

ETHNOGRAPHIC EVALUATION OF A RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN TWO AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES AND A UNIVERSITY

Pauline E. Brooks, PhD

Public health anthropologists at a large urban university and a community advisory board (CAB) representing two African American communities partnered to find clues to the high incidence of African American low birth weight, preterm delivery and infant mortality. Collaborating as equal partners, the Healthy African American Families (HAAF) project ethnographically explored what it means to be African American, pregnant and living in the urban inner city.

A team of evaluators used ethnographic methods to study the partnership over a continuous four-year period. The objectives of the evaluation were to study the: a) collaborative partnership; b) levels of community involvement/participation; and c) openness and interactiveness within the partnership. Focusing primarily on the African American communities' contributions to the research partnership, this article also identifies what worked, what didn't work, and what sometimes worked for the partnership as a whole, including the funder's role.

The evaluation of university researchers as they conduct their work in partnership with and within communities of color is a new way of learning about partnered research. Findings from this evaluation inform the social science community about: what happened, how it happened, the quality of interaction of professional researchers as they worked cross-culturally, the broader context that impacted the research, the confidence one can have in the quality of the data, and the cultural relevance and contextual appropriateness of the research interpretations. (*Ethn Dis.* 2010;20 [Suppl 2]: s2-21-s2-29)

Key Words: African American, Research, Ethnographic Research, Evaluation, Pregnant Women, Participatory Evaluation, Community-based Research, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s in the United States, there have been a growing number of research efforts partnering universities with culturally diverse communities of color to explore longstanding societal problems. On the one hand are the universities — the large mainstream institutions that are hierarchically organized and materially well resourced. On the other hand are communities of color — culturally rich, often culturally and racially different from the mainstream, not hierarchically structured and, when compared to the mainstream, lacking in material goods, services, opportunities, technology and finances. Additionally, in communities of color there is often a history of previous negative experiences with researchers and evaluators. Prior negative experiences sometimes involve disrespect and lack of consideration by researchers toward community members, loss of community resources as a result of culturally inappropriate evaluations and/or other decision-making that works against the interests of communities of color.

When universities and communities of color attempt to come together as equals to conduct collaborative research, the research plan and implementation are not likely to hold tightly to preconceived conventional research paths. This happens not only because there are more voices to be heard, but also because these voices say very different, even unfamiliar things that influence the shape of the research.

In these partnerships, the question of power is a primary concern. Those who have the right to talk, to decide what gets researched, to determine how problems are defined and whose perspectives and interests are represented

and what is reported have the power to name. Naming, in its grandest sense, means identifying, labeling, conceptualizing, analyzing, interpreting and conveying to others the nature, parameters and possible solutions for the issues under investigation. Collaboration in naming is powerful, for it carries the potential to expand and improve upon the ability to address old problems with new insights.

An interdisciplinary team of evaluators observed and studied the processes and activities of the Healthy African American Families (HAAF) partnership. The HAAF partnership consisted of public health anthropologists at a major southern California urban university, a government funder (that had strong interests in partnered-research), and two African American communities. The two communities were represented by a community advisory board (CAB). These very different entities worked collaboratively to ethnographically research the question: What does it mean to be pregnant, African American and live in an urban inner city in the United States? Through the exploration of this question, the partners hoped to find clues for unraveling the longstanding problems of the high incidence of African American preterm delivery, low birth weight and infant mortality.

This article, based on the ethnographic findings of the evaluation team assigned to observe and study the HAAF partnership,¹ presents findings on the participation and interactiveness among the HAAF partners, with special emphasis on the community partner. Concerning the partnership as a whole, this article includes findings about what worked, what didn't work, and what sometimes worked over a continuous four-year period of evaluation observations.²⁻⁵

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Pauline E. Brooks, PhD; Independent Evaluation Consultant; c/o 3512 Glenhurst Ave.; Los Angeles, California 90039; 323-821-5891; Pbrooks_3@hotmail.com

METHODS

Evaluation Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation were to ethnographically study the: a) HAAF collaborative partnership; b) levels and amount of community involvement and participation; and c) levels and degrees of openness and interactiveness within the project.

