Becoming Together: A Community-Based Participatory Research Orientation

THEORY: ROOTS AND GROWTH

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is an orientation to research wherein community members, organizations, and leaders partner with academic and/or scientific researchers to develop and execute research that is mutually beneficial and/but prioritizes the needs of the local community. Short- and long-term action plans that utilize research findings to ultimately improve conditions for the local community are elemental to the CBPR process.

CBPR is a type of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the roots of which are most commonly attributed to Paulo Freire, a Brazilian revolutionary working at the intersection of critical pedagogy and social change; Orlando Fars Borda, a Columbian researcher and sociologist; and Kurt Lewin, an applied psychologist who came to the U.S. as a Jewish Refugee from Nazi Germany in the 1930s (*see* Helm et al. 2015; Wallerstein and Duran 2008; Holkup et al. 2009). Together, the traditions allow for 1) theorization about the ways that traditional western academic research practice inscribes and perpetuates uneven distributions of power across society by privileging dominant forms of knowledge and knowledge production and 2) promotion of ways of doing research that engage community and encourage community researchers to develop skills and solutions that support communities themselves.

Scholars/practitioners have continued to expand the liberatory beginnings of CBPR/PAR through the integration of Marxist, feminist, queer, and Indigenous work (*cf.*, Smith 1999; Trask 1999; Hooks 2000; Gegeo and Watson Gegeo 2001; Appadurai 2006; Tallbear 2011, 2014; Kihleng 2015). Even when not explicitly named as CBPR, these perspectives continue to (re)imagine the potentials of research as a useful tool, responsive to and collaborative with place, people, culture, and need; grounded in practices of mutualism, reciprocity, co-creation, respect, and consent; generative of practical solutions to community need; and productive of bodies of work that better represent the epistemological and ontological multiplicity of our world. These qualities are critical to executing sustainable research and ongoing decolonizing work across the globe (West 2005; Aini and West 2018; West and Aini 2018), and carry CBPR into a world where researchers can and do come from communities themselves.

PRACTICE: "AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS"
Examinations of Power
CBPR has been made popular through its use in contexts that academic and medical researchers have found difficult to access because of an underlying or overt mistrust of research and researchers in these communities (Ford et al. 2012; McElfish et al. 2019; Ritchie et al. 2013). This is in part because of the ways that research and researchers have directly harmed people and places through medical and other research experiments (Smith 1999; Evans-Campbell et al. 2008; Nguyen-Truong et al.2 020; Yang et al. 2019), and also because of the ways research and researchers represent arms of colonialism and global capitalism—forces that marginalized subjects recognize as those which have helped to create and perpetuate the conditions of gross inequity across the globe (Said 1978; Smith 1999; Appadurai 2006).

The approach is cited widely, and yet not always operationalized to truly decolonize research (Tuck and Guishard 2013; Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2013). We are reminded that it is not merely a matter of including community members in the process, but of distributing power, and allowing the aims of a

project to be mutually determined. This means paying attention to the various vectors through which social power is distributed under global, national, local, and hyperlocal sociopolitical and economic systems in the place in which one is engaging in research, and working with the dynamics of each place to encourage improved and just conditions for people in that place. It takes wide-ranging and critical knowledge, skills in relationship and facilitation, skills in research and capacity development, and an ability to formulate plans of action based on research findings, as well as flexibility, generosity, and self-reflexivity.

Foundationally, researchers utilizing a CBPR approach must thus learn about, understand, and be willing to name, out loud and in real time, the dynamics of power in place (Pandya et al. 2021; *see also* Oluo 2019)**.** Researchers can prepare for their work in an area by engaging critical analysis of global systems and broader trends in the region, and can learn from local community liaisons and observe through time the vectors of power in that location, including those that course through familial/political positions and class (Hau'ofa 2008:11-23), gender, sexuality, dis/ability, race, colorism, etc. Researchers should also always remain attentive to the ways that knowledge extraction, representational control, and knowledge production replicate colonial practice, and interrupt any actions reproducing these harms (West and Aini 2018).

Practically, understanding vectors of power can help researchers plan their work and guide and navigate the sometimes fraught space of "community." Through deeper understanding of community in place, researchers can know better who needs to be involved in what conversations, how and when it is best to initiate conversations, and even who best to lead conversations (Pandya et al. 2021). When working across hierarchies in community, it is sometimes useful to name power dynamics (*ibid.)* as a strategy to build standards of equity into group dynamics (Oleo 2019). Knowing and accounting for histories and power dynamics can lead to less harm, and more successful, effective, and just partnerships, research, and outcomes.

