"We Are About Life-Changing Research": Community Partner Perspectives on Community-Engaged Research Collaborations

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Abstract

This study examines the ethics and politics of knowledge across 15 distinctive community-engaged research projects. We focus our analysis on interviews with community partners and consider their perceptions of research, academic research partners, motivations for partnering, and the benefits and challenges of community-engaged research. We highlight three themes: Community partners' (1) motivations to know better and more systematically what they already know, (2) interests in legitimating community-based knowledge (i.e., knowledge produced beyond the academy), and (3) efforts to navigate often inflexible university timelines and budgetary processes. Our findings highlight concerns at various ethical, political, and epistemic intersections and connect to the possibilities and limits of equity-oriented collaborative research methodologies for redressing epistemic and social injustices. We suggest that these challenges need systematized attention if the field of community-engaged research is to achieve the epistemological and social justice missions that are often articulated as the aspirations of such partnerships.

*Keywords: community-engaged research, community partner, knowledge
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In the 1990s and early 2000s, activist scholars, policymakers, community leaders, and students posed critiques of the insular nature of higher education and contributed to the formation of what later became known as community-engaged research, or "research that is conducted *with* and *for*, not *on*, members of a community" (Strand et al., 2003, p. xx; emphasis in original). Community-engaged scholarship facilitated more responsible approaches to social scientific inquiry that aimed to respond to urgent societal problems in marginalized communities (Boyer, 1990, 1996; Burawoy, 2005). Such approaches aimed to forge "complex, institutional, lasting collaboration[s] between academic institutions and communities" (Strier, 2014, p. 160) and emerged as promising alternatives to hierarchical modes of extractive research on communities. Proponents of these engaged practices—which are variously referenced in different fields and disciplines as research–practice partnerships, community-engaged research, action research, university–community partnerships, participatory research, and similar framings—argue that well-designed collaborations enhance the rigor, relevance, and reach of academic research projects (Balazs & Morello-Frosch, 2013; Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014; Warren et al., 2018). Although multiple institutional barriers constrain possibilities for faculty to partner with/in communities (e.g., tenure and promotion criteria; Eatman et al., 2018; Ellison & Eatman, 2008), community-engaged research remains a meaningful strategy for producing knowledge that advances long-term, sustainable, community-based

and community-driven change (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Farley-Ripple et al., 2018).

Collaborative research is in many ways antithetical to the individually based and competitive nature of traditional academic research (Bowl, 2008). To open space for and justify this research modality, some collaborative researchers have studied the partnerships themselves for clues about their efficacy, focusing largely on how the university researchers describe the specifics of the partnerships and projects. These studies position community partnerships as a way for universities to fulfill their public mission and serve local communities (Boyer, 1990; Brown-Luthango, 2013; Gronski & Pigg, 2000; Strier & Schechter, 2016) and to mitigate historically unequal and extractive university–community relations by rooting them in more equitable relations of trust and power-sharing (Denner et al., 2019; Werkmeister Rozas & Negroni, 2008; Strier & Schechter, 2016). Because community-engaged research is grounded in the lived experiences of community members, the research itself is poised to be both more relevant to the issues at hand and more rigorously interrogated, investigated, and analyzed by people who have the most at stake in the outcomes of the studies (Balazs & Morello-Frosch, 2013; Farquhar & Dobson, 2004; Glass et al., 2018; Strier, 2011, 2014). The multiple epistemological gains from more relevant research questions, ethically attuned methods, and community-responsive findings strengthen the warrants for social science research and can transform the terms of policy and practice (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014; Smyth, 2009; Strier, 2011; Subotzky, 1999).

Critical efforts to theorize and reimagine university research in community partnerships are ongoing (Nelson et al., 2015; Peacock, 2012), as the research community has raised concerns about the persistent colonial and racist entanglements that challenge even those researchers intending ethical and epistemological interventions (Glass et al., 2018; Sabati, 2018). However, this literature still primarily relies on researchers' reflections and experiences in relation to their own institutional contexts (e.g., Buys & Bursnall, 2007; Mirra & Rogers, 2016; Nelson et al., 2015) and more generally lacks in-depth empirical analyses of community partners' perspectives about collaborative research. Our study focuses on *community partners'* motivations to collaborate and their experiences with/in collaborative research partnerships. We offer insights drawn from projects that received seed funding from the Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California (CCREC), a systemwide research initiative across the University of California campuses. These collaborative research partnerships articulated specific ethical, epistemic, and relational values that CCREC identified as central to the praxis of "equity-oriented" collaborative, community-engaged research (CCREC, n.d.).

We approached this investigation as exploratory, seeking to learn from community partners about their motivations for pursuing research partnerships, their experiences with research, and what they have learned about the process of collaboration. We were particularly interested in community partners' insights into the early stages and overall aims of project formation, selection of research topic and design, and expectations of social change from the work. We also wondered about the labor of research and what material "asks" are made of community partners to initiate and sustain research collaborations. Finally, we were seeking to listen deeply with the kind of embodied, reflexive analysis called for by activist-scholars who build with and alongside communities to transform institutions and our society (Gillan & Pickerill, 2015).

Based on in-depth interviews with community partners from 15 different research projects, this inquiry illuminates how community partners understand the epistemic relevance and dynamics of collaborative research. Community partners identified three main themes that point to how they strategically navigate and intervene in the ethics and politics of knowledge and knowledge production. These negotiations of epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007; Kidd et al., 2017) manifest in their intentions for the research, their interests in reshaping whose knowledge counts, and their everyday interactions with researchers that reinforce for them that the timespace of knowledge production and dissemination in academia does not align well with that in communities. We explore these themes across multiple equity-oriented projects with differing topical foci, geographic and regional characteristics, and social and political contexts. This overview reveals distinctive frameworks for understanding key ethical, political, and epistemic dimen-

sions of collaborative research as well as for guiding structural institutional change, field development, and equity-oriented university–community research partnership formation.