Evaluation Team

Efforts were made to assemble an evaluation team that was diverse by gender, age and academic discipline. The final team consisted of four African American evaluators: three females and one male. Two members of the team were in their twenties, two in their forties. Each team member had some degree of previous evaluation experience, and each came from a different academic discipline, which strengthened the evaluation efforts by generating different approaches and interpretations. Disciplines represented on our team included: cross-cultural evaluation, marriage and family counseling, African American studies, and community journalism.

Evaluation Procedures

Evaluators closely followed the HAAF research team; an evaluator tried to be present wherever the research team or CAB members gathered. Evaluation team members convened at least several times per week, sometimes daily, to process events, verify data and plan for any additional evaluation data collection.

Evaluators sought answers to questions like: When university-based anthropologists try to work as equal partners with two African American communities (located 11 and 23 miles from the university) to explore sensitive questions such as pregnancy, low birth weight and infant mortality, what happens? As the research partnership unfolds, what works and what doesn't? In what ways and to what extent, if at all, does the communities' participation

influence the quality of the data or the nature of the research processes?

Though some data were derived from the periodic administration of surveys and structured closed-ended questionnaires, most evaluation data were generated by ethnographic techniques.⁶ Data collection included: content analyses of audiotaped resource interviews, focus groups and community advisory board meetings; observations of researcher-in-community contacts across a variety of settings; participant observation at scheduled meetings/trainings; review of internal documents; and formal and informal interviews with individual researchers, CAB members and community participants.

The evaluation was collaborative. There was routine feedback to the evaluators from the HAAF research partners. CAB members, HAAF research staff (some of whom were community members hired as research ethnographers) and the funder gave regular input to the evaluation concerning what they thought should be added to the evaluation. They gave this input through formal and informal interviews, informal conversations, focus groups and questionnaires.

All partners regularly reviewed and critiqued drafts of evaluation reports. When there were serious differences in interpretation of an event or process between a HAAF partner and the evaluation team, both points of view were included in the evaluation report and labeled as such.

Evaluation Values

The evaluators sought to be inclusive in their data collection and its review. They accomplished this by considering and representing different points of view, and routine dissemination of quarterly findings to all partners and staff for discussion. Over the four-year period, the evaluation team generated five principles⁷ to which they actively attempted to adhere:

1. Vigilance to maintain confidentiality of respondents.

2. Vigilance and precautions to help ensure no harm to the population being studied—this includes the local project and any research system factors.
3. Vigilance to assist the participating communities to secure benefits, specific and general, through HAAF resources, services and skills.
4. Research conducted on historically oppressed groups of necessity must consider: (a) the whole research system and the various agendas behind the study; (b) the larger social/political context in which the historically oppressed group and the researchers are embedded; and (c) specifics of the historical relationships among the participating entities/parties.
5. Vigilance to foster the inclusion of perspectives from widely diverse community segments, such as by SES, cultural orientation, family composition, etc.

Consistent with these five principles, evaluators expanded the initial focus of the evaluation to include both the funder and the wider African American community.⁸ In the case of the latter, for example, evaluators recorded questions and comments at community-wide meetings held by the HAAF project, and conducted interviews with individual attendees.

The use of quarterly evaluation reports, as opposed to yearly or twice yearly reports, helped to maintain a focus on the processes and details of the research partnership, without overwhelming the evaluation staff or HAAF partners. Quarterly reports included details and insights from daily research activities that might easily be overlooked in annual reporting.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Community as an Equal Partner Affected the Practice of Research

Efforts to incorporate the community as an equal partner brought many

substantive changes to the initial research plans. Some of these changes involved the issues below.

Cocultural Dynamics

Cocultural dynamics⁹ (ie, the lack of cultural congruity that may exist between individuals of the same cultural group and between individuals of different cultural groups) were palpable at the beginning of this partnered research project. The diversity within African American communities and within the mainstream culture also appeared within the HAAF partnership. For instance, African American ethnographers (several of whom were from the participating communities) had their own issues concerning attitudes about African American colleagues and other cultural groups represented on the team. Non-African Americans on the research team, too, needed opportunities to address some of their own attitudes and preconceptions. Hence, there was a level of individual and group development required before the necessary teamwork could occur.

