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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

An Exploratory Framework for Community-Led Research to Address Intimate Partner Violence: a Case Study of the Survivor-Centered Advocacy Project

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Abstract

This case study discusses the Survivor-Centered Advocacy (SCA) Project, a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project that convened anti-violence advocates from culturally specific communities to design and implement research. The project used a unique approach to build grassroots research capacity and center survivors of intimate partner violence from historically marginalized communities. This approach coalesced into the creation of an exploratory Community-Led Research (CLR) framework that incorporated trauma-informed, research justice and language justice principles. The CLR framework responded to community members' desire to lead, rather than simply participate in, the research process. As a result, five studies were designed and executed by practitioners turned community-based researchers, most of whom had never before engaged in research, except as subjects. The CLR framework integrated the skills and experiences of community-based and external researchers, and led to high levels of engagement, rich data, more equitable research processes and innovative research projects.

Keywords Community-based participatory research · Community-led research · Research justice · Language justice · Survivor-centered advocacy · Domestic violence · Intimate partner violence · Family violence · Culturally responsive · Culturally specific

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Building the power of those "most impacted" by social, political and economic problems has been a central tenet of practice, policy and research in the arena of human services (Green et al. 1995; Minkler 2012; Reisch and Garvin 2016). For those addressing intimate partner violence (IPV), the question of who is "most impacted" has been confounded by concerns about how to center not only the needs but also the agency and self-determination of survivors of IPV in an increasingly professionalized field (Cattaneo and Goodman 2015; Koyama 2006). While often viewed through an individualized lens, the dynamics of IPV are not simply interpersonal or inter-familial. Within marginalized communities, IPV is embedded in a structural context in which individualized patterns of violence are mediated by legacies of structural oppression, discriminatory policies and lack of access to resources (Mehrotra et al. 2016); Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). Marginalized communities in the United States include communities of color, immigrant/refugee communities, lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-questioning-intersex (LGBTQI) or "queer and trans" communities, communities of people with disabilities, religious minority communities, low-income communities and their intersections.

How can research on IPV build knowledge that addresses the needs of and elevates the position of power of survivors, particularly those within the context of marginalized communities? How can the research process, itself, align with values and practices rooted in and relevant to diverse marginalized communities? This case study documents and analyzes the Survivor-Centered Advocacy (SCA) Project, which attempted to address these two central questions through its aims and processes, and all participants of which identified as being from marginalized communities.

The SCA Project was initiated by the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV), a national resource center that serves a network of providers, researchers, policymakers and activists working on issues of gender-based violence (including IPV and domestic violence) in Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities. Despite the vast knowledge of API survivors of IPV and community-based practitioners on issues related to IPV, API-GBV and its constituents recognized the paucity of 1) research documenting this knowledge; 2) community capacity to gather it; and 3) practices and policies that reflected it in the broader mainstream domestic violence field. "Community-based practitioners" identify themselves and their roles in a variety of ways, including: practitioners, advocates, organizers, and survivors of violence (not currently in crisis). In general, they work to provide resources, services and/or support to survivors of violence, as well as build awareness around and mobilize against violence. Although we acknowledge and honor each of these identities, for the sake of brevity in this case study, we generally use the term "practitioners." Mainstream services and service providers can be thought of as those that are not culturally specific. The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 defines "culturally specific" as "primarily directed toward racial and ethnic minority groups (as defined in section 1707(g) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 300u-6(g))" (42 U.S.C. 13,925(a)(6)). Section 300u-6(g)(1) defines the term "racial and ethnic minority group" to mean "American Indians (including Alaska Natives, Eskimos, and Aleuts); Asian Americans; Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders; Blacks; and Hispanics."

API-GBV was also particularly interested in exploring the concept of SCA, which is broadly defined as both a comprehensive and individualized approach of working with survivors in a way that strives to meet their individual needs, as they define and prioritize them, rather than applying a generic service delivery model that centers more on the needs and preferences of professionalized "service providers" (Allen et al. 2004; Center for Survivor Agency and Justice 2017; Goodman and Epstein 2008). While SCA has long been a familiar grassroots concept and practice, a preliminary literature search found that very little academic knowledge exists regarding culturally specific SCA. Further exploration employing key informant interviews with API practitioners revealed an "intuitive" sense of what culturally specific SCA is – but with little or no supporting documentation. For these reasons, the SCA Project team envisioned a research project that would both generate knowledge about the meaning and practice of survivor-centered advocacy in culturally specific marginalized communities; as well as build the capacity of community-based practitioners to conduct research addressing survivor-centered, culturally specific needs, perspectives and power to positively change related practice, policy and access to resources.

Principles Informing the Design of the SCA Project

Language Justice

The SCA Project's Design Team was composed of API-GBV project staff and external consultants, all of whom were steeped in a range of research- and practice-based experiences addressing IPV in marginalized communities. The Design Team's initial vision of the project included principles and practices emerging from API-GBV's work in the field. One was the intention to support a multilingual space by applying a "language justice" lens, which stemmed from API-GBV's work providing training and technical assistance on language access, and later grew to encompass an equity focus. Language access is commonly defined as providing services and support in-language or with appropriate interpretation and translation for those who have limited English ability. It is critical in multilingual environments in the United States (where the dominant language is English) to insure that non-

English speakers are able to participate fully in all aspects of human life, more generally, and in the context of this project, in activities related to research, specifically (Batterbury 2014; Judicial Council of California 2015; McKee et al. 2012). Language justice goes beyond expanding language accessibility in that it also aims for equity, which includes de-centering English in favor of centering the perspectives and experiences of limited or non-English speakers. Language justice works to level power dynamics that result in language inequities, by including in its analysis the observation that the very selection and meaning of words in most public contexts are structured from the perspective of the dominant culture (Antena 2013). Accordingly, language justice has an explicit focus on social justice, since so many non-English speakers are among the most marginalized, especially those from communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities (Antena 2013).

