

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Research Teams: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Race and Justice

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Abstract

Since the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and the racial justice protests that followed, many institutions, including the academy, pledged their support for policies and practices that combat on-going racial injustice. Social justice and anti-racism initiatives abound on college campuses, including programming, hosting speakers, and proposing required 'diversity' classes for all students. For all this rhetoric, college and university administrators have remained silent when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion practices as they relate to research. And yet, extant research documents the ways in which racial and gender biases have consistently shaped every level of research from the development of the research question, to the diversity (or not) of the sample, the availability of funding, and the probability of publishing. In this paper we focus on one aspect of the research process: the assembling (or not) of diverse research teams. We explore the benefits that diversity in research teams brings to the integrity of the data as well as the obstacles to both assembling

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a diverse research team and managing it successfully. Specifically, this paper focuses on the myriad ways in which diversity in research teams is treated as a set of boxes to check, rather than an epistemology that underscores positionality and power. We present a series of case examples that highlight the ways in which diversity, equity, and inclusion are successfully and unsuccessfully achieved in research teams, both in terms of outcomes and experiences. These case examples focus specifically on power relations along all forms of diversity, including race and gender as well as rank. The case examples also serve to unpack the ways in which research teams can rely on positionality as a tool for addressing power at three distinct levels: in conducting social science research generally, between the researcher and the “researched,” and among the research team itself.

Keywords

Diversity, equity and inclusion, epistemology, research methods

Introduction

White, cisgender, heterosexual men dominate at the ranks of full professor within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). White women, though they are still rare among the ranks of full professor, are well represented among the ranks of assistant and associate professor. Comparatively, those with other marginalized identities, especially non-whites, are often relegated to the ranks of instructor and adjunct across PWIs (Zambrana et al., 2017). The lack of diversity among faculty and thus lead researchers, and the ways in which this lack of diversity limits the depth and quality of research evidence the institution produces, continues to be a key concern. However, following the murder of George Floyd and the social justice protests that followed, many institutions, including PWIs, revisited how their own policies and practices contribute to ongoing social injustice on their own campuses (Clayton, 2021). In their own internal reviews, many PWIs and universities have clamored to champion ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ (DEI) (Huff, 2021). Although institutions at times treated these distinct and discrete concepts as a singular entity, they nonetheless began to develop sustainable pipelines for recruiting cisgender women and individuals historically excluded from PWIs, like Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others (LGBTQ+) community. These strategies sought to bring fresh perspectives to the classroom, new ways of approaching research design and questions, and more robust lenses from which to analyze, conceptualize, and write about data. Despite these efforts, students, faculty, and academic on-lookers continue to discuss the underwhelming substantive impact of DEI commitments. As a result, academia, and by default research teams operating within PWIs, remain dominated by white, cisgender, heterosexual men and women.

Many scholars talk about the importance of diversity in research teams (Cheruvilil et al., 2014), citing the ‘edge effect’ and its implications on the quality and depth of research rigor and production. The edge effect was first defined by Odum (1953) as

the tendency for species' richness and an increased probability of mutation and evolution to occur at the junction zone between two communities, or at the 'edge.' Perhaps this is why we often use the term 'cutting edge' to refer to research that moves us beyond traditional, hegemonic constructs.

Others have applied the concept of the edge effect to research teams, citing that the more members of a team who "bump up against each other" due to their differences—individual identities or disciplinary training—the more possibility for richness and for novel ideas (evolution) to emerge. For example, Freeman and Huang (2015) found that research teams that were more diverse produced scholarship that was more likely to be cited than that which was produced by homogeneous teams. Diversity in teams, and thus the various lenses the team takes to the research question and data, improves the understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Particularly as criminologists, sociologists, or plainly as social scientists, our role is to describe and explain social problems in the most robust and rigorous way possible. Achieving the widest, most exhaustive lenses possible means that diversity in research teams is not a box to check, but rather an ethical imperative to the scientific process.

Assembling a diverse team does not alone ensure either equity or inclusion among research team members, nor does it necessarily produce cutting-edge research. Building a research team grounded in the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion requires reflexivity and deliberate decision making by lead researchers. As a mix of early and veteran scholars, we acknowledge this lens reappropriates a more global or institutional commitment to DEI as the responsibility of individual faculty. However, as organizational scholars contend across a variety of social institutions, those on the front-lines are the true implementers of change (Kras et al., 2019; Lipsky, 1980; Rudes, 2012; Rudes & Portillo, 2012). These street-level bureaucrats are often tasked with top-down mandates and must interpret, make decisions about, negotiate, and at times resist reform. Thus, micro decisions ultimately shape the kinds of change that is implemented in practice. For social institutions like universities, this casts front-line staff, or faculty leading research, as the primary change agents of DEI in research teams. It also means our reappropriation of responsibility to faculty is an ironic extension of street-level bureaucracy to those who often write about this phenomena.

