Shifting the Research Paradigm: Exploring Community-Based Participatory Research and the Implications of Traditional Research Methods on African-American Populations

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Abstract

Traditional academic research methods seek to produce objective results. This paradigm of research often elevates the presumed objectivity over subjective or experiential knowledge. This positivist paradigm operates on the premise that there exists a single reality independent from the inquirer, by which the subject/object can be observed from a distance and methods are utilized to control any confounding variables. The current project set out to explore and understand the best approaches to community development. The experience proved to be a journey through a range of research methods and techniques, uniquely shaped by the socio-cultural, historical, political and economic climate of the community. Through the research process, we, as researchers, arrived at a revised paradigm for working with and engaging populations, one that equitably distributes the involvement of community members, organizations, and researchers alike; a new method that celebrates the importance of the *process* as much as the outcomes. In the summer of 2012, we investigated the specific post-desegregation and urban renewal policies that have contributed to racially disparate outcomes amongst the residents of Western North Carolina, focusing specifically on the small community neighborhood of Shiloh, North Carolina. We explored and identified the most effective way to address these inequities while working to promote sustainable processes of growth within the community. This paper is unique in that it highlights the many incarnations a project can take while working within a community to research and promote health and social justice. Through the journey, we as "researchers" gleaned insight into the awesome potential for social science/public health research methods to enhance the community if the investigator is willing to fully immerse oneself, be adaptive, and share equal investment in the outcomes of the community. Traditional academic research methods often create an inherent power dynamic between the researcher and the subject. Through new and creative methods of community-building, the University can create positive, lasting relationships with a community, in an environment that fosters mutual growth. With community-based participatory research, the traditional power structures inherent in research will still exist, but a new level of transparency and honesty is accrued, which in turn fosters a greater potential for equal investment in the outcomes. Academic institutions must continue to explore these mutually beneficial avenues of research and practice.

1. Background

In May 2013, several UNC Asheville students were invited to participate in a social business competition organized by the University of North Carolina General Administration (GA). A social business is a non-loss, non-dividend design that addresses a social objective/need in the community through the means of a traditional business model[1]. It is different, however, from a non-profit because the social business seeks to generate a modest profit, which in turn

will be redistributed to expand the reach, improve the product/service and subsidize general responsibilities to best address the original objective or communal need.

The group of students preparing for the social business competition was invited to identify a social problem and then develop a social business to address the problem. Two students decided to expand on a class project involving the Shiloh community in South Asheville by investigating the socio-cultural, historic, political and economic environment of the Shiloh community in order to develop a community-building social business idea. Thus, the purpose was to research the effects of post-desegregation in the Shiloh community (social problem) and identify an effective tool that the Shiloh community could employ in addressing a distinct social problem while simultaneously promoting jobs (social business). As the research process unfolded, so did the researchers' understanding of the limitations of traditional research methodologies in certain communities. This paper describes a journey in research, and so while typical research headings, such as "methods" and "results" are used to structure the paper, the content – like the journey - transcends those boundaries in many places.

2. Methods

The initial plan was to conduct a literature review on the effects of post-desegregation and then to develop a survey to ask Shiloh community residents about their experiences and hopes for the community. The methods used to conduct the literature review were searching for articles and primary data pertaining specifically to the effects of post-desegregation in the Shiloh community of South Asheville. In addition, sources of pertinent information concerning the practices, policies and outcomes of American Urban Renewal Projects and Post-Desegregation policies within Western North Carolina were researched in secondary sources. Paying particular attention to the subsequent impact of these determinants, it was necessary to explore the perceptions black populations had toward medical care/health industries and community interventions. This paper presents the findings from the literature review alongside the findings from the field.

In order to prepare the field questionnaire and application for the Institutional Review Board, researchers spoke first with some key informants in the community. At that point, the researchers found that all of the key informants became immediately apprehensive and reluctant to the idea of UNC Asheville students coming into Shiloh and asking questions to create a social business on their behalf. Furthermore, there existed no foundation to the experience, except for the inherent and negative power dynamic attributed to traditional researchers within the community. It became clear that this exercise in community growth/social justice was not going to work because of a failure to focus on building rapport and positive relationships within the community. Following the typical protocol and trajectory for scientific research neglected the process of building trust in the community, and instead perpetuated the hierarchical role of academic observers. A distance emerged between the researchers and the residents. The traditional paradigm of research dictates that there is a single reality, separate from the researcher that can be observed and ascertained. However, this reality was limiting researchers' ability to interact with the community and thus it was necessary to re-assess the field questionnaire and approach.