Methodology

This study is based on in-depth interviews with community partners to examine the early dynamics of partnership formation in community-engaged research projects. Partners invited for interviews represent projects that were funded in response to calls for proposals designed to address both significant gaps in the research literature and significant challenges confronting disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

Equity-Oriented Community-Engaged Research Partnerships: Early Stages

The projects were selected in annual competitions between 2011 and 2015 that were open to faculty members across the 10-campus University of California system. Conceived in part as a response to the 2008 Great Recession, CCREC supported problem-based collaborative research aimed at addressing the state's interrelated crises precipitating in the economy, education, employment, environment, health, housing, and nutrition. These projects were grounded in and generated from the actual complex, entangled situations confronting communities and policymakers. Projects were positioned to investigate the crises harming local communities and to identify possible solutions to those crises. Collaborative research methodologies were also envisioned as central to facilitating public learning processes that would enable community residents and other stakeholders to deliberate about the challenges they face and to make reasoned, evidence-supported decisions for the common good.

CCREC's approach foregrounds ethics by positioning an equity orientation as the driver of the research collaboration, entailing active engagement with/in aggrieved communities when connecting justice-driven research to policy settings. It therefore raises epistemic and ethical issues that are not satisfactorily addressed by traditional research methods, existing codes of research ethics, and the requirements of institutional review boards (Anderson et al., 2012; Glass & Newman, 2015; Ross et al., 2010). For example, developing careful,

respectful relationships and valuing this process of relationship building as central to the research itself—not as simply assumed or as a side issue—is understood to be part of the ethical, epistemic, and political *necessary preconditions* for beginning an equity-oriented, justice-driven research project, as well as *necessary ongoing conditions* for accomplishing it. However, universities and funders rarely support the time- and resource-intensive processes of bringing together diverse partners and stakeholders in meaningful and respectful ways.

To make an ethical and epistemic intervention that could address this gap, CCREC awarded up to $20,000 for one year of support for these crucial formative stages of collaborative research projects. The 15 seeded projects in this study addressed a variety of issues at the core of their work, and can be categorized as having the following primary foci: labor (3), youth organizing (3), incarceration (2), environment (2), leadership development (2), immigration (1), community organizing (1), and Indigenous rights (1). However, given that these projects were intentionally designed to cut across multiple issues and communities, these categories are largely placeholders to help generally locate the projects and the community partners we interviewed.

Data Collection: Seed Grant Project and Respondent Selection

We purposefully selected 15 from among 20 funded projects to be solicited for interviews in the summer of 2015 at the conclusion of the four cycles of seed grant competitions. We considered their diverse geographic contexts, research questions, and activities as documented in their annual reports. We excluded from the analysis only those projects that were not research-focused, were only partially funded by CCREC, or that were focused on developing infrastructure within their institutional settings. Specifically, we excluded a grant that funded only the post-production workshop dialogue portion of a research and film project, two grants that funded research infrastructure to support local projects at two law schools and a campuswide center, and a grant that supported only a forum with policymakers concerning research that had already been completed. For each grant-funded project included in the study, we conducted separate interviews with the researcher partners and community partners, asking similar questions.

This article focuses on community partner responses because of how they illuminate the ethical, political, and epistemic intersections of community-engaged research and the challenges and opportunities thus revealed for researchers who pursue these methodologies.

For each funded project, the specific person interviewed came at the recommendation of the lead researcher, although one project referred us to an additional community partner whom we also interviewed. One community partner could not be reached, and one agreed to the interview to contribute to the analysis but did not agree to allow their words to be quoted in a research article. In the end, we conducted and coded 33 interviews, with 15 respondents identified as "community partner" and 18 as "researcher."

We use the terms "research partner" and "community partner" broadly to distinguish the primary affiliations of partners within projects, although this distinction does not necessarily bear on the research practices themselves where roles were often shared or blurred. The research partners all had formal university affiliations because this was required to be a principal investigator and receive a grant. Community partners, in contrast, had varied backgrounds and affiliations. Nine of the 15 respondents worked at or led community organizations and had no affiliation with the university of their research partner. The remaining six community partners were at one time connected to or involved with the university as a student, staff member, or instructor. These intersecting affiliations are perhaps unsurprising, given the ways that people meet and relationships are built, and how they affect community partners' interest in research, their familiarity with research methods, and their positionality in the social and research dynamics of a collaboration.

Our interviews with community partners probed four aspects: (1) the factors motivating the formation of the collaborative and the project's early ontogenesis; (2) the development, design, implementation, and evaluation of the research process; (3) the partner's reflections on opportunities or challenges in the project; and (4) the partner's expectations of and aspirations for anticipated change both within the project and with regard to broader issues of justice and social change that had a bearing on the work of the community organization.

The 60–90-minute interviews, conducted in person, by phone, or on Skype, were led by one of the three coauthors who, at the time, were doctoral students and were part of a larger team studying our own work as a Center to gain perspective on its strategic initiatives. Prior to conducting the interviews, we held an interviewer training to ensure interviewer consistency in contacting respondents, conducting interviews, and following postinterview procedures.

