcher, but I don't say 'university researcher' I say 'native researcher'. So being a native researcher, wanting to come into communities, and unfortunately now that I have my own research, I also have to identify as a university researcher, and take on that baggage – that was really hard for me. Sometimes you have clan relationships that affect who you are as the researcher, who you are as the native woman in the room. So it becomes having to manage and having to work at both identities for yourself.

As a diverse team we have learned the importance of these iterative reflective conversations as a magnified power of observation, allowing us the opportunity to find different ways to value CBPR research as a way of life from each of our perspectives, for ourselves and the communities we work with, in a continual process of navigation and co-learning. The challenge remains: how can academic and community partners engage in co-learning, being cognizant of the effect of identities on the research process itself?

Impact on Research Decision Making Processes

The question of how our identities and positionalities inform the research process has forced us to challenge our internal motivations and orientation to CBPR, as well as our team's decisions on data collection efforts and interactions with community partners. In particular, in our planning for the CBPR case studies we have faced decisions on whom we sent to conduct the visit.

In our initial discussions, we were less aware of the impact of our own identities, though we came to realize the importance in our first site visit to two tribal communities in the Northwest. Luckily, our team could draw on two core Native research scientists, with the white PI and a Latino doctoral student. Though we had carefully planned our exact qualitative interview guide, we found that access to information came more readily with the Native scholars in informal interactions or with the Native scientist allowing twice the time for interviewee responses, and we began to question the uniformity of our qualitative protocol. As we gained increasing comfort with our own internal process toward self-reflection, we began to more explicitly plan whom we sent to our case studies by focusing on aspects of cultural, linguistic and experiential concordance with each group.

In our CBPR panel, the lead author (MM), a Black male, reflected on his identity during his site visit to a rural partnership with a southern African American community.

> So, identity was very important for me and, because I'm familiar with the South, and I'm familiar with that type of reinforcement of division and highlighting my 'otherness', it helped me exploit that in a sense as a researcher because some of the team members that I had to interview were black men. I didn't need a cultural broker, even though I wasn't from that community, because I could use my … shift from an academic researcher to a black man, to a 'brother', who understood the subtle racial dynamics that no one really wanted to discuss … I think that's the beauty of CBPR. It allows the researcher to use their internal strengths and assets as part of the research and not necessarily have to set your biases aside, but just be aware of your biases.

In this case study, MM was joined by co-author ALS, a white male researcher. In the team planning stages, we speculated how our identities might influence data collection and the comfort of community partners during interviews to share racialized and social dimensions of their experience. While it helped to have the researchers, ALS and MM, interview community partners who shared their racial identity, we also became aware of exchanges which were disclosed in confidence and not to be used as 'data'. Recognition of these sensitivities has required that our team members maintain this confidentiality even at the expense of reporting valuable insights during the analytic process. These interactional perspectives have often not been part of qualitative data analysis, as researchers often perceive them as outside of intended research themes. Further, this type of reflexivity has not generally been reported in the CBPR literature, exploring how identity and perceived power within identity status may influence data collection and analysis processes. With relationship-building paramount within CBPR, sensitivity to confidentiality issues and

community priorities becomes even more critical to promote community capacity-building and ownership of their own knowledge to reduce health disparities.

In another tribal case study, identity and relationships of power changed our data collection decisions. We had originally identified two Native scientists and the project coordinator to travel to the site to collect data. Within a matter of days, however, we were made aware that there was an expectation that the Principal Investigator of the study (NW) would accompany the team. Recognizing the symbolic meaning of this request, we quickly amended our plans. Clearly, the tribe expected the presence of the Principal Investigator and her attendance likely played a role in enhancing the acceptability of our research.