Importantly, we acknowledge that the principles of building a research team steeped in the values of DEI are rarely taught to scholars. There is no training to do it, no metric to measure how well it is done, and no system to ensure it happens. But this does not let us—faculty and lead researchers—off the hook. This paper will unpack a series of case examples that highlight how diversity, equity, and inclusion are successfully and unsuccessfully achieved in research teams, both in terms of research outcomes as well as experiences. While we recognize the litany of ways in which lead researchers can improve DEI in their research teams (e.g., committing to hiring graduate students who represent different identities and have some diversity in training; requiring and providing meaningful training in DEI), these cases will specifically focus on a central theme of power. We will detail the ways in which power plays out in teams and offer strategies that rely on positionality as a tool for unpacking power at three

distinct levels: the power and privilege of conducting social science research generally, power between the researcher and the “researched,” and power among the research team itself. In this paper our focus is on the importance of building truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive tables to which young researchers with varied identities are not only invited, not only welcomed, but valued, their voices elevated and centered. Our hope is that if we are to place the burden on our peers to live up to a university-level commitment, we do so with explicit guidance.

What is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?

People often refer to diversity, equity, and inclusion as if they are three strands of the same concept. This is not surprising given that many offices on college and university campuses, as well as in many corporations, refer to the offices and the professionals who lead them as a singular unit: “DEI.” Yet, as we will demonstrate here, not only do these three unique concepts require different strategies to accomplish, but the vast majority of focus is on only one of the concepts: diversity. This is likely because diversity is the easiest of the three concepts to implement, measure, and *see*. Yet, diversity efforts alone do not adequately address the inadequacies associated with traditional research conducted primarily by white, cisgender, heterosexual men and women.

Diversity commonly refers to including people who hold different identities, perspectives, and training. One of the most commonly employed strategies for ensuring diversity in research teams is to assemble a team that is interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary. The natural sciences have long recognized the importance of interdisciplinary teams. As discussed, evolutionary scientists note that most ecological and biological diversity occurs at the edges of habitats, a phenomenon referred to as the ‘edge effect.’ Entire fields of study, including biochemistry and public health, are examples of the breaking down of disciplinary silos and the emergence of interdisciplinary and diverse approaches. Social sciences have been late to this game. Criminology, perhaps because of its need to establish itself as a discipline distinct from sociology, psychology, social work, anthropology, economics, and political science, is among the most resistant. Yet criminologists have much to gain in working with colleagues across interdisciplinary lines as they seek to understand pressing social issues including poverty, persistent under- and unemployment, gender-based violence, achievement gaps in education, and disproportionate rates of incarceration, just to name a few. That being said, this paper is not focused on interdisciplinarity – many others have already made the case for the impact of interdisciplinary teams. Second, in our experience, interdisciplinary teams can and often do recreate hierarchical structures of race, gender identity and experience, and sexuality, even when they include scholars with different types of disciplinary training and focus. Therefore, we devote our paper to a discussion of assembling research teams that intentionally disrupt status and power hierarchies in order to conduct the highest quality research while simultaneously advancing opportunities for people who are under-represented at traditional research tables. That being said, diversity alone does not promise or inherently

promote equity or inclusion. These concepts and practices are secured via uniquely different processes.

In contrast to diversity, the concept of *equity* refers to the acknowledgement that not all people start from the same place. In the context of research teams, equity requires that we elevate specific people to hold as much space as others by providing more responsive support, or even simply *more* support, to them. Practically speaking, this means recognizing that because of structural barriers that impede the professional advancement of women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ scholars, offering associate professors the opportunity to serve as principle investigators on a team that includes full professors, who as we note are significantly more likely to be white, cisgender, heterosexual men, can be an equity strategy. In this example, support must also be provided in order to ensure success. Support might include *additional* teaching load reductions, limited service obligations, and summer salary that serve to create equitable circumstances under which an associate professor can thrive.

