

COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AS A CRITICAL ENACTMENT OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

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South Africa's history of colonization, expressed particularly through the violent system of apartheid, calls for participatory approaches to research and practice that aim to decolonize knowledge construction, transform modes of community engagement, and address dominant power relations. This article reflects on how these challenges are addressed in the Spiritual Capacity and Religious Assets for Transforming Community Health through mobilising Males for Peace and Safety project in a low-income community in the Western Cape, South Africa. This analysis focuses on some of the possibilities and challenges relating to using community-based participatory research as a community engagement strategy for the purposes of enacting critical community psychology in an African context. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The effect of colonization and globalization on knowledge systems, research practices, and social development in Africa and other contexts has been recognized by many (Bishop, 2005; Brown-Acquire, 2011; Smith, 2005). In this respect, within South Africa's history of colonization, which has been expressed particularly through the violent system of apartheid, there is evidence of approaches to research and practice that endeavour to decolonize knowledge construction, transform exclusionary modes of community

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engagement, and address dominant power relations within academia and, more specifically, community–academy partnerships (see Lazarus, 2006, 2011; Ogunniyi, 2011).

This article describes and reflects on how the Spiritual Capacity and Religious Assets for Transforming Community Health through Mobilizing Males for Peace and Safety (SCRATCHMAPS) project aims to enact community engagement through a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. We begin our reflections with a description of the principles, values, and modes of engagement underlying transformatory approaches to community engagement, and then we delineate links to critical community psychological approaches. Thereafter, we describe the SCRATCHMAPS project and its particular community engagement model as framed by the principles of CBPR. We then analyze how this approach is implemented in a local community context. Our analysis focuses specifically on possibilities and challenges germane to CBPR as a community engagement strategy, with a view to drawing lessons for enacting critical community psychology in an African context.

Within South African tertiary education there has been a growing emphasis on *community engagement*, an umbrella term that includes various professional and academic pursuits such as service learning, professional service, and community-based and applied research. Key values and principles that guide such community initiatives are as follows: understanding and respecting both historical and current dynamics of the community, aligning academic objectives with the community's priorities, establishing appropriate structures and processes to promote accountability and optimal community participation and ownership, and strengthening and sustaining community initiatives (Herbertson, Ballesteros, Goodland, & Munilla, 2009; Lazarus, Taliép, Bulbulia, Philips, & Seedat, 2012).

Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, and Herreman (2010) provide a useful framework for understanding different approaches to community engagement that traverse a continuum to include consultation, consent, involvement, and participation. Engagement through consent focuses on obtaining stakeholder approval of an initiative; while consultation embraces interaction with the community, it does not include participation in all the phases of project development and implementation. Community involvement may incorporate relevant stakeholders as volunteers in a project, while participatory forms of engagement places the accent on including community members in the planning, implementation, and overall assessment of initiatives. Within participatory engagement in the context of marginalization and inequalities, the emphasis is on community knowledge, agency, control and ownership, and power differentials (see Seedat, 2012).

Following their continuum, Bowen et al. (2010) distinguish between three types of community engagement: transactional, transitional, and transformational. Transactional engagement tends to be unidirectional, reflecting a one-way communication and transfer (e.g., from academic institution to community). Transitional engagement goes beyond the one-way approach but does not commit to a full partnership, and it generally incorporates consultations and collaborations. Transformational engagement reflects two-way processes, characterized by joint learning, co-management, and shared control of projects. This approach encourages attentive listening, active dialogue, reflexivity, and a focus on the potential for unequal power dynamics in university–community partnership arrangements (see Seedat, 2012).

