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Epistemological inclusiveness in researching the African American community

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ABSTRACT

African American communities have experienced negative effects from a history of medical abuse, lack of proper research procedures, and misinterpretations of study findings because of racism. These past injustices have led to a mistrust of research and researchers. This paper focuses on how some methodological challenges, in a study funded by a National Institutes of Health grant on two low-income African American communities in Kentucky, were mediated through the collaboration of a multi-racial/ethnic team of researchers engaged in cross-disciplinary research. The information for this paper is based on the reflections of key members of the research team. The reflections show that having researchers with different epistemologies resulted in a culturally aware and sensitive study in which emic and etic research approaches were adopted. The inclusion of race-based epistemologies and close community ties were found to be particularly useful in building trust and getting the support of the two communities. However, these outcomes were only possible because research team members provided each other latitude for intellectual freedom and leadership.

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Introduction

Cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural research is gaining popularity worldwide (Bird, Campbell-Hall, Kakuma, & The MHaPP Research Programme Consortium, 2013; Dawad & Veenstra, 2007; Hantrais, 1995, 2009), and, specifically, in health-related research where it is used to strengthen health systems and scale up interventions (Gonzalez Block, 2006). This type of research usually requires careful, deliberate collaboration to integrate data, methodologies, perspectives and concepts from various fields in the attempt to understand 'new knowledge' or find the solution for real world problems (Huzairi, Zaini, & Zaini, 2012). Simultaneously, others have recognized that there are social relations of power within research teams that can thwart the collaboration process (Cohen, Kruse, & Anbar, 1982; Mauthner & Bell, 2007).

Although the impact of mixed methods research has been well-studied and found to be valuable in research on different socio-cultural populations, what has been less researched is the impact of using teams of researchers with varying racial/ethnic backgrounds, gender identity, and/or nationalities, on

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methodological approaches. This paper explores the influence of race, culture, and epistemology on the methodological development and implementation of a research grant funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States. The study was conducted by a team of university researchers on two communities in Kentucky with a substantial portion of African American residents: one in an urban center and one in a smaller town surrounded by rural farmland. The NIH study did not set out to analyze how the social structure of a multidisciplinary, multi-racial/ethnic research team can impact research design and implementation. Team composition, however, presented an opportunity to examine how a diverse set of researchers with different epistemological positions mediated some of the ethical concerns linked to researching the Black community. The uniqueness of this paper, therefore, is that it examines the research methodology used to navigate the power relations between the research team and the two African American communities. In the second half of the paper, we also address the relationships among and between research team members as they negotiated their various roles in the communities and in the study overall.

The NIH project

The purpose of the NIH project was to explore individual, familial, community, and structural factors that influence fruit and vegetable consumption in two African-American communities in Kentucky. Specifically, it sought to gather data on the knowledge and beliefs of the participants on diet, health, and illness in their families and community. The study purpose was met using a multi-stage study design implemented in two African American communities in Kentucky: Louisville and Hopkinsville. Both locations have sizeable African-American communities, 22.9% in Louisville and 31.9% in Hopkinsville (United States Department of Census, 2012). According to the 2010 US Census, Louisville is a large city with a population of 597,337. The research sample was taken from residents located in West Louisville, which is a geographically distinct and segregated section of the city where 79% of the residents (51,000 of 64,741) are African-American (Crutcher, 2013). Hopkinsville is a smaller city (mid-sized) with 31,577 residents (United States Department of Census [USDOC], 2012). Compared to West Louisville, Hopkinsville is a smaller population center surrounded by rural farmland. It is also more racially integrated than Louisville.