Analytic Frame and Process

We employed an inductive and iterative analytic process in which we reviewed interviewers' analytic field memos and constructed lists of emergent themes and findings. The study team noticed some striking alignments with a four-part conceptual framework that had been developed in a collaborative, reflexive, iterative process grounded in a different database of interviews emanating from a tandem CCREC project on ethical decision-making in community-engaged research, and collected by an overlapping research team. The emergent themes and findings were then reanalyzed, using the conceptual framework of the CCREC Ethics Project that was developed in dialogue with an internationally distinguished group of scholars and scholar-activists who participated in an invitational conference to interrogate and extend the framework through visualizing their analysis in real time (Baloy et al., 2016). The four-part conceptual framework includes attention to knowledge, relationality, place, and time (Table 1).

The category *knowledge* helped us delimit passages where partners discussed the intentions and aims of their collaboration, the agenda and design of their research project, and the sources of knowledge that were drawn upon to generate and produce knowledge in the research project, as well as discussions about knowledge sharing and stewardship. The category *relationality* helped us focus on the architecture of the partnership; that is, how partners established communication practices, negotiated obstacles, and delineated responsibilities. The concept of *place* pointed us to the ways in which partners described the unique social locations through which they entered into partnership, as well as the broader historical and material locations in which the collaborations unfolded. Finally, the category *time* was meant to capture the challenges of balancing real, immediate, on-

Table 1. Conceptual Framework for Understanding Community–Engaged Research Collaborations as Developed by the CCREC Ethics Project	
Knowledge: The generation, mobilization, and dissemination of knowledge within and beyond the project and the alignment of these relations to project purposes.	
	Mobilizing and leveraging knowledge: What is the work we want our work to do? What motivates the collaboration?
	Agenda and design: How are research partners framing or articulating the inquiry, including emergent concerns, questions, and needs?
	Generating and producing knowledge: What sources of knowledge do partners draw upon, need, and produce?
	Knowledge sharing and stewardship: How does the collaborative discuss audience, venue, authorship, and representation?
Relationality: The components of working collaboratively, including communication, negotiating obstacles, and delineating responsibilities.	
	Positionality, accountability, and responsibility: What are the roles and responsibilities of partners, including opportunities and challenges around issues of power, race, gender, class, ability, citizenship, language, and other identity markers?
	Communication: What systems of communication do collaborations utilize? How is positionality considered in the communications that are prioritized?
	Negotiation: How do partners navigate contentious issues, disagreements, or other obstacles when they emerge?
Place: The unique social locations through which partners enter into partnerships and the broader historical and material spatial contexts in which collaborations unfold.	
	Placing ourselves: How do participants place themselves in relation to systems of power and institutions, and in relation to land? What specific contexts influence the partnership and the work?
	Borders, scales, intersections, and proximities: What are the borders that partners navigate to collaborate and how does the research disrupt these?
	Positioning our work and materials: Where does the work of collaboration take place? Who "owns" these places?
	(Re)imagining places: What and whose visions of social change guide the project?
Time: Time deals with the challenges of balancing real, immediate, on-the-ground needs with long-term visions of change.	
	Project's history, process, and timeline: What were the origins of the project and how is the partnership sustained over the course of its lifetime?
	Past, present, and future of problem: How do collaborating partners juggle short- and long-term, urgent and future needs? Near- and long-term aspirations?
	Valuing people's and communities' time: How does the partnership recognize differences in who has the time to do the work, and how the work is or will be recognized remuneratively and otherwise?
	Institutional and organizational temporal rhythms: How are the demands of what is considered research/data/knowledge in the partnership met within the institutional and organizational variances in other temporal demands (such as around funding)?

the-ground needs for warranted knowledge with long-term visions of change, including the way in which institutional contexts structured relationships in the collaboration. In the absence of interrater reliability tests for NVivo 10 for Mac, we adopted an intentional process to ensure consistency in coding across multiple coders. The three coauthors who conducted the interviews coded three interviews independently and then came together to discuss and articulate the nuances of the coding schemes before going back and recoding these and the remaining interviews.

Findings on Ethically and Politically Fraught Knowledge and Knowledge Production

Three main findings emerged from the analysis and contextualize discussions of the rewards and challenges of community-engaged research, revealing how community partners strategically navigated and intervened in the ethical and political power dynamics of knowledge and knowledge production. The first finding highlights community partners' intentions toward research and their focus on the material impacts and opportunities that the collaboration afforded for their respective communities. The research itself was a means to an end for community partners, an end that rarely included speaking to the academic literature. Our analysis of these intentions invites discussions that enable community-engaged research projects to become more responsive to community partners' expressed desires, needs, and aspirations for collaboration.

The second finding pertains to community partners' long-term interests in reshaping prevailing cultural and institutional assumptions about whose knowledge counts and about the processes of knowledge production. Community partners repeatedly expressed frustrations with local, state, or federal agencies that assume community-based research is biased or illegitimate. We explore community partners' efforts to establish "community" as a viable space for knowledge production and their acknowledgments that this is not the norm.

Third, community partners detailed their perspectives on the material realities or impacts of the disjunctions in place, time, and processes that demarcate knowledge production in university settings from the knowledge dissemination and mobilization needs in the everyday workings of community organizations. A variety of ethical, political, and epistemic challenges arose in disparate timelines, student turnover, and university processes that slowed the process of partnership formation and research.

In the sections below, we draw on the words of community partners to illustrate these three thematic findings. To maintain respondent confidentiality, we have not described the projects in great detail, nor have we identified specific respondents with names or pseudonyms. We took care to ensure that all voices were represented and have not quoted any one respondent more than three times (in short or longer quotations).