Eksteen, Bulbulia, Van Niekerk, Ismail, and Lekoba (2012), working in South Africa, understand community engagement to be a collaborative and partnership approach that emphasizes active and inclusive participation, encourages equitable power and mutual benefits for all parties in joint activities, and upholds the principles of justice,

critical consciousness, and self-determination. In explicating their model of community engagement, developed within the Ukuphepha Safety, Peace and Health Initiative, Eksteen and colleagues refer to six interconnected pathways: relationship building, community-centred learning, social justice and contextual congruence, citizenship and building of democratic traditions, strengthening community services, and affirming the social economy. Their model, drawing on a number of models and approaches, moves across the continuum of consultation, involvement, engagement, and ownership, with the latter being the ultimate goal.

CBPR, as the name suggests, is an embodiment of participatory engagement that reflects a particular worldview that seeks to shape engaged research practices, embodying a holistic, critical, systemic, and relational approach to knowledge construction and research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005; Nation, Bess, Voight, Perkins, & Juarez, 2011; Rappaport, Alegria, Mulvaney-Day, & Boyle, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). CBPR is based on partnerships between research institutions and community members, promotes co-learning and engagement with all relevant knowledges (including indigenous knowledge systems), and seeks to share findings with all relevant stakeholders. In CBPR, community engagement occurs at all levels of the research process, is relevant and responsive to community needs, affirms strengths and resources of the community, and is committed to pursuing both action and research goals. CBPR recognizes engagement as a long-term process that ultimately promotes community ownership and sustainability (Israel et al., 2005; Lazarus, Duran, Caldwell, & Bulbulia, 2012; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

The values and principles underlying community engagement practices, including CBPR described above, resonate with key values of community psychology (Chavis, 2000; Lazarus, 2007). Critical community psychologists within the South African context have emphasized the need to develop tools that enable sociohistorical, political, and economic analyses that focus on conflict and power dynamics (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Hamber, Masilela, & Terre Blanche, 2001; Seedat, Duncan, & Lazarus, 2001), support the development of empowerment programs that emphasize personal and collective agency (Lazarus, 2007), and encourage reflexivity (Seedat, 2012; Seedat & Suffla, 2012). Reflexivity involves researchers examining the philosophical assumptions that underlie research initiatives, and the shaping influences of their own location and positionality within a community engagement processes (Seedat & Suffla, 2012). The project that is described and discussed below constitutes one attempt to enact these imperatives.

THE SCRATCHMAPS PROJECT

In this section we discuss the context and specifics of the SCRATCHMAPS project as an enactment of critical community psychology within one low-income community that is marked by high levels of violence in the Western Cape, South Africa (Donson, 2008; Seedat, van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009). Males are particularly at risk of being both perpetrators and victims of violence in this community, as is the case in many other communities around the world (Donson, 2008; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002; Lazarus, Tonsing, Ratele, & Van Niekerk, 2011).

SCRATCHMAPS is organized around two key ideas. First, religion and spirituality constitute unexplored resources for addressing violence and promoting safety and peace (Cochrane et al., 2013; Laher, 2008; Lazarus, Seedat, & Naidoo, 2009). Second, hegemonic masculinity, a dominant set of beliefs and expectations about what men should and should

not do—in relation to the construction of manhood—can act as a major area of risk for violence perpetration and victimization (Clowes, Lazarus, & Ratele, 2010; Lazarus et al., 2011). Research points to direct links between negative forms of masculinities and violence and conflict, particularly in relation to the ways in which manhood or masculinities are constructed. Thus, research has also highlighted the importance of focusing on positive aspects of masculinities to promote safety and peace (Barker & Ricardo, 2005).

Informed by these two ideas, the main research question for the SCRATCHMAPS project is: How can the mobilization and leveraging of community assets, with a particular focus on spiritual capacity and religious assets, promote safety and peace, particularly through the promotion of generative masculinities, in a low-income South African community? The overall project objectives are as follows: (a) develop conceptual frameworks to explain the possible mediating influences of spiritual capacity and religious assets and generative masculinities in the promotion of safety and peace; (b) map the dynamics underlying spiritual capacity and religious assets in one community; (c) develop, implement, and evaluate an intervention that mobilizes spiritual capacity and religious assets to promote generative masculinities; and (d) contribute to our understandings of community engagement as it is expressed through a CBPR approach. This article focuses on the fourth objective of the project.