The research design for the grant involved three main phases. First, we conducted transect walks[1] and semi-structured interviews in homes. We identified participants based on zip codes and personal contacts of some faculty members and staff at our university. Snowball sampling procedures helped us recruit more participants until we conducted six transect walks and 41-h interviews: 20 with residents of West Louisville and 20 with residents of Hopkinsville. Second, we collected paper and pencil survey data from community centers, churches, barber shops, and other gathering venues inside the communities. The total sample size was 310 (n = 153 in West Louisville and n = 157 in Hopkinsville). Third, we employed a market-trade off survey and collected quantitative data utilizing special computers and software set up in a secure space during community events. Again, our total sample size was just under 400 (N = 393: n = 167 in West Louisville and n = 226 in Hopkinsville). All three phases were conducted in African American neighborhoods and necessitated various levels of face-to-face interactions with individuals, households, community leaders, local business, churches and the community as a whole.

Issues of trust and epistemology

Issues surrounding African American participation in research have stimulated much interest over the years (Earl & Penney, 2001; Huang & Coker, 2010). Researchers have debated the extent to which the memory and/or legacy of the US government-sanctioned Tuskegee Experiment that resulted in paralysis, blindness, dementia, and shame in the African American community, is the root cause of mistrust by the African American community, or whether mistrust of research is the result of other examples of medical abuse (Davis, Green, & Katz, 2012; James et al., 2011; Thomas & Quinn, 2000).

In sum, mistrust comes from both factual and perceived instances of exploitation and discrimination and is based on a history of medical abuse, racism, lack of information, lack of understanding of informed consent, racial stigmas, and poor recruitment efforts (Corbie-Smith, Thomas, Williams, & Moody-Ayers, 1999; Huang & Coker, 2010).

To increase the participation of African Americans in research projects, researchers should therefore be culturally aware and sensitive and make a conscious effort to have positive attitudes and actions. Researchers should also clearly define research projects as beneficial and/or educational, and the informed consent process should be explained to participants before entering the field (Huang & Coker, 2010). An effective gatekeeper can greatly assist in ensuring that most of these features are met and that researchers can garner the support and trust of the African American population.

Although these recommendations can be seen as 'simply good field research,' they are particularly important in researching the African American community because of the group's history and because more recent data collection has been used to negatively depict this racial group (Earl & Penney, 2001). Scheurich and Young (1997) suggest that the impact of racism may be unconsciously missed at the epistemological and methodological levels by White researchers. Further, Stanfield (2011a) suggests that if the role of epistemology in research is not taken into account, then it is more likely that the paradigms used for data collection and interpretation are grounded in biases (e.g. ethnocentric).

Epistemology is understood as the study of knowing, specifically addressing the nature of the relationship between the inquirer and the inquired. In reference to Black Feminist epistemology, Collins (1991) points out that such epistemology is composed essentially of the following four main 'contours' or characteristics: (i) concrete experiences are treated as a criterion of meaning; (ii) dialogs are used in assessing knowledge claims; (iii) an ethic of caring is developed; and (iv) an ethic of personal accountability is accepted (pp. 208–219). Within these understandings, epistemology queries whether there is complete "objective detachment or value freedom" in the conduct of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 201). In other words, to what extent do one's values and preconceptions affect what she sees, hears, and records in the field (Patton, 2015)?

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), there are some individuals who believe that research is inherently 'objective' and claim to not have an epistemological stance that influences their data collection and interpretations. These individual researchers are of the view that the questions they ask are linked to their respective discipline interests and that assumptions or pre-conceived knowledge about their subjects do not affect the analyses or the methodologies adopted. Other researchers suggest that there are epistemic justifications in research and that there are different forms of consciousness or ideologies based on the social situations and conditions of specific groups (Barnes & Bloor, 1982; Fuller, 1996; Hoare & Smith, 1971; Stanfield, 2011b). As a result, there can be different assumptions about what that reality can be (epistemology) and these differences influence inquiry about that reality (methodology).

The extent to which researchers from different social settings can truly capture the experiences (reality) of others and the understanding of their situation is challenging in cross-cultural research. How much of what is investigated and interpreted is influenced by the researcher's own construct? Tsai et al. (2004) argue that a researcher's values and understanding of the social world can influence the data collection process and analysis. For example, Lassiter (2000) explores the sensitive issue surrounding the Western research tradition, which tends to 'place the single author in a dominant relationship with the text's "subjects"' when the researchers are outsiders (p. 601). Lassiter (2000) argues for the collaborative ethnography method, which requires and encourages communication between the researcher and the participants that is characterized by the sharing of equal power between both parties.

