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Article

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Abstract

Universities increasingly cast themselves as engaged institutions committed to building collaborative relationships with community-based stakeholders. Although promoted in terms of empowerment, community engagement can reproduce or accentuate problematic social relations. This qualitative case study of a campus–community partnership provides a critical analysis of community engagement. The data reveal how the ambiguities of "community," including the politics associated with defining and representing local groups, complicate these initiatives. The analysis extends existing conceptualizations of community and community engagement by (a) illustrating how a campus/community divide serves as a rich source of critique and (b) demonstrating the need to reshape community engagement around a critical understanding of community and community representation. In addition to these contributions, this study provides a set of guidelines for future community engagement efforts.

Keywords

community engagement, community, partnership, interorganizational

Contemporary universities and colleges face increasing public pressure to address vital economic, social, and environmental problems at the community level. This pressure results from shrinking public spending on social programs combined with rising higher education costs. Many schools have

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responded by developing new, community-based engagement initiatives. Campus–community partnerships are committed to collaborative forms of organizing and typically involve underresourced and marginalized communities. Ideally, engaged partnerships enhance the goals of universities while also increasing local actors' capacity to address and resolve the issues they confront (American Association of State Colleges, 2002; Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2001; Finkelstein, 2001; Holland, 2001). However, existing discussions of community engagement downplay the complexity of community, abstracting and dissolving important divisions and power structures in the process. As a result, they misleadingly assume a unity and homogeneity that rarely exists. Campus–community partnerships are characterized by inequalities of power that impede collaboration and introduce conflicts. Despite these inherent tensions, much of the literature implies that community is easily located and defined and that community representation is nonproblematic. Such assumptions minimize critical power relations among participants. This qualitative study of a campus–community partnership extends current understandings of community engagement by examining how the ambiguities of community, including the politics associated with defining and representing local groups, complicate these initiatives.

Campus–community partnerships are designed to be interactive, dynamically responding to participants' needs. In this, they depart from unidirectional forms of university outreach seen in earlier models of service learning (Ang, 2006; Crabtree, 1998). Although much has been written on the benefits of community engagement, there has been less discussion of the potential challenges and dilemmas of these efforts (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). Partnerships lacking meaningful input from community-based stakeholders create ownership tensions and skewed priorities. Such problems arise when funding agencies or university special initiatives determine the priorities of partnership (Medved et al., 2001). Although promoted in terms of empowerment, community engagement can reproduce or accentuate problematic social relationships. In this, community engagement has critical parallels to management-sponsored participation initiatives within workplace contexts (Deetz, 2005; Stohl & Cheney, 2001). In many cases, campus members have greater access to resources, scientific knowledge, research assistants, and time than community-based groups (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). Although faculty members may receive grants or fellowship support to compensate their labor, community engagement often hinges on the voluntary labor of community members. Unequal access to decision making and the disproportionate division of labor creates harmful power imbalances that undermine the goals of community engagement. Campus-based participants must address these

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critical concerns if community engagement is to have the transformative effects suggested by its many proponents.

I begin by contextualizing the international growth of the community engagement movement, including how the movement reflects several key shifts within the larger higher education context. Then, I argue that existing discussions of community engagement would benefit from increased attention to critical perspectives on community. Drawing on participant observation data gathered during the planning phases of a campus–community partnership, I trace the emergence of key conflicts tied to the role of academic research, the boundaries of community, and the politics of community representation. The data illustrate how engagement initiatives are constrained by institutional practices and existing social and material inequalities, including how these constraints jeopardize the goals of engagement. The data also demonstrate the role of communication in challenging and reproducing power relations that arise within local engagement efforts. By showing how participants simultaneously claim and resist community membership, my findings contribute to ongoing efforts to understand how meanings of community are defined, contested, and sustained through discursive practice (DeChaine, 2005; Della-Piana & Anderson, 1995; Hogan, 1998; Pearce & Pearce, 2000; Shepherd & Rothenbuhler, 2001; Zoller, 2000). In addition to these contributions, the analysis extends existing current conceptualizations of community engagement by (a) illustrating how a campus/community divide serves as a rich source of critique and (b) demonstrating the need to reshape these efforts around a critical understanding of community and community representation. Finally, my study develops a set of guidelines for future community engagement efforts.

Contextualizing the Popularity of Community Engagement

The recent popularity of campus–community engagement reflects several key shifts in the wider landscape of higher education. Together, these shifts illuminate how community engagement efforts are both enabled and constrained by a set of financial interests and incentives. First, in an era of neoliberal policies and shrinking public funding, universities face growing pressure to address social needs not being met by state or market actors. Community engagement is seen as an ideal mechanism for addressing the negative social impacts of neoliberal economic policies (Ang, 2006). For example, campus–community engagement efforts have focused on sustaining rural livelihoods in Australia (Winter, Wiseman, & Muirhead, 2006), aiding technology transfer in Sweden (Brulin, 2002), addressing economic

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and social issues jeopardizing the health of marginalized communities in the United States (Israel et al., 1998), and supporting international development efforts by Canadian faculty and students (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2007).

Second, amid growing economic instability and rising higher education costs, universities increasingly need to demonstrate their relevancy to various publics (The National Center for Public Policy, 2008; Ostrander, 2004). There is an overlapping desire on the part of many academics to pursue engaged scholarship (Barge, Simpson, & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Cheney, Wilhelmsson, & Zorn, 2002; Krone & Harter, 2007; Putnam, 2009; Simpson & Shockley-Zalabak, 2005). Many observers argue for an increased connection between the research and teaching functions of the academy with "real world" or practical concerns (e.g., Boyer, 1990; Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship, 2005; Holland, Eng, Powell, & Drew, 2007; Van de Ven, 2007). In the U.S. context, community engagement is now a key feature of the influential Carnegie and Kellogg Foundation accreditation schemes for higher education institutions; universities increasingly leverage such classifications to help publicize their practical contributions to local communities. In this way, the growing community engagement movement provides a rebuttal to criticisms of universities as "ivory towers" and enhances perceptions of legitimacy and accountability for its participants.