Impact on Knowledge Creation

Researcher identity and positionality reflect statuses (in part) derived from dominant group social and academic institutions, and which may have an impact on the valuation of community knowledge and outcomes. Dominant culture systems have been used historically to oppress or disadvantage subordinate groups, through political, economic, educational, and knowledge system means. Subordinated groups have learned to create ‘hidden transcripts’ hiding their true thoughts and emotions while adopting norms and beliefs of mainstream society (Scott, 1990). Inaccessible discourse creates a tension for researchers, as community members may feel they need to protect issues from outside researchers, in order to defend their community identity and values (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996). Yet, the academics who come from a shared or similar identity background may be able to gain access and insights, unavailable to others.

> When our host (a community partner) escorted us into a local restaurant prior to the start of interviews in southern Missouri, I felt like we had traveled back in time to the era of Jim Crow segregation … It seemed as if everyone stopped in mid-sentence and gave me that look that whites give a black man when they want to put him on notice that the social space he has just entered is being surveilled. Racism was strong in this tiny southern hamlet but was being under-emphasized by some of the informants. The legacy of Jim Crow racism is still painful to both blacks and whites. There appears to be a cultural norm that discourages discussion of racial inequality. Whites (here) deny that racism still exists or, if so, they are unaware of it. Blacks acknowledge that racism is prevalent especially amongst older whites but would prefer not to dwell on the past.

In this interaction, MM was able to ‘experience’ the reality of community members being objects of the dominant gaze, even as they often are objects of academic research. He was able to perceive and then add interview questions about the distinctly regional approach to racism, drawing from his own personal experiences, and shifting from the position of an outside academic researcher to that of an insider, a Black man well versed in subtle forms of white racism. His insights based on his identity led our team to theorize about regional differences in negotiating racism and disparities in community-academic collaboration.

For scholars of color on the research team, they may be experiencing their own knowledge being marginalized in the academy, as their communities have been led to believe that their cultural heritage and knowledge is devalued by mainstream society. Historically, they have

seen their communities as often the objects of research, with the knowledge generated appropriated to reflect the theories and requirements of the academy. At the same time, they face the contradiction that they are the academics too, and question which knowledge paradigms to embrace.

Because CBPR seeks to create a research space of safety in which all partners equally control knowledge production (Atalay, 2012), this safe environment needs to also extend to the research team. As we began to recognize, in each successive case study, how much it mattered who was part of the case study field team, we began to talk much more openly among ourselves about the importance of identity within knowledge production. One of our research team members epitomized this openness:

> As part of this dialectic exchange, I am much more prone to take risks in sharing my own voice and hidden narrative as a researcher of color; and as the research progresses, I am challenged to delve deeper into the layers that have constructed my identity. At its best, the research team helps me better understand my own internal dialogue and positionality which then externalizes into a stronger, more confident and freed researcher voice with a more social-justice embedded identity. By giving voice to my vulnerabilities, it gives me the leverage to better understand myself, my changing relationship to the research in a good way and to understand myself better outside the context of my own community, because the CBPR research team process has made it safe to be vulnerable and grow and challenge myself and let out that hidden voice that indigenous scholars carry forward.

Honoring the identity of our team members therefore has not only facilitated an enhanced cultural map for interpreting research data, but has also created a safe environment for cross-cultural communication and respect within the team. This reflexivity based on identities and communication becomes equally important for the full partnership of community and academic members, so as not to colonize community knowledge generated from the research, but instead to incorporate racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic differences within the analyses. Cultural humility and efforts to match academic researchers who share identities or lived experiences with community members then become important components of CBPR.

Writing/Representation

In writing and representation of the data, academic power and privilege can become omnipresent as academics have the training and tenure expectations to produce peer-reviewed articles, whereas community partners, especially in under-resourced settings, have overwhelming job expectations that preclude additional tasks, let alone those which do not immediately serve their community.

Critical theory, post-colonial, and feminist scholars have also challenged the power held traditionally by academics in ‘re-presenting’ findings. Michelle Fine (1994) has articulated three stances for publishing community voices:

1. ‘ventriloquy’, when researchers describe objective truth, never using the word ‘I’ in their analyses;

2. ‘voices’, when researchers present quotes without a critical analysis of people’s history or context, and without their input as to which stories are included; and

3. ‘activist feminist research’ as a negotiated stance, when researchers are explicit about their identity, and, through dialogue with community members, work towards a context based portrayal of knowledge.