These insider and outsider perspectives have been linked to what is known as the emic and etic approaches in research methodologies (Patton, 2015; Sanday, 1979). The two approaches, however, may provide different findings because they emerge from assumptions associated with the researcher's own constructs. According to Pike (1954), the etic approach involves 'standing far enough away from, or outside of, a particular culture so as to observe the similarities or differences from other cultures' (p. 10). Here, the researcher is more interested in testing hypotheses and as such attempts to identify

common components or universal aspects of human behavior that transcend cultural differences (Fukuyama, 1990; Lu, 2012; Ridley, Mondoza, & Kanitz, 1994). In other words, the etic approach assumes that all cultures can be observed as generalizable phenomena, with comparable features and universalistic measures.

In contrast, leading anthropologists Boas and Sapir argue that meaningful distinctions can only be made by people within the cultures, that is, the emic perspective (as cited in Patton, 2015). Researchers who adopt the emic approach assume that the best way to understand a culture is from the perspectives and values of those being observed. The emic approach attempts to identify culture-specific elements or human behavior that cannot be comparable across all cultures and therefore requires relative measures. The two approaches, etic and emic, are frequently discussed in a wide range of cross-cultural literatures (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999; Wright-St Clair et al., 2013). As a general rule, the epistemology of the researcher and whether the relationship between the inquirer and the inquired is embraced and valued often determines the adoption of an approach characterized by an emic or etic focus.

Since the emergence of race-based epistemologies, a wide range of Black scholars have elected to include them in their research.[2] Their inclusion, in turn, has stimulated heated debates as to whether race-based epistemologies could be creating parallel subjective and racist results (see Hunter, 2002). Proponents of race-based epistemologies argue that if the life experiences of people of African descent are integral to the analysis of research, then there should be some degree of an Afro-centric, Black, or race-based epistemological framework embedded in the study. Implicit in embracing race-based epistemology is the adoption of the emic approach that recognizes that there are distinct historical and cultural experiences of the African people (Kershaw, 1992), and in this way engenders the inclusion of the community's understandings and interpretations of their conditions and experiences in the research findings.

As a general rule, a useful epistemological position for those who are of a different cultural background researching 'the other' is to maintain a critical relationship to the research topic (and population) through self-reflexivity (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004; Knowles, 2006). This process requires self-reflection by researchers and acknowledgment that there are differences between the researcher and those being studied. Within this context, the authors of this paper thought that it would be interesting to reflect on the various epistemologies that were adopted during the aforementioned research project, in particular those of the African American and researchers of color on the team.

The research team and methodological reflections

The research team was composed of faculty members and graduate research assistants from different disciplines. Over the course of the project there were modifications to the team's composition and the actual data collectors in the field varied based on individual availability. This paper uses reflexivity to reveal team members' interests and relationships with the African American community. The reflections reported on in this paper are from team members who interacted most with the communities from the Departments of Communication, Pan-African Studies, and Sociology. The team members included two junior White faculty (one who was the PI), two junior African American faculty, two senior women of color faculty, an African American Research Assistant, and three African American gatekeepers, two of whom also assisted in data collection (see Table 1). In addition, our data include recalled commentary from a senior African American male researcher who was involved in the early design stages, but died before data collection began.

Although the reflections of all the main team members are examined, for purposes of looking at race-based epistemology and emic approaches in researching the African American community, the reflections and perspectives of the African American and team members of color are made central to the analysis and discussion of this paper. The experiences observed and discussed focus primarily on the earlier phases of the project – the qualitative research and the paper and pencil survey data

Table 1. Breakdown of team member role and race/ethnicity.

