

Collaborative Research as Subversive Practice? Can we challenge structures through
collaboration?

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This paper analyzes the ongoing process of a collaborative research project evaluating mental health supported housing. By considering the experiences of two academic researchers, one community researcher and two service user researchers, we ask whether the relationships formed through collaborative research have the potential to challenge oppressive structures. The oppressive structures to which we refer include the marginalization of psychiatric survivors, the positioning of academic knowledge as superior to experiential knowledge, and the hierarchical relationships and power imbalances between mental health service users and service providers. In this paper, we share the successes as well as the challenges of this ongoing project, consider them in light of the existing literature, and ask if collaborative research is subversive practice: does it challenge power relations and promote structural change?

Collaborative Research and Social Change

We use collaborative research as a name for research that emphasizes a partnership with those affected by it: research that is often referred to as Participatory Action Research (PAR). As Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow, and Brown (2005) remind us, PAR is not just a research methodology, but rather a philosophy, rooted in social justice. However, as PAR becomes more mainstream in its use, it seems that researchers may be forsaking this philosophy and rather advocating for PAR as a means to improve research rather than *necessarily* to also strive for social justice (e.g. Allam et al., 2001; Smith, Monaghan, & Broad, 2002). While we certainly agree that quality is always of concern in research and that participation of those affected by research will undoubtedly improve the quality of the process and results, if we focus solely on this as rationale—to the exclusion

of attempting to create social change through our research processes—, we risk reproducing relations of power, where, as Nygreen (2006) suggests, we simply try to convince those with whom we are collaborating to see the world as we do or where we use participation only for our own purposes, “as a means to an end” (Chung & Lounsbury, 2006). In other words, we risk co-opting the very knowledges that ought to both inform our research and be honoured by it.

One of the goals of PAR is social change; however, there is disagreement as to what is regarded as valid social change (Healy, 2001): is it small, local changes or, in order for change to “count,” must it be comprehensive social change? Despite this disagreement, Maguire (1988) notes that there are three types of social change that PAR is aimed at achieving: raising critical consciousness of researchers and participants, improving the lives of people involved in the research project, and transforming social structures and relationships. Healy (2001) suggests that PAR researchers must celebrate local changes (i.e., changes in relationships), while Weick (1984) asserts that, in social change work, it is important to achieve “small wins,” rather than expecting large-scale change to occur dramatically. In fact, Danieli and Woodhams (2005) note that very often those conducting emancipatory research with individuals with disabilities argue that participation in the research process can itself be transformative.

We do not necessarily see comprehensive social change and local changes as different sorts of transformation. We understand that one way to effect structural change is to alter the ways in which we relate to others. Giddens (1984), in his structuration theory, asserts that structures (what he refers to as the *rules and resources* influencing our actions) are only created within relationship and, thus, are challenged through relationship as well.

Part of our reflections on our research process is aimed at understanding whether this is occurring within our project.

Collaborative Research and Power

There is an increasing awareness of the need to consider the power relationships within PAR or collaborative research projects (e.g., Carrick, R., Mitchell, A., & Lloyd, K., 2001; Healy, 2001; Nygreen, 2006; Ochocka, Janzen, & Nelson, 2002; Wallerstein, 1999). However, these analyses of the process of collaborative research projects consider the power dynamics among members of the project, but do not seem to look more broadly at the context within which the project is situated: the organizational and structural processes that impact on the power relations and the ability of the project to produce meaningful change (Grant, Nelson, & Mitchell, in press; Kemmis, 2001).

For example, in our collaborative research project including two academic researchers, a community researcher, and four researchers who are tenants of the housing development we are studying, we can name these structural sites of power relations: two universities, the organization in which we are conducting the research, social attitudes toward mental health and illness, traditionally hierarchical relationships between service users and service providers, disabling attitudes regarding the abilities of psychiatric survivors, and social constructions of academics and professionals as the holders of valid knowledge.

We have identified a very few authors who have considered the broader structural processes that influence the positionings of those involved in a collaborative research project. For example, Varcoe (2006), describing a collaborative research project where she attempted to create a safe place for racialized women, notes that emancipatory

agendas in anti-racist research are made more onerous in light of widespread racism and structural inequities that lead to unequal access to privileges and resources that enable meaningful participation. Reid (2000), in a project with a women's organization, found that the power dynamics in the setting, along with social inequities, interfered with the research team's ability to re-address power imbalances.