Trauma-Informed Approach

The Design Team was also acutely aware of how important it would be for the project to acknowledge and attend to community and individual histories of trauma. As Goodman and colleagues (2017) note, citing previous work, researchers working with communities on issues related to IPV should have "a trauma informed lens that takes into account that survivors, their family members, and program staff may be experiencing current trauma, or consequences of past trauma" (Edleson and Bible 2001; World Health Organization 2001; Slattery and Goodman 2009; Sullivan et al. 2017). Furthermore, for many marginalized communities, there are deep wounds stemming from historical legacies of colonization, slavery, cultural suppression, and other forms of historical oppression, as well as from displacement due to war, genocide, and colonial occupation (Kirmayer et al. 2014, p. 300; McKee et al. 2012). Further compounding these wounds is the increased targeting and vulnerability experienced by members of marginalized communities in the always-evolving socio-political climate. While there was not much information available about trauma-informed research practices specifically, the Design Team felt that it could apply two sources of knowledge to the project: its collective experience around trauma and trauma-informed practices in the IPV field, as well as its individual members' lived experiences as part of marginalized communities.

Research Justice

Finally, the Design Team was guided by an intention to disrupt structural inequities in typical mainstream research processes, which can cause harm to marginalized communities. These structural inequities encompass all aspects of the research process, from who is doing the research and which communities are included in it, to the process by which it is done, to who has access to the research products. For example, many communities of color and other marginalized groups are generally underrepresented among the total population of researchers, and there is evidence that researchers of color receive disproportionately less research funding than their white peers with similar levels of achievement and experience (Ginther et al. 2011; Hayden 2015). Similarly, many marginalized groups are underrepresented in research studies, yet this seldom prevents such studies' findings from becoming canonized as evidence-based practices (Serrata et al. 2017; Sheikh 2006). In addition, as Assil and colleagues (2015) point out, communities often have limited or no access to research products from academic and government institutions due to language limitations, cost, and privatization of information (there is little open access to the literature base, which mostly lies behind paywalls and is in English); they have experienced stigma due to negative portrayals of their community in research, often stemming from ill-informed or biased assumptions; and community sources of knowledge have been discounted as "anecdotal" or "biased" compared to mainstream academic or institutional sources of knowledge.

In contrast, the Design Team wished to use a framework that is perhaps best described as "research justice." As defined by DataCenter, research justice is a strategic framework that aims to address and transform structural inequities in research by centering community voices and leadership as a pathway to meaningful and long-term social change (Assil et al. 2015).

Assil and colleagues (2015) suggest that in a research justice framework, research driven by community priorities confronts institutional barriers to information, offers communities opportunities to challenge and retool power structures in research processes, and creates community-generated solutions in public policy and decision-making arenas. A research justice framework also acknowledges and gives equal power and legitimacy to different sources of knowledge, weaving together mainstream or institutional knowledge with cultural and spiritual knowledge, as well as experiential ("lived experience") knowledge (Assil et al. 2015). This approach has parallels in Satterfield and colleagues' (2009) transdisciplinary model of evidence-based practice, which highlights the importance of considering practitioner and client perspectives along with the research evidence base and environmental context; as well as Serrata and colleagues' (2017) community-centered evidence-based practice approach, which prioritizes culturally relevant evidence grounded in the voices of community members.

Adopting a Community-Based Participatory Research Approach

As the Design Team investigated different frameworks to guide the research processes of the SCA Project, the community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach emerged as one that fit many of the project's initial goals well. There was no framework that seemed to encompass all aspects of the trauma-informed, language justice, and research justice principles described above, and particularly not as applied to a diverse group of practitioners from historically marginalized culturally specific communities. Yet much of the core components of CBPR fit the project's intended goals, such as Green and colleagues' (1995) straightforward description of CBPR as a method of "inquiry with the participation of those affected by an issue for the purpose of education and action for effecting change" (p. 4). The primary principles of CBPR are described as intending to bridge the gap between researchers and communities, to create trust, share power, cultivate co-learning, augment strengths and resources, build capacity, and observe and tend to needs identified by communities (Israel et al. 2005). CBPR also attends to issues of power differentials, particularly between external (often academic) researchers and community partners (Garzón et al. 2013; Israel et al. 2005; Minkler 2005).

CBPR often incorporates another concept that was relevant to the SCA Project, that of cultural humility. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) discuss cultural humility as a process that requires ongoing self-reflection and critique, which includes examining one's own pattern of conscious and unconscious racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination and oppression; addressing power imbalances; and establishing and maintaining partnerships with communities that are mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic. Israel and colleagues (2005) note that cultural humility is embedded in the principles of CBPR because of its emphasis on co-learning, which requires surrendering the role of "expert" in order to value the role of community members as partners in the learning process. This was a particularly germane concept in the SCA Project, which had capacity building as one of its explicit goals.

The team ultimately decided to proceed with CBPR as the central framework guiding the research processes of the project. CBPR principles seemed like a good fit with the initial vision of the project, and Design Team members felt they had a sufficient understanding of CBPR. Many of the Design Team members had professional experiences with CBPR approaches in the domestic violence, public health, and health care fields; and had knowledge from the literature, which provided useful examples and guidance about research projects in IPV contexts involving collaborations with community-based organizations, some of which were culturally specific (Bloom et al. 2009; Edleson and Bible 1998; Glass 2009; Mouradian et al. 2001; Sullivan et al. 2005; Yuan et al. 2016).