Team member	Role in research project	Race/ethnicity
#1	Senior faculty, member of original grant writing team and data collector	Person of color
#2	Principal investigator, junior faculty, member of original grant writing team and data collector	White
#3	Senior faculty, member of original grant writing team (deceased)	African American
#4	Junior faculty member of original grant writing team and data collector	White
#5	Senior faculty and data collector	Person of color
#6	Junior faculty and data collector	African American
#7	Junior faculty and data collector	African American
#8	Junior term faculty, gatekeeper (Louisville), and data collector	African American
#9	Research assistant and data collector	African American
#10	Gatekeeper (Louisville and Hopkinsville) and data collector (Hopkinsville)	African American
#11	Gatekeeper (Hopkinsville)	African American

collection because these involved greater face-to-face interactions with residents and solicitations of trust and participation.

Data for this paper were collected from researchers' reflections at four different activities at various parts of the grant's study design and implementation. First, recollections from researchers who were involved in the early planning meetings for the grant proposal described their rationale for selecting the communities, the research team and the research design for the grant proposal. Second, the researchers recalled that once the grant was approved the other assistant professors, data collectors and gate keepers joined the team's discussions at several planning meetings organized around implementing the research. Third, team members remembered that there were conversations with each other, the gatekeepers, and the student research assistants while planning the field data collection processes and while in the field collecting data. Oftentimes, these conversations occurred on the campus, in vehicles while traveling to the communities, as well as in hotel rooms, lobbies and restaurants. The team also included in their reflections the lessons learned and moving-forward tips that were discussed as they traveled back to campus. Lastly, an opened-ended questionnaire that was focused on the research themes of this paper was sent to those team members who were heavily involved with data collection.

Reflective findings

Our reflective findings center on two main themes. The first, and more prominent theme, is how different epistemologies influenced team members' interactions in the field and how these interactions, in turn, shaped the researchers' personal epistemologies. Within this first main theme, several subthemes emerged: (1) the effect of the researchers' race-based epistemologies on the study's design, (2) the effect of race and ethnicity on community relations, and (3) the effect of fieldwork on the researchers' epistemologies. The second finding focused on the internal development of team structure and leadership roles assumed by full-time faculty during the design and implementation of the grant. Within this theme we discuss when and how conflict emerged and was resolved.

Effect of diverse epistemologies in research design

A woman of color in the Department of Communication initiated writing the research proposal to study culture and communication in African American communities. The grant initiator approached a White colleague whom she knew had prior success securing funding from NIH. Selection of the type of research was based on epistemological interests linked to study population, academic discipline and appropriateness for grant funding. For example:

> I wanted to write a grant whose main focus was on the African American community. My previous work on HIV-AIDS made it apparent that although the African American community was the group most severely affected, they were not the group most aware of the disease or of how to prevent the spread of the virus. (#1)

The next step was to seek out appropriate research team members based on the research population, research area specialization and skillset. For the purposes of the NIH grant proposal the composition of the final research team reflected: (1) the research interests of its members and their desires to implement a multidisciplinary study and (2) an acknowledgment by the initial team members of the importance of expanding their numbers to include scholars who were familiar with researching the life experiences of African Americans. To address this latter point, team member 1 approached a senior faculty member from the Department of Sociology (#3) who had years of research experience primarily focused on African Americans. Once team member 3 agreed to join the team, he suggested bringing on several other people with expertise in various areas relevant to the research design (e.g. methodological expertise, local community connections, and medical sociology). Team members 4 and 5 were specifically suggested by team member 3 and led to the development of a well-balanced study group. On reflection, team members 3 and 5 reported that they agreed to join the group because of their personal and epistemological links to the African American community, while team members 1, 2, and 4 were motivated by the social justice element of the research.