Third, in many countries, universities have responded to funding cuts by becoming increasingly entrepreneurial in their search for revenue sources. Individual researchers face growing pressure to choose topics that attract outside funders or result in commercial revenue streams (Giroux, 2007; Silvey, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Washburn, 2005). At the same time, educational foundations and state agencies have created a number of policy statements and financial incentives aimed at increasing campus–community involvement. For example, the Australian Commonwealth government has recently released several reports promoting community engagement (Winter, Wiseman, & Muirhead, 2006). In the United Kingdom, the landmark 9.3 million pound "Beacons for Public Engagement" program has created a wealth of new possibilities for community engagement by providing financial and administrative support for new campus–community partnerships. Such initiatives provide universities with crucial financial support, allow new opportunities for engaged scholarship, and provide an alternative to what is seen as the burgeoning commercialization of academic scholarship.

Finally, fostering partnerships between universities and communities marks a return to a deep tradition of civic engagement (Boyer, 1990; Huber & Harkavy, 2007). Over time, universities and their faculties have cultivated a

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commitment to public service through practices like service learning, and health, agricultural, and educational outreach. For example, U.S. land grant institutions have a rich history of applying university expertise to local agricultural development needs (Jacobson, Butterill, & Goering, 2004). Thus, the recent campus–community engagement movement resonates with pragmatist traditions of higher education reform (i.e., Dewey, 1927).

From a community standpoint, increased involvement with local universities garners several benefits. Local community budgets have decreased in the wake of neoliberal economic policies. Like universities, nonprofit organizations have become increasingly entrepreneurial in their search for financial support (Frumkin, 2002). Partnerships with academia enhance perceptions of legitimacy. Community-based participants leverage their academic partnerships to navigate a larger funding context increasingly centered on promoting community engagement. In this way, community engagement functions as an important source of social and economic capital.

Developing Critical Perspectives of Community Engagement

Barriers to Engagement

The interdisciplinary literature on community engagement makes a persuasive case for universities to address pressing social problems such as poverty. Noting that the risks associated with achieving tenure and promotion remains a major barrier for faculty, this literature argues for the development of new institutional practices and policies to support their involvement (e.g., American Association of State Colleges, 2002; Brulin, 2002; Calleson, Kauper-Brown, & Seifer, 2005; Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship, 2005; Holland, 2001). Much of this discussion takes the perspective of faculty and administration, revealing a need to understand the barriers to engagement from the perspective of community-based participants.

Members of campus–community partnerships experience a range of competing motives and constraints on their participation. While research-intensive university reward systems privilege peer-reviewed scholarship as an important outcome, community-based participants may desire other outcomes such as increased wages or legislative change. In addition, the primary professional obligation of faculty at research universities—to create publishable results—is often more easily met than the more diffuse goals of community engagement, such as alleviating poverty or disrupting patterns of wage discrimination. In some cases, the interests of community-based members are in direct conflict

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with the interests of the university. This may be the case when community-based stakeholders identify the need for increased social responsibility from a corporation holding multimillion-dollar contracts with the university. In addition, depending on the extent to which the partnership challenges existing social relations, participants' involvement carries different types of political risk. Last, faculty participants may have little direct experience of the social problems being addressed. These important differences in experience emerge, for example, in partnerships focused on reducing violent crime in low-income housing neighborhoods. Unlike residential participants, faculty living in other areas can more easily disengage from these problems. Community engagement initiatives would benefit from an increased understanding of these built-in conflicts and differences from the perspective of community-based members.

Campus/Community Divide

A common, defining feature of community engagement includes the intentional collaboration between campus members and community-based stakeholders. Such definitions construct strong borders around the university, conceiving of community as existing outside of these borders. As a result, discussions of community engagement reinforce a strict campus/community divide. A campus/community divide treats the university and the community as occupying distinctly different spheres and results in several problematic assumptions.

The image of the university as a discrete entity separate from the community taps into a limiting container metaphor of organizations (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). The container metaphor suggests that the university has the ability to choose when and how to intervene into various communities by reaching "out." In addition to lending further support to popular critiques of the academy as an "ivory tower," the campus/community divide absolves universities from acknowledging the ways in which their actions have historically affected surrounding communities. Many universities and colleges have direct impacts on local employment, policing, land use, and residential property values (Ostrander, 2005). In some cases, local histories are extremely painful—such as when universities have played a role in maintaining systems of division and segregation, such as by supporting the proslavery elite in the antebellum period in the Southern United States, or by gentrifying surrounding low-income and working-class neighborhoods (Sullivan et al., 2001). Universities—as complex organizations—are embedded within various overlapping historical, political, and economic relationships with their surrounding communities. Community engagement initiatives must be able to come to terms with the impacts these ongoing relationships have on their ability to form meaningful partnerships.

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The Ambiguity of Community

The need for community perspectives on engagement is made even more problematic by the uncritical way in which the interdisciplinary literature conceives of community. Existing discussions of community engagement downplay the complex nature of community by treating it in the abstract. These abstract treatments are misleading in that they assume an amount of unity and homogeneity that rarely exists (Joseph, 2002). Abstract treatments are particularly problematic when they result in essentializing conceptions of community. Scholars such as Audre Lorde (1984), and Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (1983) have demonstrated how appeals to a unified experience—such as seen in depictions of women as belonging to a universal community—depend on the neutralization of critical differences such as class, race, and sexuality. Abstract, essentializing conceptions of community deny its diversity, including how community engagement efforts can reproduce existing inequalities. Community-based participants have competing interests, disagree about which actions to take, and have different cultural expectations about communication and collaboration (Barge, 2006; Pearce & Pearce, 2000; Zoller, 2000). Failing to plan for such differences may result in lackluster participation, false consensus, and the stifling of valuable forms of dialogue.