The Research Project

The project referred to here is a mixed methods longitudinal analysis of two models of supported housing for those labeled with serious mental illnesses: housing with onsite support and housing without such support—both new housing developments. We are in the first year of a three year project, where we are tracking tenants' progress and satisfaction with their housing. One of the major goals of the project is to build capacity within the organization to conduct its own research. As a result, four tenant researchers have been hired to participate in the project, with the hope that, as time progresses, they will be able to take control of the project with occasional consultation from the academic researchers.

In order to locate tenants willing to participate in the project, Jill and Anne asked the executive director of the organization to announce at a community meeting that they were hoping to hire tenants to work on the project. From this announcement, five individuals expressed interest and were interviewed. All of them were hired and trained; however, one has withdrawn from the study because of health issues and another is sporadically involved. The other three attend meetings and collect data consistently. Of these three, two (Bob and Philip) agreed to co-author this paper.

The community researcher (Michael) is a former student of Jill and Anne. He has an interest in collaborative research as well as in mental health services. When Jill and Anne realized that they needed a community researcher, they approached Michael because they both thought highly of his ability to form relationships and to remain organized and committed.

Jill and Anne are both researchers at academic institutions. Anne has thirty years experience in social work research as well as experience with mental health education. Jill has five years experience as a researcher as well as frontline and management experience in mental health services, especially in supported housing work.

The Organization

The organization in this study provides supported housing to individuals labeled with a mental illness. It has operated one 40 unit apartment building since the early 1990s and opened this new building in January, 2006. The new building has approximately 30 bachelor apartments, as well as offices, a common lounge area, a common eating area and a common outdoor garden area. There is a full time caretaker who lives on site as well as a program manager with an office on site, seven resource workers who provide individual and group support, planned activities and crisis intervention, and a peer mentor who provides supportive counseling, crisis intervention, and recreation support. In addition, there is an executive director and a housing administrator who are responsible for the new building as well as the original one.

The organization has regular, planned group activities, activity and skills groups, and a meal program where tenants eat breakfast (self-serve, facilitated by a peer) and the evening meal (prepared by a chef) together. There are monthly meetings for all tenants

of the building and tenants are expected to take an active role in these and other aspects of the internal community. While tenants live in their own apartments, the group activities and common areas, as well as the focus on peer support, provide them with the opportunity to have both privacy and community.

A previous study (Grant, 2006) of the organization (when it only had the one building) found that the central feature of the organization was its focus on community and recovery from mental illness through this community. Further, this previous study identified three key aspects of the organization that supported the community it creates: mutual respect, interdependence, and structured flexibility.

During the first phase of this project, the organization decided that it would open a third building—this one without onsite support. While it is only just beginning to rent its apartments, tenants at this third building will also participate in the study.

After Jill completed her doctoral dissertation at the organization, the management of the organization asked her to conduct an evaluation of their new services. Jill agreed, with the condition that the project serve to increase capacity for research at the organization. The organization approved of this approach and Anne agreed to work with Jill on the project, which is funded by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Prior to the funding, the organization paid the tenant researchers for their work; they are now paid through the grant.

Jill and Anne were committed to a collaborative model of research for this project for many reasons: to create employment opportunities; to build capacity at the organization; to improve the quality of the research; and to learn more about collaborative research. Foremost, though, was the awareness that this approach to research was compatible with

the values of the organization: community-building by drawing on the strengths of individuals.

To date, our research project has included training and research team meetings, data collection via surveys and interviews (partnerships between Jill or Michael and one of the tenant researchers), data analysis, and reflections on our process. This paper presents some of the reflections we have had on our research process.

Method

Each of us spent some time reflecting on the process of the research thus far. We responded in writing to the questions below. Each of us then submitted our responses to Jill, who gathered them together and tried to find the themes within our responses.

Results

The results suggest that we bring and are having varying experiences, interests and commitments to the project. The themes constructed from our responses are shared as well as quotes. As one of us is quoted, we are identified as a Tenant Researcher (TR) or as an External Researcher (ER).

Interest in Project

The first question we responded to was: Why were you interested in being involved as a researcher in this project? The themes arising from this question were: to make a difference, to learn about research or collaborative research, to enact values related to social justice, and to learn about the results of the project.

To Make a Difference

From our responses, it seems that some of us joined the project with a strong commitment to the organization and to the people who live there, wanting to make a

difference in the experiences of those who live there. For example, one of us (TR) responded that they are involved, “Because I have lived at [the organization] for 15 years and I have been active in the community. I hope I can make a difference in the way people have lived.”