The inclusion of researchers with different racial identities was a useful strategy that could ensure that the community benefit from the research and help reduce the potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

> Expanding the qualitative elements of the research and making it more participatory would help empower the two communities in the research process and also in the use of the findings. (#3)

Team member 3 suggested that transect walks with trusted community contacts, conversations with community residents and leaders, and visits to the communities were important steps to build trust among their residents and to underwrite the African American community involvement in the research process and outcomes. Similar sentiments were shared by all the African Americans on the research team, and supported by the other team members. For example the junior African American faculty members reported that:

> I was attracted to the study because I saw it as an opportunity to further enhance my research skills in a project that could also be beneficial to the African American community. I also saw it as an opportunity to get to know the local African American community. (#6)

The study's main aims were what attracted me to the project, as my research interests are closely aligned to the overall purpose of the study. Also, the study provided a wonderful opportunity for me to become further acquainted with key gatekeepers, the overall community and other like-minded researchers. This study also allowed me to hone specific research skills. (#7)

> The research topic alone was an advantage. African American families are all impacted in some way by the food choices or habits that have been passed down from generation to generation. This project addressed a need many African Americans in the community have wanted to discuss, the need and desire to want to eat healthy. (#8)

Similarly a gatekeeper felt that:

> I was giving back to my community in some way. I had always said that I wanted to do that in Hopkinsville. I hope[d] that somehow, this was a start to that journey. (#9)

Clearly, epistemological positions derived from relationships with the African American community drove many individual scholars' decisions to be involved in the study. The closeness and/or identification of the research team members with the research population manifested in some type of social obligation to help the community become healthier.

The epistemological impact of team member 3 on the research methodology was also evident in the team's consensus to conduct the proposed qualitative interviews in participants' homes or familiar places and to ensure that these conversations were initiated by African American team members. Moreover, utilizing participants' homes and spaces would provide an opportunity for the experiences of the African American community to be documented and understood from their own perspectives. The team thought that having insights into participants' daily surroundings would also provide a better socio-cultural context for the interpretation of the paper and the pencil survey data and market-led exercises.

Other research team members, such as the African American gatekeepers, also helped ensure that other aspects of researching the African American community were in place, such as providing comfortable and safe data collection venues and conducting data collection activities in the presence of other trusted members of the community (e.g. family, friend, pastor, and barber):

> Since the interviews were at the participant's place of residence they were extremely comfortable and more willing to respond. Other family members were in the home while the interview took place. I think this alone provided a sense of security for them. (#8)

Similarly, the research team knew that one of the issues related to why African Americans are suspicious of research is because, in the past, the process and outcomes of studies were not always explained to them. As a result, in the NIH-funded research, potential participants were always informed about the process, not only as an Institutional Review Board requirement, but also as an effort to explain the social benefits for the African American community that could be accrued from the study findings (i.e., insight into how to communicate with community residents about factors influencing their high rates of obesity and associated health issues).

Recruitment of community contacts

The community contacts or gatekeepers were recruited from students and staff whose families were from the two African American communities. This recruiting process was not surprising as most colleges and universities in the US are predominantly White institutions. Most faculty members generally do not live or socialize in the local African American communities, and rarely in poor neighborhoods, irrespective of race/ethnicity.

Although community contacts were initiated from all faculty members on the research team, more contacts were made by the team members who had the longest and more established professional and social relationships in the community. As such, the gatekeepers and community contacts were derived from a confluence of factors, such as personal friendships, professional departmental relationships, and lived experiences in the community. Team members 1 and 5, and to a slightly lesser extent 2 were initially the main recruiters of community contacts and gatekeepers. They had staff members in their departments who grew up either in Louisville or Hopkinsville and who agreed to help the team generate additional community contacts. Successful assistance in reaching out to both communities was possible because over the years these faculty members had developed close professional and personal relationships with the staff and students who acted as gatekeepers:

> One of the gatekeepers recruited was one of my former graduate students and trusted me socially and as a mentor. She also knew my epistemological position and allegiance to the Black community. (#5)

The racial identities of the gatekeepers and their close personal ties to the community were very beneficial to the research development, process and objectives. For example:

> I was very familiar with the location and the area of where the participants resided. I have family members who live in the West End [of Louisville]. My knowledge of the area and my ability to spark conversation with participants about the local community contributed to the level of comfort participants displayed in their responses. (#8)

The gatekeepers and community contacts were able to convince community residents, businesses, and churches to support the research project, sanction participation, and get the sample sizes required. There is no doubt that the willingness of the communities to participate in the study had a lot to do with the person who contacted them. For example:

