

Working Together to Advance Indigenous Interests with Community Psychology

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Highlights

- This issue provides insights to advance Indigenous peoples' interests with Community Psychology.
- These articles promote responsibility and action to increase Indigenous self-determined interests.
- Indigenous interests are represented in collaborations, knowledge, and interventions.

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Nigaya'iso gadugi nitsvnesdi: In the mind and heart always have the thought of working together"
(ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ ᎠᎵᎠᎵ ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ; Cherokee Nation)

The above quote represents one of several Cherokee community values that belong to all tribal citizens, who according to traditions passed down have a responsibility to maintain them. This particular value centers around the charge of thoughtfully (“in the mind”) and genuinely (“in the heart”) working together for and with the Cherokee community. Although drawn from traditional knowledge that has been passed down in one specific tribal community, this value resonates with the commitments and practices of Community Psychology. Relationship building, community empowerment, capacity building, among other collaborative modes of community engagement are keystones of Community Psychology (Trickett, 2009). Reading each of the articles in this special issue of *American Journal of Community Psychology*, there are numerous ways these researcher-community teams uphold the importance of *relationship*, which is foundational to

Indigenous knowledge (Cajete, 2016). Importantly, these articles accelerate vital conversations within Community Psychology about what it means to be guided by Indigenous knowledge and community perspectives, how best to represent the experiences of Indigenous peoples, and what relationships, roles, and responsibilities must be cultivated to better support Indigenous communities' self-determined interests. Further, the articles convey important strengths, challenges, and recommendations for moving beyond the status quo of intervention work with Indigenous communities to realize sustainable, systems-level change paving the way for additional Indigenizing projects. Collectively, these works highlight “novel” pathways toward a Community Psychology more responsive to the issues and interests of Indigenous peoples. However, these articles also make clear that many components to these pathways are by no means “novel” or new for Indigenous collaborators (e.g., drawing upon local knowledge and cultural practices to promote community health and wellness). Contributing authors' insights into advancing Indigenous peoples' interests with Community Psychology are organized around three overlapping and mutually constitutive domains: research collaborations, knowledge production and dissemination, and intervention processes and practices.

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Working Together to Represent Indigenous Interests in Collaborations

Community Psychology's distinctive approach to research entails trusting, collaborative relationships organized around the issues, and interests of community partners. Collaborative approaches to research have increasingly

become expected by Indigenous community collaborators and accepted across fields of study (e.g., health, education, environment), leading several scholars to advance models that aim to structure these collaborations to better serve Indigenous interests throughout the research process. These models include, among others, Community-Based Participatory Research (Wallerstein, Duran, Oetzel, & Minkler, 2018), Tribal Participatory Research (Fisher & Ball, 2003), Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012), and Decolonizing Research (e.g., Smith, 2012). Articles in this special issue feature a variety of collaborative Indigenous community-research arrangements, some spanning multiple decades (see Cwik et al., 2019; Kading & Walls, 2019; Rasmus, Charles, John, & Allen, 2019; Wendt et al., 2019), and they emphasize the centrality of relational context informing the strengths and weaknesses of these models for realizing the goals of each collaboration. Taken together, these works highlight exciting points of convergence between Community Psychology and many Indigenous peoples' priorities while opening conversations within the field about the kinds of relationships that are needed to continue and improve upon in this work.

Contributing authors underscored the importance of attending to relationships within and surrounding Indigenous community collaborations. As one article noted, “very rarely are the mechanisms of ‘CBPR gone wrong’ examined” to offer guidance on how to maintain good relationships among collaborators (Rasmus, Charles, et al., 2019; see also Parker, Pearson, Donald, & Fisher, 2019). Reflecting on the relational context of federally funded collaborations with Indigenous communities, researchers raised seldom-published concerns “about replicating colonial relations through pursuing research framed by priorities of federal funders and academic institutions” (Wendt et al., 2019). Rather than fixed and uniform, though, research relationships were described as dynamic, multidimensional, and at times, exacting, taking a widely unacknowledged emotional toll on some Indigenous researchers (Walden & West, 2019). This includes, for example, painful experiences related to the death of a researcher or community collaborator, sometimes an elder who holds vast community knowledge and often guides research efforts (Rasmus, Charles, et al., 2019). Absent good relationships for research, these works highlighted how Indigenous community members may be guarded against sharing important nuances of local knowledge (John et al., 2019; Wendt et al., 2019), and researchers may overlook forms of diversity within Indigenous communities, creating additional challenges to collaborative work (e.g., diverse religious or cultural spiritual beliefs/practices informing different opinions about research engagement and community solutions; see Gone, 2019; Wendt et al., 2019).