Access to Data

Several community groups desired to have immediate access to some of the HAAF data and the community background statistics. These groups wished to use these materials to support new applications for community grants from other funders. This request required HAAF to practice sharing of data very early in its development.¹⁰

Usefulness of Data

Community voices emphasized that data generated by the research partnership must also have usefulness to the community, not just to the HAAF researchers.¹⁰ In response to solicited comments from community ethnographers, CAB members, participating pregnant women, resource interviewees and focus group participants, the research partners made modifications to the ethnographic checklists and other

data gathering instruments. Researchers added and/or modified questions in response to specific community concerns, and to collect more meaningful data.

Other Community Interests and Issues

Community interests extended beyond the immediate boundaries of the project and linked HAAF's focus to other community concerns, such as violence-related youth deaths and injuries. Some community members linked high infant mortality, preterm delivery and low birth weight into a continuum with the high mortality and morbidity rates for older African American children and young adults as a result of violence. In this linkage, several community members spoke about an overarching theme of premature death and preventable injury as a larger umbrella connecting HAAF's initial focus with other related community issues.

Structure of the Research

The university anthropologists had to rethink their earlier decisions concerning such issues as: how the research problem should be approached; who and what constituted community; should project staff recruited from the community as community representatives/ethnographers receive the same pay as graduate students hired as ethnographers; who in the community needed to be approached, at what stage in the project and about what specific topics; and how to reach, enroll and retain a good cross section of pregnant women in the community. Community input in all of these issues modified the initial plans of the anthropologists.¹⁰

To illustrate, community members strongly supported the position that homeless women, women without phones or women who often move and are hard to follow-up had to be included. These women were considered as much a part of the African American community as any other

women. As such, they had to be represented in the study of African American pregnancy; the study should in no way be limited to just middle class or easy to find women. This issue had ramifications for the HAAF research in that the research design required regular multiple follow-up interviews with the women throughout their pregnancies and postnatally.

Community members also emphasized the importance of the cultural and contextual meanings of participants' words and behavior, not simply the words and body movements. The community saw this as critical for understanding the experiences of pregnant African American women. For example, that a woman said that something was bad had to be placed within its cultural and immediate context to understand what the pregnant woman meant: Was the woman referring to something that she thought was awful, or to something that was good?

The issue of culture had importance for the partnership for several reasons. First, the partnership had to recognize that the partnered research was immersed in different language codes, dialects and code switching. Recognizing this, the challenge became how to organize to more effectively work with these issues of language and meaning. In the end, as part of the solution, community ethnographers were kept on the project longer to help with cultural and contextual translations. Also, the partnership began to consciously work at keeping cultural layering⁷ to a minimum. Cultural layering, in this instance, referred to the inadvertent overlaying of the researchers' language and culture — during the processes of report writing, for example — onto the statements made by the pregnant African American women. Changing the African American statements into the language of the mainstream or into the language of the academy, had the potential to change the meaning of the original statements made by the pregnant women.

Data Collection and Handling

Input from the community also influenced data collection and data handling. Specific community concerns about data accuracy and appropriateness were part of the guidance community members offered to the HAAF research team. Some of this guidance included the following.

Getting the Information Right. The university anthropologists had to first learn about the African American community. This learning involved relationship building and developing familiarity with community circumstances. Additionally, the researchers had to pay attention to the following:

Identify the right questions. Identify the questions that community members want asked in this research concerning pregnancy, low birth weight, infant and maternal morbidity and mortality. What are other related concerns for the community? What are the specific and related questions that may make a meaningful difference in the reality of community life?

Learn how to ask questions. Some questions cannot be asked directly if an honest answer is desired. One CAB member offered this example for asking about alcohol use during pregnancy: Ask, "How did alcohol taste to you when you were pregnant?" or "Did alcohol taste any different to you when you were pregnant?" or "Did alcohol have a different taste to you when you were pregnant?" Because people in the community know to say they do not drink alcohol during pregnancy, don't insult people or invite them to lie by directly asking "Did you drink alcohol during your pregnancy?" Also, questions about the taste of alcohol should be asked within the context of other questions about the taste of other beverages and foods.

Don't ask what you don't need to know. Researchers need to understand there are areas about which they do not need to know; researchers do not need

the interviewee to reveal illegal activities of neighbors, other people's business, or people's real names or addresses. An interviewee's not telling, and the researcher not knowing, protects both the interviewee and the researcher. This instruction, given by a CAB member, was part of a larger discussion of "Be aware of your surroundings. Know where you are. Act accordingly."