> I talked about the research project and how important it was for us to get Black folks to do these interviews … He told me that, 'yes, I would love to help … I'll open up my shop for anything you need, what day y'all coming?' (#10)

Effect of fieldwork on researchers' epistemologies

The reflections from both junior and senior African American researchers revealed that although epistemology informs methodology, fieldwork that builds epistemic relationships along cultural identities

can inform epistemology. For example, while the senior African American scholars of color acted on their epistemological beliefs and understandings, the junior, less experienced, African American scholars were less conscious of theirs until they reflected on their data collection experiences. Clear meaningful relationships emerged from an emic connection to the participants who looked like them and their family members. Recognition of similar cultural traditions and habits, as well as being treated by the participants as 'one of them,' ignited strong feelings of identification:

> During the interviews, I was emotionally moved [because] it was easy for me to see my grandmother, my cousins, even myself in the participants. When I did the interviews in [West Louisville], they were so comfortable [with] me being in their homes. One of the ladies actually kind of waved me over to her pantry and cabinets so I could see what she kept. A young lady I interviewed in Louisville was about my age, and single, like me. And we laughed and talked like old times. (#6)

> Although my methodological training and research prior to this study is rooted in race-based epistemology, my experiences with people in the community further strengthened my view of the importance of acknowledging my beliefs and my place as a researcher within communities. Having meaningful interactions with a study participant who stated that I remind her of her niece highlighted, for me, the need to always be aware of these bonds when conducting research. (#7)

Fascinatingly, relationships were easy to build based on the social identity of the African American researchers with the respondents, and the respondents with the African American researchers. For example:

> [I could feel] myself developing these bonds in short amounts of time … I can say that I've never felt that way before while collecting data. And I was particular about them having consent forms and knowing my name on the form, and knowing where they can call … These are people we're working [with] here, not just subjects or data points. (#6)

Sharing similar racial identities and cultures built empathic relationships. Moreover, all the African American members of the research team reported that they believe that race matters and is useful in building trust, particularly in researching the African American community. Whereas having insiders on research teams in general can have the same effect in any community-based research project, gatekeepers in this study felt that race/ethnicity mattered.

> African Americans feel more comfortable talking to other African Americans or should I say people that look like us/them. People trust the people that we grew up with. The trust must be there to get the information. (#11)

African American faculty members were not the only ones who made discoveries regarding their identities and how these identities impacted the project. White faculty members also recognized that their racial identities had to be taken into consideration and therefore, negotiated different roles in the research process. For example, one White faculty member reported that in Louisville:

> Due to the anticipated reaction of community members to me as an 'outsider', I did not interview study participants and directly ask them personal questions. Instead, my roles were behind the scenes. (#4)

Interestingly, the two White faculty members identified more closely with the rural community of Hopkinsville.

> I noted the similarities between my hometown and this small town surrounded by rural farm land. I identified with the flow of life in a small town, and I felt a sense of camaraderie with our participants from this location despite the fact that our race, gender, and socioeconomic status sometimes differed. It was easy to talk with them about growing up in a small town where everyone seems to know everyone. (#2)

> In Hopkinsville, all of the research team members were outsiders in various ways. None of us were members of the churches, clients of the barbershops, or residents of the town. Here, I did interact with community members in relatively unobtrusive and less personal research activities. (#4)

These reflections illustrate that research team members developed emic connections to the research context. These connections were based in the researchers' ability to relate to the community participants in the rural area and/or through their racial and cultural similarities to the research participants.

In summary, our reflections revealed three important themes that explained how racial identities positively impacted the project. These were the effect of the researchers' race-based epistemologies on the study's design, the effect of race and ethnicity on community relations, and the effect of fieldwork

on the researchers' epistemologies. Because previous research has focused on researchers' emic and etic approaches (e.g. Pike, 1954), a major element of our reflections included the ways in which the team members referenced their epistemologies and negotiated their roles during the design and execution of the research methodology.