An ER stated their involvement arose from a desire to help to build capacity at the organization.

When I was approached by management to do this project, I wanted very much to help the organization out—I believed (believe) that one way to help the organization out in a way that matches their values is to help tenants become capable of doing research—so that the organization builds skills and doesn’t have to call on outside researchers for future projects.

Learn About Research/Collaborative Research

In addition to wanting to make a difference for others, some of us also wanted to make a difference in our own research abilities and saw this project as an opportunity to further develop research skills and to better understand how collaborative research succeeds. For example, one of us (ER) said

I was interested in seeing if people who are residents in housing run by this organization were able to draw from the strengths and confidence that the program tried to generate for residents to take up the responsibility to be primary data collectors in our study.

Another ER noted, “I was partly drawn by an interest and value in community-based participatory research and mental health and social work...The project presented an opportunity to use and develop research knowledge and skill.”

Social Justice Values

One of us (ER) saw this project as an opportunity to enact some values related to social justice, responding to the marginalization of psychiatric survivors’ knowledges and to the barriers to employment: “I wanted to provide jobs for psychiatric survivors & I think

collaborating with service users...increases opportunities to challenge the idea that only professionals and academics have valid knowledge and skills.”

Curious About Results

The project, it seems, provides an opportunity for us to better understand the experiences of tenants at the housing developments. One TR said, “I was curious about how new residents perceived the [organization]’s environment, which is unique as well as supportive.” Similarly, an ER with a previous research experience with the organization noted, “I spent time at [the organization] doing my dissertation research, during which I was struck by what a special place [the organization] is and was interested, when asked, in watching the progress of the new programs.”

Positive Aspects of Involvement in Project

The second question we responded to was “What have you liked about being involved in this project?” Four themes arose from the answers: developing skills, feeling connected to the subject, enjoying the mutually respectful relationships we are building, and feeling valued.

Developing Skills

As noted above, one of the reasons researchers decided to work on this project was to learn new skills and/or further develop old ones. From our responses to this question, it appears that we are meeting this goal. A TR said, “I like interviewing the new residents partly because I have a background in sales interviewing and also as an assistant researcher.” An ER noted the opportunity to learn more about doing collaborative research: “I like learning about how to do/not to do collaborative research.”

Feeling Connected to the Subject

Again, linked to the reasons why researchers became involved in the project, we expressed that we feel a connection to the topic of supported housing. For example, an ER stated that they enjoyed “learning about mental health housing experiences from discussions with resident researchers and from interviews with participants in the study.” The TRs both expressed that they enjoyed the research because of their personal connection to the challenges and successes of participants. A TR shared, “On a practical level I can relate to their housing needs.”

Enjoying the Mutually Respectful Relationships We Are Building

Most of us mentioned the importance of the relationships we are building through the research project. An ER said that they are enjoying “Talking, working, and developing professional relationships with resident researchers.” Another expressed how the respect held for each other makes a difference in how we approach the project.

We are still in the early days of this project, but I am enjoying the opportunity to get to know some residents of the programs we are studying. I have been impressed by the dignity and self-acceptance of the resident researchers, and their eagerness to learn new skills. I am impressed by their confidence, and their expectation that they will be treated with the same respect and openness that they extend to others. I am also impressed by their patience and persistence as we proceed through the project at a slower pace than was expected because the buildings are filling up more slowly than expected.

Feeling Valued

While the ERs seemed to accentuate the importance of relationships, the TRs noted the results of these relationships: that they feel valued. These are the examples of feeling valued that they shared: “I can express my thoughts and views on the day to day operation of [the organization].” “People can look at me and have trust in what I am doing.” “I feel very happy about having a job.”

Negative Aspects of the Project

We responded to two questions linked to the negative aspects of the project: What have you disliked about being involved in the project; and what have you found frustrating about being involved in the project? Our responses included: the surveys, challenges in relationships, institutional bureaucracy, and nothing.

Surveys

One of the TRs noted that the use of surveys was not to their liking, saying, “I personally dislike questionnaires and I think there are like minded residents. I’m thinking of the surveys.”

Challenges in relationships

It is unsurprising, given the development of new relationships and the extension of existing relationships, that there would be some challenges related to this. Some researchers noted that it was frustrating when a member of the Research Team did not show the same commitment as they did.

