

Ethnography in Community Psychology: Promises and Tensions

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Abstract Community psychology recognizes the need for research methods that illuminate context, culture, diversity, and process. One such method, ethnography, has crossed into multiple disciplines from anthropology, and indeed, community psychologists are becoming community ethnographers. Ethnographic work stands at the intersection of bridging universal questions with the particularities of people and groups bounded in time, geographic location, and social location. Ethnography is thus historical and deeply contextual, enabling a rich, in-depth understanding of communities that is aligned with the values and goals of community psychology. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the potential of ethnography for community psychology and to encourage its use within the field as a method to capture culture and context, to document process, and to reveal how social change and action occur within and through communities. We discuss the method of ethnography, draw connections to community psychology values and goals, and identify tensions from our experiences doing ethnography. Overall, we assert that ethnography is a method that resonates with community psychology and present this paper as a resource for those interested in using this method in their research or community activism.

Keywords Ethnography · Qualitative methodology · Ethics · Social change

As a method of scientific inquiry and action, ethnography holds strong promise for use in community psychology

(e.g., Maton 1993). Indeed, ethnography's emphasis on deep contextual understandings, subjective meanings, relationship building, and attention to process is aligned with the types of questions that are of interest to community psychologists and the values that guide their work (Barnyard and Miller 1998; Maton 1993). Moreover, when employed by community psychologists, critical ethnographic approaches can be a powerful tool in service of community psychology goals such as liberation and social change (Reyes Cruz and Sonn 2011). Despite the potential for ethnography to honor the values and further the goals of community psychology, there have been few discussions of this method or the inherent tensions and complexity that are part of ethnographic exploration. This paper fills this gap by advancing a critical understanding of ethnography informed by the values of community psychology and in service to its disciplinary goals. We first define ethnography and explicate its philosophical and historical underpinnings. Next, we articulate the promises of this approach for situating research within and advancing the goals of community psychology. Then, drawing from our collective ethnographic experiences, we highlight tensions experienced throughout ethnographic work with examples of how we have navigated these tensions. Our goal is not to present a "how to" guide regarding ethnography, but rather to address the question of "why" ethnography holds promise for community psychology research and action. Ultimately, we hope such illumination will increase and accelerate the use of ethnography within the field.

Ethnography

Ethnography is broad and diffuse, escaping simple definition (Atkinson et al. 2001). As Miller et al. (2003) note,

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“ethnographic modes of inquiry do not constitute a single, unified perspective or set of methods” (p. 220). However, definitions of ethnography tend to share an emphasis on first-hand examination of a social or cultural setting through the researcher’s immersion in that setting, repeated and often varied forms of data collection, and an inductive, systematic, and generative approach to inquiry (Atkinson et al. 2001; Miller et al. 2003). Simply put, ethnography is the study of the daily lives of a group of people, an examination of subjectivity and meaning making.

Participation by the researcher in the community across prolonged periods of time and observations written in fieldnotes have historically been the core of ethnography, though more contemporary forms of ethnography include a greater diversity of methods such as interviewing, focus groups, and document analysis (e.g., Felton 2005; Ozer et al. 2013). Through the engagement of the researcher in a setting and the use of systematic methods, ethnography becomes a “dynamic and contradictory synthesis of subjective insider and objective outsider” (Sluka and Robben 2012, p. 2). Ethnography is the primary method of research in social/cultural anthropology. It is being applied in many disciplines today, including sociology, education, health, and psychology. Indeed, ethnography can be used to study distant cultures, local institutions, and communities. Malinowski’s (1922/1932) early ethnography of people in New Guinea, the first chapter, became for a few generations the textbook on how to do ethnography for anthropologists. This well-known line from the book defines ethnography’s primary goal: “The goal is, briefly, to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world” (p. 25) (sic). Wolcott (1995) calls ethnography a scientific method needing an artistic sensibility, given that one personally immerses oneself in a social setting and out of which data emerges. Marcus (2009) adds that it is “less a matter of training in method, or specific techniques of inquiry and reporting, than of participating in a culture of craftsmanship” (p. 3). The craft is relational, the central feature of qualitative research (Kral 2014). Ethnography is based on, according to Schensul and LeCompte (2013), developing relationships and enjoying the unfamiliar.

Historically, the development of ethnography was influenced by the “Chicago School” during the 1920s and 1930s when sociologists at the University of Chicago were conducting “community studies” in the urban environment. Anthropology moved from text as data, the “arm-chair anthropologists,” to participant observation in the 1920s, in what Stocking (2001) called an ethnographic revolution. Qualitative inquiry was called for, as Boas (1920/2001) noted that of interest were methods that capture “the most intimate life of the people” (p. 125). What began in the nineteenth century and earlier were traveler’s tales and studies by missionaries and colonial

administrators (Harbsmeier 1997; Leitch 2010; Wheeler 1986). The earliest anthropologists came from the natural sciences, and they were interested in experience. Their short fieldwork soon moved to longer time periods spent studying people with anthropologists like Boas and Malinowski who believed that understanding the full context of people’s lives was necessary (Asad 2002). Ethnographic writing changed as well, from descriptive accounts to experiential, first-person stories. First-person narrative in ethnographic writing did not appear until the 1950s and expanded greatly in the 1980s (Tedlock 1991).