The SCRATCHMAPS project is located in a larger safety, peace, and health promotion program, the Ukuphepha Initiative: Demonstrating African Safety. SCRATCHMAPS is a partnership between the Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU), located in the South African Medical Research Council and University of South Africa, and the International Religious Health Assets Programme (IRHAP), an international program hosted by the Department of Public Health, University of Cape Town. In addition to the academic partners, two community structures have been established to manage and conduct the SCRATCHMAPS research in one community in the Western Cape: an advisory committee, comprising both community leaders and service providers, and a local community research team comprising 10 community members.

The participant community is situated in a neighbourhood in the Helderberg region in the province of the Western Cape, South Africa. There are approximately 164 houses and twice as many backyard dwellings in this low-income community. The residents are mostly Afrikaans speaking and were previously classified as “coloured”¹ by the apartheid regime. More than half of the residents are younger than 40 years of age; many have (45%) low educational levels and almost half of the population earns an income that is considered to be below the poverty line (Development Action Group, 1997²). Although there have been various social service interventions in this community, initiatives are fragmented and community advancement is limited.

The SCRATCHMAPS research design includes the following phases:

1. Preparation (2011–2012)
2. Community asset mapping and action planning (2012–2013)
3. Development, implementation, and evaluation of the main intervention (2013–2014)

¹Although the continued use of this term derived from apartheid is considered to be problematic to us, its continued use in research in South Africa is an accepted practice, given the redress still needed.

²Although this is an old reference, it is the only demographic study conducted specifically in the local community involved in SCRATCHMAPS. The South African Census 2011 figures do not isolate this particular neighbourhood in their statistical analysis.

Two areas of activity that run across the entire time frame of the project are (a) process evaluations, particularly of the CBPR community engagement strategy, and (b) ongoing development of the conceptual and theoretical framework. It should be noted that the theory action research relationship between the different parts of this work is dynamic in nature.

Phases one and two of the project have been completed, and thus constitute the focus for our reflective analysis in the sections that follow. Our analysis is aimed at describing a CBPR enactment of community engagement and reflecting on key characteristics of each of the CBPR principles and their specific enactment within the SCRATCHMAPS project. We also review achievements and challenges encountered in the enactment process. The discussion is informed by the process evaluation data obtained from the research thus far and our own insights as members of the research team.

REFLECTIONS ON SCRATCHMAPS' COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH AND STRATEGY

SCRATCHMAPS' community engagement strategy reflects a transformative approach that is linked to a critical community perspective (see Seedat, 2012). As such, SCRATCHMAPS consciously uses a CBPR approach to facilitate maximum participation, involving community members in the planning, implementation, and overall assessment of the project, including ongoing reflexive activities challenging unequal power relations. Table 1 captures SCRATCHMAPS' CBPR-informed community engagement framework.

Table 1. SCRATCHMAPS Community Engagement Process

<i>Transformational community engagement enacted through community-based participatory research (CBPR)</i>	
<i>CBPR principles</i>	<i>Community engagement phases</i>
Partnership as a framework	1. Preparation for research and action in and with local community
Co-learning and co-creation of knowledge	2. Community asset mapping and action planning
A participatory research process	3. Development, implementation and evaluation of intervention
An asset-based, strengths approach	<i>Across all phases: conceptual development and process evaluations</i>
Research relevance and responsiveness	
Working with the action-research tension	
Sustainable community building	
Community empowerment and agency	

The reflection that follows refers to each of the CBPR principles outlined in Table 1.