Inclusion is the process that ensures these individuals not only sustain the space provided to them, but are as welcomed, elevated, and centered as often as everyone else. This requires, among other things, debunking the assumption that offering equity in professional opportunities, including additional support, is an ‘affirmative action’ policy. In other words, equity without inclusion can produce a hostile work environment in which those with privileged identities resent what they perceive to be special treatment, rather than understanding that equitable practices are simply tools for addressing systemic, historically oppressive structures such as white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

In order to create research teams that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive, members of the team must engage in a reflexive process that reveals clearly where the power lies among the individuals who comprise the team: who has power, who lacks power, and how power manifests relationally. Swedish social philosopher Goran Therborn (1999) examines the ways in which power manifests in nation-states. We find his articulation useful when thinking about power in research teams as well. As Therborn (1999) argues, hegemony is the power to define what is good and what is possible. In other words, those on the research team who hold power get to determine what matters, what is worthy of investigation, and which methods and approaches should be employed. Similarly, feminist standpoint epistemologists articulate the ways in which power excludes voices, and in nearly every case the excluded voices are those of people with marginalized identities (Collins, 1990; Harding, 2004; hooks, 1984). Thus, dissecting and interrogating power is essential to assembling research teams that are truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive to produce cutting edge research.

Impacts of Successfully Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Teams and Case Examples

The extant literature on diversity in research teams primarily examines the impact of diverse people and training, documenting the variety of ways diversity in research teams is advantageous. This includes improving the research design process,

gaining access to communities, building rapport with participants, and increasing communication and satisfaction with the research process among team members (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Missing from much of this analysis is a discussion of the ways in which power impacts the experiences of members of diverse research teams and the lived successes of these teams. In our case examples, we infuse discussions of power to unpack the finer details of how these teams play out in practice.

Positionality and the Privilege of Social Science Research

Feminist standpoint epistemology (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Harding 1991, 2004; hooks, 1984), a framework developed largely by Black feminist theorists, articulates the ways in which positionality informs the various ways of knowing that individual researchers bring to their work, research designs, and research questions. Though anyone can read the existing literature to expand their framework for understanding social phenomena, positionality often gives the researcher a window into areas of inquiry that are often hidden from view. For example, as Black feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) argues in her foundational articulation of intersectionality, Black women's unique experiences with intimate partner violence (IPV) were instrumental in advancing both research and activism related to gender-based violence. Is it any surprise then that Black women founded both the #MeToo (Tarana Burke) and Black Lives Matter (Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Ayo Tometi¹) movements? Their positionality, as the targets of misogynoir (a term coined by Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey in 2010) and as the 'collateral' victims in the police killings of unarmed Black children and teens, grants insight into the structural systems of oppression that place Black women and their children at higher risk for violence. In this way, the positionality and lived experiences of Black women evoke more nuanced research questions, create more robust research designs to dig into the minutia, and do so while attending to the unique needs and emotional labor of their research participants via their social proximity to them.

Some scholars critique this level of social proximity and consider this embeddedness or shared identity (i.e., 'me-search') as problematic to the scientific process which demands objectivity (Ray, 2016). As Harris (2021) notes, this critique comes from a positivist paradigm and incorrectly assumes that researchers who do not share identities with research participants, or researchers who are predominately cisgender, heterosexual, and white, are objective *because* of their social distance. This presumption, which is not only erroneous but perpetuates gatekeeping as a mechanism to define who can and should do the research, ultimately upholds systemic structures of power and privilege of predominantly white research teams that Therborn's (1999) framework elucidates. In fact, intersectionality and positionality scholarship contends that *everyone* holds positionality of some kind, thereby rendering all research questions and methodological design an extension of the researcher's experience and bounded knowledge (Alexander-Floyd 2012; Hancock 2007). In this way, research devoted to uncovering and explaining social problems can never be objective.

Reflectivity is the important process of implementing and interrogating positionality. Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004) offer this description of the process of reflexivity:

In simple terms, reflexivity is the process through which a researcher recognizes, examines, and understands how her social background, positionality, and assumptions affect the practice of research. The researcher is as much a product of society and its structures and institutions as the participants she is studying. One's own beliefs, backgrounds, and feelings become part of the process of knowledge construction... Reflexivity also requires that the researcher makes visible to both the research audience and possibly the participants one's own social locations and identities. (p. 115)

By engaging in reflexive processes that acknowledge and render visible our positionalities, we can adequately account for any biases that may be a product of our positionality through employing rigorous methodological designs, reconsidering the language and format of the questions we ask, and critically examine how we analyze data to draw conclusions.