Indigenous insiders may more easily hear hidden voices with their shared emotional connections, therefore being able to move beyond ‘ventriloquy’ to contextualize the research. As a scholar of color so eloquently commented on the CBPR identity panel:

> Having a clear idea of my identity is so important and that works with Indian women because I have to think about [my impact] … One of them came back and hugged me, and she was crying. I thought maybe I had asked her a question that upset her, but actually she said that nobody had ever asked her opinion about anything in her life, and to have this interview was so meaningful to her … This is the type of work, when you are working with your own people, these are the types of emotional experiences that you have … I feel as an American Indian woman that I am able, with me strongly attached to my identity and my community, I am able to address some of the most persistent health disparities among American Indian women, and I am very grateful for that, and make no apologies for it ever.

Publication remains an issue; and we have grappled in our own CBPR research, with how to involve our community partners in publications. It has not been an easy task, as LB states:

> As a native researcher engaged in over 13 years of prevention research with tribal communities of the southwest and utilizing CBPR principles it has been difficult to encourage tribal partners to engage in research dissemination, particularly in writing peer-reviewed journal manuscripts. To the tribal communities, there have been no perceived direct benefits in actively developing a paper laden with academic vocabulary.

She goes on to describe how her tribal partners over time recognized their desire to share their successes with other tribes and also to publish in academic journals to improve their NIH funding possibilities. With a shared or multiple identity perspective, writing about CBPR research could therefore expand to analyze the contradictory nature of social locations and relationships, exploring how iterative interpretation and presentation of findings are storied, patterned, and context bound.

Discussion

We hoped in this reflexive auto-ethnography on identity/power and positionality to theorize two questions about our own CBPR team’s experiences: how our experiences of social and cultural identities express themselves within CBPR; and how dimensions of power and privilege conferred by these identities impact our capacity to co-create effective CBPR. We used the four categories of research positionality, research process, knowledge creation, and publication/presentation to unpack our own learning experiences. We have explored not just

our ascribed/achieved identities, but also our motivations and values (partially drawn from our identities) that have driven our view of CBPR as a social justice project.

Our specific deliberations about field research team composition considered the fact that we were conducting case studies with diverse communities (i.e. tribal, segregated rural/urban, and multi-racial/ethnic, and multi-gendered). Though in open dispersed communities, identity may be less salient than closed concentrated communities (Birman et al., 2005). We sought to minimize the unintended consequence of re-colonizing the population by ensuring that our field teams, as much as possible, reflected the ethnicity and/or class status of the communities we investigated. Through time and relationship building in our fieldwork, we endeavored to extend cultural humility and trust to theorizing about the significance of researcher identity in fostering effective community collaborations. Recognizing the additional dimension of power and positionality, we sought to design a field team composed of members who could navigate the complexity of positions within each academic-community partnership, allowing our team to investigate and interpret group dynamics from multiple vantage points. We hoped to contribute to a new principle of *research team identity* as a unit of analysis for effective CBPR practice.

We found that matching researcher identity with that of the interviewee minimized social distance, mistrust, and barriers to hidden transcripts, a kind of triangulation of data collection by varying identity with position to increase the validity of the knowledge accessed. Different team members heard different information, both inside the interview and in outside, non-taped, disclosures that we used for better understanding context, but that we respected by not including them in official transcripts.

We also found that it was not only ascribed or achieved identity that mattered, but our collective perspective on the work, our cross-cultural communication and proxy trust of relationships, in other words, how we ‘worked the hyphen’. Though the Principal Investigator of the qualitative case study component is a well-known CBPR researcher (NW), our team gained entrance to several case studies through additional proxy trust by local colleagues who vouched for our social justice orientation; many of our case studies shared this broad worldview fostering a congenial atmosphere for engaging research participants.