Structure and Evolution of the SCA Project

Project Description, Goals and Outcomes

The SCA Project was structured as a 15 month CBPR project with a two-tiered or "nested" research design. The first tier focused on *building knowledge* about the meaning and practice of culturally specific survivor-centered advocacy; and the second tier on *building capacity* of practitioners from marginalized communities to conduct research in their own communities. Both of these tiers were connected to the final action-oriented goals: to use the data generated about survivor-centered advocacy practices that lift up and support marginalized communities; and to inform advocacy efforts to change practices and policies to prevent and intervene in IPV (in both culturally-specific and other communities), as well as those structural conditions that serve to perpetuate violence. This paper focuses primarily on the second tier, building research capacity, although more details about the other aspects of the project can be found in the SCA Project final report.[1]

With regard to the capacity-building tier, by the end of the project period the SCA Project: 1) increased the research skills of 10 practitioners from five community-based organizations/groups from Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, Korean American, Native, Latinx and Sikh American communities; 2) built research capacity within each of these organizational and community settings; 3) produced a wealth of research capacity-building training and technical assistance materials in English and Spanish, and conducted in-person training and technical assistance in bi- or tri-lingual settings; 4) supported five community-based teams to design and execute a research project, including implementing human subjects protections, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting and disseminating research findings; 5) produced community-grounded knowledge about survivor-centered advocacy in historically marginalized culturally-specific communities; and 6) co-created a set of CBPR principles and agreements with community partners that guided research activities and collaborative processes during the project, as well as laid the foundation for the exploratory framework for community-led research (CLR) discussed in this paper.

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[1] Full details about the SCA Project can be found in the final report that will be posted to the following website by Spring 2019: www.api-gbv.org. The SCA Project team and participants included: Aracelia Aguilar, Maria Carrillo, Harmit Cheema, Juana Flores, Susan Ghanbarpour, Irene Girgis, Amber Hodson, Tara Holcomb, Maria Jimenez, Mallika Kaur, Mimi Kim, Lesli Irene LeGras, Beckie Masaki, Carolina Morales, Kao "Tang" Ying Moua, Nuri Nusrat, Ada Palotai, Orchid Pusey, Riffat J. Rahman, Alvina Rosales, Wendy Schlater, Hyejin Shim and Liz Suk.

Table 1 Research phases of the Survivor-Centered Advocacy Project: Aims, convenings, activities and outcomes

Phase	Project aim	Collective convenings	Primary activities	Outcomes
1	Co-creation of CBPR principles & preliminary design/selection of SCA research projects	Community partner orientation	• Project description & aims • How do we define survivors? • What is research? • What is CBPR? • Workshopping preliminary research design	• SCA CBPR Principles and Agreements document • Proposals for SCA research projects • Selection of SCA research projects
2	Research skills building	Research capacity building trainings (remote & in-person)	• Research ethics • Focus groups • Story telling • Interviews • Qualitative analysis	• CBPR curriculum • Community-based researcher workbook
3	Community-based research project design, implementation, data collection, analysis and dissemination	Community partner sense-making / collective analysis	• Review of SCA process • Shared research learnings • Presentation of research findings	• Site-specific research reports • Evaluation findings • Final SCA Project report

Project Phases

The project activities relevant to the capacity-building tier were organized into roughly three phases. The first was the co-creation of shared CBPR principles and agreements that would guide the SCA Project; the second was research capacity skills building via trainings and individualized technical assistance; and the third was the community-based teams' design and execution of their research projects, including a shared analysis / sense-making session. While these phases somewhat overlapped (for example, the preliminary design of research projects informed which skills training would be most relevant), they were designed to scaffold upon each previous activity, as depicted in Table 1.

Project Roles

The SCA Project was initiated and guided by a Design Team composed of API-GBV project staff and external consultants, all of whom identified as being from API communities, and who possessed a range of research- and practice-based experiences addressing IPV in marginalized communities.

Seventeen IPV practitioners from diverse culturally-specific marginalized communities from across the State of California participated in the first tier, representing 10 community-based organizations or groups, as well as a couple participants who were unaffiliated or were not representing their organizations/groups. They included practitioners from African-American, Sikh, Korean, Native, Latinx, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Arab, Hmong, South Asian, and LGBTQ/Two Spirit communities, many with intersecting identities; they worked in the IPV field or from fields that intersect with it, including restorative justice, community development, and reproductive justice. They are referred to in this manuscript as community partners.

The second tier was a subset of the first, comprising 10 practitioners from five different organizations/groups, who formed into five corresponding research teams. They were community-based "researchers in training," that is, they were the focus of intensive research capacity-building efforts. It is important to note that at the beginning of the project, eight out of the 10 practitioners reported little to no experience conducting research, and had little experience even as a participant in a research project (the other two, both from the same organization, reported experience conducting research projects). Indeed, the Design Team intentionally framed the SCA Project as an opportunity for practitioners who were interested in learning to conduct their own research projects, to receive intensive research capacity building regardless of prior experience conducting or participating in research. That is, part of the design of the project was to share these research skills with communities that

Table 2 Survivor-Centered Advocacy Project teams and roles

General Role	Team	Constitution	Specific role
Project design and research support	Design team	• API-GBV project staff • External research consultants (2 out of 3 consultants)	• Design overall SCA Project objectives, activities, and timeline
	External researchers	• API-GBV project staff • External research consultants (2 out of 3 consultants)	• Conduct CBPR skills-building trainings • Provide technical assistance for site-specific SCA research projects
	Evaluation team	• External research consultants (2 out of 3 consultants)	• Design evaluation • Create instruments • Implement evaluation • Produce evaluation findings
Community-based partners	Community partners	• Network of culturally specific community-based advocates, practitioners and organizers familiar with IPV in marginalized communities	• Inform SCA Project design and implementation • Co-create CBPR Principles and Agreements • Pool from which SCA research projects are selected • Contribute to sense-making at analysis stage of SCA Project
	Community-based researchers	• Self-selected subset of community partners who conducted SCA research	• Trained in CBPR methods • Designed, implemented, analyzed and disseminated SCA research

otherwise had little exposure to them, as part of the project's commitment to reducing structural inequities in research, including inequitable distribution of and access to research skills. This subset of practitioners is referred to in this manuscript as community-based researchers.