Ultimately, researchers shifted the paradigm and decided that it was more important to the project, and to UNC Asheville's relationship with local communities, to build connections with the community, at the risk of never creating a social business or arriving at a research end point. The researchers made it a priority to become immersed in the Shiloh community and culture, not as UNC Asheville researchers, but as engaged citizens (citizen researchers) interested in serving and working together. It required a conscious shift of expectations and goals, placing the researcher within the Shiloh community and Asheville at-large. This subtle shift had enormous, positive effects on the ability of the researchers to work in the community, gain insights, learn about emerging disparities, and find positive ways to promote community growth.

The decision to immerse in the community and serve alongside residents is aligned with the principles of community-based participatory research. With community-based participatory research, all partners contribute "their unique strengths and shared responsibilities to enhance understanding of a given phenomenon and the social and cultural dynamics of the community, and integrate the knowledge gained with action to improve the health and well-being of community members[2]." The evolution of the work dictated that we become malleable to new environments and situations. The metaphorical 'walls' of academia had been brought down, and researchers became closer-to-equals, with a shared investment in collective outcomes. Access was not immediate, and the process continues still, but the shift in ideology allowed for positive social gains. Slowly communication developed and trusting relationships formed. We assessed our growth through the simple measure of the amount of people we routinely engaged with.

Building on the strengths and resources of the community, researchers identified key members of the community to engage, including the community elders of the Shiloh Community Association. Utilizing what could be called a snowball technique, social connections grew and opportunities continued to present themselves. Researchers began to discuss the unintended consequences of desegregation on the American South and the black community and gained insights into the thriving history of black communities of Asheville (Southside, Stumptown, Burton Street, East End, and Downtown), while hearing stories of the socio-cultural, religious, and political infrastructure of black Asheville prior to desegregation. The ideological shift provided the platform for spectacular qualitative experiences to present themselves in ways the researchers believe were not possible with a traditional research approach.

This project's planned, traditional research methods of inquiry and the scientific method were reflective of the positivist theory of social science. This method posits "the central position of positivism as philosophy for knowledge where experience is the foundation of all knowledge[3]." This method presents the observation of reality, via *sensory* perception, as the only admissible basis for human true knowledge. The inherent limitation of this method quickly became evident when the Shiloh community rejected requests of observation and inquiry. There exists an often subtle power dynamic inherent in positivism that acts as a deterrent during the research process. As this research journey continued, shifting the methods reflected a change in ideology and goals. Obtaining IRB permission to conduct a "study" became a barrier, for it would have introduced yet another power differential and increased skepticism through the use of a consent form to be signed before we could really talk with residents. The process of signing forms, a simple procedure, has historically significant (negative) implications; White county officials used paperwork as a legislative means to systemically displace communities of color. The students abandoned the idea of doing research *on* this community. Instead, it became a process of relationship-building, as a precursor to research, if appropriate, and in this process the "findings" were more reflections on the process and the "subjects" were us, the researchers. Thus, as is the case with so many aspects, I depart from traditional use of third-person in this paper, using personal pronouns "I" and "We" to emphasize my and my partner's role, perceptions, and lessons.

2.1 The Strengths Of Community-Based Participatory Research

The shift in this project celebrates exposure to experiences related to participatory community development and the humanistic inquiry method. In place of formal case studies, there is an informal platform of discussion--one-on-one, small groups and with organizations. It is experiential-based learning that values compassion, respect and a slowly emerging friendship. All are presented as equals, individuals inquisitive about community members' stories, and excited to serve. This method:

> Enhances the relevance, usefulness, and use of research data by all partners involved. It joins together partners with diverse skills, knowledge, expertise and sensitivities to address complex problems. It improves the quality and validity of research by engaging the local knowledge and local theory based on lived experience of the people involved. It recognizes the limitations of the concept of a 'value-free' science and encourages a self-reflexive, engaged and self-critical role of the research, variously referred to as 'critical subjectivity' and 'informed subjectivity'. It creates theory that is grounded in social experience, and creates better informed/ more effective practice that is guided by such theories. Has the potential to "bridge the cultural gaps" that may exist. Aims to improve the health and well-being of the communities involved both directly through examining and addressing identified needs[4].