Institutional bureaucracy

One of the researchers (ER) described the challenges faced in interacting with large bureaucracies that are not necessarily conducive to collaborative research.

I have disliked working within the strictures put on by the bureaucracies we are part of. First, the [researcher] contracts were outrageously and unnecessarily legalistic. This almost put the project in jeopardy because, understandably, they scared people who are not necessarily used to so much bureaucracy and fear of liability. Second, for the risk people [at the university] to consider that employing service users was somehow risky—yet being unable to define it—was very frustrating.

Nothing

Three of us said that there was nothing that we disliked or found frustrating about the project. For example, a TR said, “I am happy with everything. No complaints.”

Surprising Aspects of the Project

We considered the ways in which we have been surprised by the project. Our answers are captured by these themes: professional relationships and commitment of the team, results of the research, and the structural barriers to and supports for collaborative research.

Professional Relationships Demonstrating a Commitment of the Team

Each of us commented on the extent to which we are pleasantly surprised by the professional relationships and commitment to the research and the team. An ER summed up our feelings: “The level of positive rapport that I feel has been established with the resident researchers also surprises me. I generally expect less openness and connectedness from work relationships.”

We expanded on this idea by noting each other’s professionalism. It is interesting that the ERs and the TRs seemed to be implying that we anticipated similar areas of difficulty that have not, as yet, arisen for us. A TR said, “I was also surprised at the professionalism that Mike Weyman has shown in moving the project forward despite all the scheduling difficulties.” Similarly, an ER noted that “the ease and pleasure of the project has also surprised me: people generally have been reliable, punctual and cooperative. Many other task groups in which I have been involved have been much less enjoyable.”

Linked to that, one of the ERs noted that they were surprised at the confidence of the TRs when they were interviewing the community researcher

When we interviewed Michael for the research coordinator position, I was surprised at how confidently the resident researchers questioned him. They were not at all shy about moving beyond the “professional” questions about experience with research, and what attracted him to the position to more “personal” questions about what he likes to do in his spare time, and where he grew up.

Research Results

Some of us have been surprised by the results of the research we are conducting, both by how open participants are and by the positive nature of the comments they are providing in regard to their housing. One TR noted that it surprised him when “one resident in particular opened up when interviewed. His candor and paranoia-less answers surprised me.” Another TR spoke more generally about how his fellow tenants have been very open with their answers in the interviews: “People at [the organization] have come around and expressed their concerns without fear. With a little encouragement people learned to trust one another.”

Along with being surprised at how open participants have been, some of us expressed surprise at the positive nature of their comments. For example, an ER said, “I have been surprised by the high level of favourable comments provided by participants and resident researchers about living at [the organization]. I had expected to hear more comments that were negative.”

Structural Barriers to and Supports for Collaboration

The final area with which we expressed surprise concerned the structural barriers and supports we are finding related to our project. These areas of surprise were all expressed by ERs.

One ER noted that they were

surprised—and disappointed— by [a staff member]’s reaction to tenant researchers: that they should not be hearing confidential material from other tenants and that staff members would be better equipped to conduct the interviews. It’s interesting that [the staff member] seems to think that, because the tenant researchers are service users, they are unable to maintain confidentiality. It also surprised me that [the staff member] didn’t see that employing the tenant researchers is just the same as employing tenants in other positions in the organization.

The structural barrier referred to here is internal to the organization involved in the research. In contrast, an ER noted how the organization supported the research and the positive effect this has on the research and the researchers.

I have also been surprised by the sense of peace and acceptance that the residents convey – about themselves, and about the slower than expected progress of the study. I find that this acceptance of how things are unfolding, which I understand to be an extension of the culture of the residence where they live, is “contagious”, and I am less concerned about “being behind schedule” than I might be in other projects.

In other words, this ER believes that there may be structural support at the organization for collaborative research.

Another area of structural constraint that we noticed was not internal to the organization, but rather related to the culture of research and our sometimes narrow empirically-based ideas of “proper” research. An ER stated

I was surprised by how wedded we are to certain “acceptable” approaches to interviewing. While it may not be “objective” to include dialogue and personal connection between interviewer and participant, it seems to me that this is an example of an opportunity to draw on and honour the strengths of psychiatric survivors. But it’s tricky because the quality of the research is, of course, very important—and we don’t really know what effect this is having on the interviews.

