Fundamentals of Social Identity and Social Justice: Considering Social Identity Within CBPR With Marginalized Populations

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Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a research paradigm that works with marginalized populations within health contexts. The partnership between scholars and marginalized populations empowers participants through the pursuit of social justice. However, there has been a cry for standardizing the CBPR approach particularly when working with marginalized populations. Identity is a critical construct to understand within the communities in order to collectively strive toward social justice. This paper examines how social identity theory can aid community-based participatory research teams by (a) illustrating how social identity analysis can facilitate the researcher-community partnership, (b) applying SIT to better understand community behaviors and norms, and (c) using SIT to avoid unintended consequences within CBPR intervention designs. Through understanding identity, relational empowerment can be positively redistributed back to community members. This paper will thus serve as a first step in justifying why more research is needed in incorporating social identity to CBPR intervention designs.

Keywords: social identity, community-based participatory research, community engaged research, social justice, intergroup communication

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years the popularity of community-based participatory research (CBPR) has drastically increased (Simonds et al., 2013; Brown and Stalker, 2018), and scholars seem captivated by the applied aspects of the approach. CBPR is a research paradigm (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2003) that has researchers working in equal partnership with marginalized community members to work on health issues that directly affect the community (McAllister et al., 2003; Abma et al., 2017; Brown and Stalker, 2018). CBPR works on social justice issues and policy change based on historical inequality in marginalized communities (Devia et al., 2017). Starting in the public health discipline (Israel et al., 1998), CBPR has influenced the disciplines of nursing, clinical care, social work, community psychology, and communication (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011). According to McAllister et al. (2003), there are five tenets to CBPR: (1) the formation of the researcher-community partnership prior to the research, (2) sufficient support for the community partners, (3) a commitment to research that is applied within communities, (4) developing empirical research designs, and (5) shared ownership of the project data between the researchers and the community members. Critical to the ideology of CBPR, the marginalized communities are not the only ones learning from the process, rather scholars and communities learn together from the process through dialogue (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011). Freire (1970) posited that dialogue is the process of understanding, interpreting, and transforming their reality (For further reading on co-learning and dialogue, see Freire, 1970).

One of the most frequent justifications for the use of CBPR is when a community is engaged within the project, empowerment and community buy-in increases, which helps to ensure the long-term success of health interventions (McAllister et al., 2003; Castro et al., 2004). Empowerment is not merely participation, but the process by which communities regain control over factors that influence their lives (Baum, 2008). The most common types of empowerment are relational power and power in capacity (Chaskin, 2001; Boyle and Silver, 2005). Capacity building power encompasses skills development (Chaskin, 2001), while relational power focuses on the power of a group in relation to others (Boyle and Silver, 2005). Much research has been done on building capacity power, but equally important is analyzing the power relationship between researcher and community (Boyle and Silver, 2005). CBPR is a method that can positively aid social justice action in health (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011; Simonds et al., 2013). Islam et al. (1991) explained that social justice issues are dynamic and multi-dimensional problems that are not always easy to solve or document. Because CBPR works with communities, the paradigm helps create innovative interventions that better account for community needs and creates unique evaluation tools to fit the intervention goals and objectives (Islam et al., 1991).

CBPR has been applied as a spectrum encompassing varying levels of community research participation (Butterfoss, 2006; Peterson and Gubrium, 2011; Jordan, 2016). However, this means there is not a standard method of implementation (Butterfoss, 2006; Wallerstein, 2006; Peterson and Gubrium, 2011; Brown and Stalker, 2018). Specifically, when working with marginalized populations on health interventions, scholars have indicated a need for more analysis into (a) how community members co-create the intervention (Snyder, 2007; Rimal and Lapinski, 2009) and (b) how the researcher and community team members communicate throughout the intervention (Butterfoss, 2006; Brown and Stalker, 2018; Chak, 2018). Some literature has examined the group communication within intervention teams composed of researchers and community members (Lantz et al., 2001; Christopher et al., 2008; Israel et al., 2010). However, very little research uses theory to guide the intervention communication plan between researchers and communities within CBPR. Given that CBPR teams include multiple groups of people, intergroup theories can help CBPR scholars better understand and explain intergroup behaviors and motivations.