Over and above what might be found in the mainstream, historically African Americans (and other persons of color in the United States) have been victims of exploitation and racism, and are often wary of strangers asking questions. As a form of self-protection, some people will knowingly provide untrue answers to unfamiliar people who ask too many questions.

It is also important to know who you are in the eyes of the community. Some community members may not necessarily distinguish between university researchers and other question-askers such as social workers or the police.

Know the context of the answers. In speaking with one pregnant African American woman about her eating habits, an ethnographer learned that the interviewee prepared and consumed a large quantity of vegetables. In the coding scheme of the data set, this would fall under the category of health-producing behavior, which is a good thing. However, the coding for this finding was not so simple, once the ethnographer put this response into the context of the interviewee's environment. There were few fresh vegetables in the markets that served the two African American communities. Fresh vegetables in these local markets were in reality old, stale, discolored and discarded produce.

The vegetables the interviewee referred to were canned (and most likely lower cost canned vegetables) and contained high amounts of salt, preservatives and food coloring. It was important to know the context of the

interviewee's answers for the data to be accurately coded and appropriately interpreted. This seemingly minor question about coding brought to the attention of the research team the possibility that high concentrations of salt, preservatives and food coloring may be contributing to the poorer pregnancy outcomes of African American women. The question also implied that while some African American women were eating vegetables during pregnancy, others weren't able to obtain fresh produce. Thus, efforts to improve the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables within these types of communities would need to include a major focus on environmental solutions, not merely changes in individual behavior.

Research Should Do No Harm. The anthropologists had to remain constantly vigilant to not bring harm, whether intentionally, unintentionally or accidentally.¹⁰ The community spoke very clearly on this point. Another aspect of this issue was keeping one's word. It was common to hear ethnographers or CAB members say with voices of conviction: "I gave my word that X would not happen" or "I gave my word that Y would get done." This was personal and professional — people associated with the HAAF partnership had their community reputations at stake, and were very conscious about not mishandling information and not bringing harm.

WHAT WORKED

At the Community (CAB) Level

Board Demands and Concerns

The CAB clearly stated community demands and expressed their concerns about researchers entering African American communities. The CAB brought up front and out into an open forum pre-existing obstacles and history that affected research collaboration in

these two communities. Having brought these issues into the open, seeing how the university and funder responded gave the CAB a better picture of who these potential collaborative research partners really were.

Board Asked Challenging Questions

The CAB asked challenging questions. Board members and others from the community asked and expected answers to questions like: Who controls the data? What constitutes community consent? What if the African American community, as equal partner, does not want certain issues to be investigated or certain data to be reported? What assurances can the researchers and funders give that the data will not be used for harmful purposes (eg, that HAAF research will not be in some way like the Tuskegee Syphilis study [1932–1972] or used to support racial stereotypes commonly found in various mainstream literature about African Americans)?^{11–13} How will community- and non-community perspectives be represented in the study, and who (the community or the researchers) will determine how these different perspectives are defined and used?

The following is a selection of other questions that the CAB formally posed to the funder early in the partnership:

- What will change at the funding agency as a result of successful community input into this ethnographic study? How can the findings from this project be used to promote program change?
- How does the funder expect this study's findings to influence epidemiologists' ways of asking questions and analyzing data? How might our findings influence health programs and change the way medical personnel treat people?
- What is the best case scenario that you can see deriving from this project?
- What is the worst case scenario that you can see deriving from this project?

- What is the value of this study to the communities involved in it?
- What is the funder's commitment to the extended/augmented family? How does the funder plan to synthesize and integrate data towards positive outcomes for the extended family?
- With regard to maintaining the confidentiality of the participants, who owns the data from the study? When notes are submitted to the funder, are the lists linking names with codes submitted at the same time? Who will have access to the coding scheme of these data? What will be done with the data that are collected during this study?
- What guarantees does the funder make concerning the use of these data for the benefit of the African American community, and not for its detriment?¹

Members Used Reputations as Calling Cards

Community advisory board members used their own reputations as calling cards and letters of introduction for the project's entry into the community. This made it possible for the researchers to access existing community networks. It also assisted researchers in building and maintaining community relations. Board members told the community that this project and the partners' commitment to the community were different from research-as-usual. The CAB's efforts resulted in the project gaining access to people and places to which, under circumstances of research-as-usual, they might not have access.