The authors in this special issue refreshingly reflected on dimensions of research often omitted from the literature, and from the diverse relational arrangements they described, we can hear multiple perspectives contributing to a richer conversation in Community Psychology about how researchers, practitioners, and institutions (e.g., the Society for Community Research and Action) might think differently about the relational contexts of community research and action so as to better inform future work with Indigenous communities. For example, how might the responsibilities of Community Psychologists be differently construed if attention to relational context was oriented toward responding to common Indigenous cultural sensibilities (e.g., Parker et al., 2019) versus sociopolitical interests of particular Indigenous nations (e.g., Quayle & Sonn, 2019; Fraser, Hunter, Lemay, & Splicer, 2019)? Further engagement in these conversations can deepen our understanding of Community Psychology's foundational principles (e.g., “sociocultural competence”, “reflective practice”) and their relevance to Indigenous community research and action. To work together “in the mind and heart,” then, it is important we continue (individually and with communal support) to thoughtfully contemplate our relationships, roles, and corresponding responsibilities within our own communities (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) and those with which we partner with on research and action (e.g., community mobilization) projects.

Working Together to Represent Indigenous Interests in Knowledge

Community Psychology values ecological perspectives, contextual analyses, and knowledge situated within local worldviews to understand and pursue issues and interests prioritized by community partners (Trickett, 2009). This special issue propels the field forward by exploring these familiar tenants of Community Psychology in relation to Indigenous interests and their representation in knowledge production and dissemination. Common to these efforts, described by some as Indigenizing or decolonizing research and teaching, included historical contextualization of community problems, care for Indigenous self-representation, and engagement with Indigenous languages.

Importantly, all of the articles—which span collaborative community-driven projects across the United States, Canada, and Australia—contextualized community problems in relation to enduring impacts of colonial violence and conceptualized their work as responding to that legacy of historical and ongoing settler colonialism. While several researchers referenced existing literatures, many

turned to contemporary Indigenous community members to provide that context. Research teams working with the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona (Cwik et al., 2019) and Yup'ik communities in Alaska (Rasmus, Charles, et al., 2019), for example, invited elders to provide this context, which was then synthesized to inform suicide prevention interventions. Comparatively, rather than synthesize community member accounts, researchers working with the Noongar in Western Australia (Quayle & Sonn, 2019) and the Aaniih (Gros Ventres) of Fort Belknap, Montana (Gone, 2019), offered in-depth analyses of narrative forms used to communicate local understandings of this context to glean additional insights into its relevance for understanding community life today. By situating community members as authorities over their own experiences, these projects were better able to infuse existing bodies of knowledge with Indigenous peoples' self-determined representations of community life. Further, these projects support a parallel process of Indigenous self-representation in knowledge dissemination, as illustrated by projects aiming to Indigenize psychology curricula (Schmidt, 2019), Indigenous research ethics training (Parker et al., 2019), and using Indigenous art and artists in research evaluation/results dissemination (Straits, Tafoya, Cordero, Tsinajinnie, & Jose, 2019). These efforts amplify and reinforce Indigenous self-representation in bodies of knowledge that circulate through academic and community settings.

Integral to supporting self-determined representations of Indigenous experiences and community life in knowledge production and dissemination processes is engagement with Indigenous languages. Jacob and colleagues (2019) underscored the essential value of Indigenous languages to preserving Indigenous knowledge and ways of living. While one article detailed an Indigenous language education pilot program for K-12 teachers-in-training to highlight language learning as a key pathway toward community wellness (Jacob et al., 2019), contributions to this special issue frequently engaged Indigenous languages as integral to knowledge production or dissemination. Indigenous language terms and phrases were often used in defining problems and solutions for community wellness (e.g., Cwik et al., 2019; Rasmus, Charles, et al., 2019), and on two occasions, analysis of language practices (e.g., storytelling) enabled researchers to illuminate less readily apparent dimensions of community life (e.g., Gone, 2019; Quayle & Sonn, 2019).

Together, these contributions explore familiar tenants of Community Psychology in relation to the challenge of representing community interests in knowledge production and dissemination. Although notable patterns emerged around historical contextualism, Indigenous self-determined representations, and Indigenous languages, closer

attention to how projects varied in their pursuit of these goals invites a much-needed conversation within Community Psychology and with Indigenous community partners regarding what it means to represent Indigenous interests in knowledge production. For example, how might Community Psychologists' concerns about Indigenous interests related to (mis)representation be differently directed by attention to Indigenous language terms and phrases (e.g., local terms used to categorize experience, per Kading & Walls, 2019) versus traditional language practices (e.g., storytelling, which may or may not be in a tribe's traditional language; per Gone, 2019). Engagement with both traditional language terms and language practices can be meaningful modes of Indigenous self-representation. To move these conversations forward, cross-disciplinary engagements with Indigenous Studies, where theories of Indigeneity, traditional language revitalization, and Indigenous wellness have been more fully elaborated, would greatly benefit the field and our Indigenous community partners.