This framework allowed for continued growth and friendships within the community. We were invited to participate in an African-American historical preservation bus tour in Asheville, NC. We utilized the Special Collections office of UNCA, found academic journals, popular journals, printed hardback/soft back books, and used various social mediums, including the Internet, Facebook, and Twitter to gain understanding and insights into our experience and cultural immersion. We also practiced the method of cooperative inquiry, or collaborative inquiry, whose major premise is that we 'research with,' rather than 'on' people and populations. Certain key informants and community elders' communal discussions were a highlight of our experience, covering an inordinate amount of ground, and often processing a moral lesson.

We also participated in the opening of a Community Association Library in Shiloh, networked with the youth of Shiloh and co-produced a hip-hop song. We were invited to attend a traditional church service and speak about our creation of a community garden and database and the utilization of social media to promote involvement. We participated in an 18-week garden program, Strong Roots (Bountiful Cities grant), which taught math, science and

gardening skills to the youth of Shiloh as an after-school program. We conducted pre- and-post surveys of the youth experience in Strong Roots.

2.2 *Walking* As A Method

At one point, with no methodological direction to turn, we decided we would *walk*. Literally. Every week we would drive to Shiloh and park, and start walking in any direction, exploring a community for the first time. Walking proved to be a simple way of engaging with the community. We met a multitude of personalities and acquired insight into the rhythm and pace of the community. We placed out feelers into the community by asking questions and listening to concerns. The process of walking through neighborhoods on foot and communicating with community members proved a formative experience for us. No literature we had examined offered 'walking' as a method of engaging communities. This was a simple example of finding creative ways to engage populations. However, we still wanted to serve on a greater scale. This desire was our catalyst to explore various methods of civil service and community-engagement.

2.3 The Value Of Key Informants And Stakeholders, Social Capital

No topic is too taboo for discussion; it is your reflection and orientation to the topic that truly matters. Special moments, also possibly referred to as *pivotal conversations,* occurred ad hoc in coffee shops, community gardens, and a multitude of other informal settings all over Western North Carolina. During these conversations, we, the researchers, were also called upon to express our sentiments and understanding of a wide range of topics. These little conversations gave great insight into the beliefs of certain personalities, and further contributed to the evolving perception of the community zeitgeist. Likewise, the community members began to identify our value sets and ideologies through these conversations. The community presented collective social norms, social trust, values and information to us. We served as a mirror to the community, and they symbiotically reflected our image back. This developed social capital generating a mutually agreed and shared set of norms/interests amongst all actors and stakeholders. Social capital produces collective strength and cohesion, and proved to be our most beneficial method utilized. We became invested stakeholders of Shiloh, sharing equally the social expectations and responsibilities of the community, and began working together toward our collective goal.

3. Results And Discussion

Our research bifurcated its purpose by exploring both the unintended consequences of desegregation and urban renewal on the black communities of Asheville, while simultaneously striving to identify the most effective methods to address the subsequent disparities. These results present the findings from our literature review along side my personal observations, working closely with a classmate, while in and with the Shiloh community.

3.1 Urban Renewal, Root Shock, And Shattered Emotional Inter-Connectedness

The literature review for this project and interactions with community members revealed the urban renewal practices of the 1950's and 1960's, which targeted the "so-called blighted areas of the city," and completely destroyed entire communities of color[5]. In theory, urban renewal would "enhance the landscapes of cities and provide displaced residents model housing[6]." In actuality, African-American communities were flattened to the ground and displaced into dilapidated, multi-story buildings. Urban renewal was the beginning of a three-decade long uprooting of people of color and their history, a story often neglected in Asheville.

This project revealed that the urban renewal practices of the 1950's and 60's had a lasting impact on communities of color and devastating repercussions continue to be a disabling force in modern society. Researcher and author, Mindy Thompson Fullilove has coined a term, *Root Shock*, to describe the crippling consequences urban renewal had on minority populations across the United States[7]." Root Shock is the theory that recognizes the interconnectivity of all life and the potential for tiny actions to spread out across the globe and have massive future implications. Fullilove asserts,

This lesson of interconnectedness is as hard to learn as differential calculus or quantum mechanics. The principle is simple: we-that is to say, all people- live in an emotional ecosystem that attaches us to the environment, not just as our individual selves, but as beings caught in a single, universal net of consciousness anchored in small niches we call neighborhoods or hamlets or villages. Because of the interconnectedness of the net, if your place is destroyed today, I will feel it hereafter[8].