Throughout its history, ethnography has relied on different philosophical foundations such as structuralism and functionalism, and most recently interpretivism. Geertz (1973) established the “interpretive turn” as a hermeneutic response to positivism and away from methodology determining inquiry, leaning on the later Frankfurt School with a focus on contextualized meaning, history, and the political. This fits with critical theory today, including critical community psychology (Davidson et al. 2006; Kagan et al. 2011). Geertz called this type of ethnography thick description, detailed knowledge of people’s lives in their social and historical context. Rabinow and Sullivan (1987) show that interpretive social science has developed across a number of disciplines and indeed ethnography provides an interpretive qualitative method to understand people within their context.

Importantly, a critique of ethnography emerged during the postmodern turn in the 1980s, seeing ethnography as a form of domination and control, especially in the study of a colonized and oppressed people. Responses have included listening to multiple voices and viewpoints within a community, reciprocating and giving back to the community something that can be of benefit, and becoming more reflexive. A newer, critical ethnography calls for attention to ethics, fairness, disruption of the status quo, positionality, dialogue, power and control, decolonization, and a dose of surprise, ambiguity, ambivalence, and indetermination in the relations with the people we study (Hammoudi and Borneman 2009; Madison 2005). Recently, a collaborative, participatory ethnography has been proposed, corresponding to community-based participatory research (Lassiter 2005). This also fits with action research, with social action and change being one of the goals of research (McIntyre 2007; Reason and Bradbury-Huang 2007; Stringer 2013). Clearly, ethnography with the goal of social action through collaboration is directly in line with the social action values of community psychology.

Traditionally, the data of ethnography have been fieldnotes. Ethnographers write what they see, hear, and experience. The writing is more of a filter than a mirror of the reality one observes, and it is integrated dialectically with the fieldwork in the creation of thematic, coherent

narratives (Emerson et al. 2011). Notes are often jotted during the fieldwork, shortly after participation or observation. Some ethnographers may write in the evenings after a day of interactions and observations. Interviews are common in ethnography and become another important source of data. Fieldnotes can be analyzed the same way interview transcripts are through qualitative methods of analysis such as grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Timmermans and Tavory 2007), consensual analysis (Hill et al. 1997), or other interpretative analytic frameworks. Qualitative software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti can be used to aid in analysis. In our ethnographic research, fieldnotes and interviews are the primary sources of data whereas some researchers also incorporate archival data sources to describe the social and historical context. Systematically synthesizing observations from these sources, through qualitative analysis and interpretation, allows for meaning to emerge to understand culture, context, and the research questions of interest.

Promises of Ethnography for Community Psychology Research and Action

Ethnographic methods provide a vehicle to conduct research and to pursue action in ways that resonate with the goals, values, and core mission of the field of community psychology. Although a comprehensive review of community psychology values and goals is beyond this paper, community psychology scholars cite values including a focus on the whole person; health or a focus on personal, relational and collective well-being (Prilleltensky 2012); caring, compassion and support for community structures and concern for the welfare of others; self-determination, participation and social justice; respect for diversity; and accountability to oppressed groups (Nelson and Prilleltensky 2010; Prilleltensky 2001). Tebes et al. (2014) also note the organizing principles of understanding culture, context, promoting empowerment, and encouraging collaboration with community stakeholders. In addition, according to Kloos et al. (2012), community psychology values the promotion of community and social change through processes of empowerment and citizen participation. Scholars also note that methodologically community psychology often adopts constructivist and critical philosophies of science, seeing knowledge as taking place within researcher–researched relationships and social contexts, and shaped by power relationships stemming from social institutions and belief systems (Kral 2014; Tebes 2005). Although many of these values pervade the use of ethnography, in this paper we focus on the potential for ethnography to (a) reveal unique insights about culture, diversity, and context; (b) provide a vehicle to conduct

collaborative and participatory research, (c) help bridge the gap between research and practice, and (d) promote the welfare of communities and their right to self-determination.