Within both scholarly and popular accounts, the term *community* conjures positive associations of fellowship and inclusion. This is in part because community is defined in terms of shared interests and imbued with notions of the public good (Depew & Peters, 2001). Critical and feminist theorists have attempted to redefine community in terms of its heterogeneity (Agamben, 1993; Mohanty, 2003; Young, 1986). Such attempts challenge the presumed unity implied by abstract calls for community, for example, noting that communities are constituted as much by exclusion as they are by inclusion (Hart, 1998; Joseph, 2002). By drawing attention to the diversity of community, critical perspectives prompt vital questions about how important social, economical, and political differences shape campus–community partnerships.

A significant drawback of treating community in the abstract is the ambiguity of its referent. Abstract calls for greater engagement with local communities prompts questions about the politics of voice, including who may speak on the behalf of a particular community (Alcoff, 1991; Dempsey, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Abstract treatments also imply that locating and representing a community's interests is nonproblematic (Ganesh & Barber, 2009). However, the acknowledgment of the diversity of community opens up new understandings of the politics involved with identifying and representing community interests. In this way, critical perspectives on community introduce

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an important set of concerns about who (and what) constitutes the community within community engagement.

Engagement initiatives typically bring together groups across culture, socioeconomic status, gender, race, and ethnicity. These differences affect participation, including who is considered a legitimate community representative and whose contributions influence decision-making processes. Abstract appeals to community within existing discussions of community engagement raise fundamental concerns about power and belonging (Joseph, 2002). These abstract treatments are problematic because they suggest an already constituted, fully formed community. Such an understanding minimizes the role that communication plays in constituting community, including how the boundaries of community are constantly being remade through organizational practices and discourse (Della-Piana & Anderson, 1995; Hogan, 1998; Shepherd & Rothenbuhler, 2001).

In summary, universities increasingly cast themselves as engaged institutions committed to building collaborative relationships with community-based stakeholders. However, these partnerships have unintended disempowering effects. I have argued that our current understanding of the power relations within community engagement is structured by a persistent campus/community divide and limited by the tendency to downplay the diversity of community, including the politics associated with identifying and speaking on the behalf of particular communities. In the following study of a campus–community partnership, I demonstrate the need to reshape community engagement initiatives around a critical conception of community and community representation as well as a deeper understanding of the role that communication plays in structuring these efforts. My study does so by pursuing the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the potential impacts of understanding community as external to the university? In what ways is a campus/community divide enabling or disabling?

Research Question 2: How does the ambiguity of community shape community engagement efforts?

Method

Research Setting

The research reported here focuses on the initial formation of the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Partnership (SDPRP, or "the

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Partnership"), an engaged partnership initiated by members of the Center for Integrating Research and Action (CIRA) at the University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill. The SDPRP is an exemplar of campus–community partnership, bringing together faculty, graduate students, and community-based stakeholders around the goal of addressing problems of poverty and sustainable development. As a founding member explained,

> [the partnership] grew out of the recognition [by campus members] that civil society groups were already addressing important social problems . . . these groups had a lot to offer campus members in terms of information, knowledge, and expertise in dealing with these problems.

At the same time, campus members felt they possessed expertise and skills that could be better applied to important social problems facing their surrounding communities. As reflected in the early planning minutes, they envisioned the SDPRP as a way to pool the multiple forms of knowledge associated with different social positions, organizational resources, and forms of experience. By focusing on the initial planning and launching of the SDPRP, the following study develops an understanding of the conflict-filled, deliberative processes through which community-based stakeholders shape the contours of engagement.

Data Collection

Shortly after arriving on campus, I began participating in initial weekly planning meetings for the Partnership. After gaining permission from participants and my Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct a study of the Partnership's development, my role evolved into that of a known participant-researcher. As I discuss later, the introduction of a research component played a key role in sparking deliberations about the role of the university in relation to the community and serves as the basis for a portion of the analysis.

Data for this study include my participant observations and detailed field notes of Partnership meetings, in which I focused on the level of interaction, capturing direct quotes and dialogue whenever possible (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Partnership meetings varied in composition, location, and length, and it include (a) 10 on-campus meetings attended by campus-based participants, for a total of 20 hr; (b) 4 regional meetings attended by campus-based and community-based members, for a total of 24 hr; and (c) 2 two-day planning meetings attended by members of the Partnership and an array of relevant stakeholders, including policy makers, local health officials, university

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administrators, and community-based activists. With the permission of participants, I audiotaped and transcribed each of the planning meetings, resulting in 150 single-spaced, typed pages.

Although my data collection period spanned 2 years, my analysis primarily focuses on a formative 2006 planning meeting. In addition to playing a significant role in shaping the terms of the campus–community partnership, the events at this meeting provide particularly rich insight into the challenges involved with locating and identifying the community in community engagement. Coordinated by campus-based members, the planning meeting occurred over an intensive 2-day period at an on-campus location. The meeting agenda included developing the campus–community partnership as well as coming to an agreement about a common project to rally around.

The 38 participants of the planning meeting included representatives from three regions of North Carolina, the "northwest," "northeast," and "southeast." Although each of these three regions have their own distinct geographies, histories, and cultures, they encompass counties that meet or are close to meeting the Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service's designation of "persistently poor." Community-based participants included self-identified, community-based leaders from each of the three regions, several representatives from eight additional community-based organizations spanning each of the regions, several community-based health and public education professionals, and four interdisciplinary faculty and graduate students affiliated with nearby universities. The 17 UNC at Chapel Hill–based faculty and graduate students represented multiple disciplines, including anthropology, communication studies, city and regional planning, ecology, epidemiology, and nutrition. A community organizer from out of state served as the meeting facilitator. By centering my analysis on this planning meeting and its aftermath, the study provides a rare view into the contentious processes of formation involved with putting the ideals of community engagement into practice. This choice also garners rich insight into the barriers to engagement from the perspective of community-based members.