Working Together to Represent Indigenous Interests in Interventions

Nearly all contributions to the special issue featured descriptions of Indigenous community interventions, and thus not surprisingly, a third domain for consideration of representing Indigenous interests is interventions. Interest in developing health and wellness interventions tailored to the interests and experiences of minoritized communities, including Indigenous communities, has grown in recent decades, resulting in a range of responses to questions about how interventions could or should be guided by local knowledge (Okamoto, Kulis, Marsiglia, Steiker, & Dustman, 2014; Rasmus, Trickett, Charles, John, & Allen, 2019). While the bulk of this literature has focused tailoring established, evidence-based health interventions (cultural adaptation research; see Castro, Barrera, & Holleran Steiker, 2010) and training health professionals to provide services differently (e.g., cultural competence training; see Sue, Zane, Nagayama Hall, & Berger, 2009), Indigenous community intervention research has distinguished itself by making additional calls for local knowledge to inform interventions (e.g., practice-based evidence; see Echo-Hawk, 2011; see also, Rasmus, Trickett, et al., 2019). Articles in this special issue reflect a continuation of this trend by pushing for creative, community-driven responses to health and wellness issues, elevating the use of Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies to move beyond harmful practices of “tagging a feather on” (Walters et al., 2018, p. 2) established intervention processes and practices.

Researchers, in considering how to inform intervention work with Indigenous community interests, described intervention development and implementation processes that were distinctive in emphasis on collaboration and consensus-building to understand local health issues and explore possible solutions. The Waimānalo Pono Research Hui, for example, developed from a partnership between academic researchers and one Native Hawaiian community, met monthly over meals to build consensus and clarity around community priorities for research and intervention programming (Chung et al., 2019). Engaging in genuine collaboration and consensus-building can also support Indigenous communities in specifying local, self-determined understandings and concepts for communicating about health, wellness, and healing to better inform intervention research. For example, Anishinaabe community members worked together to define wellness concepts used to guide future research (Kading & Walls, 2019), while in another article, interviews with American Indian community members living on a reservation provided local definitions of health, illness, substance misuse, and recovery to inform a local multilevel community-driven intervention approach to programming (Skewes et al., 2019).

Informing intervention work with Indigenous community interests also led researchers to develop interventions that featured a range of practices leveraging both professional and local Indigenous community knowledge. For example, adopting a collaborative, consensus-building intervention development process, one research team pursued an intergenerational, cultural approach to upstream school-based suicide prevention that involved White Mountain Apache elders reinforcing connections to youth by teaching Apache culture, language, and ways of life (Cwik et al., 2019). Taking a similar approach to intervention development, another research team aimed to address mental and physical health issues within the Blackfeet Nation by developing an intervention trial in which one arm hiked to a culturally significant site (John et al., 2019). Together, these two contributions combine Indigenous community knowledge into their respective approaches as part of a consensus-building process. Additionally, Wendt and colleagues (2019) featured seven research–community teams engaged in a range of culturally adapted and culturally grounded intervention research projects (all guided by partner community preferences) to address substance use prevention and treatment. Together, these contributions demonstrate how, with good research relationships, being responsive to Indigenous community interests in intervention research leads collaborations to pursue diverse routes toward health and wellness, which often defy overly simplistic and restrictive Indigenous–Western binaries.

In sum, these Indigenous community–academic research teams demonstrate a variety of ways that Indigenous knowledge, including traditions, values, language, and practices, can guide intervention development, implementation, and evaluation. Rather than follow a predetermined script, research teams embraced collaboration and consensus-building to bring partners together and develop creative responses to current community issues using a combination of community members' local knowledge and researchers' professional training (often not mutually exclusive categories). Moreover, research teams often included community members with diverse roles and perspectives within partner communities to guide work (e.g., youth, elders, service providers, those with lived experience related to the focus of research/intervention), helping to ensure intervention programs served the priorities of these sovereign nations. Thus, Indigenous community intervention researchers extend Community Psychology principles in their work, and through collaborative and consensus-building efforts guided by Indigenous self-determined interests, they continue to lead the field with innovative, community-driven responses to local priorities concerning health and wellness.

Conclusions: Our Collective Responsibility “Working Together”

Community Psychology has long pushed for a broad contextual shift away from focusing on individuals in isolation (as in conventional Psychology) toward understanding individuals as embedded within communities (Trickett, 2009). Three years ago, this field celebrated its 50th anniversary, and Gone (2016) urged us to consider Indigenous alternative (or “alter-Native”) knowledges to inform our work, including historical, intergenerational trauma in the etiology of problems; relational ways of being and approaches to wellness; reclamation of Indigenous traditions to guide healing; and honoring and prioritizing Indigenous epistemologies. The contributing authors in this special issue of *American Journal of Community Psychology* respond to this call by building a conversation about how Indigenous interests can be infused into Community Psychology collaborations, knowledge production and dissemination, and community interventions. These are conversations that must continue, not only among individual Community Psychologists, but also the professional communities in which they are embedded (e.g., the Society for Community Research and Action; graduate and undergraduate training programs) to move our field toward becoming more responsive to Indigenous issues and more useful in collaborative work with Indigenous communities. As Dr. Linda

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) asserted, “Producing research knowledge that documents social injustice, that recovers subjugated knowledges, that helps create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and ‘listened to’ and that challenges racism, colonialism and oppression is a risky business” (p. 198). Honest conversations about this work, its challenges, and potential solutions keep us moving forward and are necessary as we engage in this “risky business.” The body of work in this special issue describes diverse collaborative community research, action, and intervention efforts, yet it is a testament to a larger collective working together “in the mind and heart” and demonstrating our responsibility and action toward advancing a Community Psychology in service of Indigenous peoples and their self-determined interests.

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