Ethnography is primly situated to address community psychology's interest in culture and cultural methodology (Kral et al. 2011b). Ethnography has strong potential to provide a highly nuanced and contextualized description of a phenomenon that illuminates the interweaving of context, culture, and diversity (Kral et al. 2011b; Maton 1993). Ethnographic work stands at the intersection of universal questions (e.g., how do community-based organizations promote empowerment?) with the particularities of people and groups bounded in time, geographic location, and social location (e.g., how does a Latino-focused community-based HIV/AIDS service organization promote Latina sexual health; Harper et al. 2004). This intersection is achieved as ethnographic methods and reporting use a thick description (i.e., the detailed accounting of people's lives) of context through field note observations and reporting of the historic and social factors relevant to the community (Geertz 1973), thus illuminating the complexities of context. Locating the community within the larger historic and social world may show not only how history is relevant to the lived experiences of community members (Reich et al. 2008) but also how social power operates at individual, community, and societal levels of analysis (Speer 2008). Integrated together, ethnographic methods allow for an exploration of culture by recording, interpreting, and articulating the subjective and shared meanings of people, groups, and how these meanings matter for how people live their lives (Rappaport 2000). The goal of ethnography is to then weave together the layers of context to provide an in-depth understanding of how context and culture shape the phenomenon of interest.

Ethnographic methods are already present in community psychology research, especially through case studies of particular social settings, such as community action groups (e.g., Berryhill and Linney 2006; Culley and Hughey 2008) boards (Bond and Keys 1993), community agencies (Felton 2005), religious organizations (Mankowski and Thomas 2000; Todd 2012), educational groups like after school programs (Maton and Salem 1995), youth participatory action research (yPAR; Ozer et al. 2013), or research with groups such as Native Americans (Gone 2011). This research shows the potential for ethnography to reveal the role of context and culture in shaping subjective meanings in diverse groups and settings. Such research also holds promise to document how social processes (i.e., the patterns of transactions, relationships, and social regularities) within a setting create norms, ultimately shaping personal stories and community narratives (Rappaport 2000; Seidman 2012; Tseng and Seidman 2007). The prolonged

engagement of ethnographers allows for research questions focused on transactional processes across time which may capture the essence of community development and change (Altman and Rogoff 1987). Ethnography can thus be a tool to understand personal and community narratives across time, and when applied to social action may be used to document and understand how communities serve as empowering settings to work together for systemic change and social justice (Case and Hunter 2012; Maton 2008). These rich questions addressed by ethnography are at the heart of community psychology theory, research, and action.

In community psychology, scholars also have called for an increased use of research methods that centralize the participation, voice, and collaboration of community members (Jason et al. 2004). Although this is later discussed as a tension in ethnography, ethnographic methods have potential to be very participatory which may create a context for mutuality, reciprocity, and collaboration throughout the research process (Jason et al. 2004; Lassiter 2005; Nelson et al. 2001). In keeping with the value of participation, community psychologists have often employed community-based participatory research methods (CBPR; see Jacquez et al. 2013; Jason et al. 2004) participatory action research methods (PAR; Kidd and Kral 2005), and youth participatory action research (yPAR; Langhout et al. 2013; Langhout and Thomas 2010). Although distinct from and more general than CBPR and PAR, ethnographic methods may be used as the research method to systematically document and report on CBPR and PAR action projects aimed at creating social change. For example, Mohatt et al. (2004) conducted an ethnographic participatory action study that was culturally grounded in an Indigenous community in Alaska, incorporating Indigenous knowledge and values. Also, Ozer et al. (2013) incorporated participant observation as part of a larger yPAR project focused on youth empowerment. This intersection of ethnography as a method to document and report action projects is a strong promise of how ethnographic methods can be used to further community psychology research and action.

Finally, there is promise for ethnographic methods to help bridge the gap between research and practice. First, relational research methods such as PAR (and by extension ethnography) are noted in the community psychology competencies as a key component to integrating research and practice (Kral 2014; Tebes et al. 2014). Second, community psychology practice is broader than CBPR and PAR and thus ethnography may serve as a vehicle for those engaged in other types of practice (e.g., consultation, program evaluation) to disseminate their work within the larger field of community psychology. Given the similarity in community-based action work and ethnography (i.e.,

sustained engagement, documenting one's process through field notes), ethnography may be a natural method whereby community psychologists already engaged in social action with communities can document and analyze their experience to share with the larger academic and practice communities. Thus, ethnography can be the vehicle for articulating the process of how we as community psychologists work for social change, the process of collaboration and doing research, and ultimately to document how social change occurs. Last, ethnography may be used to inform community-based interventions, such as using ethnography to determine the multiple levels of need for an HIV prevention program (Schensul et al. 2009), to inform a multilevel intervention for youth empowerment (Berg et al. 2009), or to inform other health related interventions (Andrews et al. 2012). Whether to inform interventions or report on community-based work, ethnography holds promise to help bridge the gap between research and practice.