Supporting data include organizational documents, including several mission statements, strategic plans, and funding reports collected over a 2-year period. I also draw from documents stemming from the 2006 planning conference, consisting of pre- and postconference emails and documents, handouts circulated during the conference, and a 20-page CIRA Planning Conference Report distributed to members several weeks after the meeting. Supporting data also include follow-up conversations about the Partnership with five community members and five campus members. During these conversations, I presented initial analyses and requested feedback on my interpretations.

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Together, this supporting data provide longitudinal insight into the Partnership, including important developments occurring before and after the 2006 planning meeting.

Data Analysis

This study relies on thematic analysis, in which I identified key themes based on their recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Owen, 1984, 1985). After repeated readings of the transcripts and my field notes, I compared principal moments of contention and agreement. At this stage, I sought to understand what participants identified as problematic about campus–community partnership as well as what they identified as nonproblematic. Repeated iterative comparisons of meeting transcripts and field notes revealed an important theme related to coparticipants' reservations about integrating research and action. Next, I identified reoccurring moments of discussion and reflection about the terms of partnership, including the value of different types of communication and models of engagement. I also focused on understanding how the diverse stakeholders of SDPRP came to identify and resist the priorities of community engagement as well as how members managed issues of power, participation, and representation. I confirmed and refined key themes through informal member checks (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). After writing up my initial interpretations, I circulated a draft of the preliminary themes and invited general comments, critiques, and extensions from coparticipants during a portion of a regional meeting. The final analysis also incorporates detailed feedback from individual members.

To protect individual confidentiality, I identify participants by their role, pseudonym, or region, rather than by their name or organizational affiliation. Throughout, I use the terms *campus-based* and *community-based members* to distinguish between the two primary groups taking part in the partnership. However, this choice contributes to the very same kinds of contradictions and ironies that I point to in my analysis. The terms fail to capture the overlapping boundaries of each construct. They also reproduce a strict divide between the university and the community. Yet, the terms also serve strategic purposes, as demonstrated in the following analysis. For example, they allow me to draw attention to the distinctly different accountabilities that each group brings to the collaborative endeavor. Unlike community-based members, faculty must convince their colleagues that their involvement constitutes engaged scholarship. Conversely, community-based members must negotiate their own commitments and positions relative to the groups they represent, a task made more difficult by the ambiguity surrounding "community."

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A Case Study of Campus–Community Partnership

Early Planning Efforts

Initial planning for the Partnership took place over the course of several years, during which campus-based members of CIRA solicited feedback and critique from community members, leaders of three community-based organizations, and colleagues from surrounding universities. This included an initial 2-day conference held in 2005 focused on eliciting community feedback. According to a founding campus-based member, this early period of feedback resulted in three substantive changes in design and outlook. The following description of these changes illustrates how community-based members' expectations diverged from those held by campus-based members in significant ways.

First, in their initial conceptions, campus-based members envisioned sponsoring a sabbatical system for community leaders to carry out a residency at the university. They quickly scrapped this plan based on initial feedback from community-based leaders, who saw the sabbaticals as impractical, potentially burdensome, and as taking them away from their work "in the community." In the words of one leader of a community-based organization, campus members needed to "come to the community" and work on developing trust with people living in each of the regions. Importantly, this response indicates that, in addition to having a different vision of partnership, community members resisted taking part in the campus community through a sabbatical option. Here, community-based members argued that campus folks were not knowledgeable about their local needs.

A second significant change resulted from campus members shifting their original goals from the topic of "alternative economies and energy" to "poverty and sustainable development." From the perspective of community-based stakeholders, the newer terms better represented the language they used in their own work. The change indicates a different set of priorities from those developed by campus members. Community-based members argued for a much wider approach to poverty beyond alternative economies or energy. A third change involved the wording of the CIRA summary and mission statement, which community members saw as disconnected from their own realities because of the aforementioned issues. A community-based member volunteered to work with a campus member to revise this language. Their conversations laid the groundwork for a new mission statement, which defined CIRA as a "locus and catalyst of support, coordination, and preparation" for research/action collaborations between university researchers and community organizations (CIRA, Our Mission). These early deliberations established the need to attend to the different goals, priorities, and language

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that the community-based participants brought to the Partnership. In the following sections, I show how the construction of the university as potentially harmful to the community, combined with the ambiguity surrounding notions of community, complicated this task.

Emphasizing University/Community Divides

The 2006 planning meeting was a watershed event in the development of the SDPRP, allowing the opportunity for community-based participants to air their concerns about community engagement. Over the course of the 2-day event, community-based members voiced their deep disenchantment with academia, including how the university was already impacting the communities of which they were a part. Although participants acknowledged the potential value of working to reform what they saw as an antagonistic divide between the university and the community, they drew on a guiding metaphor of university practice as a form of extraction. In this way, participants creatively deployed a campus/community divide to forward a critique of the university and to surface vital issues of inequality and difference.

The discussion surrounding my introduction of a research component provides a rich example of community members' critique of university practice. Early on the first day of the meeting, following my university's IRB procedures, I outlined participants' rights and the procedures for protecting their individual privacy and confidentiality, asked for permission to record and analyze the conversation, and opened up the floor for questions about the research. The ensuing discussion paints a stark portrait of how easily the bureaucratized routines of academic research structures community engagement efforts. Yet the discussion also reveals the ways in which a campus/community divide serves as a resource for critique and transformative change.

Neil, a faculty member with a long history of working with community-based groups in one of the regions, opened the discussion by questioning the kinds of protection IRB procedures offered for community stakeholders. He stated, "Here . . . we have this very awkward bureaucracy of this institutional review that is actually set up more to protect us than other people, I believe." His remark elicited several murmurs of agreement, including the following comment from one community member: "So we have a consensus on that." Several participants elaborated on this assessment, urging greater community involvement in deciding the terms of the proposed research and opening up further discussion about how research should be treated in the future.