Each of the community-based researcher teams designed and executed a culturally-specific research project related to SCA, with the support of API-GBV project staff and consultants who were organized into a team of four external researchers (three of whom overlapped with the Design Team). That is, the external researchers were a group of Western-educated academically- and/or formally-trained researchers who were external to the communities with whom they were working. Their role was to design and deliver group trainings as well as provide one-on-one technical assistance to build the capacity of the community-based researchers to design and implement their own research projects. Each external researcher was usually paired with one (sometimes overlapping with two) community-based research team, based upon geographic availability, familiarity with research methods that matched the selected research design of that team, and rapport. Though the external researchers were not from the communities with whom they were working, they identified as having a culturally specific and/or culturally responsive approach to research, in part because each identified as members of historically marginalized communities with substantial histories of working in community-based organizations and settings. They were also selected on the basis of having deep knowledge of and experience with participatory research approaches like CBPR, as well as the flexibility and willingness to decode research jargon and provide capacity-building from a strengths-based perspective. Table 2 provides more details about these roles.

SCA Project Learnings about Community-Led Research

Lesson One: Acknowledge the Community's History with Research Harms

At the initial SCA Project orientation gathering with community partners, the Design Team facilitated a discussion and free-listing activity about the participants' prior experience with research and their resulting conceptions of research. The responses were immediate, passionate and remarkably aligned in their negative assessment of research. The word cloud in Fig. 1 was constructed from their response to the question, "What comes up for you when you hear the word 'research'?" In explaining their answers, participants spoke at length about their communities' experiences (both historical and contemporary) of research being used as a colonizing practice, a tool of exploitation and extraction, a method of

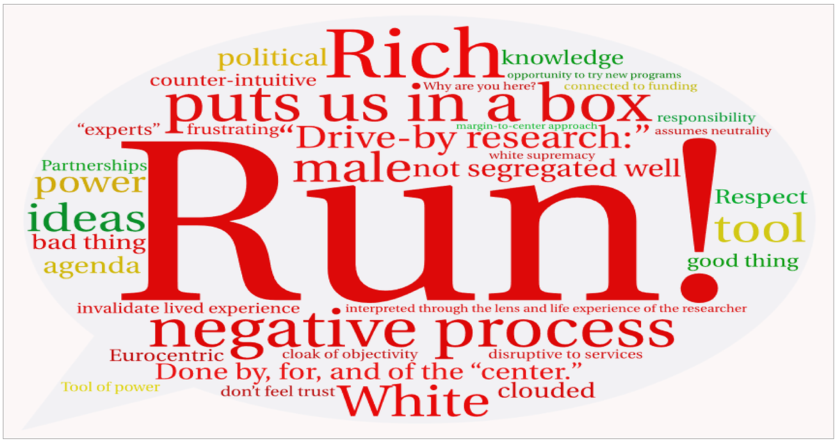

Fig. 1 Pre-Project word cloud of free-list responses to the question, "*What comes up for you when you hear the word 'research'*?" Note: Positive associations coded as green, neutral associations coded as yellow, and negative associations coded as red

stigmatizing communities, and a way of maintaining and reinforcing researcher-subject and academic-community hierarchies that support systems of oppression. One particular repeating theme was of academic researchers who came into communities to take information and leave without ever giving back, described as "drive-by research." The conversation around research harms was much longer, richer, and more complex than had been expected by the Design Team. It was clear from the response that most participants' communities not only had an extensive, and mostly negative, history with research, but that it was critically important for them to have that history heard and acknowledged before they could consider engaging in a research process.

Lesson Two: Establish Co-Created Principles & Agreements

Following the discussion of the negative response to research, the Design Team facilitated a more aspirational discussion of principles that should inform research, asking community partners: what could be positive about research? What would the research process look like if you were creating it? This discussion resulted in the co-creation of a CBPR framework with community partner-driven research principles and practices, named the SCA Project CBPR Principles and Agreements, a condensed summary of which is presented in Table 3 (the full version can be found in the SCA Project final report). The Principles and Agreements served as a foundation for the overall project, and were regarded by the community partners as a critical step in setting out a vision for a research process that they considered to be trustworthy and in line with their values. The Principles & Agreements were meant not only to guide the interactions between the Design Team and the community partners, but also the research process between the community-based researchers and their research participants.

Table 3 The Survivor-Centered Advocacy Project's community-based participatory research principles and agreements (condensed version)

1) Transparency in all stages of a project.
2) Collaborative decision-making in all aspects of the project.
3) Balancing of mutual accountability of researchers to participants, of participants to researchers, of participants to community, etc.
4) Community/participants are recognized as experts.
5) Center those most impacted.
6) Center practices that are trauma-informed/trauma-mitigating.
7) Center anti-oppression principles and frameworks.
8) Participants/community members own their own data.
9) Build in self-reflection and consciousness-raising practices to examine our own dominant culture/oppressive habits.

Avellaka's experience illustrates a perfect example related to the principle about centering trauma-informed practices. Avellaka's Field Research team (Wendy) is located in a small, rural, Native American Reservation. During the study period, Wendy's community experienced a wave of deaths that were not only close together in time, but also in relation, and had a devastating cumulative effect on community members from Sister Reservations. Based on a deep understanding of tribal customs and traditions, to give space to honor the communities' mourning, Avellaka's team intuitively applied a trauma-informed lens and shifted from the original research plan of individual interviews, which would put further strain on community members by requesting too much of their participation, to a focus group. Not only was the focus group more respectful of people's needs at that moment, but it also provided a format for individuals to come together to share their stories in a way that participants expressed was so positive and healing, that they were interested in perhaps continuing the group past the research. Recognizing the lack of equal access to justice for tribal based (within tribal jurisdiction) LGBTQ/two-spirit folks was re-triggering in that it recalled the community's history of loss, disruption, and fracturing of families due to historical genocide, dislocation, disease, and other negative consequences of contact, missionization and US policy.

Lesson Three: Maintain Community Researchers' Autonomy

As community partners revealed histories of exploitation, extraction, stigmatization, and other forms of oppression by mainstream researchers, the Design Team recognized that the community-based research teams would need a high degree of control and autonomy over their own research projects. As a result, the Design Team created project parameters that clearly articulated that the community-based researchers had broad autonomy to define their own research questions, choose their methodologies and participants, request the research capacity-building technical assistance and resources they needed (including language resources at no cost to them), and focus their reporting and dissemination strategies in the ways that best reflected and supported their own communities, rather than adhere to an externally-imposed research or funder-driven agenda. Importantly, this included clarifying that any data that they generated belonged to them, and not to API-GBV or the funder; and that if, at the end of the analysis, there were findings that they chose not to share externally (for example, due to concerns about community stigmatization or exposure of vulnerable community members), that was their prerogative. At all points during the project, the Design Team asked participants about what information could be shared with the funder or publicly, versus what was restricted to just the Design Team or internal to the community-based researcher team.