Description of Our Ethnographic Contexts

Although the promises of ethnography for community psychology are clear, there are tensions inherent throughout the process of conducting ethnography. Prior to discussing these tensions it is necessary to briefly mention the specific ethnographic contexts that have informed our understanding of these tensions. The first author has conducted ethnographic work to understand how specific settings promote well-being among marginalized populations, with specific attention paid to self- and group-enhancing processes that emerge within counterspaces. Over a 9-month period he investigated a counterspace for offender-labeled African American youth in the form of a youth development program (Case and Hunter in press). Over a similar time span he also investigated a counterspace for African American college students attending a predominantly White institution. The second author has conducted ethnographic research with religious interfaith organizations (Todd 2012). He spent a year and a half as a participant observer at monthly meetings for two different religious interfaith organizations, documenting the groups' purpose, organization, and structure; the role of social capital and social networks in how the groups pursued their goals; and the intersection of religion and social justice enacted within each group. The third author has conducted ethnographic work with Inuit in Arctic Canada, in participatory projects exploring suicide, suicide prevention, colonialism and culture change, kinship, and youth resilience (Kral et al. 2011a). Overall, the experiences of the authors within these contexts will be used to ground the following tensions in ethnographic research.

Table 1 Tensions in Ethnographic Work*Pre-engagement Tensions in Ethnographic Research*

1. Dynamic inquiry, static requirements

Strict IRB requirements may conflict with the relational and dynamic character of ethnography, threatening to undermine what makes the method both unique and powerful

2. Optimal levels of engagement

How involved (in terms of time and energy) to be in an ethnographic context is not always clear, and there may be limits on how involved one can be

3. Balancing multiple agendas

An ethnographic study often serves multiple needs. Negotiating these needs in a way that does not compromise the conduct of the study but also observes principles of mutuality and reciprocity can be a challenge

Tensions During Ethnographic Engagement in the Field

4. Negotiating multiple roles and identities

The ethnographer carries into the field multiple roles and identities that must be balanced and negotiated given the relational nature of ethnography

5. The inevitability of disruption

By the mere introduction of the ethnographer into a setting, the setting is altered. This calls for researchers to think deliberately about the disruptions to a setting they would like to minimize and those they would like to promote

Post-engagement Tensions in Ethnographic Research

6. Managing transitions

Although the transition from collecting data to leaving the setting to write up results is inevitable, its timing is not always clear, especially as one considers the impact of departure on setting members

7. Representation: Deciding what to report and how to report it

Social science has had a long, sordid history of misrepresenting the other and furthering their marginalization. How does the ethnographer ensure this dynamic is not reproduced in their work?

Tensions in Ethnographic Research

A tension can be defined as a balanced relation between strongly opposing elements. In ethnography, tensions arise when there are competing demands or diametrically opposed courses of actions. Complicating these scenarios is the reality that opposing courses of action often have both foreseeable benefits and detriments. As a result, there often is not a single clear-cut solution. In ethnographic work, tensions exist at all stages of the research process: prior to the ethnographer becoming embedded in the field (pre-engagement); while the ethnographer is in the field (engagement); and after the ethnographer has exited the field (post-engagement). We have organized the discussion of tensions around this model of the research process but recognize that this process may not be entirely discrete or linear. We also provide a summary of the tensions in Table 1. Overall, we believe a discussion of these tensions

illustrate the ethnographic process and will be useful to community psychologist interested in or already engaged in ethnography.

Pre-engagement Tensions in Ethnographic Research*Dynamic Inquiry, Static Requirements*

One tension experienced by ethnographers is how to accommodate Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements for protocol specificity with the necessarily relational and emergent character of ethnography (Librett and Perrone 2010). Ethnographers have increasingly decried seemingly stringent IRB requirements more suited to highly controlled laboratory studies and survey research than to the “flexible and wandering research design” (Renold et al. 2008, p. 433) that typifies most ethnographic studies (Bosk and de Vries 2004; Librett and Perrone 2010). Bosk and de Vries (2004) note that, “We [ethnographers] do not know in advance what questions we will ask or, for that matter, where we will draw a curtain and choose not to inquire—or decide not to report” (p. 253). Thus, requirements for rigid adherence to specific procedures can undermine what makes ethnography unique and effective as a relational methodology, creating a tension between satisfying static requirements while engaging in dynamic inquiry.

