Nepantla and ubuntu ethics para nosotros: Beyond scrupulous adherence toward threshold perspectives of participatory/collaborative research ethics

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Abstract

Participatory Action Research (PAR) refers less to a method and more to a continuum of approaches to collaborative inquiry that aspires to do things differently than they have been done in the past. Within PAR, ideally, some phenomenon, problem, or issue has been identified as a mutual area of concern to researchers and community members; working together they design, conduct, analyze, and disseminate the findings of a shared piece of research and action(s) in the context of equal partnerships. If PAR is embraced holistically boundaries inevitably blur as research team members become implicated in each other’s lives. This blurring while momentous can give rise to ethical challenges that IRB centered research ethics are inadequate to engage or provide parameters for the conduct of de-colonial research. Even hyper-conscientious adherence to IRB rules, professional codes of conduct, and computerized ethical trainings, does not provide guidance in how to conduct ethical de-colonial participatory research. Borrowing from Borderlands I conceptualized participatory researchers as nepantleras because their work is about unremitting trying to initiate and sustain counter-hegemonic ethical research relationships bridging race/ethnicity, culture, privilege and entitlement within collaborations that the outside world homogenizes. Using individual interviews and a longitudinal de-colonial ethnography of a community based ethical review board this dissertation attempted to understand how different nepantleras define the parameters of ethical conduct in research. I had presupposed that excavating nepantlera ethics would provide more tangible and inclusive ethical touchstones for
unsuspecting researchers and community partners to use while traveling what can be unsteady
ground in collaborative research. In some ways I have accomplished this by unearthing
landmines and suggestions for detours on to terrain that is more respectfully traversed between
academic scientists and communities. I am in other respects left with the sobering realization that
conducting truly ethical collaborative research is trickier than I could have possibly imagined.