One such theory is social identification theory (SIT), which assumes that individual identity is shaped by perceived membership into groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity is critical to understanding power and social justice (Jetten et al., 2012). According to Artz and Murphy (2000), social justice for marginalized populations requires the marginalized groups to construct meaning for themselves (Papa et al., 2006). (Papa et al., 2006) argued that for marginalized groups to become empowered, they must fully understand their identity and world perception. In addition, Jetten et al. (2012) argued that understanding identity has the potential to "contribute to a "social cure" that is capable of promoting adjustment, coping, and well-being among individuals who are dealing with a range

of illnesses, injuries, traumas, and stressors" (p. 5). Social identity theory has been used to explain and predict group behaviors and norms (Hogg and Turner, 1987a; Jetten et al., 2012), making the theory fundamental to many health intervention designs (Jetten et al., 2012). However, scant research has explored the impact of social identity specifically within CBPR.

Many scholars argue that CBPR interventions would benefit from rigorous approaches to CBPR (Peterson, 2010; Peterson and Gubrium, 2011; Wilson et al., 2018). Scholars also question the accuracy of CBPR applications throughout the research process (Butterfoss, 2006; Chak, 2018). As Lewin (1951), one of the founders of Action Research, stated, "there is nothing so practical as a good theory that affects practice" (p. 169). In an effort to meet the growing need for standardization and rigorous applications of CBPR, this paper examines how SIT can aid CBPR scholars and teams by (a) illustrating how social identity analysis can facilitate the researcher-community partnership, (b) applying SIT to better understand community behaviors and norms, and (c) using SIT to avoid unintended consequences within CBPR intervention designs. Health intervention designs need to be cognizant of the dynamic process of identity specifically when targeting marginalized populations in order to avoid unintended consequences, build stronger partnerships, and to uphold social justice. This paper will serve as a first step in justifying why more research is needed in incorporating social identity to CBPR intervention designs.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY (SIT)

Identity is a dynamic process that involves evaluation in which the individual continually self-categorizes their in-group membership (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999). SIT posits that individual identity is layered with memberships within multiple social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). SIT does not predict individual-level beliefs or attitudes toward the social group, but rather takes a holistic look at the group and the structures in place that impact both the behaviors and the identification of groups, which ultimately impact individuals (Turner, 1999). Through observing group dynamics and behaviors, and communicating with group members (Odenweller and Harris, 2018), individuals understand the standard set of practices and beliefs of the group (Hogg and Terry, 2002).

Individuals within groups commonly compare their group to other groups in order to gauge positive distinctiveness (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Positive distinctiveness is the belief that a group is superior to others, which is critical to maintaining group members and group identification because individuals must believe that their self-image is being positively influenced by membership in a specific group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hogg and Turner, 1987b). SIT proposes a spectrum called the interpersonal continuum to understand how individuals perceive their group by comparing it to other groups, also referred to as out-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). If the in-group is seen as less favorable as compared to an out-group, there are three strategies individuals can take to maintain positive

distinctiveness: (1) individual mobility, (2) social creativity, and (3) social competition (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999). If the positive distinctiveness of the group is threatened by negative associations, individuals may choose to distance themselves from the group or leave the group, which is called individual mobility (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Individual mobility assumes that the boundaries of the group are adjustable or permeable (Ellemers et al., 1990). Social creativity occurs when individuals are motivated to protect the group, so they adapt or change the group's attributes or behaviors to appear more favorable (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Haslam et al., 2001). Social creativity can involve adding new attributes to the in-group in order to balance out the threats to positive distinctiveness, or bolstering the already existing positive attributes of the group (Haslam et al., 2001). Finally, social competition, confronts out-group members directly about the negative stereotypes to their in-group membership (Haslam et al., 2001). The moderators to the choice of strategy include group characteristics like hierarchy, the level of commitment the individual has to the group, and the group stability (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). SIT allows scholars to see identity not as a category, but rather a dynamic process (Usborne and Taylor, 2010).