Negotiating intellectual and research roles and responsibilities

Our findings suggest that cross-cultural research benefits from having racially and ethnically diverse research teams with different epistemologies. Specifically, this diversity fosters dialog to assess knowledge claims and helps cultivate an ethic of caring and personal accountability among researchers, which is particularly important for researching populations that have been misrepresented in the past and among whom issues of trust persist. In such situations, epistemological inclusiveness can be helpful in overcoming logistical challenges, establishing trust, and creating comfortable and meaningful environments to build a better understanding of research populations. However, differences in epistemologies, roles and responsibilities must be negotiated, particularly when diverse research teams are involved. Thus, a fourth theme emerged from the reflections of the key researchers that centered on elements of internal team function and structure.

In this study, team members varied by research disciplines and interests, methodological expertise, race and ethnicity, and in the academic ranking of faculty members and others. Mauthner and Bell (2007) argue that power in research teams can be found in four sites: (i) the institution where research is circumscribed by academic groups and a sense of belonging based on cultural and geographical boundaries; (ii) enacted practices and experiences that involve interpersonal dynamics linked to different types of belonging (i.e. the space in which we work, the field work in which we engage, the participants whom we interview, and the documents that we produce), which possess some overlap with the concept of epistemology; (iii) the discourse and understanding or agreement of how labor should be divided and how team work should be organized; and, (iv) the extent to which the social relations of power within the team allow for members to interpret, question, modify the team work, and manage their belongings. Past research also points out that this last power site can be constrained and influenced by task requirements and that social relations among team members can affect task performance (Cohen et al., 1982).

Although the first three power sites from the Mauthner and Bell (2007) study existed within the research and our team, the reflections of team members tended to center on the last site (i.e. social relations) when recalling issues of decision-making and control. The roles adopted by different members were generally non-conflictual, reflecting the composition of the team and the sharing of intellectual leadership. Cohen et al. (1982) provide some description of this type of team function in their overlapping typologies of research team designs and leadership roles.[3] The reflections of team members in this study suggest that the team design and structure was similar to Cohen and colleagues' Type B design. Team members freely inserted their research interests in the study design (as described in the recalled discussions with team member 3) and collectively decided on what data were to be gathered and which team members were most suitable to guide these data collection methods. What this study showed was that some of these decisions were epistemologically- and discipline-based with the appropriate emic and etic approaches. As such, where intellectual matters were concerned there were minimal levels of conflict. For example, members with qualitative expertise were tapped to lead and oversee the transect walks and interviews, while members with quantitative expertise made decisions about survey construction and members with emic perspectives contributed to data collection considerations.

Although the PI possessed a particular area of expertise, she tended to coordinate rather than dominate intellectual discussions about the first phases of the study. However, she took on a central intellectual role in the execution of the latter phases of the study that involved quantitative data collection (specifically, with regard to the construction of a market trade-off survey for which no other team member possessed experience). When disagreements arose during the study, a collective discussion generally ensued to clarify the team's approach, with greater argument weight or perspective placed

in the province of those with perceived domain expertise. Thus, these discussions were often led by the team member who had been conferred epistemological and/or discipline-based intellectual leadership during the grant writing process and implementation. Yet, these informal discussion leaders consistently solicited, entertained, and incorporated others' viewpoints and opinions in negotiating a final decision or approach.

With regard to team leadership, Cohen et al. (1982) also describe four managerial styles (i.e. bridge, facilitator, line manager, and nominal), which overlap but are conceptually distinct from the construction of the four research team designs described above. According to the reflections of the original grant writers, the PI, for the most part, performed both facilitator and bridge roles, which is generally in keeping with the leadership style of Type B team structures.