This theory of interconnectedness highlights the emotional, social and cultural fissure produced by American urban renewal projects on the fragile emotional ecosystem of minority populations. Fullilove reveals "Root Shock rips emotional connections in one part of the globe, and sets in motion small changes…that spread out across the world, shifting the direction of all interpersonal connections[9]." Asheville is no exception; urban renewal decimated the rich socio-cultural and economic institutions of black and minority populations and left in their wake newly modified homes and businesses that overtly catered to the white majority.

   In theory, urban renewal would enhance the urban landscape of cities and work to provide displaced residents with improved housing conditions. What really occurred, as the *Crossroads Journal: A publication of the North Carolina Humanities Council* succinctly points out, "many rich and vibrant communities of color were completely flattened" to the ground[10]. Today, the dispossession of neighborhoods continues to resonate with most of those who were displaced[11]. Many residents discussed the painful "severing of neighborhood ties and the disorientation that arises from not really knowing that a place is yours[12]." By some estimates, 1,600 black neighborhoods were demolished by urban renewal. This massive national destruction caused root shock on two levels. First, residents and communities experienced the traumatic stress of the "loss of their life world[13]." Second, because of the "interconnections among all black people in the United States, the whole of Black America experienced root shock[14]." The experience of root shock, coupled with the historic subjugation and enslavement of black populations in America lead to a sense of disillusionment and distrust. Root shock, post-urban renewal, "disabled powerful mechanisms of community functioning, leaving the black world at an enormous disadvantage for meeting the challenges of globalization[15]." The destruction of the urban renewal movement, coupled with the unintended consequences of desegregation ossified an often-dismissed emotional nadir of the black collective experience. The vigor of the civil rights movement led to the expectation that the black experience in American would be greatly improved when segregation was finally abolished. Prior to desegregation, completely separate business enterprises and economies existed and thrived, catering to the unique markets of each population; black communities had self-sustaining, sovereign infrastructures that functioned as a product of the American segregated social parameters of the times.

   The unintended consequences of desegregation were the forced closings of black businesses, en masse. The process of "integration" was achieved through forced assimilation, new policies dictated whether or not a business or enterprise would remain open, and in turn which one would close. Our discussions revealed that it was customary for the black businesses, schools, and enterprises to shut down, and individuals were forced to assimilate into the white infrastructures. Little regard and assistance was provided to black communities during this monumental period of change. After all, white infrastructure remained an autonomous entity as it always had, while under-prepared and under-resourced black populations were left to deal with a new system (and all its inherent structural flaws), rife with inequities, designed with the needs of the white population in mind. Lack of sufficient transportation to schools, groceries and other essential businesses only further perpetuated inequality.

   Author Fullilove asserts that "the great epidemics of drug addictions, the collapse of the black family, and the rise in incarcerations of black men- all of these catastrophes followed the civil rights movements, they did not precede it. Though there are a number of causes of the dysfunction that cannot be disputed- the loss of manufacturing jobs, in particular- the current situation of black America cannot be understood without a full and complete accounting of the social, economic, cultural, political, and emotional losses[16]..." The evolution of American urbanization was greatly influenced by the influx of southern farmers relocating to northern industrial metropolis. This migration raised "fresh doubts as to the cities capacity to assimilate its heterogeneous inhabitants…Forced by poverty to cluster in the poorest districts from which the latest immigrants were already migrating, the blacks seemed about to repeat the residential cycle of previous new comers when *circumstances intervened*[17]." Federal programs for urban development wanted to address the issue of modern urbanization, if only to quell social upheaval and unrest. Blake McKelvy reveals "that despite the pervasive racial prejudice, the national pledge of equality reaffirmed by the Supreme Court prompted federal authorities to require the submission of 'workable programs' for the relocation of any persons displaced by urban renewal project. To fulfill this requirement, it was often first necessary to first erect public housing on another site, and the search for such sites brought demonstrations of prejudice from white neighborhoods[18]."At its inceptions, it is easy to understand how urban renewal would be viewed as a positive thing for the community, especially since major metropolis were brought to the edge as a result of modernization and

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social stratification in urban cities. Our experience affirmed the reality presented by Dr. Fullilove. We would listen to first-hand accounts of the destruction urban renewal/desegregation had on black businesses and communities of color. Speaking with a prominent funeral home director, he shared of entire histories being eradicated as a result of urban renewal.