Karla, a representative from a community-based organization, remarked that campus members routinely deny access to their research because "there

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are always copyright issues around everything." She went on to emphasize the importance of shifting to a model of research as nonproprietary, stating, "For me, [it's] very important that the research inform as many people as possible." Tabatha, also a community-based participant, highlighted the importance of building renewed trust between communities and campus members in the light of past injustices, commenting,

> There does have to be a trust factor . . . because when you talk about research and communities, you cannot disconnect [the] historical relationship of research to communities . . . of this, you know, exploitive kind of research and using people to [get] what they want and then leaving and even tricking people.

Several participants supported this line of critique by offering examples of unethical treatment. According to one community-based organizer, "the surprise element is always there I find for the communities, whether it's being misquoted, or mangled quotes, or whether it's finding out [about something] . . . after the fact."

Allan, a leader of a community-based organization, shared how members of his region have been negatively impacted by academic research studies:

> I've seen research where actual facts are not even factual anymore because the communities are not allowed to review what the professors went on to publish . . . going from [my region] recently . . . some folks that we've been working with and publishing on top of publishing that we knew nothing about. And quoting us. Or misquoting I guess I should say. So, it does get to be an issue because the community literally finds out and then here we go with the parting of the waters.

His comment about the "parting of the waters" indicates how the experience of past injustices shapes future opportunities for campus/community partnership. Later in the day, he addressed the academics in the room directly:

> [You've] got all these papers sitting on top of shelves that you've been doing all these years. And the one component that was missing was that the community was not involved in it other than giving the information. It was never brought back to the community.

In these examples, participants condemn a form of engagement in which locally based knowledge is extracted from the community for the benefit of

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researchers. The desire for an additional layer of community review was in part prompted by the nature of the proposed research aims, which failed to fully anticipate how this research addressed practical community needs, including existing relationships between campus members and communities. Participants' comments also indicate a much broader critique about how the university was currently functioning in their communities as a concentration of power and knowledge. While the metaphor of extraction reproduces the construction of the university as something separate from the community, it also serves as a source of resistance or critique.

Participants outlined a clear agenda for transformative change within the university, including the ability for community control of any finished products of research. Dan, a self-identified researcher and community organizer affiliated with one of the regions, was careful to position himself as he argued for change in the research process, saying as follows: "With a foot in academia and a foot out there in the community . . . [pause]. Anytime you present a paper or give a talk or publish, I think we ought to know that." Neil, a campus-based researcher affiliated with one of the regions, added to this:

> I also think it would be great if in the process of writing up, if the people who are writing could invite feedback and critique of the work so we could possibly deepen it before it's published. I always tell folk that the best research is the second phase of research when you take research back to the people, to the interviewees and share it and get more reflection on it prior to calling it knowledge. So I think that that would be good to have a second loop of dialogue.

In response to these requests for new forms of access, several of my colleagues noted that the recordings and analysis could be shared within the partnership, with one stating, "It's just a matter of asking." Another participant offered a suggestion about creating a Web archive of materials related to the partnership. Although several participants voiced their approval at this technological fix, others disagreed. Relying on Internet technologies to transform campus/community relationships only ensured uneven access. According to Neil,

> [M]any people don't use the Internet as much as academics do, and maybe they don't have fast connections and are trying to dial up if they have a computer at all . . . so it might be that the process set up for academics might not really bring in community-based people as to the extent it is designed.

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Despite campus-based members' attempts to address the issue through technological means, it became increasingly clear that such solutions were deeply flawed. During the coffee break that followed our IRB discussion, several community-based members shared that many of them simply did not have adequate time or staff to invest in processes of partnership. These structural barriers indicate how a demand for community participation can be both impractical and burdensome (Dempsey, 2007a; Stohl & Cheney, 2001).

Brenda, the meeting facilitator, summarized these difficulties, stating as follows:

> [I]t really is indicative of the challenges involved not only in intrainstitutional exchanges but in intercommunity exchanges. And it really is the inability to anticipate the impact of your behavior on me . . . the inability to understand the difference in my frame of reference, in yours and my priorities and yours and my system . . . Where there are two different worlds and they must come together to create even a modicum of change. And there is something almost built in to keep that from happening. Unless these opportunities are used to do cross-understanding and cross-education. That means that everybody with a challenge about the research needs to be involved in both creating how it happens and determining what it does at some level, and it is a process and not an event. But similarly, the researchers really must be more [laugh] involved in understanding why I have an issue with your talking about what I talked about . . . [pause] without talking to me about talking about it!

Her comments are noteworthy for several reasons. First, they forward a critique of the ways in which institutionalized academic practices—such as IRBs—may jeopardize the espoused goals of community engagement. From this perspective, when IRBs require university-level reviews of research aims without a similar form of community review, they perpetuate a model of research as an extractive, rather than productive, force for communities. Second, these comments mark an important shift in the framing of the change process. Much of the writing on community engagement positions these efforts in terms of their ability to solve pressing social problems through campus/community collaboration. However, there has been considerably less discussion of the ways in which university structures and routine practices affect community members. Brenda's comments subvert the direction of change, arguing that a primary goal of engaged partnership should be the transformation of academic practice. Her suggestion elicited strong agreement from

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campus and community-based participants about a need for research in the service of transformative change within the university itself.

The discussion surrounding introducing a research component underscores the ease with which participants framed university researchers and community members as belonging to two separate spheres. However, it also reveals how this divide functioned as a point of resistance for the group. Community-based participants drew on a campus/community divide to assert greater control over the shaping of the partnership, including opening up space to communicate directly about how these efforts serve to reproduce existing power relations. As such, many participants actively sought to protect the conception of the university as external to the community.

Ambiguities Surrounding Definitions of Community

Over the course of the planning efforts, key questions emerged around how the "community" was to be defined, including who was able to legitimately claim community membership. The ambiguities surrounding "community"—and how these ambiguities accentuate a tension between commonality and difference—are revealed in the following exchanges, again taken from the first day of the 2006 planning meeting.