"We Are About Life-Changing Research": Why Community Partners Collaborate

Understanding community partners' epistemic intentions, desires, and motivations for collaborating with university-based researchers provides important insight into the structural conditions that prefigure university–community collaboration. Key factors motivating community partners to engage in research collaborations were their desires for better data, or for analysis of existing data, in order to inform their organization's ongoing practices as well as their broader visions of community-based change. Other community partners expressed more urgent desires to secure further funding to sustain the work of their organizations, often in the face of skepticism. As one interviewee explained, the communities were not "being heard by the [funder's] program managers," so it was important that the assessment of their coalitional work across various communities be "academically sound." Interviewees from two projects discussed the research collaboration as an opportunity to explore what the organizations knew anecdotally in order to better understand how their program was working and to document its effects; as they put it: "So, we are about life-changing research; that's the kind of research projects we're interested in." That is, they explicitly recognized ethical, political, and epistemic intersections as motivations for their research collaborations.

Community partners from three projects that were focused on labor justice issues discussed research as *knowing better and more systematically what was already known*

among the leadership as an important component of developing policy strategies and/or bolstering existing policy campaigns. One community partner described wanting to test the limited evidence of the organization and extend the impact of what they were experiencing: "We had these individual cases of semi-anecdotal evidence . . . what can we do to broaden it out and make a bigger story?" The research provided an opportunity to quantify an understanding of the problem and to use the "numbers" for a variety of beneficial outcomes, including advocacy in the public arena, policy design, and sustaining the organization through solicitation of additional funding. The research also enabled them to "get a broader picture of how widespread the issue is" and conduct "some original research to understand that." Another partner described the importance of gathering data to inform policy specifically from "the point of view of the actual workers." The research was also described as something that could feed into developing policy proposals and to strategize organizing around the issues at hand to build power to enact change. A third community partner described how the research supported a later stage of the work and policy development:

> All we had done was document the problem exist[ed] . . . we were trying to get to the next level . . . to figure out the solution, we needed [the researcher's] expertise both thinking about other sectors [and] analyzing the data.

In this case, the researcher provided needed technical expertise for the data collection and analysis. Because the organization was embedded and trusted in the community, its staff facilitated access to the research participants, thus improving the validity of the data.

Community partners from five other projects discussed how research provided opportunities to learn skills, build capacity, and/or engage their given community in an educational process that linked knowledge production to knowledge mobilization, evoking a lineage of adult education and community-based research for justice (Freire, 2018; Horton & Freire, 1990). These educational processes, which were geared toward the developmental stage of the research and partnerships, included (1) work-

shops to build capacity for research, including specific skills such as data mapping; (2) convenings to document organizing strategies and learn from one another; and (3) public fora of stakeholders, community members, and policymakers to debate and shift local policy. Another project framed the research collaboration as a learning opportunity for youth and young adults that folded into existing programs. This involvement benefited the broader community, and added to the skill sets and resumes for participants' job and college applications.

These sorts of near- and long-term utilitarian material advantages were explicitly recognized by the community partners as vitally important in their commitments to building the research collaboration. Interviewees were far more likely to mention advantages such as these than views that regard research, knowledge production, or learning as intrinsically worthy activities independent of navigating problems and achieving outcomes.

Traditional notions of research were regarded with some suspicion; community partners expressed frustration in relation to prior projects in which researchers had not shared their findings with community members who had been central to the research. Participatory projects gave them cautious hope for generating findings that could, in fact, be useful to their work. One project originated from what could be described as an "overly researched" community that had previously experienced extractive approaches by researchers who collected data and left without sharing findings. A community activist with that project who had previously served as a point of contact for such researchers said it this way:

> And the problem is that people like me who stay in the community, people constantly ask, "What happened to that interview that I give two years ago, three years ago?" There's nothing I can say. All I can say is, "Well, there might be a publication," but they also want to know, how can this change my life? How can this better my community? So when I learned about participatory action research in which the community themselves become their own storyteller, doing all the research, that's why I got interested.

This activist was part of a project imagined to begin in the community and stay in the community, but the desire and opportunity to "tell our story" and have the research travel and circulate to "better my community" was also important for this community leader. Given their prior experience with extractive research practices that were not able to inform practice or policy, curating the research to inform wider communities and policymakers was of the utmost importance. Still, this community partner also recognized the potential impact of participatory research on the academic research literature, which often overlooks or misrepresents experiences like those in their community.

Only one other community partner noted the importance of speaking back to the formal, academically legitimated research literature as a key objective of the partnership. This partner emphasized organizational strategic gains from the research, and discussed the significance of the researcher's academic knowledge and networks as unexpected bridges that bolstered their existing policy work and augmented its impact:

> [Research partner], because they were at the university, was much more connected and had a sense of that kind of research and academic work that was going on and helped identify opportunities that could help connect the issues . . . to make that more accurate and robust. Also, helped us think about what indicators might be useful to help policymakers understand the impacts around [topic] in our area . . . really helped us connect the two worlds.

In two thirds of the funded projects, community partners described being heavily involved in the design of the research questions or focus of the work. Indeed, these community partners were particular about the sorts of researchers with whom they would work, noting that it was of utmost importance to learn how to better prioritize their community's needs through the research. As one community partner whose program served low-income rural families noted, their research was intentionally designed

> to see if our work was effective and if it was . . . impacting families

in a positive way. We knew anecdotally that it did, but we wanted something solid. So that was the impetus for the partnership. . . . It was definitely collaborative because we couldn't have done this without them. They're researchers and know all the protocols to do a survey that's going to be valid in the world outside of [region]. We don't have those kinds of skills here, but we have the families . . . and we have good relationships with the families.