It should be noted that the Design Team did keep a handful of externally imposed requirements in place, primarily for internal administrative reasons including budget and fiscal management, as well as to provide some standard guidance around research ethics. Among the requirements were that community-based researchers' projects 1) relate to some aspect of SCA (defined broadly); 2) reflect the co-created CBPR Principles and Agreements; and 3) uphold human subjects' protections and ethical research practices.

Lesson Four: Apply an Equity Frame to Collaborations between Community and External Researchers

A research justice lens highlights structural inequities in how research knowledge and resources are held and distributed, who has access to them, and which are regarded as "legitimate" and "credible." Thus, until those inequities are erased, many community-based research projects are likely to include collaborations with external researchers, who have had formal and/or academic training and hold certain kinds of privilege that have facilitated their access to this knowledge. This was true for the SCA Project, which attempted to mitigate this by structuring the collaborations between community-based and external researchers in ways that promoted capacity building and skill-sharing, to work towards breaking down some of these inequitable access issues within the scope of the project. For example, capacity-building trainings included the straightforward presentation of research jargon and its translation into lay-person language, without favoring either. The goal was to equip community-based researchers with knowledge of both research practices and their corresponding academic jargon, so that they could build familiarity and confidence with both. This process of translating research concepts and jargon for a non-academic audience, while upholding a high standard of research process and practice, was another key step towards research capacity building. Throughout, the team of external researchers also worked hard to center principles of cultural responsiveness and cultural humility in their collaborations with the community-based researchers.

However, as the project proceeded, the Design Team became aware that to a certain extent, and despite their best intentions, the external researchers were being regarded as "experts" in a way that reinforced their power and privilege, and was undermining the collective goal for equitable research processes. It was difficult to tell how much of this "expertise" dynamic occurred as a result of the inherent challenges in dismantling some of the external researchers' own privilege and biases, or was due to some other factor; but the discrepancy between intent and impact was apparent. This dynamic was exacerbated by other privileges the external researchers enjoyed, which in addition to their formal education included access to the literature base, funding, and other researchers and personnel; credibility among the academic research community; respected academic outlets for dissemination; material resources (e.g., meeting space, supplies, admin support); and technical resources (specialized technology and software, and proficiency using it).

It became clear that external researchers wishing to collaborate with historically marginalized communities would often be confronted with these and other difficult questions related to power and privilege. This would require external researchers to not only bring to bear the multitude of skills and knowledge that came with their formal training, but also to have a particular inclination toward anti-oppression and self-reflection practices, and a desire to move beyond mere awareness of the privilege inherent to their role, to instead take action to address and mitigate it so as to not reinforce systemic inequities.

After discussion and reflection among the external researchers and Design teams, they decided to address this privilege gap by stepping back and taking a more subordinate role, as well as more openly recognizing and supporting the community-based researchers as the lead researchers. While this was always the project's intent, the external researchers decided to more actively re-commit to this intention, with more tangible practices. This meant they listened more closely to the community-based researchers' capacity-building needs and requests, and customized trainings and one-on-one technical assistance to attend to them, rather than using generic capacity-building resources; they shared the fruits of their formal education and access to resources by creating capacity-building materials such as a workbook for community-based researchers with customized templates and guidance, and distributing research methodology-related materials in English and Spanish; and they communicated with community-based partners via their preferred methods (whether in-person with interpretation, via online video, etc.), even if that method introduced some inconvenience to the external researchers. An example of this was how an external researcher created a training guide on qualitative thematic analysis that was highly customized for a particular community-based research team's beginner skill level, was translated into that team's preferred language, used examples from that team's story circle transcript, and was walked through with the team during an in-person mini-analysis and coding session that was simultaneously interpreted, so that the team could feel comfortable applying these analytic skills on their own, to their in-language transcripts (rather than have the external researcher code them, using translated transcripts).

This interplay between the community-based and external researchers' knowledge, skills, and expertise, and the dynamics of how issues of privilege and equity were negotiated between them, caused the Design Team to continually rethink and redesign the SCA Project as it progressed. This resulted in a stronger emphasis on infusing principles of cultural humility throughout the project, including allocating resources to repairing harm when microagressions or other evidence of inequitable behavior on the part of external researchers surfaced (regardless of intention). It also included emphasizing a strengths-based approach to capacity-building; supporting bidirectional learning; and surfacing, naming and valorizing research skills that community-based researchers possessed, but that tended to be under-valued or under-appreciated due to systemic research inequities and internalized research oppression, as described in the following sections.

Lesson Five: Scaffold Capacity Building on Community Strengths and Bidirectional Learning

The SCA Project external researchers were charged with creating trainings and providing individualized technical assistance to build the capacity of the community-based researchers to execute their research projects. However, the project's overall approach was to link this learning to community partners' practitioner competencies and lived experiences in ways that promoted "acts of cognition, not transferals of information," as noted by Freire in his description of liberating education (Freire, 1970, p. 79). For the formally-trained external researchers, this was challenging, as it required them to move beyond simply de-coding jargon and rendering esoteric concepts slightly more accessible, which is too often the typical approach in training community partners. Rather, it required them to scaffold new concepts and skills on top of those that community-based researchers already had. In order to do that, they needed to spend time building relationships with community partners to learn more about their professional and lived experiences, and then deliver training or technical assistance components that were highly-individualized and responsive to that particular community researcher team.