SIT AND CBPR PARTNERSHIPS

Critical to CBPR is the idea that there are equal partnerships between the researcher and community partners (Israel et al., 1998). As previously discussed, relational empowerment refers to the power renegotiation between the researcher and the community (Boyle and Silver, 2005). However, by having the researcher define the unit of shared identity within a community, the relational power dynamics are already skewed to give more power to the researcher. Understanding the identification process of a marginalized community is an imperative component of the first tenet of CBPR, which is the formation of the researcher-community partnership (McAllister et al., 2003). SIT analysis requires communities to define their own identity, thus relational power is positively redistributed back to the community by fully understanding their own identification process. Identity deconstruction is critical to empowerment (Papa et al., 2006), so CBPR efforts to increase empowerment within marginalized communities can be facilitated through understanding identity. Standard CBPR practices pre-define the community identification, which limits the communities' conversations that fall outside of those parameters leading to group othering (Papa et al., 2006; Brown and Pehrson, 2019).

SIT AND UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY BEHAVIORS AND NORMS

The community within CBPR projects is defined as any form of mutual identification or social ties (Israel et al., 1998). In practice, the researchers often assign the parameters of identification to a community by a health issue, race, geographic area, or age demographic. While these categories allow for clear community

definitions, they don't allow communities to define their own identification, which is counter to the philosophy of CBPR (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011) and is not in spirit with the social justice requirement of allowing communities to construct meaning for themselves (Papa et al., 2006). Unique to participatory research paradigms is the self-assignment of community members (Israel et al., 1998). This is important because understanding what mutual ties communities see for themselves would allow scholars to have a rich understanding of community beliefs, behaviors, and norms, which is imperative to creating efficacious CBPR interventions (Israel et al., 1998). SIT analysis would also allow scholars to see the strengths of social identity within communities (Usborne and Taylor, 2010).

Finally, SIT can help CBPR teams develop interventions that are more culturally competent. SIT posits that individuals want to maintain a positive self-concept (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999). An in-depth analysis of the identity of community members would provide key analysis into the culture and cultural practices of a community (Devia et al., 2017; Wallerstein et al., 2017). For example, Devia et al. (2017) argued that understanding the culture of communities facilitates positive group dynamics as well as facilitating long-term success of the intervention. Understanding the identification of a community is critical to understanding the community itself. If CBPR scholars take the time to understand how communities achieve positive distinctiveness, SIT can help scholars combat the deficit model and understand the strengths of the community better. The communities' processes of achieving positive distinctiveness can then be included within intervention designs (Jetten et al., 2012). Including the identification process within the intervention design supports Israel et al. (1998) argument that CBPR needs to have a holistic perspective of the communities' social structures, which in turn influences the capacity building outcome of the CBPR intervention. Thus, SIT considerations in CBPR designs can establish the framing of the message in a way that is conducive to the community identity (Chaskin, 2001; Wallerstein et al., 2008; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011).

SIT AND MANAGING UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES IN CBPR

SIT can also help CBPR scholars navigate the unintended consequences of homogenizing community members. As Cho and Salmon (2006) argued, there will always be unintended consequences to any intervention. However, researchers should attempt to predict potential unintended consequences through multi-level analysis (Cho and Salmon, 2006). Communities within CBPR projects are marginalized (Israel et al., 1998; Wallerstein, 2006; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011). On a macro-scale, the community could also have lower status and power within society. As SIT proposes, groups encountering threats to positive distinctiveness can address conflict through social creativity, social competition, or individual mobility (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). While members of a community might share traits or characteristics that lend themselves to being defined

as singular units of identity, marginalized community members may deal with in-group conflict differently (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Haslam et al., 2001; Usborne and Taylor, 2010). For example, Huse and Wendorf Muhamad (2018) examined the social identification of Appalachians, a cultural group within the United States who have been marginalized and stereotyped as unintelligent hillbillies (Billings et al., 1999; Algeo, 2003; Tighe, 2007; Cooke-Jackson and Hansen, 2008; Wood and Hendricks, 2009). In order to address these stereotypes associated with Appalachia, Appalachians strived toward positive distinctiveness by either promoting the positive attributes of the community or by disassociating from the group entirely (Huse and Wendorf Muhamad, 2018). When analyzing social identities that aren't permeable (e.g., race, sex, sexual orientation), members of a marginalized community may choose to disassociate from the group in order to maintain a positive self-concept (Huse and Wendorf Muhamad, 2018). By seeing community identity as a dynamic multidimensional process, CBPR scholars could be less likely to homogenize communities to singular traits of identification (Morley and Robins, 2002) such as geography, religion, or cultural association.