3.2 The Dark History Of Medical Exploitation Amongst Black Populations, Understanding The Source Of Community Perceptions

An important aspect of understanding the sentiment of communities post urban renewal and desegregation, is to look at the treatment of African American populations by the dominant establishment, historically. There is a dark American history of medical exploitations amongst black populations, dating back centuries. From colonial era practices of using unidentified black bodies as cadavers for the advancement of science, to the horrific Tuskegee Syphilis Trials that denied treatment of penicillin to infected impoverished sharecroppers, lives of innocent human-beings were destroyed. Communities of color experienced what Harriet A. Washington termed a "medical apartheid[19]." Centuries of medical experimentations and exploitive medical practices on black populations left intergenerational scars, passed along progeny lineage; the core of black communities fearful perceptions of outsider interventions stems from "how blacks have been convenient, powerless, maligned, and abused subjects of profitable medical research[20]." "Blacks were made subjects of experimentation that served to denigrate their intelligence, or to provide distorted justifications for their enslavement[21]." Groups of vulnerable blacks, including children, soldiers and prisoners have been consistently targeted. Both the federal government and private corporations have devised large-scale research abuses that range from radiation experiments to biological-weapons development[22]." This touches on the core of humanity and its awe-inspiring potential to completely destroy life but even more important, the soul. This is a history that goes beyond 'discrimination' of a people based on color; it is, in fact, the complete denial of one's existence. We must acknowledge the past in order to regain trust and to seize the future.

Washington believes "to re-gain trust we must first acknowledge the flagrant abuses of the past and the subtler ones of the present, yet much of the popular argument around medical experimentation and African Americans is dictated by culture and politics, not historical facts[23]." While Washington clearly articulates the weight of medical ethical deficiencies on minority populations, she also places her gaze on the current health disparities of black America, she asserts, "this aversion [to the medical field] is a reaction black Americans can ill afford[24]." Washington has tapped into the crucial dichotomy of the black communities plight; emerging health inequities of people of color necessitates that now, more than ever, "African Americans must welcome and embark upon medical research as a bridge to forbidding the gulf between the health profiles of sickly enfranchised blacks and those of healthy, long lived whites[25]." Modern clinical-methods of health research are less likely to violate ethical principles, particularly with minority populations because of Institutional Review Board protocols. However, even with these assurances, research that treats community members as subjects and not participants, and imposes burdens on communities without results may be ethically questionable.

Depo-Provera, an FDA approved contraceptive drug that was tested on poor women of color abroad, was selectively marketed, not only to poor black women, but also to thousands of young black girls. The reality of the drugs health profile was contraindicated for women with diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. Population-health specialists wondered why was this drug was predominantly used by African-American women in public and low-income clinics at such a disproportionate rate. Frederick Osborn, a Population Council founder wrote, "Birth control and abortion are turning out to be major eugenic steps. But if they had been advanced for eugenic reasons…[that] would have retarded or stopped their acceptance[26]." Depo Provera is an example of racist fears coupled with racist mythology being manifested negatively in its campaign and function. One 1990's *New York Times* editorial title famously asked, *Can Contraceptives Reduce The Underclass[27]?* Most media analysis "did not speak so directly of Norplant as key to stemming black reproduction; instead, coded terminology such as "inner-city" "underclass," "welfare mother," and "urban poor" was widely understood to denote black women[28]." Statistics like this only reinforce perceptions of paranoia. Historically speaking, the catastrophic exploitations by the clinical medical community, coupled with American Federal regulations/legislations that demoralized and marginalized people of color, has lead to perceptions of distrust and fear of American institutions. These negative perceptions remain even today and have the potential to impact the efficacy of public health interventions.