One example of this is the way in which Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA) built upon their storytelling expertise to inform how they did their qualitative data collection. A core part of MUA's work is facilitating groups and building their members' skills in telling their own stories, as part of their political advocacy work. Thus, when MUA's Field Research team (Juana, Maria, and teammate Maria Carrillo) chose qualitative methods (a focus group and story circle) for their Field Research project, many of the skills inherent to their practitioner role, such as group facilitation and instilling confidence in participants, were easily transferable. They also had a deep rapport and inherent trust with their research participants, all of whom were MUA members for at least a year, as well as many shared life experiences and native language skills. For participants who may have been immigrant Latina women, their organization and team was known as a safe space for disclosure, even at a time of escalating anti-immigrant and racist targeting and discrimination, and fear of families being separated or denied services. This combination of shared identity and practitioner expertise, along with their openness to seeing results as an opportunity to grow and change, enabled MUA's team to develop insightful research questions, elicit rich narratives, and analyze and interpret the qualitative data with a high degree of validity and trustworthiness.

Some topics were easier than others. For example, the Design Team initially struggled with how to provide a training on research ethics, which is typically quite dry, abstract, and jargon-laden. One especially important concept that was necessary to convey was about consent in research, which assumes an ongoing process in which the participant can opt out at any time without penalty or other negative consequences, rather than a one-time static consent. Ultimately, the team was able to frame it as analogous to consent in the sexual assault/healthy relationships context, a concept with which all of the community-based researchers were already familiar through their work as practitioners in the domestic violence field. Similarly, participants had a deep and intuitive understanding about mandated reporting and confidentiality protections described in the consent form, because these had analogues to their work. Both their work and their lived experiences as members of marginalized communities informed their approach to infusing trauma-informed research processes throughout the project, such as using embodiment and grounding practices in their research sessions, and having support staff like a counselor on-site to help participants manage any triggering or negative feelings.

A related concept was the bidirectional learning exchanged between the external researchers and community partners. The external researchers possessed valuable knowledge and skills about research processes and methods, which they shared in various formats with the community-based research teams. In turn, the community-based researchers brought a plethora of equally valuable research-related knowledge and skills to the table, including expertise in the historical harms of research and forms of research oppression. Unfortunately, despite their commitment to cultural humility and research justice, the external researchers still made errors that reflected some of those harms.

One such example was when two of the external researchers were working with the DeafHope team on qualitative thematic coding, and needed to be called in to learn lessons about language justice related to Deaf communities and ASL. When the DeafHope Field Research team (Amber, Aracelia, and Tara) video-recorded their in-depth interviews with participants communicating in American Sign Language (ASL), their external researchers assumed that the video recordings would be interpreted and transcribed into English. However, they quickly and gently reminded the external researchers that ASL is a gestural/visual language and has no written form, and thus, rendering ASL into a written form such as English requires interpreting the original ASL statement, a process which, by nature changes the original data. Exacerbating matters further was the reality that research done in and on Deaf and signing populations routinely uses this flawed approach. However, so many variables in the interpretation process can severely impact the quality of the data and therefore the findings. Were appropriately qualified interpreters used? Did they use a “check interpreter” process to increase validity of the interpretation? Did the Deaf research participant have some linguistic need that required the expertise of a Certified Deaf Interpreter? Did the Deaf participant alter their language use due to historic mistrust of having quality interpretation? Researchers with cultural intelligence would analyze data directly from the original language, ASL or otherwise, to preserve quality and accuracy. The DeafHope team shared both academic literature, as well as their own perspectives grounded in their lived experiences, to convey that their process of data analysis must be carried out through thematic coding of uninterpreted / untranscribed videotaped interviews, and that collaborative research partners must understand and respect the specific language conditions for Deaf participants and researchers. Once the external researchers understood that research conventions that rely upon verbal or written English, rather than centering ASL, can be oppressive, they were able to adjust their technical assistance around thematic analysis and coding so it did not rely on text. They also were able to think creatively with the DeafHope team about how to use other visual components besides text to retain more meaning, when presenting their findings to non-ASL audiences. In this way, the DeafHope team learned some qualitative analysis techniques while the external researchers learned about a form of research oppression they were unaware of, and expanded their knowledge around qualitative analysis.

This focus on strengths-based capacity building and bidirectional learning had an unintended but salutary effect, which is that the external researchers began to pay very close attention to the different skills and attributes that the community-based researchers possessed. In doing so, and through extensive conversations with the community partners and observations of their research projects, they began to notice a pattern in the skills that the community-based researchers brought to the table.

Lesson Six: Value Community Partners’ Research Skills: Recognizing Cultural Intelligence

Through their extensive interactions with the community-based research teams, and shared reflections over the course of the project, the external researchers noticed a core set of skills and attributes that seemed to be a consistent thread running through all the community researcher teams, and which appeared to generally enhance their research processes and outcomes. For the sake of expediency, we have termed this concept “cultural intelligence,” although we recognize certain problematic aspects of the term. For example, the management literature has adopted this same term to refer to “an individual’s capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings” (Ang et al. 2007, p. 335; Earley and Mosakowski 2004). The construct builds upon notions of “social intelligence” which focuses on “capabilities to grasp, reason and behave effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity” (Ang et al. 2007, p. 337). While this article uses a concept of the same name, it should not be confused with that applied to the context of management.

In the context of the SCA Project, cultural intelligence is a type of knowledge that is based upon lived experience within a particular community setting as one identifying with that community. It includes embeddedness and social positioning within the community; deep knowledge of the community’s culture, norms, priorities, history, and legacies of trauma; fluency in the primary language(s) spoken by the community, including jargon and slang; critical analysis of inequitable and oppressive practices and structures, particularly as they impact their community; emotional intelligence and empathy; and shared identity and lived experiences with other community members around the research topic of interest. It can also include understanding and using modes of communication and preserving meaning that are intrinsic to the community, such as oral or narrative traditions, like creation stories.