Partnership as a Framework

The partnership approach adopted in SCRATCHMAPS reflects a particular approach to power relations, specifically as it pertains to academy–community relationships. Partnership needs to be built on “respect” (see Patterson, Cromby, Brown, Gross, & Locke, 2011), and so requires a constant focus on knowledge and power, resources and power, participation and power, community dynamics, as well as research methodology challenges (Lazarus, Duran et al., 2012; Lazarus, Taliiep et al., 2012; Nation et al., 2011; Seedat, 2012; Springett & Wallerstein, 2008).

Integral to the focus on power, all key stakeholders in SCRATCHMAPS are viewed as equal partners—bringing together a diverse range of expertise, research skills, and theoretical knowledge. However, the assumption of equality is not a denial of power dynamics, especially when there is a tendency among community-based social actors to defer to those perceived to possess sophisticated academic knowledge and greater material resources (Marais, Naidoo, Donson, & Nortje, 2007).

SCRATCHMAPS has attempted to address these matters of power through open discussions and negotiations within the advisory committee and local research team, which includes 10 under- or unemployed residents of the community, and academics from SAPPRU/IRHAP. One of the specific ways in which the challenge of power differentials has been addressed within these structures is through the use of a transparent accounting of project funding. As one of the academic researchers noted in her diary: “I was aware that it was important that we share the SCRATCHMAPS budget with the Advisory and Research Team as such transparency is important when trying to equalize power relations and build a partnership.”

Co-learning and Co-creation of Knowledge

A partnership of equals, the goal of a critical participatory approach, requires a shift away from capacity building as “training” by academic experts, wherein community members are cast as consumers, to arrangements wherein all parties learn together, offering different strengths, talents, skills, and knowledge to a project (see Railton CAP Research Team, 2011). Such a shift requires a deep attitudinal orientation that encourages genuine respect for all partners as equals. Likewise a critical approach to community engagement demands that we adopt deep and active listening (Bettez, 2011) to acknowledge and engage with different knowledge systems to obviate academic dominance (Lazarus, 2006, 2011; Seedat, 2012).

In SCRATCHMAPS co-learning is pursued in a number of personal and structural ways. At a personal level, the project fosters critical reflexivity that includes an ongoing examination of team members’ attitudes towards themselves, others, and their own knowledge assumptions. This process entails a kind of deconstruction process, highlighted by critical theorists and community psychologists (see Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Hamber et al., 2001; Seedat, 2012). Critical reflexivity is facilitated primarily through regular reflective discussions in research team meetings (held once a week on average) and diaries compiled on a regular basis by both academic and community research team members. These diary reflections often include a specific focus on power relations within the group.

At a structural level, co-learning is facilitated by identifying the strengths and capacities of all the research team and advisory members and utilizing those strengths to address the different educational needs of the research team. This learning happens at both formal and informal levels. The academic members do, however, play a more central role in research skills training. Co-learning is also facilitated through eliciting residents’ views on all key aspects of the project, including project conceptualization.

A Participatory Research Process

Accepting that community participation is a central element of transformatory community engagement, CBPR, and community building (Austin, 2005; Bradbury & Reason, 2008; Minkler & Baden, 2008; Nation et al., 2011; Springett & Wallerstein, 2008),

SCRATCHMAPS facilitates optimal participation through the inclusion of community members in the first and final stages of the research (negotiating the aims of the project and ensuring that the findings are disseminated to those involved in the research). Community members are also included in areas that are often seen as the domain of the academics: developing the tools for data collection, collecting data through a variety of research methods, analyzing the data, and writing up and presenting of the findings.

Although interdisciplinary theoretical work has been conducted by the academic partners in the project, the development of the key concepts, and their relationship to one another, has been pursued within a grounded theory framework, primarily through the community asset mapping workshops and focus group discussions held with community members and service providers. The grounded theory work has been pursued through symposia and workshops that bring together a mix of academic and community experts. One of the SCRATCHMAPS advisory chairpersons, who participated in a recent colloquium, noted that the generation of knowledge was dependent on both academic and community knowledge's, saying that "*the one cannot be without the other*". He was referring to a colloquium which included both academics and community members and centred on discussing the conceptual framework for the project.