Generally, community partners did not articulate a desire to speak back to or even with the academy or research literature itself as a motivating factor for their collaborations, nor did they see academic networks as sites holding knowledge of immediate value to their own work. Rather, what was important was that the research have explicit ethical–political aims and practices that could materially improve opportunities for the community, inform the organization's practices and programs, increase funding, contribute to policy development, or bolster participants' individual skills for future job and educational opportunities. Research was desirable as a source of power to do real work when engaging with the dominant systems, structures, and institutions that had long relegated their communities to the margins.

"It's Not Fair, but It's the Reality": Legitimacy and Community Knowledge

Although community partners were not specifically interested in contributing to academic knowledge production, they were in fact interested in reshaping the terrain of knowledge production more broadly, especially in ways that recognize the legitimacy of community-based knowledges. They described various scales of (mis)recognition at local, state, and societal levels, and how they expected collaborative research to counter prevailing assumptions about whose knowledge counts and allow them to speak back to those in power who marginalize, discount, or entirely disregard what their communities know. As has already been made evident here, there are complex intersections among ethics, politics, and knowledge, and when these intersections are made explicit in collaborative modes of research with aggrieved communities, the stakes get amplified. The community part-

ners describe multiple sorts of "epistemic injustices" that are constitutive of material injustices that exclude or marginalize certain individuals and groups of people as holders and producers of knowledge, or in other ways undermine their civic agency through the marginalization of their knowledge claims (Fricker, 2007; Kidd et al., 2017).

We take up the notion of epistemic injustice broadly to capture what emerged inductively in the interviews, often in response to questions that asked community partners to describe the benefits of collaborative research. They repeatedly expressed how those in power—such as local political leaders, policymakers, or funders—often considered their research findings or knowledge claims subjective, biased, or illegitimate because they and their organizations were advocates for social justice. These respondents faced a form of "compound injustice" by "having one's agency compromised by an epistemic limitation for which one bears no culpability and of nevertheless being judged or blamed for the lack of agency" (Simpson, 2017, p. 254), and they experienced it as a kind of double bind of legitimacy. Here is how one respondent described the bind of their local inequitable epistemological conditions in a discussion of the benefits of collaboration:

> So one benefit is [collaboration] gives our work . . . it's not fair, but it's the reality . . . is that it gives our work legitimacy in the eyes of people who otherwise wouldn't think our work is legitimate, or [who think] that our work is fluffy, "Oh, all you need to do is care about people."

This particular respondent had just finished a highly detailed description of the organization's systematic and strategic approach to research, and yet, they also enumerated how those in positions of power interpreted their findings as lacking sophistication and "objectivity." The recognition that "it's not fair, but it's the reality" highlights the ethical, political, and epistemic binds they face that produce motivations for community partners to seek university research partnerships. This underscores the need for research to be attentive to the varieties of epistemic injustice within the dynamics of the relationships at the core of collaborations, as well as within the structures of the research projects and of universities, in order for research to also impact the larger dynamics and structures of social and political power (Glass & Stoudt, 2019).

Another respondent described the challenges of not being recognized as a legitimate knowledge producer by contrasting the community organization's positionality with the assumed legitimacy of university spaces and knowledge emanating from there:

> When [information] comes to someone from somewhere . . . from the community, [it] might not be valued as something important, or as something [where] there was actual knowledge. But when it comes from researchers, specific prestigious universities and they think it's, "Oh, wow. 'So-and-so' said it, so it must be."

Other community partners also explicitly recognized that knowledge produced in university spaces or with university authorization exists as a kind of truth that has material impacts on policy and practices. Further, this "university-legitimated knowledge" contrasted with their community-based truths or knowledge, even when it was supported by research, if that research was undertaken by the community itself. These contradictions illuminate various conditions of epistemic injustice that prompt collaborations with the university, as even a community's research-based findings might not register on a plane of "actual knowledge" and thus have limited effect within policy, funding, and academic research contexts. The emphatic ontological claim at the end of this interviewee's statement is worth reemphasizing—university-sanctioned knowledge, once uttered, "*must* be"—though we can note how this might be misplaced hope in the material power of academe's truth in the struggle over whose knowledge counts at the moment of decision in legislatures, in school and foundation board rooms, and in city council and judges' chambers. In this way, community partners rely on particular university-community partnerships to mitigate conditions of epistemic injustice even though simultaneously this reliance indirectly delegitimizes the community's epistemic authority through the sanctioning and circulation of university-authorized knowledge as the source of legitimacy.

In response to multiple forms of epistemic

injustice, community partners strategically leveraged their collaborative research with university partners to garner recognition at varying scales: from local audiences, which included other community-based organizations and local businesses; regional or statewide audiences, including regulatory agencies; and also society writ large. Reflecting on the benefits of the research collaboration in a project with numerous community stakeholders, one community partner stated, "A lot of folks felt grateful that there was a report that they can reference instead of saying, 'You know, we're hearing this from [community people].' There was an academic report that actually showed what we've been saying." Thus, the contextualizing and repackaging of a community's knowledge claims about the harms it suffers into the language and form of an academic report evokes this interviewee's expression of the value of collaboration; however, the report provided little new information or understanding to them. Their need for the academic-style report with which to leverage the power of their knowledge remains a testament to, or an explicit acknowledgment of, the concomitant epistemic injustice they face in the presence of historically produced hierarchies of knowledge that accompany and reinforce social, economic, and political power.