Members Performed a Wide Variety of Tasks

Board members performed a wide variety of research tasks including: construction of checklists and topic areas for the ethnographic interviews; identified additional community resources; recruited broader community

input and assistance through holding community-wide meetings; showed how and where to recruit pregnant women from the two communities; assisted in recruitment of staff; worked on budgets; provided community input for coding and analysis of data through specialized focus groups and community meetings; conducted trainings; and presented the HAAF project on the radio.

Members Served as Resource Conduits

CAB members served as information and resource conduits for the community. Several CAB members took HAAF staff and evaluators around, personally introducing them and showing them where things were located in the two communities. These CAB members described and explained the history of the communities and clarified things that people living in the neighborhoods silently expected from a culturally appropriate research project.

Community Advisory Board Developed New Collaboration Model

The CAB also developed and presented to the funder a new model of community collaboration. Later, these same CAB members worked closely with the funder to plan and develop the second phase (HAAF II) of the project, which aimed to be even more community-initiated and community-driven.

Community Ethnographers Presented Papers at Annual Convention

The ethnographers hired from the community traveled cross-country to the annual convening of the American Anthropological Association. There they presented formal papers about their ethnographic work.

At the Funder Level

The funder acted on its desire to engage community participation in shaping the HAAF research. The funder listened and responded to the CAB, even changing some of its own practices based on CAB and other community

members' comments. Several examples follow:

- The funder acceded to the community's insistence that something must be left behind in the communities at the project's end, and that the communities must have access to the data. As an outcome, the data remained in the community for community use.
- A second phase was developed and funded for the project, with plans for culturally appropriate prevention strategies for the two communities based on the ethnographic findings.
- The funder routinely traveled 3,000 miles (one way) to attend monthly CAB meetings, participated in ongoing discussions of community concerns, and offered various types of assistance. In general, with a few exceptions when communications broke down, the funder kept up with the project. The feeling on the HAAF project, at least from staff and CAB perspectives, was that the funder was a supportive presence. Once initial hesitations were allayed, CAB and staff were generally not reluctant to approach the funder about issues or concerns.
- The funder permitted community-based organizations (CBOs) to have early access to the HAAF demographic data. Several CBOs used HAAF demographic data to prepare grant applications to other funders.
- On separate occasions, the funder paid the expenses for the evaluation team, then later the CAB (at the suggestion of the evaluation team), to travel cross country to hold several days' meetings with top level health researchers and decision-makers within the funding institution. This gave evaluators and the CAB potential input at the national level around issues of research collaborations with communities of color.

At the University Level

"Both the university and the funder, during the first half of the project,

created an environment of invitation for active community participation".¹ During the first six months to two years of the HAAF research partnership, the university generally showed a level of sensitivity, respect for community requests and commitment to community interests. During these early years, the university's involvement was open, highly participatory and constructive. For example, the university arranged for:

1. Community advisory board members to conduct trainings for the research staff.
2. Board members to participate in weekly staff meetings, if so desired.
3. Ideas and suggestions from the CAB and larger community to be acknowledged and acted upon. The university then followed through on these ideas. For instance, as a result of feedback from several health clinic sources in the community, the project redesigned its newsletter, *HAAFTime*, to better meet the interests and needs of community people using clinics — the layout was changed, more graphics were added, and different topics were included.
4. Recruitment and hiring of community people in paid positions on the research team. This increased the training needs for the project. It required more responsibility and effort on the university's part, but was beneficial in improved quality of the data, data coding, and analyses.
5. Change in the employment classification of persons recruited from the local African American community. There was a change from the initial job title of community worker (at a lower pay rate and fewer benefits) to one of ethnographer (at a higher pay rate and usually reserved for university students) for the same work activities.
6. Inclusion of community participation in research planning, data

collection, analyses and reports throughout the project.

7. Board members to have a reasonable amount of time to provide feedback on HAAF reports and documents before these written materials were submitted to the funder. The university restructured deadlines to accommodate the time needed by CAB members to actively and meaningfully participate in the writing of reports.
8. At the request of a community staff member, moving weekly staff meetings away from the university and into the two communities. This move helped staff to become more familiar with the communities, and the communities to have more contact and to gain familiarity with HAAF.