Our internal discussions of power mirrored the recently published inquiry into power and privilege between community and academic members in a long-term environmental justice partnership, which found that direct dialogue about these issues deepened their trusting relationships and communication (Garzon et al., 2013).

One of the most stimulating questions was ‘how team members may view their affinity for a utilitarian vs social justice worldview research orientation?’ Can CBPR researchers admit that their interests are utilitarian (i.e. publication, funding, tenure, promotion, knowledge production)? Similarly, what are the perspectives and backgrounds of CBPR researchers that gravitate more towards a social justice focus in CBPR research? A social-justice oriented partnership is more likely to have a greater degree of proxy trust for an outside researcher that shares a similar commitment to social justice. The same may be true for a more

utilitarian oriented partnership, and the legitimacy conferred by *our* NIH funding contributed to additional proxy trust about our scientific exploration. In our collective reflection, we found that we could integrate these positions, realizing that communities expect 'usefulness' of findings, even as they share a broader capacity building health equity goal. Exclusively utilitarian research perspectives, however, such as simply recruiting minorities into clinical trials, may ethically compromise partnerships.

We also found that our goal of distributing power among the team members in our research process by engaging students, as well as research scientists and faculty, giving them the opportunity to travel to the case study sites and to be involved in primary data collection, has mattered in terms of democratizing our own knowledge and the value of each person to reflect on their positionality and identity within the knowledge creation process. We have grown as a team in our ability to be more reflexive about our own personal identity and research orientations. By creating this safe space of mutual trust and respect for difference, we have been better able to extend that collaborative spirit into the research setting.

One under-theorized outcome of community based participatory research is liberation. CBPR is liberating for both the community and the academics involved in the work. When the essential ideals of CBPR are faithfully adhered to, the community is better able to free itself from the social structural factors that have historically silenced its voices of concern and marginalized its aspirations for hope (i.e. colonization, racism, sexism and economic exploitation). The academic researcher may likewise find release from personal and cultural biases that can develop through the achieved status of rigorous academic training; and through the ascribed status arising from individual power, privilege, and prestige accruing as an academic researcher.

In this spirit, we therefore propose the following recommendations that address the issues and challenges we consider critical to the field. It is our hope that these recommendations aid in a dialogue that leads to a more effective practice of community based participatory research.

Research Team Building and Reflexivity

Within the context of ensuring a diverse academic research group, allow teams to form organically. Build in team member reflections on their own and others' personal identities, marginalization and privilege, skill sets, strengths and weaknesses, and personal/professional goals for involvement in the project into the ongoing dialogue of the research. Establishing a system for continual self-reflexivity helps to create an atmosphere of trust, facilitates communication and conflict resolution, and promotes power sharing among team members.

Utilitarianism and Social Justice Worldview

Understand and investigate the differences in these two orientations towards CBPR, and how they might be influenced by career stage, privilege, community setting and goals, funding requirements, and stage of research; and may shift by context. Affirming the possibility of real social or policy change will hasten a social justice worldview, while contexts with little possibility for change might reinforce a utilitarian approach, particularly for researchers of color who face added scrutiny about the 'coins of the realm' within the academy. Each

approach brings different strengths, shortcomings, and may also be bridged as social justice researchers seek to assure usefulness of findings.

Reflection on Researcher Identity

Seek to include academic team members whose identities (i.e. gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class) intersect with those of the community partners. If you do not have a cultural match of research team with population, work diligently to diversify your institution's faculty and students and also seek a cultural broker from the community itself. Changing the face of the academy is an important structural way to make a difference in knowledge production, as diverse academies foster trust, effective communication, access to local knowledge and the valuing of epistemological diversity. For many scholars of color, or with disabilities, and for women, working class and queer scholars, knowledge production is impacted and evolves because it involves theorizing their own lives, their places within the academy and their communities of origin. Through team member reflexivity, individual researchers can be cognizant of changes that occur 'within' and over time, and be better able to access and assume the most empowering and appropriate identity for work inside and out.