In a youth participatory action research project that extended a local policy struggle to build a youth-led, statewide demand for interconnected issues experienced by young people of color, one participant reflected on how collaborative research fostered civic engagement and power, both in the present and the future:

> For the community in general, for the community in talking to the people in power is to hear that these youth are here. That they're active now and they will continue to be active and they're not the future, but they're the now, because we are already starting to participate. We're not going to stop participating later on, for them to know of our needs, and to address the needs.

This respondent expressed an urgent demand for recognition and engagement tied to a particular spatial and temporal location, a demand for action to remedy historically produced inequities lived in the present tense. They also articulated a demand to recognize youth and young adults, especially those of color, as not some future force to be reckoned with, but as a current and growing presence, a group with a clear understanding of its needs and an expectation that community institutions serve them. This resistance to the discursive positioning of youth and young adults as relevant only to a future society, rather than a currently existing one, led the respondent to regard research as an opportunity to build the kind of knowledge that could mobilize and organize the local community around young peoples' needs. This positioning challenges the histories of delayed recognition and inclusion that have pervaded their local politics and for so long disadvantaged their parents, grandparents, and previous generations.

Another community partner described similar demands for recognition of an empowered knowledge as a primary motivation for participating in collaborative research projects:

> So, this is what I was saying before, this is why I'm so picky about academics, because I insist that every time we put out a report it says by [X-organization] with research support from [X-researcher], or whoever else. But it's so important that it's authored by our organization. We are up against [Established Organization], which is this huge, very powerful lobby. When they put out a report nobody questions anything. Is this real? Is this credible? Is this academic? When we put out a report there's immediate questioning. So we have worked very hard over the last decade really to establish ourselves as a source of our own credible expertise and research. That workers are just as much experts on the industry as employers are. That's why the byline being "By [Our Organization] with support from whoever." That's how we always handle it.

For this respondent, the assignment of authorship was another strategic intervention to counter the epistemic injustices that were integral to maintaining dominant political structures, which earlier in the interview they had described as "a general perception that community organizers are not smart." By insisting on lead authorship, this re-

spondent worked within the existing rules and processes of knowledge production to reposition their organization as credible knowledge producers. The point of the order of authorship was not to tacitly or explicitly affirm a hierarchy of knowledge, nor to advance within university-based rules of prestige and career. Rather, the point was to advance on the terrain of advocacy and policy, and on the articulated terrain of struggle in regard to epistemic injustice. This same partner went on to say:

> There aren't as many universities in the region as in some other places, so yeah, it's, it's especially valuable in places where—like ours where there's not a lot going on. And if we don't have any research, then we allow the, the powers-that-be to control the conversation, and they can say whatever they want, because nobody's questioning.

These findings highlight the importance of understanding the intersections of the ethical, political, and epistemic terrain of knowledge production and of taking action to establish more equitable epistemic standings for community partners. Community partners intimately understand how one benefit of collaborative research is the broader social, economic, and political legitimacy conferred on knowledge claims when an academic scholar is involved. They turn to research collaborations to subvert the epistemic injustices present as they work to have their knowledge recognized and valued as the foundation for their political agency, even if it is articulated through the voice and in the language of an outside researcher. "It's not fair, but it's the reality." "'So-and-so' said it, so it must be." Indeed, these double binds mean that much needs to be done to develop the practices and strategies needed to reshape the prevailing institutional and cultural assumptions that reinforce a wide range of epistemic injustices. As these community partners have articulated so forcefully, they seek researcher partners who are ready to make explicit the ethical, political, and epistemic intersections that produce complex double binds as they navigate whose knowledge counts, for whom, where, and how. In other words, university researchers can learn from and follow the lead of community partners to strategically position their research collaborations in ways that are attentive to and respond to such context-specific epistemic injustices. These complexities offer productive starting points for reimagining how researchers might accompany community partners and oppose long-standing conditions of material and epistemic injustice.

"It's Not Anybody's Fault, Right?": Responsibility for Disjunctions in Place, Time, and Processes

Community partners experienced challenges of collaborating across vastly different institutional and organizational structures, priorities, timelines, and processes. University researchers recognize how time-consuming community-engaged scholarship is relative both to many other research forms and to its impacts on their career assessments (Foster, 2010; Jordan et al., 2009), yet their community partners' impacted timelines are often made invisible in the academic context of the research. The ethics of whose timelines are prioritized, where and in what ways, and for whom, similarly reveals a variety of double binds for research and community partners that force them to grapple with the enduring effects of differences in institutional, social, and political power. These effects reach beyond the capacities of any one individual or project to contest or transform, and yet each individual and each project must be accountable to their own times, places, and peoples without unduly blaming individual persons for the difficulties that must be faced in these binds.

For example, one community partner commented on negative consequences and lost opportunities because their policy and organizing timeline was not the primary driver of the research process:

> I would have liked to . . . turn around and get the reports out quicker. . . . It was almost a year between when we finished the data collection and when we actually got the report out. So if we're able to do it quicker, we could've brought the group together.

University timelines are notoriously rigid and slow moving. Those who work predominantly in universities become so accustomed to their own annual calendars and weekly schedules that they often do not recognize the challenges these time frames pose to other frames of reference, organizational demands, and human relations

(Denner et al., 2019; McLaughlin & London, 2013). Another partner echoed a similar concern about timelines and research processes as they related to advocacy, highlighting tensions that can arise when research-based materials may be needed before the researchers feel they are ready for public scrutiny. Quicker turnaround is something that these partners identify as missing in their work, and they point to ways these binds can be more ethically navigated, and partnerships can be strengthened and made more impactful, when a diversity of products gets defined and clarity about the flow of the output gets established at the outset of a collaboration.