We believe this is a healthy tension that encourages ethnographers to carefully consider the ethical implications of their work. As noted by Haverkamp (2005), the same ethical principles guiding all research may need to be articulated and enacted in different ways given the relational, transactional, and prolonged engagement of qualitative researchers. For example, Bourgois (1991) identifies ethical issues in ethnography including informed consent; honest presentation of self by the researcher; images of the community in publications; respecting local knowledge, values and institutions; preserving anonymity of participants and communities; and obtaining permission to record people in fieldnotes. Murphy and Dingwall (2001) further state that the principles of nonmaleficence or avoidance of harm, beneficence, autonomy/self-determination, and justice should be part of the ethics of ethnography. When working with communities and with people of different cultures, Trimble and Mohatt (2006) recommend the following ethical virtues in research: prudence, integrity, respectfulness, benevolence, reverence, and trustworthiness. Thus, the challenge for ethnographers is to apply ethical principles to ethnographic research and to describe to the IRB how these issues are being addressed. Further, the importance of engaging with communities in a way that is ethical is in keeping with community psychology’s value of concern for the welfare of others, especially those in a

disadvantaged position. Although a full treatment of ethnographic ethics is beyond this current paper, many of the tensions we describe could be cast in terms of ethics (e.g., disruption of the setting, representation). Each ethnographic project will have different ethical issues; however, we now give one example from Todd to illustrate how he navigated the IRB.

One way to translate nebulous ethnographic methods to concrete IRB requirements may be to “bound” the research in time and space. For example, Todd attended monthly meetings when working with religious organizations. In his IRB proposal he was clear that observations would occur only during these meetings which “bounded” when and where he could observe. Thus, the ability to ethnographically document any observation as data was still included; however, there were limits on when and where such observations would take place. Although some settings may not be able to be bounded, or the boundaries may change over time, it is possible that other ethnographic projects could determine a bounding of when and where observations take place while maintaining the ability to make in-depth observations. Also, to manage issues of informed consent, he read a short script at the beginning of each meeting informing members of his role as researcher and his desire to take field notes. He noted that anyone could ask not to have observations recorded about them. This balanced giving people the choice to “opt-out” while also being minimally intrusive. This may not work in larger settings, but if possible researchers may be creative in providing choice to individuals regarding if information about them is collected and how it is used. Translating these procedures into IRB language helped him to reflect on how to systematically and defensibly balance personal autonomy with the goals of the research and also helped the IRB understand how ethical principles were being honored in the ethnographic research.

In addition to communicating to the IRB how one will bound data, it is crucial to acknowledge the risks inherent to relational methods and the extent to which these can be reasonably mitigated. For example, despite attempts to conceal participant and group identities, results are sometimes ‘decoded’ and findings misused in ways that further oppress marginalized populations (Bosk and De Vries 2004). Moreover, sometimes efforts to minimize risk can undermine a community’s sense of agency or hamper the development of authentic relationships between the ethnographer and community members. In his work with Inuit communities, Kral has had participants and communities not want to be anonymous and he honored this request by using their real names. We also have a colleague who received a request from the IRB to have people complete a paper consent form before any interaction. This colleague successfully argued that this was not appropriate since

ethnography is a relational method and such a request erected an artificial boundary between researcher and participant. Throughout these examples, dialogue with the IRB about the nature of ethnography led to solutions that honored ethical imperatives meant to promote the welfare of communities, while maintaining the integrity of the method. We hope such dialogue is not protracted, but ultimately helps both the researcher and IRB better understand the ethical components of ethnographic research and creative possibilities in attending to ethical issues.

Optimal Levels of Engagement

Engagement with a setting over a prolonged period is undoubtedly a crucial element of any ethnographic study. But the decision of how engaged one should be in a setting is debatable and an ongoing tension (Suzuki et al. 2005). Ethnographic studies have been known to extend to 1 year, sometimes several years. Further, as Marcus (2007) notes, even after a long period of engagement, a sense of “incompleteness” is common and perhaps even desirable given the open-endedness of ethnography. Such a prolonged engagement can undoubtedly yield useful data and insights, and is in keeping with community psychology’s value of understanding the context of people’s lives and forging collaborative relationships with those with whom the ethnographer works. However, deciding to be intensely engaged may be suboptimal for researchers, many of whom have multiple scholarly, practice, and service commitments (Suzuki et al. 2005).

Case faced this particular tension in his ethnographic work. He was unsure how much time he needed to spend within the program that was the focus of his study. This program had activities 4 days a week, so there was no shortage of opportunities for engagement. Realistically however, it was not possible to be present for all activities. He addressed this dilemma by first being present for as many activities as his schedule allowed, which was about twice a week, 4 h each day. Then, the closer he approached “theoretical saturation” (the point where there was repetition of themes and few novel findings in observations and interviews; Patton 2002), the fewer activities he attended. Thus, his participation ebbed and flowed throughout the project. Todd and Kral had different levels of engagement, such as Todd who attended monthly meetings and Kral who initially lived in his community for 9 months. These examples highlight the reality that (a) there is no right or wrong level of engagement and (b) level of engagement may change with time. This is not to say that the choice of level of engagement is an arbitrary one. Rather, as illustrated above, level of engagement should be yoked to the goals of inquiry and desired types of social change. The

implication of this for community psychologists is that they should carefully consider the level of engagement that will enable them to achieve the goals related to their inquiry or social action. An additional consideration for level of engagement is the preference of gatekeepers or other setting members. For example, there may be activities that setting members intend to be private and to remain undocumented. Or, there may be events or activities that setting members want the researcher to observe because of their meaning and importance to the group. Thus, it is prudent to negotiate level of engagement with stakeholders and to communicate that engagement may ebb and flow based on the needs of the study and the setting. Such negotiations are in keeping with the values of collaboration and honoring the right of communities to self-determination in the research process. These negotiations may even be part of the formal or informal contract between researcher and gatekeeper. To the extent the researcher negotiates engagement at the beginning of the study it may decrease the possibility of misunderstanding later on in the collaboration.