3.3 Experiential Learning, Shared Oral Histories, And The Healing Potential Of Storytelling

A rich source of information was the black history preservation bus tour, which traveled to key historic black communities/sites in Asheville in the spring of 2012 and contained narratives about the impact of urban renewal and desegregation. This pivotal experience highlighted the amazing history not often heard in Asheville. The conductor was also the tour guide, and he didn't hesitate to cover a wide range of topics pertaining to the distribution of wealth in Asheville and a biased American system designed to perpetuate inequity and subordination amongst the masses. The conductor viewed urban renewal as just another metaphorical brick in the foundation of collective American apathy. Author Arnold Schuchter states in *White Power/ Black Freedom,* "Urban renewal periodically becomes an important issue in the United States because of its results, or often its lack of results, are frequently so visible and odious as to defy concealment[29]." Continuing further he reveals, "the ability of government and the urban renewal program to operate, in many instances, with scandalous disregard for the interest of the people affected, presupposes a relatively quick return to normal levels of public apathy; and their ability to operate as they do is dependent upon the general public's traditional capacity to dumbly absorb abuse or to ignore it[30]." The remarks of the bus-tour conductor were eerily reflective of Arnold Schuchter's statement about Middle America. Schuchter portrays American middle class

> "As more or less aware of the deficiencies of their government, who regard the truth as a terribly disquieting intrusion upon their carefully constructed unreality of middle-class existence. They vaguely sense an alien underside of affluent America, and live with an underlying fear of the disparity between their fragile illusion of safety and well being and the forces and circumstances seemingly beyond societies control[31]."

The conductor of the tour presented his perception of American values to the backdrop of dilapidated communities affected by urban renewal, public housing neighborhoods in a state of decay with 5 generations of progeny living under the same rough. East Asheville was the location where hundreds of African-Americans had gathered during the Reconstruction Era to create a community that provided "social, commercial, religious, and educational opportunities in a segregated society[32]." Eagle Street and the Southside Neighborhood buildings punctuated his stories of the pain and loss at the hand of modernization and gentrification. Black American's determination to achieve equal civil rights and equal privileges in the cities reinforced an earlier urbanizing trend toward self-conscious communities[33]. In attendance on this tour sat professors from UNC Asheville. They interjected stories with personal accounts and histories of Asheville and the evolution of black Asheville.

Another individual participating in the bus tour was a public health professor from UNC Chapel Hill researching the U.S. census and the blatant practice of redlining/yellow lining in communities of color; redlining was a practice utilized by early governments and businesses to control and dictate property values, discriminate against minority populations and exploit communities at the benefit of another. Corporations would rate a community based on a scale that included such tags as "yellow", [red] "c-third grade", or "declining," the result of "decreasing desirability" due to aging homes and "infiltration from lower grade elements[34]."

An article in *The Crossroads* by UNC Asheville professor Ken Betsalel, outlines lessons learned and insights gleaned through his students' work with community members that survived urban renewal. He asserts the importance of having trust is the crux to any community. The second element was the importance of having a "home-place" in a community, an identifying, unifying agent. And the last lesson is "the importance of the story itself. While storytelling sometimes opens up old wounds, it also has the capacity to heal, as those who told their stories came to value their experiences in new ways[35]." One area of particular interest was the importance of youth in community, and their potential to serve as positive health promoters.

3.4 Slowly Emerging Trust And Rapport Within The Community, Youth As Agents Of Change, Lingering American Apathy

Interacting with the children and youth of the Shiloh community revealed a lot. Kids are an open book, not afraid to share their perceptions and opinions. Working with them illuminates the part of community-based research methods that "emphasize the need to be placed on developing norms and ways of operating that promote understanding and demonstrate sensitivity and competence in working with diverse cultures[36]." Children already instinctively operate on this level of sensitivity and intrigue and can therefore be valuable key players in any social justice movement or community growth efforts. As Annette Laurau reveals in her book *Unequal Childhood: Race, Class and Family*

Life, at a young age children are developing social tools, cultural capital, skills and ideologies (cultural repertories) that will shape the rest of their lives. Socio-economic determinants are at play with children and impact the distribution of opportunity to inherit "cultural capital[37]." In this regard, social capital is skill individuals inherit which can "be translated into different forms of value as they move through various arenas of life[38]." Research shows how "middle class children are more likely to learn to make demands on *professionals*, and when they succeeded in making the rules work in their favor they augmented their social capital[39]." This is contrasted with the reality that when "working-class and poor children confronted institutions, however, they were generally unable to make the rules work in their favor, and nor did they obtain *social capital* for adulthood. Because of these patterns of legitimization, children raised according to the logic of concerted cultivation can gain advantages, in the form of an emerging sense of entitlement, while children raised according to the logic of natural growth tend to develop an emerging sense of constraint[40]." This evidence supports what can already instinctively be inferred, that socio-economic determinants are powerful indicators of the likelihood to thrive and prosper in American society.