A graduate student helping to lead the conference voiced her concern that the partnership appeared to be moving toward a model of engagement that emphasized a strong boundary between academics and community members. Stating that several of the graduate students shared her concerns, she continued,

> We are aware that we are up against a historical kind of relationship between communities and researchers that isn't of our making . . . there is this . . . pervasive binary or pervasive us/them way of thinking about where the community is and then where the researchers are . . . so I want to just challenge this idea that there is the community out there and then the researcher "in here" who are of these very different worlds.

When she finished, the conference facilitator remarked that her comments were "well said." Another graduate student continued the discussion by stressing how the divide between researchers and the community reflected a particular set of cultural values that were perhaps unique to the United States. In her comments, she critiqued the move to stress difference over commonality:

> What is really striking to me is this idea of talking about community . . . in a very abstract almost academic sense of the concept . . . who defines

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> community? Is it my family? Especially in this country where social networks are so fragmented. Can you tell me what is the community in this country? I don't see it anywhere. [laughs] So, why not rethink this notion of community? If CIRA is about emphasizing research and action, let's really articulate that relationship and . . . let's not have so many prejudices among us. [Let's not say] you academics you just do this, you action people you do this . . . let's break that down. If we are to analyze this, we are all working class folks, right? I mean, [laughs] let's put things into perspective . . . so just to bring the traditions of other countries, where intellectuals are not seen as so separate from society.

These comments indicate how a willingness to challenge a campus/community divide created a space to contest the meanings of community. They also suggest that a campus/community divide takes considerable work to produce, and it could easily be framed otherwise, such as along class lines. However, another academic quickly stepped up to defend a divide between the campus and the community. He introduced an important distinction from his perspective:

> We all belong to multiple communities, but in the context that I've heard it and the way that community groups here use the word, it means the people who directly experience the problems we're talking about. So if we're talking about poverty, the community means the people who are being subjected to . . . the systems that produce mass poverty.

After drawing limits around his own ability to claim community membership, he added that this way of defining the community had implications for the larger partnership:

> We know what to do already. Which is that the community—and by this lets mean the groups of people who are dealing with regional underdevelopment, who are dealing with poverty and racism—that they are identifying the problems and our role is as servants who have certain skills not to [be] serving the powerful to maintain the present system but to serve the community groups, that's our job.

Several community-based participants went on to voice support for this articulation of academics as the servants of community needs. Cherie, a nonprofit leader, described how her own organization was taking the lead in setting these new terms of engagement with research-oriented universities:

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> We're working in our communities to redefine these relationships between researchers and communities because the historical relationship has been that the researcher comes to the community to say this is the problem and this is what we're going to do about it and then they do it and they get what they want and they leave. And we'll never hear anything else again.

Her comments supported previous calls to flip the direction of the change process within engaged partnerships. Importantly, accounts of campus members as servants of the community created a set of implications for action in regard to control over the participative process. As elaborated by a community member,

> [There is a] need for communities to redefine these relationships between researchers . . . the community must be the driver and not the driven. You can't come as saviors. Because you're not saviors. We just need the right tools. And so the relationship is we define the relationship that we need to produce the change. You might think of a project but your project is going to have to be shaped around what we need and not our needs being shaped around your project.

This framing of researchers as distinctly separate from—and in the service of—community members remained a central point of contention for some campus-based members, who viewed it as a return to a model of engagement based on dissemination rather than dialogue. The contention surrounding these issues reveal how competing assumptions about the relative merit of dialogue and dissemination shape campus–community partnership, discussed next.

Who Represents?

One of the key difficulties related to defining the contours of community membership relates to the politics surrounding representation, or who might claim the ability to speak on the behalf of particular communities (Dempsey, 2009). In this case, the latent politics surrounding community representation surfaced only as it became increasingly clear that participants had different preferences for dialogue. Although some participants called for increased dialogue between different stakeholders, others rejected the idea. How these competing preferences elicited concerns about community representation can be seen in the following excerpts, taken from the second day of the 2006 planning meeting.

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Based on the conversations that occurred during the first day of the conference around mutual transformation, the conference planners decided to scrap their original agenda. The original agenda called for the regions to begin identifying a common set of problems they faced so that the wider partnership could begin planning a collaborative project around those problems. Instead, the planners proposed spending more time defining the partnership itself, including developing a sense of common identity, creating ground rules for membership, and drafting guidelines for how research would be treated. This willingness to revise the agenda indicated a commitment to relinquish primary control over the participative process. However, the attempt to address a tension related to participation by creating a space for dialogue introduced a new set of concerns.

To begin, the conference facilitator asked participants to share their thoughts on the following question: How should we negotiate the relationship with CIRA? After asking members of each particular region to consider this question from their unique perspective, a faculty member affiliated with one of the regions volunteered to begin. He started his comments by emphasizing the need for CIRA to spend time getting to know his region. He emphasized that his desire for increased forms of dialogic communication reflected his region's cultural expectations:

> We felt yesterday that by the afternoon things were moving very fast. We tend to deliberate and we take a long time, and we are more indirect in the way we deliberate. And we do a lot of what we call porch settin' and listening to each other. And we sort of felt that we were not able to come up with the problem for our region without maybe CIRA coming to visit us, to sit down with folks, and we would bring other organizations to the table.

Such comments reveal how the ambiguity surrounding group membership pervaded the planning process. A fellow campus member from the region offered support, stating that CIRA needed to invest more time communicating with people in each of the regions to be able to

> start where the people are at with the questions people have. And that means not just the people in the room . . . it means that CIRA has to . . . reach out to the people who are directly impacted.

He then argued that the larger partnership required a listening process wherein members of CIRA came to each of the regions. However, campus

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and community members alike took issue with this suggestion. A participant affiliated with a community-based organization began the critique by stating,

> I feel like part of the burden of that falls on the regions and not CIRA so much. Because if I were going to take off my hat and just go back to where I live . . . I don't know how to put this, but . . . I don't want to hear about CIRA. I would like to know that there is an entity like CIRA, but what I want the relationship with is with my region. I think that the burden of opening that discussion is ours to carry and to open up because we are the community and serving as representatives of the community . . . I don't think that it's CIRA's organizational charge to help us open up and be inclusive and participatory.