What distinguished cultural intelligence as a concept within the project was not only the frequency and consistency with which it was observed, but the ways in which it manifested to enhance the community-based research projects. These included community-based researchers': 1) consistently intuitive understanding of which research questions are meaningful and relevant to their community, including the appropriate way to ask them; 2) authentic trust and strong rapport with community research participants; 3) ease of understanding and ability to navigate their community's cultural context, histories, signifiers and cultural beliefs; 4) recruitment strategies that used novel methods and leveraged social positioning, shared identity and trust to reach difficult-to-reach groups; 5) rich interpretation and analysis of data consistent with the meanings intended by community participants; 6) access to community resources (e.g., community accessible spaces and language accessible materials) that facilitated data collection and dissemination of findings; and 7) community-based dissemination strategies and access to the communities that most need the information.

Sikh Family Center's (SFC) story gives an example of how embeddedness within the community can lead to access to community institutions, as well as longer-term dissemination and community mobilization activities that lead to positive community and institutional changes. SFC's Field Research team (Mallika and teammate Harmit Cheema) chose to examine, through focus groups and storytelling interviews, how community-based interventions on family violence in the Sikh community could be initiated or strengthened, particularly in the context of community peer groups and gurdwaras (Sikh faith centers). Through SFC's research, they repeatedly heard how peer groups in the community often understand and empathize with the concerns of survivors, but think themselves ill-equipped to intervene. Meanwhile, the institutions of gurdwaras, meant to be places of community support and refuge, were critiqued by research participants for not meeting, or being perceived as unable to meet specific social needs, particularly for women and survivors of violence. However, because their organization has already been working in the community for several years, they were able to identify several situations in which they did successfully work together with gurdwaras to support survivors, and think about how to build on those as potential points of entry in the future, as well as how to amplify positive stories, despite the confidential nature of the work. SFC's embeddedness in the community means that they both have a history on which they can potentially build to improve services for survivors at personal and institutional levels, as well as a commitment to staying in the community to see that potential through. Further, they believe their history of evidence-based research and reporting-back statistics to the community, galvanizes further action by their stakeholders and partners, as well as counters the invisibilization often experienced by U.S.'s half a million Sikhs in general, and Sikh American survivors in particular.

Similarly, the field research done by KACEDA (Korean American Coalition to End Domestic Abuse)/QYUL (Queer and Trans Koreans Yearning for Unity and Liberation) demonstrates how shared lived experiences and deep trust and rapport with the community can lead to a novel, robust recruitment strategy and participants who were highly invested in the research project. KACEDA's QYUL Workgroup's Field Research team (Hyejin) fielded a survey to a queer and trans community that is stigmatized within an already marginalized culturally-specific community. External researchers would typically find recruiting participants from such a hidden group incredibly challenging, and struggle to get the number of participants that would be needed for statistically-significant findings. Yet they were able to get over 150 respondents in an incredibly short period of time, the first 100 in just a week. Because they are members of the LGBTQ Korean American community, they were able to leverage their familiarity with LGBTQ networks to quickly create an innovative social media-based snowball sampling dissemination strategy, asking questions that were both relevant to the community and that used culturally appropriate wording. Sharing their own stories highlighted the visibility of LGBTQ people within the Korean American community and legitimized their research effort as one that was initiated by and important to the community. This degree of trust and investment in the research by the respondents was only made possible because their research team was perceived as trustworthy and part of the community, themselves. Furthermore, the incredible level of buy-in from respondents was likely due to participants' knowledge of their work and advocacy in the community, instilling a sense of confidence that the depth and detail of the stories that were shared would not just go into a research void, but would have meaningful impact.

The sum of the culturally specific knowledge and experiences of the community-based researchers in the context of their whole lives as members of marginalized culturally specific communities – and in their experience as practitioners and organizers working with IPV survivors – culminated in extraordinarily robust, credible, and relevant research projects. Our observation was that this success stemmed at least in part from their intrinsic skills and knowledge, which strengthened their ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data about communities who are rarely, if ever, represented in the research literature.

An Exploratory Framework for Community-Led Research

Moving from CBPR to CLR: Nine Key Elements

CBPR is an inherently flexible approach that contains a spectrum of possibilities for participatory research processes and collaborations. Thus, it is not entirely clear to us whether the framework we are proposing in this paper can be contained within that spectrum, or is qualitatively different. However, most of the members of the Design Team had at least some experience – and in some cases, extensive experience – with various permutations of CBPR, and concluded there was something in the subtle shift from communities "participating" in research, to leading it, that merited attention. In addition, although CBPR doesn't preclude it, we haven't yet become aware of a research project that integrated all of the various principles that were embedded in or evolved over the course of the SCA Project. Yet, it was clear to us that each one of these core components were integral to the success of the project, particularly in the context of working with a diverse group of historically marginalized communities. Thus, we offer this exploratory framework for community-led research (CLR) as a starting point and perhaps roadmap for other researchers interested in pursuing this kind of collaboration.

The CLR framework weaves together principles that were infused into the project from the beginning, as well as those that came to the fore or evolved over the course of the project. It takes account of the skills and attributes exhibited by the community-based researchers as well as the external researchers. Based upon the experience of the SCA Project, the CLR framework has nine key elements: 1) *centering those most impacted* by the issue being studied as the primary drivers and leaders of the research project; 2) *embedding language justice principles* throughout the project; 3) recognizing trauma and *using trauma-informed research practices* that reinforce grounding, promote self-care, and provide nurturing and safe spaces for participants; 4) *acknowledging and addressing the community's history* with research and researchers, and especially any harms it may have suffered as a result of that research; 5) establishing a set of *co-created principles and agreements* that define and guide the relationships between different partners in the research, and particularly between community and external partners, as well as between researchers and research participants; 6) maintaining a high degree of *autonomy* for community-based researchers to define, execute and contextualize their research; 7) *Applying an equity frame* to collaborations between community and external researchers; 8) *scaffolding capacity building* on community strengths and bidirectional learning; and 9) *recognizing and valuing cultural intelligence,* or the community partner's knowledge rooted in shared norms, history, language, experience of inequities and oppression and shared identity and lived experience with their community (see Table 4).