Another community partner struggled with an often-noted thorny aspect of managing time differences in university partnerships: integrating undergraduate and graduate students into the collaboration. The involvement of students in community-engaged research, which can be a key advantage in terms of research project staffing and student experiential learning, can also entail significant personal and organizational challenges for community partners if not structured in ways that are community driven and valued added (Glass & Stoudt, 2019; Greenberg et al., 2019). As the community partner put it,

> I'll be the first to say, I love working with students. I think there's lots of advantages for everybody, [in the] collaborations, but they leave, either for the summer or they graduate. Sometimes projects don't end in the same—on the same schedule. Someone who may've been really immersed in the data is now—we can track them down, but their head may not be as—it's not like having someone still here, and that's just a function of the way—[people] should move on. It's not anybody's fault, right?

The "faults" that get revealed at these disjunctions in institutional calendars, in the different temporalities a student may have in connection to a particular project, organization, or place, constitute a myriad of challenges specifically connected to navigating community-based methodological approaches that center an equity orientation. These "faults" indicate institutional and ethical breaks that occur in the double binds of working within institutions that have always structurally marginalized the needs of the least advantaged communities and even been party to harming them. In these binds, the challenge is not to regard the "fault" as revealing moral guilt on a personal level, but rather as pointing toward hard individual and collective responsibilities.

Ethically attuned collaborative research paradigms are not only challenging for university-based researchers, but also for community partners who are generally more accustomed to disengaged, expert-driven models of research, even if that old form was not what they desired. Old, familiar problems can seem less complicated than the arduous work of explicitly negotiating complex double binds and honoring commitments to equity. One community partner described the everyday difficulty of bringing together and valuing all community voices in the project, which was essential to the work:

> It's so hard when many people are involved and when this is a participatory action research. I mean, if this is somebody from a [university] who just wants to ignore the community now that you've done the interview . . . to me that's easier.

This respondent characterized as "easier" the model where researchers come in, interview people, and then go off to do the analysis and writing. However, they also recognized that ultimately, that form of research could not generate the quality of warrant for the truths established, nor the equity engendered through more participatory forms. Another partner similarly lamented that a participatory research process demanded a lot of labor for their small staff:

> I was just surprised how many meetings it took. Because I didn't know the steps. . . . I didn't know they had to submit the idea to some board to, I forget what it was called, to approve it and make sure that all the protocols and all the questions were appropriate for the study. . . . So it was a lot more involved than I thought it was going to be. Not over the top, it was still manageable, but it was more than I thought it was going to be. . . . But, again, to me it was worth it.

For an organization with a staff of four who were already overcommitted, the time demand surprises that came along with the research process—like many meetings and a separate application for the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects—were unexpected and insufficiently explained. This again demonstrates the importance of clear communication in the early stages of collaborative research projects as well as adequate preparation and planning. Still, even when care is taken within partnerships seeking to disrupt fragmented relationships and dynamics, community partners can be inequitably positioned to structurally support research.

Another community partner expressed frustration that universities and academia more generally were not better prepared to support the goals of community–based research, while they had better readiness to work with industry and other more lucrative sectors.

> Well, I guess I feel like, you know, public universities are for the public and you know, otherwise I think so much of the research that goes on in all the knowledge and expertise and time that people have at universities can go toward, you know, research that is fulfilling needs of industries or people with money to fund research and not communities that don't have money to fund research. So, I think it's really vital that actually, there be a mechanism or funding to ensure that research can be done that is directly addressing community needs and communities that don't have the funds to support it on their own.

For this community partner, the link between research and funding was especially challenging because when "the priorities on the ground" did not match up with those backed by money, then researchers and universities would turn to industry or other funding sources to define research aims. The hope and intention was that community–engaged research approaches would open spaces for these "on the ground" issues to surface so "research can be done that is directly addressing community needs" that would not be distorted by how those in power or with funds viewed the issues. Another community partner expressed this sentiment and also cautioned researchers:

> Don't, don't come with a mentality of, like, I'm the savior, you know, and "I'm going to create something." . . . The community is already there, so you just have to find ways to plug in. You have to find ways to support what's already happening as opposed to . . . oh, "I got money and [I can create] something."

The paradigm that the work of research is for the researchers was deeply entrenched among the grantees, even in equity–oriented projects, and although respondents acknowledged time for research was a challenge, none questioned whether the grant funds were appropriately allocated. Yet when asked, just two of the community partners we interviewed reported receiving funding to compensate the time of one of their staff members for participating in the research. Another four reported being compensated for expenses like travel and lodging, but not for their time, and the rest of the community partners either did not know how funds were spent or did not receive any. To be fair, the grantee principal investigators (who were all required to be university–based researchers) were also not directly compensated by the grants, and because they were faculty whose job it is to conduct research, we assume that their time was indeed covered. However, we also know from spending reports that they used funds to pay for student researchers, convenings, and research products. As is commonly recognized, budgets embody values, and when the material labor of research was paid for, a majority of projects did not split the allocation between the community organization and university, even though both partners were expected to contribute to and participate in the research process. We also note that despite the ethically and politically fraught nature of how funds get spent, there was little actual discussion of these matters among the partners in consideration of the work of the research.