The conceptualization of dialogue as a burden here is particularly provocative. The statement reveals important nuances about the use of dialogue and the politics of representation within community change efforts. Her comments do not suggest a wholesale rejection of dialogue; she clearly notes a preference for dialogue within her region. However, her comments reveal how demands for dialogue or voice may be disempowering, impractical, or unwanted. In other words, the comments questioned the unstated assumption that the regions wanted to engage in dialogue with university members.

The debate over the merits of dialogue is particularly revealing of the dilemmas involved with determining community representation. Several of the participants holding leadership positions within their community-based organizations saw themselves as already designated to speak on the behalf of their community. They questioned the assumption that increased dialogue would contribute to a better understanding of their needs because they were already well equipped to recognize these needs. For them, engaging in dialogue with researchers was not the best use of their limited time and resources. In this way, abstract conceptions of community lose sight of meaningful differences among participants, including their ability to represent differentially or speak on the behalf of others.

The previous comments marked a turning point in the formation of the partnership. Here, a handful of participants began identifying a preference for engagement built on the rejection of participation and dialogue with campus members. As one community member commented, "Grassroots folk don't like a lot of talk. So, we can talk all day and do nothing. In our local communities people just don't have the luxury of time to talk all day to do nothing." Such comments are revealing of the way in which opposing views of the process of dialogue and communication inform praxis (Zoller, 2000).

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Rather than being seen as valuable in itself, some participants were much more likely to argue along the lines of dialogue as "all talk and no action." Of course, such a view is in stark contrast to dominant models of community engagement found within academic literatures, which are often highly invested in a vision of participatory democracy and dialogue.

Existing discussions of community engagement have largely emphasized the value of collaboration, without delving into the inadequacy of these demands. This case details how participants' expectations about the relative merit of dialogue can conflict, and how the ambiguities related to drawing the boundaries of community membership further complicate collaborative efforts. Campus-based participants tended to forward a mode of engagement centered on the use of dialogue, collaboration, and the dissolution of campus/community divide. This was reflected, in part, by the initial conference agenda devoted to using participative dialogue to locate a common agenda for change. Campus members' continued emphasis on creating an overarching common project indicated a preference for commonality over difference as well as the assumption that campus–community dialogue was the most equitable model of engagement. Even when faced with resistance, many of the campus participants remained reluctant to depart from a model of engagement based on campus–community dialogue. In contrast, community-based participants were much less likely to argue for dialogue with campus members, instead emphasizing increased intracommunity dialogue.

Responding to the Challenges of Engagement

Over time, members of the partnership arrived at several strategies addressing the challenges of negotiating a campus/community divide, defining community membership, and determining community representation. First, campus-based participants implemented an informal process of community review for academic forms of research. For example, this article has undergone an iterative process of community review, in which I circulated preliminary analyses and drafts to campus and community members alike. This strategy temporarily suspends a strict divide between campus and community, moving closer to an ideal of collaborative inquiry. Of course, like participative forms of organizing more generally, this process is constrained by a set of material inequalities. In the case of CIRA, the experience of these inequalities further reinforces a campus/community divide. For example, many of the community-based participants have irregular or no email access and limited time or interest to devote to requests for participation and feedback. Second, in response to problems related to defining the contours of community representation, as well

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as conflicting preferences for dialogue, the partnership embarked on a 2-year process of rotating regional meetings. Held every 3 months over the course of a Saturday, these meetings are planned by members of the region rather than by campus-based members. These regional meetings have played a key role in distributing power throughout the partnership. They have also provided time and opportunity to build trusting relationships (Waldron, 2007). At the same time, they create a burden for the severely underresourced community-based organizations involved in the partnership. Again, these meetings serve as a stark illustration of how community engagement is constrained by—and may even reproduce—existing inequalities. These inequalities are made particularly visible by disparities in attendance at the regional meetings, in which UNC campus members have at times outnumbered regional participants by a ratio of three to one. These varying degrees of participation reveal the many ways in which community engagement efforts—particularly those initiated and planned by campus members—benefit academics rather than community members.

Developing Critical Conceptions of Community Engagement

Community engagement marks a welcome movement toward applying university resources to vital social problems. However, existing discussions draw on abstracted conceptions of community, and in doing so, it risk valorizing community engagement. The preceding analysis demonstrates how existing social and material inequalities structure community engagement. If community engagement is to live up to its potential promise, then campus-based members must actively identify and mitigate these inequalities. My findings highlight the role of communication in challenging the power relations that arise in community engagement efforts. They make two distinct contributions to understanding the relationship between communication and community (Della-Piana & Anderson, 1995; Hogan, 1998; Pearce & Pearce, 2000; Shepherd & Rothenbuhler, 2001). First, they demonstrate how the reproduction of a divide between the campus and the community serves as a resource for critique. The campus/community divide is useful to the extent that it makes evident the divergent goals and multiple, sometimes conflicting, accountabilities of each participant. Community-based members drew on the metaphor of university practice as a form of extraction to forward an effective critique of the university. Their critique involved noting their dissatisfaction with the many ways in which the university was already engaging in their communities in problematic ways. The analysis illustrates how a

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conception of the community as external to the university can be a productive one, such as when it serves as a resource for the critique and transformation of academic practice.