Public discourse in America typically attributes the life accomplishments of an individual to his or her individual qualities. "Americans are much more comfortable recognizing the power of individual initiative than recognizing the power of social class[41]." Studies show that "Americans generally believe that responsibility for their accomplishments rests on their individual efforts. Less than one-fifth see race, gender, religion, or class as very important for 'getting ahead in life'[42]." This American ideology "that each individual is responsible for his or her life outcomes is the expressed belief held by the majority of Americans, rich or poor[43]." Annete Laurau states, "These cultural beliefs provide a framework for Americans' view of inequality[44]." Distribution of wealth/resources, access to education, a well-paid job and a social support network are all examples of substantial inequalities within America. The paradigm that self-determination and hard work are the means to a better ends fail to acknowledge that a multitude of forces exist and are at play within society, consciously and sub-consciously.

A greater potential/capacity for good can be achieved through community-based participatory research; universities have the potential to be transformed by this new paradigm of interconnectivity and shared investment in the positive outcomes of all stakeholders. While the American Dream is not going to disappear anytime soon, this framework changes the dynamics and potential for what a community can become. Our research focused on fostering the community-based participatory research methods in the community garden of Shiloh. The garden exists as a microcosm to the community at-large. It operated as an incubator for ideas and a test ground for theories of social justice and health promotion. The Shiloh garden is now a thriving entity and community focal point.

3.5 Arriving At The Shiloh Community Garden, Trust And Rapport

The Shiloh community garden, like many infrastructures in the community, is not the legal possession of the community residents. Instead, they are city government property, presented to the community of Shiloh as a pseudo, long-term loan (see inherent power dynamics). Julie Guthman in her book, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability,* stresses the need to reassess the current food systems and social justice movements in order for them to be successful and essential to our sustainability. The book explores the racialized land and labor relationships embedded in the U.S food system, and how they continue to contribute to inequities. Guthman points out "whites continue to define the rhetoric, spaces, and broader projects of agri-food transformation[45]." Shiloh residents had clear sentiments held toward "well-intentioned white people" coming into a community and "rescuing" them. Instead, we created a weekly service day, open to the community that continues to pull more and more participants. We created a 12-foot long compost bin, 12 raised beds, mini hoop houses and an herb garden. We created with community members a Facebook account, which has amassed 300 friends. We created signage, cleaned debris and general beautification. The community pastor for 7th Day Missionary Baptist Church invited us to his service. The pastor asked that I stand during the service and speak about our goals for the garden and to recruit his church youth. Every Saturday we bring fresh juice and food to the garden, plus musical instruments (guitar and drumsticks) as well as a massage table. Nothing is traditional about our methods of community- engaged participatory work because so much of what we do is not the result of an objective goal (cause-effect). This subtle ideological shift has made all the difference and opened doors of communication and promoted real friendships. "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all human kind[46]."

And yet, we found ourselves helping with community-driven research activity. As part of a community-based program called Strong Roots, we conducted pre- and post surveys of the children, parents and staff of the after-school garden program held at Shiloh. The positive results highlight the importance of community gardens and their potential for use as a creative tool in proliferating knowledge about, and desire for fruits and vegetables. However,

an exciting and evidence-based tool to engage youth and stir physical activity, education and healthy eating habits is through the medium of a community garden[47].