Homogenizing a community to singular units of identity could lead to unintended consequences on mico-, meso-, and macro-scales. First, because individuals may use different strategies to achieve positive distinctiveness, CBPR interventions that homogenize communities may have different reactions from different people, and could have unintended consequences. Interventions could unintentionally divide people who use different strategies to achieve positive distinctiveness, and make some feel isolated or blamed for the intervention health issue. In addition, if the intervention message doesn't consider individuals who use individual mobility, a boomerang effect could ensue (Cho and Salmon, 2006). Although CBPR tries to shed light on unintended consequences, where there is action there will be unintended effects (Cho and Salmon, 2006).

The latent effects of not considering social identity within interventions could permeate to multiple fields of influence. Cho and Salmon (2006) argued that an unintended consequence of viewing a community from a systems level approach (like SIT) could lead to multilevel influence of unintended consequences by stating:

> "Individuals may carry the intended meanings to unintended levels and contexts through subsequent communicative actions, and the social environments surrounding them may direct the process and outcomes of a campaign to unintended contexts and levels." (p. 296)

The consequences of intervention may affect an individual, but may also affect the larger communities' levels of identification (Cho and Salmon, 2006). In order to understand the ripple effect action may have, a system-level analysis on the identification process of the community could mitigate the unintended consequences within CBPR designs (Cho and Salmon, 2006).

LIMITATIONS TO APPLYING SIT TO CBPR

The most significant barrier in applying SIT to CBPR requires analysis into the method of identity deconstruction and testing. Without knowing who the community is, finding a pairing between scholars and communities based on common interests would be difficult. The methodology for determining social identification within a community would also be difficult. While traditional methods of social identity are surveys, many marginalized communities may feel alienated from the process of distributing a survey (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011). Non-traditional approaches such as participatory ethnographic methods (e.g., photovoice, see Wang and Burris, 1997; or narrative journaling see Hubbert et al., 1999), or narrative interviews or dialogue circles (Barz and Cohen, 2011), should be explored as potential data collection methods for examining SIT.

Because SIT is a specific theory with potential problems in application, researchers need to test SIT within the field of CBPR. If SIT is insufficient in examining the context of CBPR, the broader identification approach, which includes self-categorization theory and principles of SIT, could then be tested for its applicability to CBPR (Turner, 1999). Utilizing the CBPR practice of dialogue, scholars can attempt to co-learn the communities' identification with them.

DISCUSSION

Taking the time to understand community identity is critical when considering the social justice elements of CBPR. The paradigm of CBPR strives to combat social justice inequalities, but the process of achieving change is critical in pursuing social justice (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2011). Social identity is critical to social justice (Papa et al., 2006). According to Artz and Murphy (2000), as previously argued, by Artz and Murphy (2000) identity as defined and understood by the community should be a critical step of pursuing social justice within CBPR intervention designs (Papa et al., 2006).

This paper examined how SIT can aid the mission of CBPR, which is to empower marginalized populations through participation in the research process (Israel et al., 1998). Social identity can help scholars by (a) illustrating how social identity analysis can facilitate the researcher-community partnership, (b) applying SIT to better understand community behaviors and norms, and (c) using SIT to avoid unintended consequences within CBPR intervention designs. As the cry for standardized approaches to communication with marginalized populations continues, intergroup communication theory can be the key to helping to navigate, understand, and explain identity of marginalized communities. SIT analysis could be the best way to protect the social justice for marginalized populations in which CBPR teams serve.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

L-KH conceived the idea of the study, reviewed the literature, and wrote the final manuscript.

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