Case Example One: Unpacking Positionality. One of the authors was a mother of young children when she began conducting research for her dissertation. In reading the existing literature, she found that the majority of scholars predicted and explained women's labor force participation through an economic lens; mothers whose families needed the money entered the labor market, and those whose families did not stayed at home. But as she sat in local parks and McDonald's playlands and children's museums listening to other mothers, she met many women whose labor force decisions did not align with what the experts who produced the scholarship predicted. Her standpoint and positionality, as delineated by scholars like Sandra Harding (1991, 2004) or Patricia Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020), suggested something different. In fact her research complicated the existing literature in ways that moved the discussions of maternal labor force participation in new and important directions.

Comprehensive research that unpacks the minutia of social phenomena must be responsive to all forms of systemic oppression operating in the ecosystem of the people understudied, but also responsive to how these systems operate in the ecosystem of researchers (Go, 2020). Although the presence of maximally diverse research teams does not blatantly preclude this acknowledgment (an exercise of inclusion) and responsiveness, it does bring a competitive advantage compared to homogeneous teams.

Team Diversity and Social Proximity to Research Participants

Social proximity to potential research participants is advantageous in other ways, including gaining access to hard-to-reach communities and building rapport. In most of the social sciences, and in criminology in particular, a great deal of research focuses on social problems and the experiences of the marginalized, historically excluded, and hidden or hard-to-research populations (Ferguson, 2004; O'Sullivan, 2019; Potter, 2015; Sandoval, 2000; Sydor, 2013). For example, entire sections in

the American Sociological Association (ASA) are dedicated to inequalities of gender, race, sexuality, and class. Herein lies an example of the ways in which power determines ‘appropriate’ research questions and populations for study. The majority of mainstream scholarship has, since inception, focused on the experiences of cisgender, heterosexual, white men. In response, area studies scholars—women and gender studies, Black studies, sexuality studies—widened the lens to include the experiences of those with marginalized identities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 2012; Cooper, 2018; hooks, 1991). An unintended but significant consequence of these attempts to be more inclusive was a tipping of the balance such that studies of inequality focused *only* on the marginalized, thus rendering invisible the ways in which privilege operates in coordination to directly produce oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Wingfield, 2013).

That being said, much social science research depends upon access to marginalized communities. Centuries of white supremacy and cis-hetero-patriarchy have produced significant, yet understandable, distrust of people in socially dominant groups. Assembling a diverse research team is one strategy that can be employed to address this trust gap. For example, white and financially privileged researchers interested in the social welfare system may hire Black, Indigenous, or other graduate students of color with lived experience for their ability to make connections in the community, recruit participants, and build rapport in ways that produce high quality data (Rainwater, 1970). To be clear, diversity here does not only mean identity but can also mean training. In fact, researchers who are trained and sensitive to the language, artifacts, and history of the potential research population can also successfully reach marginalized populations (Evans-Winters, 2021).

Case Example Two: Engaging with Community Partners in a Meaningful Way. Two authors of this paper had been studying the criminal legal system for many years when the community where they lived grappled with the exposition of the wrongful conviction of a Black man, who had served nearly 20 years in prison for the rape and murder of a white woman. The case was highly charged and divided the community along racial lines. As residents of the city and scholars studying the criminal legal system, the authors developed an interest in wrongful convictions and exonerations. The researchers knew that they could not simply swoop in and study the issue without first building relationships, particularly with those in the community who had fought for the exonerated man’s release and helped him reintegrate into the community. (Note: One of the authors is white and at the time both were employed at a private PWI in the community). The researchers reached out to local leaders, including the exoneree’s defense attorney, and offered to help. They volunteered their time to help the exoneree found a re-entry program and, through that volunteer work, built rapport and gained the trust of a community that had a long-standing, understandable distrust of the white establishment. The scholarly result was a true partnership between the exoneree, the authors, and the re-entry community that produced several publications, including a book on social capital and re-entry.

In addition to the obvious advantages of engaging community partners in meaningful ways in order to gain access to study participants, it is also important to point out

that there are many disadvantages associated with ‘swooping in.’ As noted, many communities, especially communities of color, have a history of exploitation and abuse that manifests in a deep distrust not only of individual researchers who are external to their communities, but also institutions that employ and fund research. Additionally, research conducted without community cooperation can be viewed as resource extraction, exploitative, and lacking mutual benefit. Thus, we recommend research teams consider diversity as well as include and value participants from the community under study. This directly contributes to access of communities and the ability to understand and care for those who agree to participate. It also creates inclusion and manifests the edge effect in practice where the knowledge of community members and academics are considered and valued equally, bumping into each other, and creating more nuanced and thoughtful research.