Second, the findings reveal how abstract treatments of community minimize its heterogeneity, thereby obscuring important questions about the politics of community representation. In developing the critique of abstract treatments of community, my study contributes to the expanding literatures on organizational voice (Clair, 1997; Fletcher & Watson, 2007; Gossett & Kilker, 2006; Mumby & Stohl, 1996) and the politics of community representation (Dempsey, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, Hegde, 1998). Abstract treatments of community can minimize the critical differences existing within communities, including the extent to which participants are differentially able to claim community membership as well as speak on the behalf of a community. As made evident in my analysis, the ambiguities of community exacerbate dilemmas of representation and participation. The case of the SDPRP reveals the productive moments that result when participants actively deconstruct the concept of community, including the strict divide between the campus and the community. In fact, the explicit acknowledgment of the ambiguities of community prompted an important discussion about the various forms of inclusion and exclusion operating within the partnership. In drawing boundaries around their own ability to represent particular types of communities, participants identified the need to conduct additional outreach and dialogue before deciding on a common project for the partnership. Thus, my study demonstrates that deliberative processes play a critical role in surfacing meaningful differences among participants within community engagement initiatives.

The critique of abstract treatments of community developed here should inform the growing interest in exploring the organizational dynamics arising in civil society contexts, including community-based and grassroots forms of organizing (Dempsey, 2007a; Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005). As these forms gain increased research attention, there is a danger of replicating a relatively uncritical conception of community. As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, left unchallenged, abstract treatments of community help obscure the politics surrounding organizational representation and accountability.

Community engagement brings with it multiple opportunities for campus members to explore how their research can be usefully applied to the vital social problems facing local communities. As the interest in engagement grows, there is a need to consider how these efforts are reflective of, and influenced by, the structural conditions of academic practice. The growth of community engagement takes place in the wake of a series of important shifts

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within higher education (Ang, 2006). In many industrialized countries, campus members' practices are structured by decreasing funding for the social services, an entrepreneurial and corporatized university, and growing foundation support for community engagement activities. Future research should provide an increased understanding of how the confluence of these factors shapes community engagement initiatives.

Implications for Community Engagement

My analysis has several implications for those invested in building responsive campus–community partnerships. First, campus participants should not expect to launch these partnerships without considering how their university is already affecting community stakeholders in both positive and negative ways. An important step in creating ethical modes of engagement includes the acknowledgment of the ways in which universities—as concentrations of wealth and power/knowledge—already engage their surrounding communities. To paraphrase a previous participant's comment, campus members must be more involved in understanding why communities distrust universities. Campus members should commit to making transparent the impacts of their own research and of university practices more broadly. This calls for a blunt assessment of the ways in which academic institutions affect communities.

Second, community engagement efforts should take active measures to surface issues of difference between and among participants. As the preceding analysis demonstrates, community engagement efforts must recognize and plan for the heterogeneity of community as well as the difficulties involved with identifying and representing a community's interests. They can do so by incorporating processes of dialogue and deliberation whereby members are able to recognize their different positions in relation to one another (Barge, 2006; Barge & Mittle, 2002; Deetz & Simpson, 2004; Pearce & Pearce, 2000). Engagement initiatives should schedule time for reflexive communication about the terms of their partnership, including how economic, social, and historical processes bear on their current relationships. Strategies might include the use of focus groups, workshops, or meetings devoted to working through the ways in which complex historical, geographic, economic, and social differences shape their partnership. These tactics should be used to reflect on the composition of the partnership itself, including identifying any important omissions. The effort to make evident important formations of difference should also be directed at uncovering participants' situated ideals about communication (Clair, 1997), including how these preferences are rooted in cultural expectations.

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The previous recommendation to include deliberation risks recreating a set of power relations, in that it takes for granted that community-based members would benefit from these kinds of discussions. As the analysis poignantly illustrates, the use of dialogue itself introduces its own complexities. There is an ongoing risk of overemphasizing the benefits of discursive practice at the expense of material constraints and inequalities (Cloud, 2005). Thus, a third recommendation includes taking measures to anticipate and actively mitigate the ways in which community engagement efforts reproduce existing material inequalities within and between communities. This includes, for example, recognizing how ongoing digital divides impact opportunities for community-based participants. It might also include being vigilant about unequal divisions of labor, including the ways in which community engagement efforts draw disproportionately from the unpaid labor of community-based groups and nonprofits. For example, although community engagement might easily be incorporated into (and thus, subsidized by) the job descriptions of campus-based members, community-based members' time may be voluntary, unpaid, or underpaid.

Fourth, community engagement requires a willingness on the part of its participants to engage in the murky and contentious process of pursuing mutually transformative programs for change. The preceding analysis has provided a view into the tension-filled nature of community change efforts, including the need for members to reflect on the impacts of their own historically situated practices. One of the most salient lessons of this case is the extent to which discussions of community engagement continue to locate the need for change at the scale of the community. However, community members' deep critique of academic research as extractive demonstrates an ongoing need to revisit the local politics of academic practices (Cheney, 2008; Dougherty & Kramer, 2005; Kauffman, 1992). This includes continued attention to the ways in which institutionalized conventions such as tenure requirements and IRB policies shape the many possibilities of campus/community engagement. The partnership at the heart of this study grew from the idea that community members were key producers of knowledge in their own right. Such a framework puts into play a different set of assumptions about engagement than seen in previous literatures on the topic. Centering community engagement efforts on the coproduction and application of community knowledge challenges entrenched conceptions of the academic as expert and the transfer of knowledge as primarily outward-directed. As developed in the analysis, campus-based participants must be willing to resist the urge to provide instruction and advice and instead demonstrate an ability to listen and learn from community-based participants. More drastically, campus members must be willing to

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transform their own practices, such as incorporating a process of community review of research. At the same time, the recommendation for multidirectional change does not absolve researchers from their ongoing responsibility to provide instruction, technical education, and other forms of outreach to communities.

Conclusion

Universities increasingly cast themselves as engaged institutions committed to building collaborative relationships with community-based stakeholders. The community engagement movement has been animated in large part by the search for more ethical ways for the academy to engage with broader publics. Community engagement initiatives have the potential to foster mutually transformative relationships between universities and the communities of which they are a part. At the same time, there is a need for greater understanding of the challenges involved with these efforts, including how they are impacted by—and may unwillingly reproduce—material inequalities and cultural differences.

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Bio

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