Relationality
As introduced above, time and relationship are important factors in the CBPR approach. The time one spends in place and with community allows researcher(s) to begin to understand not only the structure or dynamics of place, but how these emerge and play out in real situations, and how and who and when and where and why these schema are ruptured. Long-term involvement with place also alters conception of research and development work as extractive, short-term, unsustainable, and external; it can humanize parties to each other, and open space for honest and even difficult conversation between parties.

Relationship is an investment. It entails a quality of engagement over time, deep listening, and also vulnerability, in letting oneself be known. **Relationship is the factor that allows CBPR to be operationalized earnestly, because the approach necessitates trust, honesty, and communication through an always already ethically charged process.** If the goal of CBPR is to utilize research and build research communities to support community-driven solutions to complex problems, relationship that is an expression of parity and mutuality is that which has the potential to utilize the CBPR approach to its fullest potentials (Pandya 2021; Ritchie 2013; Holkup 2004).

There is no shortcut to this knowing, and ultimately no end to getting to know. Consistent and *sustainably* frequent communications during and beyond project periods and scope, as well as engagement with community members outside of project interests can support the development of relationship (Pandya et al. 2021). **It is important that researchers continually make space for feedback—not only on project matters, but also on researcher behavior and speech—what is culturally acceptable/not acceptable, offensive, appreciated.** While not necessarily typical of everyday relationship, learning how/when to behave or respond in certain ways, such as when to speak or not speak, when and how and with whom gender or age or class may be an issue, etc., can facilitate respect and reciprocity where cross-cultural interface might otherwise end or harm a partnership. Attention to matters that deepen relationship is critical in the operationalization of CBPR.

Nuts and Bolts
One of the tenets of CBPR is that it must include community in all phases of research, from inception of idea through dissemination of knowledge products. It should build research capacity in the community through the process, so that people in the community have increasing sovereignty over the research that is done in the community, and freedom to lead their own projects and solve for issues in their communities whenever they desire. CBPR should be driven by the concerns and needs of the community, and work toward actionable solutions that directly increase the community's well-being (Pandya et al. 2021; Holkup 2004; Tuck and Guishard 2013**).** How these principles are enacted is critical to the integrity of the CBPR approach.

Early on, organizers should ask about **levels of participation**, and assess the sustainability of each participants' engagement over the long term (Pandya et al. 2021). Sometimes, asking too much of individuals can drive participation to fade; conversely, too small an ask can lead to disconnect from the project, or impression that their participation is nominal or ancillary—again resulting in disengagement from the project. Researchers should be prepared to juggle the needs of the project with the needs of the community from day-to-day. At times, the need for weighty involvement of particular partners is mitigated by financial and/or resource investment into that partnership (Hattori YEAR). This should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Early conversations should also be had around **basic terms surrounding project content and outcomes**, e.g., "Science," or "Success." Experiences of CBPR practitioners indicate that discussions like these ensure that there is shared understanding of the objectives and parameters of the work, and helps to avoid potential conflict down the line (Pandya et al. 2021). Rmesearchers should be attentive to the ways that translation often bends towards legibility for western, colonial worlds (West 2005), and that there should be considerable effort made to define or devise terms that allow for legibility across worlds.

As the CBPR process unfolds, plans, and even aims, can change. Because the project is, ultimately, driven by community need over any predetermined or researcher objective, changes that are in the best interest of community and that help community develop solutions to the complex issues they are facing should be honored. CAISE **suggests that, instead of fixing on an outcome, one must fix to a commitment to engage and be in service to the community;** to create the project with this in mind, and to use the latter commitment as a north star to guide decisions about project directions.

One of the most difficult challenges when carrying out CBPR in small(er), indigenous communities is the issue of **maintaining confidentiality and anonymity**. Ford et al. suggests that this can be mitigated through the deidentification of data by a small team. When key data cannot be de-identified, there is consultation with that participant on whether or not that piece of data can be utilized for broader team analysis, and that participant determines the outcome of that data point. As mentioned above, the foundations of CBPR rest on trust and relationship with community. While a data point might seem critical to a project's analysis component, it needs to be weighed against the development of ongoing trust in that community and the opportunity of all future projects in that area.

As with all practical implementations of CBPR, processes and systems depend on the makeup of the community, its culture, its norms, goals, and desires. At best, it builds on the strengths, expertise, needs, and desires of community members, and develops skills within the community toward knowledge and development sovereignty.

YOUTH

Involvement and Empowerment

Youth involvement in CBPR offers incredible opportunity to interrogate another vector by which society enacts dominance and justifies injustice. Empowering youth to examine and communicate their own experience, as well as the conditions of their families and networks from their positionality, opens new routes to knowing youths' needs, visions, and desires. It is especially effective for health and education studies because of the manner in which these structures and systems discourage, dismiss, and even punish young people from participating and making decisions for themselves (Torre 2009; Cammarota and Fine 2008; Tuck and Guishard 2013).