Another area of participation has been through the collective analysis of data within small groups. The whole team has been involved in both quantitative and qualitative forms of analysis, linked to the specific project methods. The data analysis process has fostered capacity building, particularly in computer literacy, statistical analysis skills, and qualitative thematic content analysis. The team has found these analytical processes to be particularly rewarding, as one community research team member indicated: "This is the day when the real work started for us as community researchers. We worked in teams [to do] the analysis [of the asset mapping workshops] By doing this work, it helped me gain more knowledge."

Other specific methods used within SCRATCHMAPS to promote community participation are as follows: (a) democratic group facilitation within the research team and advisory committee, (b) interactive workshops within the local research structures and with community members, and (c) interactive exercises within the community asset mapping and action planning processes (refer also to Kramer, Amos, Lazarus, & Seedat, 2012; Railton CAP Research Team, 2011). The key to achieving optimal participation, we believe, is in providing good group facilitation in all community contexts.

An Asset-Based, Strengths Approach

Kramer et al. (2012) refer to community asset mapping as a process of documenting the tangible and intangible resources of a community, framed as geographical and sociological space, and marked by strengths or assets that need to be enhanced. Asset mapping focuses on human capabilities and assets, recognizing assets lie in networks and relationships, making community assets visible for the community, promoting leadership, and encouraging community ownership of the knowledge generation and implementation process. Thus, asset mapping approaches represent engagement endeavours that foster participation, agency, and group inclusivity and conceptualizes communities as being resourceful and resilient (see Seedat & Suffla, 2012).

Within SCRATCHMAPS, community asset mapping has focused on identifying (and mobilizing) spiritual capacity and religious assets to promote generative masculinities for the purposes of facilitating community safety and peace. During 2012, three community asset mapping workshops were held with a total of 74 community members including

youth, adults, and elders, as well as both males and females. The formal evaluations of these workshops revealed a very positive response, with many participants highlighting how enlightening it was to “see” their community in a positive light and to plan action based on their own assessment of needs and strengths in the community. The following extracts from the evaluations highlight these points:

I have learnt [from participating in the workshop] not to give up hope.
 I am now more aware of the strengths and the assets in my community.
 I now know my community better.
 The greatest visible asset was that many people are prepared to work together.
 Identifying strengths helps build cohesion. It also builds community.
 [The workshop made me aware] that we can change things and we can reap the fruits from these changes.

In spite of this positive evaluation from community members, the academic members of the SCRATCHMAPS team who conducted these events were aware of many challenges in the development and use of the asset mapping tool, particularly relating to the complexities emerging from trying to focus on more specific assets (spiritual capacity and religious assets) and engaging in discussions on generative masculinities. The need to pursue more in-depth research on these conceptual challenges was noted.

Research Relevance and Responsiveness

Recognizing that social research obtains relevance by remaining responsive to local community needs and agendas (see Bettez, 2011; Nation et al., 2011; Springer & Wallerstein, 2008), SCRATCHMAPS has constantly endeavoured to identify and respond to needs, despite its focus on assets. From the initial consultation in 2011, where the aims and objectives of SCRATCHMAPS were reviewed and discussed with local community stakeholders, the project maintained a space for community participants to express their views about priority needs and actions. While some of the needs were directly linked to the focus of SCRATCHMAPS, most of the priorities identified were related to general community building. This has created a challenge within the project, which calls for constant attention to priorities identified by the community, irrespective of the particular focus of the research project itself.

Working With the Action-Research Tension

In SCRATCHMAPS, the academic members of the team have been intentionally committed to facilitating a dynamic flow between research and action and theory and practice, but this has not been a simple or easy process. Community members of the research team, the local community advisory committee, and other members of the community have repeatedly called for “less research and more action” in SCRATCHMAPS. This tension has been directly addressed in the research team and advisory committee, where the debates and reflections have revealed that, in fact, “research *is* action,” with the community asset mapping process being recognized as one example. The theory–practice relationship has also been held in tension through cyclic processes of theory-driven and grounded theory processes within the project, where the diverse knowledges and wisdoms of both community and academic members have been acknowledged and integrated into the emergent conceptual framework.