Balancing Multiple Agendas

At play in any form of community-based research are multiple, sometimes conflicting agendas. There are the agendas the ethnographer has for the study. There also are the agendas of gatekeepers and other setting members. Finally, the role of the researcher in the setting can also be a matter of contention. It is not uncommon, for example, for the ethnographer to engage in non-research activities as a form of reciprocity. We have known ethnographers who have translated, shuttled children to events, served as timekeepers, and distributed food all while conducting research. However, balancing multiple demands can prove challenging; by trying to accommodate multiple agendas, the ethnographer risks over-extending themselves in ways that wear them thin or interfere with the conduct of the study.

Case attempted to preempt this tension by having a series of meetings with the gatekeeper prior to the launch of his study. In these meetings he and the gatekeeper discussed their hopes and needs for the study. He introduced his research questions and the gatekeeper, who was the program's director, discussed her desire to evaluate the experiences of program participants and document what about the program has been helpful for participants. Through negotiation, the needs of both parties were met. Case was granted entrée to the setting and the interview protocol that was used included questions that would elicit the experiences of program participants and their perceptions of what was beneficial about the program.

One way to manage multiple demands, as illustrated above, is for the ethnographer to negotiate the particulars

of their function within the setting prior to entering that setting. For us, it is often part of the initial contracting with the setting. It is an excellent point at which to gauge the needs of the setting and find ways to creatively accommodate multiple agendas. Taking this approach is beneficial because it helps forge collaborative relationships with setting members by communicating the ethnographer's intent to work with them in a spirit of transparency and mutuality. It also reduces the likelihood of setting members feeling "used" and not benefitting from the research as their needs were incorporated in the overall agenda of the inquiry. Thus, this process of negotiation can be guided by community psychology values of mutuality, attention to power, accountability to marginalized groups, and collaboration (Kloos et al. 2012; Tebes et al. 2014).

Tensions During Ethnographic Engagement in the Field

Negotiating Multiple Roles and Identities

In ethnography the researcher has two primary roles: that of observer and of engaged participant in the lives of those being studied. It has been mentioned that this is the "contradictory synthesis" of insider and outsider (Sluka and Robben 2012, p. 2). Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) define participant observation as "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (p. 1). There are different levels of participation, from being primarily an observer to becoming a member of the group. Tensions can arise for example when the researcher has received intimate detail about a life over dinner. Is this now data? Perhaps it is if the person disclosing is aware that the researcher is also a researcher, and that everything being said is also data. However, after having spent many months interacting closely with participants, have participants remembered that you are still a researcher?

The ethnographer carries many identities in the field. O'Neill (1989) identifies multiple loyalties and conflicting demands as common ethical dilemmas for community psychologists as they seek to promote the welfare of communities. For example, how does the researcher's gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual identity affect the people one is working with and studying? If I am gay, should I disclose this if I am working in a community where being gay or lesbian is frowned upon? In one example, Williams (2012) found that being openly gay as an ethnographer benefitted him conducting research in Native American communities, and recommends optimism in being open. As an atheist, how will I be perceived by a very Christianized community? An ethnographer fills

multiple roles. The traditional, detached, scientific neutral role does not fit (Boser 2006; Paradis 2000). One's roles will be determined by what one learns about the community. Ethnographers must be in a student learner role, being taught by community participants about themselves. In this sense the community empowers the researcher to be with them. This discussion underscores the reality that fruitful ethnographic inquiry requires a careful balancing of roles (Anspach and Mizrahi 2006). Ethnographers also often make friends with community participants. At the core of the participant–observer role is the quality of relationships formed with community participants. These relationships will determine whether the research will be successful (Kral 2014).

In Kral's research with Inuit in the Canadian Arctic, he has experienced some difficulty being non-Inuit (mostly "White"), a "researcher," "anthropologist," and a "student." All of these identities have been historically problematic for Inuit. Indigenous communities have had ethnographers for a very long time, and too many have been experienced negatively, being seen as spies, ungrateful, unwilling to help the community, and selfish. Deloria (1969) criticized anthropologists for seeing Indigenous people as objects, interrogating his people, focusing too much on problems, and being more concerned about their publications than the community they are studying. Odawa academic Cecil King (1997) writes, "When will anthropologists become instrumental to our ambitions, our categories of importance?" (p. 117). Fortunately, community psychology values working with communities on what is at stake for them. Yet one should be aware that ethnographers can be seen with suspicion in many communities. Thus, as participant, the ethnographer can encourage the community to be involved in the research, to identify their needs, and to use the research process to pursue the goals of the community.