The ambivalence in that researcher’s response may be related to learning/re-learning through participation in this project. The final question we responded to related to our learning from the research.

What We are Learning

It appears that we are all in agreement that there is some important learning occurring through participation in this project. The learning that we have identified includes learning from the results, learning confidence and hope, and learning about collaborative research.

Learning from the Results of the Research

From the interviews, in particular, we are learning about the challenges faced by those labeled with mental illnesses with regard to finding and holding on to suitable homes. A TR observed, “The housing difficulties of psychiatrically disabled people seems to weigh heavily on them.” An ER noted that they are learning about the disparities in housing: “From residents’ accounts, I have been struck by the sharp differences in the quality of mental health housing and the very poor condition of many mental health housing options in [the city where the research is being conducted].”

In addition to learning substantive information, we are also learning about ourselves and about the process of collaborative research.

Learning Confidence and Hope

Tenant researchers mentioned the impact that being involved in the research project is having on them personally. For example, one said that being involved in the project means “being happy with myself and learning to live again with faith and hope.” A TR also said that participating in the project is allowing them “to get involved in community again after years of hurt: I can believe in myself again.”

Learning about Collaborative Research

As noted above, several of us expressed as reasons for participating in the project learning about conducting collaborative research. From our responses, it seems we are succeeding in this area. In particular, we are learning about the barriers to collaborative research as well as the importance of being committed to it.

One ER said

I have also learned to trust the process and to put away some of the taken-for-granted “best practices” about conducting research. For example, having the tenant researchers being more conversational than I would be in an interview has certainly not ruined the research. It will be interesting to speculate on whether it has helped the research for the very reason why having tenant researchers should—that is, to connect more closely with the other tenants.

Another ER noted that being involved in this project is giving them confidence in collaborative research as an effective research strategy and helping them to learn about the aspects that make it successful.

I have learned a number of things so far from this project. One is that more deeply participatory approaches to research are possible. I have learned that the key to successfully engaging community-based people who have not been trained as researchers in data collection is training and ongoing support. With community-based research, whether participatory or not, the researchers have little control over how programs will develop, whether projected timelines will be achieved, and whether data collection will proceed as scheduled. I have learned that I am less anxious about variations from the original research design than I might have been in the past, and that funders are likely to be forgiving about variations from the original design that are beyond the control of the research team.

Discussion

After Jill summarized our responses to each of those questions, she then asked these questions of the data.

1. How do structural rules and resources impact on our ability to effectively collaborate?

One of the structural rules of which we are aware is that knowledge possessed by academics and professionals is often more highly valued than that possessed by users of mental health services (see Grant, 2006 for an in depth discussion of this). We can see the reproduction of this rule through the discomfort experienced by some of us toward the approach that the TRs take to interviewing: an approach that is much more conversational and interactive than that with which the ERs might be comfortable. One of the ERs noted that it is a bit of a quandary to balance making space for TRs's knowledges and approaches with established approaches to interviewing. This push and pull between avoiding co-optation and following the rules we learn about research suggests some of the challenges in conducting a collaborative project. It also encourages us to find a way to combine all members' knowledges in a process that is acceptable to and comfortable for all of us.

Our experiences also reflect some of the marginalization of psychiatric survivors that one of us mentioned as a reason for being involved in the project. We have encountered attitudes at the organizations involved in this project—the organization that is the locale of the research and the universities involved—that reflect broader dehumanizing and mistrusting attitudes toward psychiatric survivors. ERs mentioned these attitudes as expressed by staff at a university and staff at the organization, jolting us with the assumption of a professional location of expertise and the assumption of the inability of psychiatric survivors to be trusted.

Through our answers, then, it is apparent that at least two structural rules impact on our ability to collaborate effectively: a hierarchical view of forms of knowledge and marginalization of psychiatric survivors.

2. Are we challenging social structures through collaborative research?

This question aims at understanding whether our relationships are a site of subversive practice. The answers are mixed, which may well be reflective of a struggle between two structures that impact on the nature of relationships and services in the mental health field (Grant, under review).

TRs stated that they feel valued through this project and that they enjoy the access to employment that it provides. In addition, through our relationships, we are increasing mutual respect of one another while seeing each other in different roles than those to which we may be accustomed. It is very telling, we believe, that we are surprised by the same thing in each other—professionalism. This perhaps relates to being surprised at each others' abilities to enter effectively into one another's worlds—the home of the TRs and the work of the ERs. The increasing mutual respect is not just limited to relationships among team members, however. TRs mentioned that they were surprised by the ability of their fellow tenants to participate meaningfully in the research project, implying that attitudes toward peers are also being positively affected by the research project.