Sustainable Community Building

Community building, a central aim of community psychology practice (Chavis, 2000; Nowell & Boyd, 2010), refers to practices that mobilize community assets to support and promote positive connections and collaborative work among individuals, groups, and geographic communities for the purposes of improving community life (Austin, 2005; McNeely, 1999). Within a critical approach, community building stresses social justice and the promotion of a sense of agency and responsibility (Bettez, 2011).

SCRATCHMAPS has attempted to support community building through various strategies and approaches, for instance, through introducing a “spidergram” to help the research team map organisational and networking assets in the community. This spidergram exercise, pursued within the community asset mapping process, yielded a platform to facilitate the establishment of a wider network of service providers that may work collaboratively to promote sustainable community building (Railton CAP Research Team, 2011). One concrete outcome of this process was the establishment of a local community committee that now acts as the central conduit for planning community building and mobilizing and establishing service networks and resources in that context.

Community Empowerment and Agency

Following critical community psychology’s accent on personal and collective agency (see Bettez, 2011), SCRATCHMAPS focuses on the influences of colonialism and apartheid on individual and collective agency. The historical trauma (see Lazarus, Duran et al., 2012) created by apartheid has been expressed in various SCRATCHMAPS activities, by the research team, advisory committee, and general community members. Community members and service providers view the apathy, sense of helplessness, dependency, and anger in the community as manifestations of apartheid’s legacy and so have repeatedly requested some kind of community healing for “agency” to be released. For example, in one of the community asset mapping workshops, local service providers stressed that there is a “need to walk a path with these adults [who suffered under apartheid] in order to deal with their past.” Another excerpt from one of the researcher’s diary reiterates this point:

One aspect of the meeting that deserves highlighting is the feeling expressed, by all members, that they wanted to have some kind of “trauma” intervention to help them deal with what history has done to them—in particular, the effects of apartheid.

Thus, community healing processes are to be included within the planned intervention focusing on the promotion of generative masculinities (phase 3 of the project).

CONCLUSION: SCRATCHMAPS’ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS A CRITICAL ENACTMENT OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

SCRATCHMAPS as an enactment of critical community psychology attempts to promote collective agency and community empowerment as a way of addressing the legacies of colonialism and apartheid and their ongoing influences on community well-being. SCRATCHMAPS is in the middle of its 5-year process, and thus still has much to learn with respect to the effectiveness of the work and the extent to which the project aims and objectives are met.

However, drawing on the preceding analysis and recent reflections on the work of SCRATCHMAPS (Lazarus, Bulbulia, & Seedat, 2013) and by way of conclusion, we highlight a number of key lessons, considered to be “what really matters” in critical enactments of community psychology. Our work suggests the importance of respecting ourselves, others, and our environment, active listening, and valuing community-embedded knowledge through co-learning and co-construction of experiences. Within SCRATCHMAPS, an ethos of caring and sense of belonging and connectedness provide context and space to consider the damages of historical trauma and creatively work with the research-action tension. Developmental leadership and ongoing formative process evaluations assist in helping the research team reflect on and improve its work, fulfilling an ‘action-research’ cyclic function.

Our own commitment to reflexivity was expressed through an examination of how our positionality may entrench power differentials and recognition of diverse knowledge systems evident in communities. As part of a critical enactment, we worked in teams alongside the community-based social actors to talk to the perceived dichotomy between research and social action. In this respect, we encouraged an open dialogue about critically oriented research as a form of social action. So the transformatory approach to community engagement embodied in this project and described herein provides an example of engaging with and addressing concerns central to the lived realities of marginalized communities.

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