The work in this community sparked a trip to Milwaukee to witness and learn first hand about the urban farming project, Growing Power, first started by Will Allen. His paradigm of community gardens is a fully autonomous, self-sustaining system of food production that can serve the communities at the greatest risk for food insecurity. This model is also found in D-Town Farms, Detroit. Founder Malik Yakini states, the self-deterministic model of food production in D-Town was the direct result of the destructive socio-cultural, political and economic forces in Detroit. The alternative was the continuation of a culture steeped in low nutrition, calorie-dense foods with high trans-fats and sugars. Inaction would only lead to increased rates of heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, atherosclerosis and diabetes. Malik asserts that the greatest barrier to a sustainable food system in Detroit is shifting the black community's cultural perceptions gardening. "For many African Americans, especially, putting your hands in the soil is more likely to invoke images of slave labor than nostalgia[48]." This sentiment is pervasive in communities of color that have endured centuries of medical exploitation and subjugation. We learned that community-based participatory research is an adequate tool to address such grievances and simultaneously works to promote more positive future perceptions. We realized through our shared experiences of working in the community garden together that we were breaking down old negative perceptions and creating positive new ones. The garden was the platform for positive and lasting change. As our experience highlights, every individual holds the capacity to make positive changes to old or negative perceptions.

3.6 From Rejection To Self-Reflection

Early in our explorations it was made clear that the Shiloh community, and more specifically, the elders were reluctant to engage with our idea of conducting research and creating a social business. Further, the power dynamic accompanying our traditional methods of research only worked to reinforce their perceptions of apprehension and mistrust. One key informant of Shiloh revealed she was apprehensive about UNC Asheville students coming into the community because of her previous experience of being interviewed by a student from UNC Asheville. She expressed concern over the fact the student never presented the final report. The individual expressed a feeling of betrayal for having opened herself up personally to an outsider only to be denied the same due level of respect in return.

With this rejection, we decided it was the responsibility and shortcomings of the previous UNC Asheville researcher and the failure to present the end product/ work. Although, this answer left me unsettled. I wanted to better understand the collective forces at work within the community. Furthermore, I decided to re-assess my own intentions, goals, methods and expectations. I shifted my perspective and placed myself under the microscope of investigation. Stepping into the role of a community member, and observing myself from the outside. What would my perceptions of *self* be? What parts of my persona are most important? What are my weaknesses? How does my position as a white, college-age male carry certain presuppositions for the observer? The process of self-reflection gave insights into new perspectives of reality that I somehow had previously neglected. What does it mean to be a student researcher coming into a community rife with a history of discrimination and exploitation? In the end, I decided that it was more important to *experience* community at the risk of never even doing research. I decided to dedicate all of my efforts to find ways of serving and becoming involved. This new direction released me from the structural confines inherent in traditional positivist observation. This marked the beginning of my journey of self-reflection and growth. The initial social business idea was abandoned, and I opted instead for a process/method that required continued periods of self-reflection and inquiry. This most honest representation of *self* (without motives or agenda) is closely likened to humanistic experiential learning. Although I preferred not working under the pretense of any specific research model paradigms, I nonetheless explored methods of engaging communities. I decided that the most important aspect of my experience would be the development of trust and rapport with the community; this process proved to consume the majority of my time. As I began to make true headway in this journey, I realized the methods that most closely reflected my intentions are the ideal pre-cursors to community-based participatory research.

As Barbara Israel *et al* present in an analysis of community-based participatory research methods, "the most frequently mentioned challenge to conducting effective community-based research is lack of trust and perceived lack of respect, particularly between researchers and community members[49]." Israel concludes by stating "Once established, trust cannot be taken for granted; researchers must continually prove their trustworthiness[50]." This also touches on the importance of celebrating the *process*, and consciously seeking new methods of research to fit different realities. Considering the force and duration by which the American economic structures have exploited

certain populations, one can surmise that our collective social/emotional fabric will take a long time to heal. As health researchers, we possess the power to contribute positively or negatively to the process of healing. Community-based participatory research is a continuum, part of an ever-evolving process; where as traditional methods strive for a distinct end goal, this paradigm of research promotes the p*rocess*, whereby all participants work together to not only identify the concerns/issues in the community, but also strive together to define and address them. These approaches hold researchers accountable – *What is the impact of our actions? How are our actions contributing, negatively or positively, to the community? What are the greater implications of our work? Do the end results justify the process by which they are achieved?*

4. Conclusion

This project began within a traditional positivist research paradigm. However, the process revealed a much different journey, which strongly suggests that engaging local African American populations in traditional research paradigm may not always be the most appropriate method of research. As a young white college student male, my position as an outsider informed the level of trust bestowed upon me from the community. The journey took many turns and arrived at the powerful knowledge that community-based participatory research may provide an avenue for building relationships on which to found future research and work toward shifting the inherent power dynamic of traditional research.

5. Acknowledgements

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