On the other hand, we also see evidence of reproducing oppressive structures in our team. Structural processes, as noted above, are influencing our work. When we are faced with attitudes that service users are “risky” and incapable of acting professionally, we understand clearly just how enduring these messages can be. In addition, only one of the ERs mentioned social justice as a motivation for involvement in this project, while others emphasized the role of TRs in improving the quality of the research. Does this suggest that the ERs are at risk of co-opting TRs's knowledges? As noted above, when we focus on collaboration only as a means of improving our research, we risk influencing

those whose knowledges we are trying to respect to think and act like us (Nygreen, 2006). This is probably clearest in our struggle with methods of interviewing.

However, even within these challenges, we see progress and evidence of social change. We were able to move forward with our project, despite the concerns of the university, by educating those concerned. Because of this, we expect that we have made a difference for other researchers who will do collaborative research in the future at this institution. Within the organization where the research is occurring, as we move forward, we expect that the concern of one employee about the employment of tenants as researchers will diminish as this employee and the rest of the organization come to see the enormous contributions that the tenant researchers are making. Finally, the discussion about interviewing provides real potential for learning on the part of all of us as this discussion moves forward.

The decision to engage in collaborative research, as we see it, is part of a larger social justice initiative both external to the academy and within it. Social change most often unfolds incrementally, and we can see evidence that our project is contributing to this incremental change. As Weick (1984) has suggested, we are celebrating the “small wins.”

3. How can we improve our collaboration?

By analyzing our responses to the questions and by considering the literature, we have considered four ways in which we could improve our collaboration.

First, the ERs need to understand that various forms of knowledge can inform not only the results of the research but also the process of the research. In enacting this belief, by

honouring differing approaches to interviewing, for example, we would display trust that each others' knowledge is equally valid (Nygreen, 2006).

Secondly, and linked to honouring various forms of knowledge, ERs also may need to accept that compromises to the methodology may not sit well with researchers who have been trained in traditional research, but may be needed to enjoy the benefits of local knowledge (Smith, Monaghan, & Broad, 2002) and ultimate ownership of the project by the organization. If one of the ERs's goals is to pass on responsibility for the research to the organization, they need to truly believe that the TRs are capable of conducting the research. Similarly, there may need to be some increased learning on the part of TRs about the reasons for established methods of interviewing so TRs can be sure of making an informed choice about interviewing strategy.

The above two processes are examples of the third area in which we could improve our collaboration. We will consider an increased focus on social justice. This requires the commitment that collaboration is not only about the results, but is also about recognizing and valuing the knowledges of tenant researchers. Increasing this focus may well bring the project more in line with the theoretical roots of PAR in social change and social justice, as noted above. In addition, enhancing this theoretical alignment may well increase the success of the ERs at valuing the TR knowledges.

Finally, the reactions noted above of universities and of the organization lead us to consider the importance of advocating with these two systems regarding the strengths that tenant researchers bring as well as the rights of tenant researchers.

Conclusions

Through this paper, we have tried to respond to the question: does our collaborative research represent subversive practice? Are we challenging structures through relationships? Unsurprisingly, we have not arrived at a clear answer. As highlighted above, there appears to be a push and pull between challenging and reproducing structural processes. On the one hand, our relationships do indeed seem to be encouraging increasing mutual respect and a sense of value and hope. On the other hand, a hierarchical approach to knowledge and marginalization of psychiatric survivors is infecting our project. This reinforces the complexity of social change and the importance of considering structural factors when analyzing the success of relationships at challenging power relations. We see the contributions, however, that our project is making to the larger collaborative research/PAR initiative toward social justice.

We are addressing Maguire's (1988) three locales of change. The critical consciousness of all of us has been affected by the surprise we have experienced through each others' abilities and professionalism. Lives are being improved through employment opportunities and the creation of hope, noted by TRs. Finally, we are transforming social structures, by placing each other in unfamiliar roles and by challenging the oppressive attitudes at universities and mental health organizations.

Can we challenge oppressive structures through collaborative research? Yes, we believe we can. However, we also believe that it requires careful and consistent attention to those oppressive structures and a commitment to interrogating how they are enacted both by the research team members and by those external to the team.

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