The Inevitability of Disruption

Another tension the community ethnographer must grapple with is making sense of and managing the "disruption" that ensues from one's presence in a setting. Each setting has its own unique personality and dynamic and by the ethnographer entering that setting, she has altered the setting in some way, even if this disruption is indiscernible to the researcher (Berg 2004; Denzin 1970). Depending on the characteristics of the setting and the characteristics of the ethnographer, especially in relation to power and social location (race/ethnicity, age, SES, institutional affiliation, role as "researcher"), participants may change their behaviors even in subtle ways to accommodate the ethnographer's presence (Suzuki et al. 2005). These "reactive effects" can take the form of guardedness and self-

ensorship on the part of participants. Other times, the researcher's presence can be affirming to participants as they feel worthy of being studied or feel validated because the ethnographer is being attentive to their experiences. Regardless, one inevitably disrupts the natural flow of the setting as one enters and becomes part of the very setting under study (Suzuki et al. 2005).

From a post-positivist perspective, disruption is usually cast as a problem for the validity of research findings and as a possible ethical risk for individuals and settings. Indeed, research methodologies tend to focus on how to minimize disruption to maintain the "purity" of the data or ethically how to not alter the setting. Although these concerns are important, from a critical perspective focused on collaboration and action (e.g., critical community psychology; Kagan et al. 2011), we believe that "disruption" can be a positive outcome from ethnographic participation. For example, in terms of participatory action types of research methods (Jason et al. 2004), disruption and setting change may be an explicit goal of the partnership as to increase the social action component of the group or to increase group empowerment. In the spirit of collaboration, other ethnographers may use research data collected on and with the group to promote critical reflection on the goals and mission of the group. For example, based on his ethnographic participation, Todd presented a report to the groups which they noted was helpful in affirming and challenging the mission and goals of the group. Case sometimes provided encouragement and support to youth by reflecting on his own challenges in adolescence. Kral was very active in his communities to use research to inform suicide prevention efforts (Kral et al. 2011a). Thus, depending on the goals of the group and the ethnographer, some degree of "disruption" or group change may be an explicit goal of the partnership. It would be important to clarify this goal when discussing multiple agendas to ensure this disruption is welcome; however, we assert that in the presence of group consent, disruption can be a desirable outcome of ethnographic research and is in line with community psychology values of group empowerment and social action.

Post-engagement Tensions in Ethnographic Research

Managing Transitions

At some point the ethnographer will likely face transitions such as moving from data collection to writing up results for dissemination, changing goals or moving onto other action projects (as Kral has done with an Inuit community), or even leaving the group. Although some ethnographers may stay connected to the group for a lifetime, it is likely that roles may change. There are multiple tensions unique

to any form of transition, here we simply raise the fact that change is inevitable. The focus here is more on knowing when to move from data collection to writing and in managing one's transition out of the setting. As noted earlier, the move to writing is likely to occur when a saturation point has been reached, where enough of the same patterns are present to articulate an emerging story (Patton 2002). Other transitions away from a setting may be driven by practicalities, such as Todd who ended his participation when he moved to a new city. There is no one right or wrong way to know when to start writing or how to make a transition out of a group. We do suggest that the ethnographer prepares the community for any transition in presence or role to minimize any negative effects or feelings of loss. Such an approach is in keeping with the value of promoting the welfare of communities and minimizing harm. Effectively navigating these transitions is a critical task given the relational methodology of ethnography and the importance of attending to relationships as part of the process of engagement.

Representation: Deciding What to Report and How to Report it

Throughout the entire process of ethnography, and especially during the process of writing up findings for sharing, a strong tension is in deciding what to report and how to report it. In the methodological literature this tension has been discussed as “representation” which is the idea of how ethnographers represent others in their writing. As previously mentioned, this question came into focus during the postmodern turn in the 1980's when a critique of ethnography emerged that considered ethnography as a form of domination, especially for those colonized. Representation in ethnography is based on the relationship between observation and interpretation. Ethnography has moved from a realist position where the world is described as seen and interpreted as being this way, to one of inquiry coming from the perspective of the inquirer, of interpretation depending on contexts, histories, politics, and positions of power. The primary problem has been one of “accuracy” of the ethnographic account (Fabian 1990). Snow (2002) suggests that ethnographers have come to realize that there can be multiple and competing interpretations of data and that some voices can be excluded by privileged others. There also is an awareness that community members may not agree with the ethnographer's interpretations, and that they may be reading what the ethnographers are writing (Brettell 1993). Also, community psychologists should be especially attentive to the possible unintended consequences of how particular representations may be used to further marginalize oppressed groups (Paradis 2000). In

short, the ethnographer faces a challenge in knowing what to report and how to report it.