Valuing and honoring the community partner and its existing programs, policies, and processes is essential for community–engaged research to bridge the knowledge gap and create actionable research that can make a difference with/in/for communities. And even if "it's not anyone's fault" that disruptions and inequities occur along these seismic boundaries that can lead to cataclysms in projects, it is everyone's re-

sponsibility to engage across these fault lines in institutional and organizational structures and time scales, and in their related benefits, rewards, and costs. This engagement enables both community and university partners to understand and make explicit these various ethical, political, and epistemic intersections and their dynamics so as to design impactful and transformative research programs and interventions. It is critically important for all parties to recognize the difficulties and their particular responsibilities in these struggles and double binds, but researchers and university programs, especially, need to take the lead to work across spheres to address the material conditions that structure collaborative community-based research that aims to be equity oriented. At minimum, this includes paying community partners for their time to collaborate in research partnerships, and working collectively as a field to normalize budgets that reflect these values. It includes improving communications at the outset about the products and timelines of research processes, and collaborating to design projects that also center the products, timelines, and needs of community partners.

Discussion: Being Responsible in Research for Justice

This analysis of community partners' experiences with collaborative research highlights the fraught ethical, political, and epistemic intersections that create the need for equity-oriented collaborative modes of research. It also reveals how the public sanctioning of university knowledge as legitimate is sometimes both the problem and the solution to these fraught conditions. It demonstrates that community partners have strategic aims with their research that reach beyond the particulars of the project to intervene in the ethical and political power dynamics of knowledge and knowledge production. That is, collaborative modes of research offer some measure of promise for community partners to redress not merely gaps in knowledge but ethical breaches and political exclusions. Still, the "rewards" of collaborative research are in part rewards only in relation to broader contexts of epistemic injustice; they are rewards relative to specific histories of exploitation and oppression that shape the work of community organizations and the lives of the community members they serve. These double binds are painful to experi-

ence and navigate, though necessarily also generative. We found this type of deep, historical theorizing and intervention into ethical and epistemic injustices happening alongside and through the research collaborations even as community partners and researchers were working to address more particular, immediate, community-based needs within inequitable political and economic contexts.

This study raises critical questions about the ethical and political basis of university–community partnerships, the framings of their epistemic projects, and the understanding of research in this field. First, community-engaged research partnerships need, from the beginning, to formalize a recognition that research is not an inherent social good and may carry forward multiple forms of epistemic injustice in the research, policy, and funding worlds, and thus must be repositioned with equity and justice as orienting principles. This entails a thorough "from the ground up" review of how the benefits and harms of research are appraised (Blodgett et al., 2011; Glass & Newman, 2015; Tuck, 2009), as well as how the frames and procedures of the disciplines and practices of the academy are implicated in what can be known, by whom, and for what purposes.

Second, community-engaged research partnerships must attend to the complex intersections among ethics, politics, and knowledge production—the stakes of which are amplified in collaborative modes of research with aggrieved communities. These partnerships have the potential for deeper transformations of the knowledge production enterprise, beyond elevating the voices of aggrieved communities to better warrant understanding of those communities. They also have the potential to engage a wider landscape to secure the inclusion and legitimacy of community-generated knowledge. Dominant modes of knowledge production are entrenched epistemologies that ground the leading public and private institutions as well as common sense, even among equity-oriented community partners, whom we heard lament, "It's not fair, but that's the way it is" and "'So-and-so' said it, so it must be." Universities and university-based researchers need to openly acknowledge their relatively privileged positions in these intersections, and create processes for ensuring ethical responsibility and accountability for how the knowledge they

produce and warrant circulates within and moves the public sphere. This is not just a simple fix to the research process. Rather, it involves a reorientation at all levels of the research university to acknowledge the value of community-engaged research and the time spent in ethical, equity-oriented coconstruction of knowledge with aggrieved communities.

Third, collaborative research projects must become more responsive to community partners' expressed near-term and long-term material needs, desires, and aspirations for specific research and research products, as well as timelines for product development and dissemination. A third of the projects we explored missed this mark, and therefore did not fully deliver on the promise of equity-oriented community-engaged research to intervene into the unjust hierarchies of knowledge with which community programs must contend for funding and for recognition and inclusion at policy levels. True equity-oriented research requires building partnerships established on trust and mutual interests, and on the long-haul commitment that transformative research for justice requires.

Although among the first investigations of community-engaged research from the community partner perspective, this work has several limitations. First, it focuses on projects all seeded through the same structured solicitation that made an "ethical" approach to the research collaboration a funding consideration. Community partner perspectives might be different in collaborations that had not been required to address how they intended to approach ethical and equity issues within their work prior to receiving funding. Second, it explores only the period of early project formation,

although several partnerships were longer term in nature. We do not know how the partnership dynamics in these ethical, political, and epistemic intersections might look at later stages of development.

We hope that our brief exploration of university-community partnerships from the community partner perspective offers an alternative to the notion that community-engaged research, like social science and other research more generally, exists uniformly as a public good. The social sciences "enter into a whole range of power relationships" (Luker, 2008, p. 8), and scholars who situate the intersection of ethics, politics, and epistemology at the core of their work are better able to make their research matter in addressing some of the most vexing social problems (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Our findings reinforce existing literature that emphasizes the importance of trust- and relationship-building in research (Wilson, 2008) and a focus on the ethics of engaged research (Denzin & Giardina, 2007; Glass et al., 2018). Our analysis expands our understanding of these issues, however, by detailing ways that community partners negotiate their unjust treatment as knowledge holders and producers, while they must simultaneously labor alongside authorized researchers in the production, dissemination, and mobilization of knowledge that counts in the halls of power. Community-engaged research can be understood as residing at fraught ethical, political, and epistemic intersections that challenge fundamental structures and practices of universities, of university researchers, and of community partners as well. To be ethical, we must apply close attention and collective action to address these dynamics in research collaborations.

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