Like all CBPR efforts, there needs to be concerted effort to ensure that involvement is not nominal in nature, and actively searches for ways to activate youth leadership and voice as well as practice reciprocity over extraction and exploitation. As outlined in Ford (2012), there are different models that delineate youth participation, and rubrics by which depth of participation might be assessed. These include Hart's (1992) linear model, where involvement is tracked through low, medium, and high levels of instruction and decision-making, where "low" is when youth are being told what to do, "medium" is when youth and adults are making decisions together, and "high" is when youth are making decisions and having their decisions enacted by the collective.

Alternative models (Wong et al. 2010) understand youth empowerment differently, operating with the assumption that the objective of project participation is co-creative space shared by all participants. In other words, empowerment is not power-over, but rather collaborative ideation and decision-making. In this frame, optimal youth participation/empowerment is sharing space with adults and being treated as an equal member in decision-making and other processes that occur during the research. Wong's model also takes into consideration contexts where it is not possible or less than ideal to have egalitarian decision-making, for example, in situations or cultural contexts that necessitate predetermined frameworks and boundaries (i.e., around cultural customs of inclusion in particular situations based on gender/age, around data management and confidentiality, etc.).

Ford's (2012) project set up conditions for successful youth involvement by creating the following spaces: a local steering committee made up of youth, tribal leaders, and elders; youth-researcher partnerships; and youth action-groups to translate findings into recommendations for action in their communities. In this way they had a variety of opportunities to observe and absorb cultural and social interactions alongside the opportunity to exercise their voices in peer groups and with researchers and adults.

Youth involvement in CBPR can help researchers gather critical information, and like CBPR generally, should give primacy to creating experiences that empower and encourage self-efficacy. Project design should have sufficient scaffolding to support youth learning and growing, and open spaces where youth can experience serious involvement in the research process alongside adults, and peer collaboration, leadership, and decision-making.

Setting Foundations
Establishing successful spaces for youth takes forethought and additional discussion with youth. It is important that parameters for projects and discussions be set up in advance, for example what behavior is allowed/not allowed and when; what information is shared/private; what is required/optional; etc. Some of these parameters can be set up with youth, and this can be an early experience of decision-making and learning.

Methods of involvement should consider the strengths of youth and cultural knowing and expression, and employ these strengths in all aspects of the research, including data collection and discussion. For example, in Helm (2015), utilizing Photovoice with Hawaiian youth in a rural setting encouraged youth to access their knowledge in embodied and open ways, allowing them to think and learn outside of formal disciplinary divisions and without primacy on written or formal scholarship, while simultaneously allowing them to witness and experience the ways that knowledge is and can be produced. To witness and experience their manner of thinking and being—as youth, as Hawaiians, as rural community—as valid and as important as all knowledge proved incredibly empowering, and is a valuable foundation for more equitable scientific and research futures.

Adjustments can be made throughout the project if facilitators find, for example, gender or other factors are negatively affecting research outcomes. For example, in Helm's (2015) project it was found that girls did not participate as much or as honestly in integrated group or even single-sex group settings. Conducting one-on-one sessions with girls to analyze photos led to improved data collection and analysis. Noting these and other patterns occurring during the study can support increased project success.

Post-project celebrations of youth achievement can also be important (*see* Helm 2015), and considerations of how youth might want to be celebrated (publicly/privately, with/out awards/recognitions, by whom and to what extent), can mark the value of youth in the community and for youth involvement in CBPR projects. It can also serve as an early positive experience of research, and can encourage future involvement/leadership in spaces of integrated, community-led and community-minded work.

Setting foundations is thus about setting up the guidelines and atmosphere for a single project—developing parameters, developing relationship with youth, developing the structure for successful youth participation—and about setting up a long-term potential for youth contribution, accountability, responsibility, and involvement in their communities—through research or through other means. Setting broad goals for participation and creating spaces for youth to develop interest and responsibility helps to achieve study goals while simultaneously empowering youth participants.

STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE

CBPR is an orientation, rather than a set of procedural techniques to gather information. However, it can be thought of as a decolonizing methodology, a route through which power is named and can be redistributed through practical, methodological, and theoretical applications. If the goal of CBPR is to think and do together to spark the propensity for a better world, we might also always already be asking how we survive and move forward in this thick present, full of our individual, local, and global inheritances and also our dreams, as kin. It is a question that necessitates what Donna Haraway (2016) posits as "staying with the trouble": the recognition that "[a]lone, in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little," and inside of our entanglements, in our worlds, "we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations...[w]e become-with each other or not at all" (4). In ways CBPR is an experiment in this becoming-with, a challenge to practice working across knowledges, examining and dismantling oppressive power, and meeting places with new vision about what is possible in and of our world.

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