According to Cohen et al. (1982), the facilitator role involves the procurement and management of study resources (financial, institutional, and human). Senior team members who were already involved and/or obligated in different research and service capacities around the university were content to defer this responsibility to the PI, so little to no conflict emerged with respect to the management of study resources. The bridge role subsumes the facilitator role yet expands upon it to include 'additional functions of team interaction in the intellectual sphere' (p. 215). The presence of these two managerial roles is in keeping with the general findings of Cohen and colleagues, who espouse that interdisciplinary teams require a 'glue' to hold them together. In this study, when intellectual differences arose the PI often sought the assistance of team member 1 (who had been the longest standing team member) to help navigate and negotiate internal conflict so that data collection, coordination, and analysis proceeded smoothly. Although the need for conflict intervention was minimal, issues did arise from shifts in the context of the study and in the scope of work of some team members. However, the PI and the grant initiator met independently with affected members to discuss and identify a satisfactory course of action.

Conclusions

In sum, the reflections reported on in this paper show that multidisciplinary, multiracial/ethnic research teams reflect their members' epistemologies. There are those whose research interests are steeped in their discipline and area of specialization, others who might be more focused on the population to be studied, and others who try to balance research priorities with humanistic priorities. These differences are linked to the epistemological positions and preferences of individual researchers. Moreover, researchers in the same discipline can have different epistemologies based on race, gender, and/or other social factors. These different epistemologies can be seen as competing forces or they can be viewed as complementary and enriching to the research process. As was the case of this study, the inclusion of different epistemologies appropriate to the research population was welcomed and helpful in developing the research design and accessing the study population, employing the etic and emic approaches in data collection and analysis. Most important, they were crucial in building trust and participation among the African American community participants.

In retrospect, team members, regardless of their initial epistemologies, recognized that efforts to achieve an unbiased scientific process are never completely value-free, especially in the social sciences where research focuses on human interactions (see also Anderson, 1993; Hunter, 2002; Ladner, 1998). Indeed, the observations, reflections and experiences of the research team members uncovered varying epistemologies that did not compromise the process or the findings, but rather enhanced them.

Collaboration and tolerance for divergent approaches to scholarship and research methodology among the team members was critical to the success of this study and increased the likelihood that the information produced from the study was a more accurate representation of the perspectives, values, and experiences of those being studied. Further, some of the data collected and analyzed from the etic approach was corroborated by the information from the emic approach.[4]

What this study shows is that it is important to examine the power relations between researchers and a community and how historical negative impacts affect this relationship. Moreover, as is the case with

researching the Black community in the U.S., having multi-racial teams of researchers with race-based epistemologies can mitigate the negative impact of race-based social relations of power on research findings and interpretation. The study also reveals that there is a social context to funded projects and that within The Academy there are several levels of social stratification that can be observed in research teams. As a result, in addition to having researchers who reflect the racial or ethnic composition of the community being researched, and who also have epistemological relationships with that community, researchers with intellectual freedom and leadership can have a significant, positive impact on the planning, implementation, and analysis process of interdisciplinary research.

Notes

1. Keller (n.d.).
2. These studies can be found mainly in (Africana, Black, Pan-African, and Negro) academic journals of the African Diaspora.
3. The four typologies are not mutually exclusive of each other, nor are they on a continuum. Type A, which is highly centralized, is characterized by one dominant leader, such as the professor-student research assistant relationship. Type B, is less centralized and is characterized by a participatory structure among participants in which each member participates extensively in planning and implementing research tasks. For the most part, communication and responsibility are shared among team members unless the PI is needed to resolve a disagreement. Type C is decentralized in nature, with a minimal exercise of rights among members. Each member has independent subprojects and communication can be practically non-existent during study execution. Sub-project teams may reconvene at the end of the project to discuss findings. The fourth type, Type D, involves subject matter experts collaborating to execute a research plan created by the PI, who may have solicited expert ideas during plan development but ultimately formulated the specific plan. Team members may have responsibility for executing specific tasks of the research that the PI has preplanned, and the PI oversees execution of these plans, assigns tasks, and supervises activities. In essence, Type D lies somewhere between the highly centralized structure of Type A and the collaborative nature of Type B, where the PI acts in a similar role as a chief surgeon (i.e. allowing some team members to complete tasks, but checking on the fidelity of execution and intellectual knowledge application across the process).
4. Presented at the Kentucky Communication Conference (Della et al., 2013).

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