Early in the research partnership, the university anthropologists allowed themselves to be studied by permitting the evaluation team to observe and record nearly all project activities. This freedom for evaluators aided the detailed documentation of events and processes, even when events were not always flattering to the researchers. This degree of evaluation scrutiny of university researchers was unusual. For the university researchers, this took professional confidence and a very strong commitment to the partnership and what it was attempting to accomplish.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

Too Little Time

The HAAF project was initially conceived as a 3-year project, with one year for partnership development, one year for data collection, and one year for data analysis and report writing. In reality, it easily took twice as long in each phase.

Failure to Maintain Constant Relationships between Partners

For instance, the funder on several occasions stopped talking and closed

down communications because of legal contract restrictions. For the CAB, participation of all members was not constant and consistent. When CAB members were absent, the discussions were not as full and decision-making was not as informed since CAB members were originally selected to represent a broad spectrum of the community. In the case of the university, turnovers in the administrative positions for the project were disruptive.

Reverting to Research-as-Usual

There were distinct times when the partnership reverted to research-as-usual. There were palpable pressures (eg, convention, habit, the way things are done, job descriptions) that created a constant push for the project to revert to research-as-usual. This pressure had to be managed on a daily basis. Research-as-usual was the default mode when the project was not actively choosing the equal partnership mode.

Institutional Gridlock

Institutions have chains of command and pre-established conventions for relating to other institutions. In addition to the legal aspects of institution-to-institution negotiations, there are administrative procedures and politics within and between the institutions. When something disturbed institutional practices, other problems arose. For instance, with turnover of university staff during the last 6 months of Phase I, the university reduced lines of communication and reverted to a research-as-usual stance showing almost no partnership with the community. While the funder worked closely with the CAB to maintain the community-funder relationship and to develop the next phase, project staff often had no idea about the project's status: Was the project closing early? Is someone being fired? Is the budget being cut? Are we in trouble? Did someone do something wrong, like violate confidentiality? Should we all be out looking for another

job right now? During these times, often no one from the institutions returned phone calls, faxes, or letters.

When communication lines were strained or broken, the project slid off track. Energy and discussion had to be put into recovering from the resulting detour. These shut downs were a real problem at different points in the project's history. They were especially apparent during the last six months of Phase I when there were many internal changes happening to the university partner and between the university partner and the funder.

Unilateral Decision Making

Unilateral decision making by any one partner, especially by a partner holding major resources such as money, equipment and skills, increased confusion and mistrust within the collaboration. Unilateral decision making tended to occur simultaneously with breaks in communication among partners.

WHAT SOMETIMES WORKED AND SOMETIMES DIDN'T WORK

Partners were inherently unequal. They all demonstrated strong interest in doing the work, but had very unequal resources, power, knowledge, skills, bureaucratic rules and special interests attached to this work. This inequality, with the university and funder having a much larger amount of resources for participation, was sometimes problematic. It was nearly impossible for the community to be an equal partner when it did not have the vast resources at its disposal that the other two partners possessed.

In the third year of the partnership, after turnover among the anthropologists and increased amounts of confusion, someone higher in the university hierarchical structure explained to the evaluators (and later inadvertently to the CAB) that the evaluators and CAB were

in the position of "making an ask." This was explained to mean that the evaluators and the CAB did not have the power to be considered as equals in the partnership, but were in the position of having to accept whatever the university decided.

Partners entered the relationship holding different expectations around the meaning of partnership. Partners were able to successfully work out some, but not all of the inherent conflicts of interests and differing expectations. Concerning expectations, partners came from very different positions within the society. They each had their own strengths, weaknesses, language, reality, goals and ways of perceiving the world. When communications broke down, these differences tended to pull partners apart.

The HAAF partners more easily integrated the community into some research tasks more so than into other tasks. For instance, the HAAF project readily fit the community into tasks of outreach and the recruitment of participants — the university perceived the community partner as highly needed for these activities. The university partner, however, showed more hesitation around incorporating the community into project administration and larger decision-making concerning issues such as the budget.