Once research teams have gained access to the communities they wish to study, they must convince individual people to participate, and to participate fully. As seasoned researchers know, *trust* is a key ingredient in getting people to complete surveys or consent to an interview (McDavitt et al., 2016; Mohebbi et al., 2018). During the actual data collection process, this involves building rapport with participants regardless of method. In survey research, writing questions and response sets that make sense to respondents is crucial. Building rapport with interviewees is key to getting valid and reliable data. Trust is often easier to build among people with shared identities. These identities may be based on a single category, like race or gender, or at the intersections of multiple identities.

Case Example Three: Using Intersectionality in the Field. One strategy we have found useful is to pair people with different identities together in the field. Two of the authors of this paper, a Black man and a white woman, conducted research on families living with IPV. They interviewed both men and women, Black and white folks, in two regions of the country. With some participants, rapport was built most easily based on a shared racial identity, and in other cases rapport aligned with shared gender identity. Frequently, rapport shifted during an individual interview. When a Black woman was talking about her racial experiences, her rapport was stronger with the Black man; but when she discussed her experiences with child sexual abuse, her rapport was stronger with the white woman. Diverse *and* inclusive research teams leverage the strengths and identities of all members of the team in ways that produce the highest quality, reliable, and valid data.

Diverse Team Impacts to the Team Itself

Diverse teams are also good for the team dynamic itself. High-performing collaborative research teams consist of diverse members who are committed to common outcomes. Careful attention must be paid to the interpersonal skills of team members, including social sensitivity and emotional engagement, and to team functioning, including communication patterns. In a meta-analysis of 108 unique articles about

more than 10,000 teams, Stahl et al. (2010) found that diversity in teams positively increases creativity, but also interestingly increases conflict. While more diverse teams experienced less social integration, they also reported better communication and greater overall satisfaction with the process than homogeneous teams. Though the complexity of the task tended to increase conflict, even teams engaged in complex tasks and long-term relationships reported greater overall satisfaction than teams that were not diverse (Stahl et al., 2010; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). Although their research predominantly considered the impact of diverse research teams, measured outcomes like *satisfaction with the research process* or *better communication* are proxies for inclusion-in-action. In this way, successfully diverse teams elevate other components of the team dynamic which then create a more powerful team to solve many current social problems. And yet, despite the power of research teams to solve problems, power dynamics inside of the research team are rarely examined or discussed.

In addition to diversity in terms of positionality, previous research also reveals that diversity in disciplinary training is critical to designing research to address the most pressing issues facing society today—be it climate change, poverty, gender-based violence, or mass incarceration (Evans-Winters, 2019; Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004). Research on innovations take place on the edges, where differences brush up against each other (i.e., the edge effect). Evolutionary scientists reveal that most breakthroughs take place where different habitats meet, including where the oceans meet the shore or where the savannah meets the forest. These are the places where new species emerge. The same is true in other sciences. Most innovations take place when teams that are themselves diverse work with others across interdisciplinary lines. Not only does research benefit from diverse research teams, but also from interdisciplinary teams of people with different training. For example, different disciplines rely on different research methods. Anthropologists generally utilize ethnography whereas many sociologists, criminologists, and psychologists are trained in survey or quantitative methodologies. Interdisciplinary teams often have the benefit of conducting research that includes a mixed-methods design. Additionally, disciplinary training is also often associated with epistemological differences. Sociology, criminology, and psychology are rooted more in positivist approaches, whereas anthropology and qualitative sociology take a phenomenological approach.

Tension may emerge as different team members negotiate to have their research questions or perspectives take precedence (equity and inclusion). The outcome of these negotiations are often shaped by power, where those with more power are more successful in centering their research questions or methods. In general, interdisciplinary research is increasingly necessary in order to address the most pressing issues facing society, so attention to these power dynamics is critical.