Resistance within the Academy

Find open spaces of resistance in the margins and across the disciplines, with partners both within and outside the academy, whether they are scholars of color, others who occupy non-dominant social identities at the margins, or white allies who share values and perspectives of CBPR as social justice research.

Cultivation of Co-learning and Alignment with Community Partners

While proxy trust, whether from shared identities or personal relationships, is critical for establishing entry, seek to create an authentic co-learning environment for partnership sustainability, and, ultimately, utility of research findings. Matched identities, combined with negotiating and working the hyphen demonstrate in practice how community wisdom and insights are essential to the ecologic validity of knowledge production. Additionally, establishing a continual co-learning environment promotes community ownership and co-governance, an essential element of any change or improvement targeted for complex systems. Working towards alignment of research purpose and values is an essential practice for co-learning, including recognizing discrepancies which may create conflicts, or those differences that can be honored in the context of a shared agenda.

Collaborative, Up, Down, Peer Mentorship

Foster an equity based research environment through mentorship that acknowledges the collective levels of expertise among community and academic partners. With up, down, and peer mentorship, partnerships can move beyond a hierarchical model to create a circular democratic model where contributions from each unique position become the established norm.

Sustainability

Seek to sustain partnerships through respect for local knowledge, traditions, and community concerns as central to the overall CBPR project. Assertion of, or lack of critical awareness of researcher positionality and power, even unintentional, can lead to a devaluing of community voice, reducing the potential for long lasting partnerships.

Researcher Accountability

Develop a community checklist for holding academic researchers and universities accountable to core components of CBPR. The tool should aid communities to clarify whether a proposed project reflects CBPR ideals, is aligned with community values, and includes research cultural-identity brokers in the partnership who can facilitate co-learning and mutual respect.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it matters that the academic research team, as well as the academic-community partnership, is self-reflexive concerning how research is conducted and what is learned. Our identities matter in terms of our actual positions of power and privilege, and how the research team reflects intersecting positionalities in relation to each other and in relation to our community partners. It matters what our core values and purposes are and how aligned they are with those of our communities. Our identities and how those affect our relationships with communities matter in our research processes and in our research outcomes, especially if we care about the broadest possible outcomes of strengthening community capacities in research and action, and creating collectively based knowledge to confront and change the historic social conditions that produce inequities.

For academics, understanding the importance of identity and positionality is an orientation that connects our life experiences and purpose within the historical legacy of our profession. It allows us to guard against appropriating knowledge, to work towards negotiating co-learning and collaborative knowledge production, and it makes us better teachers. As Spade suggests (2007), within a space of dialectic exchange, CBPR in its ideal form can educate, transform and challenge ways of transferring information into knowledge for new levels of critical thinking and action. We hope that this step towards theory development will initiate a dialogue linking CBPR to the influence of researcher identity and power in order to support more effective and democratic academic-community research partnerships.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the willingness of everyone else on our UNM CBPR research team to engage in critical reflection and self-reflexivity on these issues, including: Lisa Herrera, Julie Lucero, Emma Noyes, Shannon Sanchez-Youngman, Vanessa Simonds, Greg Tafoya, Belinda Vicuna; to Tassy Parker, our colleague on the CBPR Institute for Health Identity panel; Malia Villegas and Emily White Hat, from the National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center; to John Oetzel, a one-time UNM team member and now at the University of Waikato, New Zealand; and to our colleague on the Scientific Community Advisory Council, Edison Trickett, for his invaluable contributions. Nina Wallerstein also thanks the organizers of the Minority Health Conference at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill for the opportunity to first present this material; and colleagues at San Francisco State University Department of Health Education where she is a visiting scholar, in particular, Lisa Moore for her consultations.

Funding

This publication was funded in part by NARCH V: Native American Research Centers for Health, U26IHS300293, 2009–2013, from the Indian Health Service (IHS) and National Institute of General Medical Sciences with additional support from the National Cancer Institute, National Center for Research Resources, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences, National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities, and Health Resources and Services Administration, with previous pilot funding from the National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities, NARCH III Supplement, U26IHS300009, 2006–2009.

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