Over time, institutional partners recognized more of the variety and range of skills the community partner brought to the collaboration. For instance, by the end of Year 2, the funder came to understand and appreciate the significance of a new community collaboration model that the CAB was developing. In this new model, the community increasingly assumed greater leadership roles in the research process so that a participatory project became more community-driven and community-responsive.^{14,15}

Though there was substantial evidence that all HAAF partners made serious efforts to support the language

of partnership, the reality of the partnership was that it was fluid. The dynamics of the HAAF partnership did not fit any of the four models of community research proposed by Hatch et al.¹⁶ Rather, HAAF moved along a continuum ranging from a neo-colonial model at one extreme to an open, fully functioning, equal-partner model at the other end of the continuum.

HAAF seemed to travel a path that moved forward, sideways, backwards and forwards. At times, the partnership functioned as fully open and communicative, with joint and equal decision making. When this happened, the research project was strongest and benefited from the best of each partner. Even if there were sharp differences, when all partners were fully communicating, the motivation to make the project work dominated and agreeable solutions were found.

At other times, when communication lines were broken and partners made unilateral decisions, the model of partnership functioned like a neo-colonial model. When this occurred, it did not look like the same project. Mistrust surfaced when partners were not straightforward or communicative. This created another layer of confusion to work through once communication reopened.

Depending on the month and day, one could find a highly sophisticated well-oiled university-community collaboration advancing forward at breakneck speed, or a disappointed, struggling, unhappy group of individuals with little inter-partner communication. Since there were no institutionalized structures and supports for participatory research, as the project unfolded and difficulties emerged, the functioning often reverted to the long-standing administrative structures and legal contracts, despite the positive intentions of individuals in the partnership.

If the evaluation of this partnership had been limited to capturing only a few evaluation data points per year, the wobbliness of the partnership process

could have easily been missed. It was only through the constant following of the partnership, the use of ethnographic methods and the frequent focus on the day-to-day life of the partnership, that this wobbly path was observed and documented.

The mix of cultures, socioeconomic status and experience of staff increased opportunities for improving the quality of the research. At the same time, it introduced training challenges. Training was an area that consistently needed more attention. It needed to occur in each phase of the research, though sometimes the anthropologists did not have the time to meet all of the training needs for the project. Additionally, the turnovers among anthropologists and project administrators further reduced training opportunities for HAAF staff.

Ethnographers had needs that were not always met. They needed: to be heard more often; to receive unambiguous, clear, and timely directions for tasks; a clear job description (their job responsibilities changed and expanded over time); a place to regularly meet and talk about fieldwork experiences, and: an entity (namely, the partnership) to which they could take concerns.

As previously mentioned, cultural layering in the handling of the data was sometimes a challenge. Though community people had the primary role in collecting the data, in the hierarchy of authority, non-African Americans initially conducted the analysis and presentation of the data. Analyzing, organizing and categorizing the data, uncovering patterns within the data and final research reports were all activities that could be influenced by cultural layering. In one case, non-African Americans paraphrased the words of some of the African American pregnant women and inadvertently replaced the pregnant women's meanings with their own non-African American cultural meanings. The result was that the two cultural meanings were not the same; the paraphrased material changed the

meaning of what the pregnant African American women said. This concept of cultural layering, generated by the evaluators, was subsequently used by the CAB as one of the lenses for reviewing and critiquing project reports.

To minimize cultural layering, ethnographers from the community who collected and understood the local meaning of the data were included in all data processing activities. This required a redistribution of project funds to keep ethnographers on staff to perform these activities since the original plan had been to have only principal investigators do the analyses and reports. Without this change in finances, some of the meaning from the interview data would have been lost, or perhaps worse, misrepresented.

CONCLUSIONS

Research partnerships between universities and African American communities, and including the funders of these partnerships, provide unique opportunities for creative problem solving. Partnerships, however, are demanding work. One part of this demand comes from the constant struggle to keep disparate parties in partnership throughout all aspects of the research. Another part comes from the recognition that those who have the right to talk, to decide what gets researched and what research gets written, have the power to name issues and shape solutions. At its foundation, some of the tensions and confusion in these partnerships have to do with this issue of power: who has the power, who exercises it, and how, when, where and toward what ends it is used.

Two hidden influential forces in these partnerships are history and contemporary context. The larger history and contemporary context of each partner were underlying currents in this partnership. For example, there was the scarcity of material necessities for a

healthy life within some areas of the two African American communities. Or in the case of the university, there was the influence of the university's power and politics. So, too, there were the influences of even larger underlying societal currents stemming from multifaceted long term systemic racism and structured economic inequalities.¹⁷⁻²⁷ The presence and ramifications of these currents were not addressed in this partnership, but should be in the future.