Discussion

The field of IPV has long upheld the importance of fostering more collaborations between researchers, practitioners, and survivors, while recognizing that the gap between external researchers and community-based stakeholders exists at least partly due to tensions or at times even antagonism between these groups (Edleson and Bible 1998; Mouradian et al. 2001; Murray and Smith 2009). This gap may be even more pronounced with historically marginalized communities, where intersections of race, gender, class, immigration status, sexual orientation, disability, religion and other identities contribute to unique strengths, concerns and challenges that do not easily conform to a "one size fits all" approach (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). However, there is evidence that marginalized communities have successfully engaged in research projects that use participatory approaches and build equitable partnerships (Sullivan et al. 2005). Through our work on the SCA Project, we learned that part of bridging this gap meant acknowledging the harms that marginalized communities have suffered from externally-led research processes, and applying a research justice-oriented framework that supports community-based researchers to lead the research process from start to finish – from design to data collection, through to analysis and dissemination. It also meant pushing back against a mainstream culture that privileges external researchers; rather, we recognized the unique perspectives, backgrounds, values, and experiences of community-based researchers, along with the skills inherent to the way they do their work, as a valuable collection of attributes – what we

Table 4 Elements of an exploratory framework for community-led research

1	*Centering those most impacted* by the issue being studied as primary drivers and leaders of the research
2	*Embedding language justice principles* throughout the project
3	Recognizing trauma and *using trauma-informed research practices* that reinforce grounding, promote self-care, and provide nurturing and safe spaces for participants
4	*Acknowledging and addressing the community's history* with research and researchers, and especially any harms suffered as a result of that research
5	Establishing a set of *co-created principles and agreements* that define and guide the relationships between different partners in the research, and particularly between community and external partners, as well as between researchers and research participants
6	Maintaining a high degree of *autonomy* for community-based researchers to define, execute and contextualize their research
7	*Applying an equity frame* to collaborations between community and external researchers
8	*Scaffolding capacity building* on community strengths and bidirectional learning
9	*Recognizing and valuing cultural intelligence*, or the community partner's knowledge rooted in shared norms, history, language, experience of inequities and oppression and shared identity and lived experience with their community

referred to as cultural intelligence – that enhance, rather than hinder or bias, the research process and outcomes.

While the SCA project started with a CBPR approach as its foundation, traditional CPBR approaches do not necessarily integrate trauma-informed, language justice and research justice framing. Thus, applying those equity lenses, and the lessons learned over the course of the project as a result of that application, started to illuminate components of a framework that felt similar in some ways, but fundamentally different in others, from what we have typically seen described as CBPR – what we came to call CLR. This exploratory CLR framework answers the call from community members to lead, rather than simply participate in, research processes, and integrates the skills and experiences of both community-based and external culturally responsive researchers in a way that led to a high level of engagement, richer quality of data, more equitable research processes, and innovative research projects.

Limitations

There were several limitations relating to the design and implementation of the SCA Project that could have an impact on the concepts and recommendations presented in this paper. While the SCA Project brought together a fairly diverse group of culturally specific community partners, these community partners were all based in California, and Asian groups tended to be over-represented, reflecting the identities of the Design Team and the work of the convening organization. Thus, it is unclear whether the CLR framework would have broad applicability or transferability to other culturally specific communities in other regions.

In addition, while we identified the core components of the exploratory CLR framework based on the project's extensive documentation, as well as subsequent communications among the co-authors, it is possible there are unidentified components we are unaware of but that were essential to the project's success. Conversely, it is also possible that there are components identified in this paper that were critical to the project's success in this specific implementation, but that would not be necessary if implemented elsewhere. Among these unidentified components is the possibility of selection bias. The Design Team invited many more community partners than could or would participate; of those who attended the first meeting, only about half proceeded to implement a research project. This leaves open the strong possibility that this small cohort possessed certain strengths and resources that facilitated their success within this CLR framework, but that might not be common to other potential participants. Hence, CLR – along with cultural intelligence as it applies to CLR – should be further investigated to determine the exploratory framework's applicability in a multiplicity of settings and/or with different configurations of communities.

Lastly, the SCA Project was very time- and resource-intensive. The project employed extensive interpretation and translation resources in Spanish and interpretation in ASL, professional services that generally require considerable financial resources. Resources were also available for travel to in-person gatherings that facilitated rich and diverse shared learning and also helped bring cohesion to the project. The extent to which CLR components are feasible or adaptable in projects with fewer resources remains to be seen.

Implications

This case study has potentially far-reaching implications for policy and practice in the areas of research, program design, and service delivery. The structural inequities surfaced in the SCA Project through the application of principles related to trauma-informed care, research justice, and language justice suggest that a more thorough examination of research projects involving historically marginalized communities is warranted. Community partners in the SCA Project overwhelmingly described a profound lack of trust characterizing the relationship between community members in historically marginalized communities and external researchers, stemming from many historical and contemporary examples in which communities have been harmed by mainstream research processes and external researchers. It is apparent that this marred relationship could contribute to questionable research findings and outcomes by external researchers who are unaware of, or exacerbate, the harms done to the communities being studied.

These questions are inextricably tied to both inequities in education access and issues relating to academic privilege: currently, only those with formal academic training are deemed "qualified" to conduct research, as is evidenced by what is required for research projects of any size to get any kind of mainstream research funding. This disadvantages marginalized communities, who not only face barriers to accessing education, but also find the skills and expertise they develop outside of academic settings to be devalued. Further, this connects to a need to more deeply explore the professionalization of the IPV field, and to examine the notion that a certain level of educational attainment is a necessary qualification for certain work.

Engaging marginalized communities, not just as mere participants in research endeavors, but as leaders and drivers of said research, can result in the expansion of a rich array of findings from and about groups that have historically been underrepresented in the research literature, thereby enriching the field; can address gaps in representation in the researcher community; and can create pathways to access traditionally hard-to-reach communities. Finally, research projects using a CLR framework can potentially inform prevention and intervention efforts to address IPV and other pervasive forms of harm in marginalized communities in a more targeted way that can more effectively reach those most impacted.

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