In our own work we have wrestled with the tension of representation in multiple ways. For example, Todd realized that although one of the groups he worked with would be labeled as “Evangelical” by sociological standards, the group itself intentionally avoided this label and used other language to self-describe their religious identity. Thus in his writing he noted the sociological definition but also noted the group's discomfort with the label and then used the language of the group. He also asked for feedback from his groups on his initial interpretations to make sure they resonated with group members. Kral's work has been participatory, which is a method that addresses representation directly. Community members saw the research as theirs, and were involved in every aspect, thus guiding the ways they were represented. They have even been co-authors on published papers. Case faced an ongoing challenge around how to represent African American youth who had been involved in the criminal justice system. On the one hand he did not want to romanticize their experiences or justify behaviors that brought them into contact with the justice system. On the other hand theirs were stories of social and economic deprivation, and of denied opportunities. He ultimately adopted a critical-constructionist perspective that did not absolve the youth per se, but that forthrightly articulated their world and experiences from their unique social location and meaning-making systems. What these examples highlight is that there is no clear solution to resolving the tension of representation. Moreover, even after attempts to resolve it, it is likely that the ethnographer may be left questioning whether they resolved it fully and appropriately. What seems to be important is that the ethnographer has thought carefully about representation and has taken reasonable and informed steps to navigate that tension. This may include taking a prescribed approach to representation (e.g., critical, postmodern), negotiating representation with communities (e.g., through participatory methods, member checks, etc.), or some combination of both approaches. Such approaches are explicit in their alignment with community psychology values such as collaboration, seeking to safeguard the welfare of marginalized groups, and privileging the perspectives of these groups.

Conclusions

Due to its emphasis on illuminating context, culture, and diversity, and its attention to process and relationships, ethnography is aligned with the core values of community psychology. Further, when employed to understand how communities organize for action, ethnography can be a

powerful tool in service of community psychology goals such as promoting and studying liberation and social change. The purpose of this paper was to further encourage the use of ethnography in community psychology by elucidating the parallels between ethnography and the values of community psychology and by highlighting the potential of ethnography for furthering the action goals of community psychology. After providing a general history and description of ethnography, we connected this method to community psychology values of diversity, context, culture, and action to show the ways in which ethnographic perspectives are already present in the field. We then described a number of tensions that we have encountered in ethnographic work and offered examples of how we navigated these tensions by upholding community psychology values such as collaboration and promoting the welfare and right to self-determination of communities. Although not an exhaustive list of tensions, we do believe these represent a critical set of tensions that can spur a larger conversation of how to ethically pursue ethnography in ways that further the goals and values of community psychology, which Snow et al. (2000) identify as ethically complex. We now integrate across these tensions to offer a few observations for the promise of ethnography in community psychology.

A common thread running through all the tensions presented was the need to expand and connect ethical principles to conducting ethnography. From managing IRB approval to respecting basic ethical principles of autonomy and managing disruption, there is a unique ethical element that runs through ethnography that extends well beyond just receiving IRB approval. We argue that the relational nature of ethnography demands a key awareness of the ethical dimensions of this type of inquiry. At the same time, this relational character of ethnography provides a rich opportunity to enhance our understanding of how to more generally enact ethics in the context of a community and in open dialogue with that community. We do not offer definitive solutions to the ethical dilemmas posed by ethnography, but do observe the potential to truly honor ethical principles through this engaged method of research and action.

We also desire to reiterate the connection of ethnography to questions of inquiry that strike at the heart of community psychology. Ethnographic participation and research provide a rich and unparalleled vehicle to examine diversity, context, ecology, and people within groups; furthermore, an attention to action can examine how groups work toward liberation and social change. Documenting the confluence of context and social change resonates with the research and action goals of community psychology. Although there are other methods that also allow for examinations of context and that promote action, we believe ethnography provides one method that intersects these community psychology values and goals.

This paper is a beginning to a conversation regarding ethnography. Other voices are needed to further articulate the potential use and promise of ethnography within community psychology. Specifically we are left wondering what next steps entail to further encourage the use of ethnography. For example, what are the implications for graduate training in community psychology? How can we build more systematic thinking about the relational ethics involved in ethnography, and move toward an ethics of what we should/ought/and can do rather than just what we should not do? Are there ways to be more interdisciplinary and to learn from other fields such as anthropology that have longer histories of using ethnography? We believe this is an exciting and needed conversation and as it evolves we hope to see increased use of ethnography to further the goals and promote the values of community psychology.

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