When partnerships between underserved communities of color and mainstream institutions in the United States are effective, they become a place where some of this submerged, yet influential, history and context begin to surface. The connections between these larger forces of the society on the one hand, and contemporary life conditions within communities of color on the other hand, must be made more transparent and added as a major focus for future research.

REFERENCES

- Brooks PE, Forman RE, Khalfani N, et al. *Final Evaluation Report: Healthy African American Families (HAAF), Part 1*. Los Angeles, CA: Healthy African American Families; 1995.
- Brooks PE. Cultural and representative issues when employing ethnographic research with and within African American communities. Peer-reviewed. Presentation. Atlanta, GA: American Evaluation Association; 1996.
- Brooks PE. Tilling topsoil: preparing African American communities, universities, funders and evaluators to nurture collaborative research partnerships. Peer-reviewed Presentation. Atlanta, GA: American Evaluation Association; 1996.
- Brooks PE. Four years into an African American community-university research partnership: what has worked, what hasn't. Peer-reviewed Presentation. Atlanta, GA: American Evaluation Association; 1996.
- Brooks PE. HAAF at the crossroads: Working with university-community collaboratives. New York, NY: The American Public Health Association; 1996.
- Thomas J. *Doing Critical Ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications; 1992.
- Brooks PE, Forman RE, Johnson JD, et al. *Sixth Quarterly Progress Report: Healthy African American Families (HAAF)*. Los Angeles: Healthy African American Families; 1994.
- Brooks PE, Forman RE, Johnson JD, et al. *Fifth Quarterly Progress Report: Healthy African American Families (HAAF)*. Los Angeles: Healthy African American Families; 1994.
- Grace CA. *Cultural Competence for Evaluators: A Guide for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention Practitioners Working with Ethnic/Racial Communities*. Rockville, MD: OSAP; 1992.
- Healthy African American Families. *HAAF Community Involvement Report*. Los Angeles, CA, 1995.
- Gamble VN. A legacy of distrust: African Americans and medical research. *Am J Prev Med*. 1993;9(6 Suppl):35-38.
- Byrd WM, Clayton LA. *An American Health Dilemma: Volume 1 - A Medical History of African Americans and the Problem of Race: Beginnings to 1900*. New York, NY: Routledge; 2000.
- Byrd WM, Clayton LA. *An American Dilemma Volume 2 - Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States, 1900-2000*. New York, NY: Routledge; 2002.
- Ferre CD, Jones L, Norris K, et al. The Healthy African American Families (HAAF) project: from community-based to community-partnered participatory research. *Ethn Dis*. 2010;20(1, Suppl 2):S2-1-S2-8.
- Jones L, Collins B. Participation in action: the Healthy African American Families community conference model. *Ethn Dis*. 2010;20(1, Suppl 2):S2-15-S2-20.
- Hatch J, Moss N, Saran A, et al. Community research: partnership in black communities. *Am J Prev Med*. 1993;9(6 Suppl):27-31.
- Brown MK, Carnoy M, Currie E, et al. *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; 2003.
- Corbie-Smith G, Arriola KR. A legacy of distrust: research, ethics and Black Americans. In: Braithwaite RL, Taylor SE, eds. *Health Issues in the Black Community*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers, 2001;489-502.
- Delgado R. *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; 1995.
- Hill RB. *Research on the African-American Family: A Holistic Perspective*. Westport, CT: Auburn House; 1993.
- Krieger N, Rowley DL, Herman AA, et al. Racism, sexism, and social class: implications for studies of health, disease, and well-being. *Am J Prev Med*. 1993;9(6 Suppl):82-122.
- Lipsitz G. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press; 1998.
- Nguyen M. *Black Americans: A Statistical Sourcebook*. Palo Alto, CA: Information Publications; 2003.
- Better SJ. *Institutional Racism: A Primer on Theory and Strategies for Social Change*. Chicago, IL: Burnham, Inc; 2002.
- Massey D, Denton N. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1993.
- Washington HA. *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Examination on Black Americans from Colonial Times to Present*. New York, NY: Doubleday; 2006.
- Katznelson I. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company; 2005.