Case Example Four: Leveraging Interdisciplinarity. Several authors on this paper collaborated in a research project that interrogated the experiences of people incarcerated and working in solitary confinement units in a state prison system. We often encountered both incarcerated individuals and staff who expressed that solitary

confinement had a significant, negative impact on their mental health. Including teammates with specialties in clinical or counseling psychology would have allowed our team to further investigate these reports. Our team did benefit by including members trained in critical race theory, feminist theory, and organizational theory, and we each brought our disciplinary training to the development of the research questions, survey and interview design, and analysis. Centering traditionally marginalized frameworks (critical race and feminist perspectives) was likely successful because the team members with those specialties were full professors. Had graduate students or even assistant professors championed these perspectives, they may not have been as prominently embedded in the research design.

Challenges to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Research Teams and Case Examples

Despite the documented advantages to diversity in research teams, as Stahl et al. (2010) and Stahl and Maznevski (2021) noted, there are also challenges to working in diverse research teams. In this section of the paper, we unpack some of these challenges using examples from our own experience and the experience of others. Specifically, we explore the ways in which diversity in research teams does not ensure either equity or inclusion. Assembling a diverse research team is only the first step. Team leaders must be intentional about creating and ensuring that environments are both equitable and inclusive.

Diversity versus Equity and Inclusion

Scholars who study and train on issues of diversity and inclusion (Allen, 2011; Christopher, 2018; Rose, 2015) are quick to point out the difference between research teams that are diverse and those that are inclusive. Many research teams are diverse but not inclusive. Having people around the table with different identities is diversity. Inclusion, on the other hand, exists only when the voices of the people around the table have equal weight, when the voices and experiences of the historically excluded are centered, and when those with dominant identities (e.g., men, white people, heterosexual people, cisgender people) commit to their own re-education regarding their social privilege. When white researchers ask Black colleagues to ‘speak for their race’ or represent a marginalized point of view as if it were a singular and simple construct, rather than reading the literature themselves and engaging in their own racial equity work, then diversity may exist on the team but inclusivity does not.

Case Example Five: Avoiding Exploitation and Doing Your Homework. In a research team lead by a cisgender researcher, a central point of study was transgender people’s experiences in prison. In this research team, a junior researcher identifying outside of the gender binary was asked to review the literature on trans issues, write the research questions and hypotheses, and develop the study’s measures. Though this individual had the unique positionality and social proximity to the issues to

develop nuanced questions and methods, and bring creativity to the project which centered and cared for research participants, the research team did not create a space where the trans researcher was an expert to lead the team. Instead, the team dynamic relegated the trans researcher to do ‘the heavy lifting’ and hand over the work to the lead researcher without any discussion about the process or final product. This process exploited the researcher’s marginalized identity instead of elevating it, ultimately replicating mechanisms of oppression that exist society-wide within the research team itself.

In this case, the junior researcher is vulnerable to exploitation and inequity because of both their identity (as a transgender person) and their status as a junior colleague. These intersecting spaces of oppression result in multiple forms of risk and thus increased precarity for this person. As a result, this researcher, though excited about the opportunity to utilize their positionality to contribute to the research team, may not feel they have the power to push back on exploitative assumptions or practices.

At the most basic level, and sadly incredibly commonplace, is the inclusion or hiring of people with marginalized identities to gain access and build trust with historically excluded, hard-to-reach, or hidden communities specifically to collect data, then thanking them in the acknowledgments without offering opportunities for authorship or manuscript mentorship. This is another example of a team that might be diverse but is certainly not equitable.

Case Example Six: Giving Proper Credit. As a junior scholar working on his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago in the late 1950s, the late sociologist John Moland, Jr. was given the responsibility of recruiting and interviewing gang members in the inner city of Chicago. The senior researchers, mostly white men, relied on Black students like Moland to access gang circles and provide empirical data on gang activities. Much of this research received acclaim for pioneering gang research during a time when the Blackstone Rangers, the Vice Lords, the Black Disciple Nation, and a gang headed by the infamous “King David” Barksdale, the charismatic founder of the Black Disciple Nation, were dominating inner-city Chicago. Much of this ethnographic work was done by Moland, yet he was never offered authorship or continued mentorship that would provide tangible capital in academic circles. Moland spent his career toiling at Alabama State University, never able to parlay his path-breaking work into the notable success that the principal investigator, Jim Short, enjoyed by anchoring his career to the research (Short & Strodtbeck, 1965).

This case is, unfortunately, an all too common experience for graduate students and junior scholars. Not only is their labor exploited, but often their mentors’ careers are advanced on the backs of this physical and emotional labor. In these cases, students and mentees rarely achieve the same level of professional success because the ‘profits’ of the labor fuel someone else’s success. And, more often than not, that someone else is a cisgender, white person. In contrast, equitable practices would ensure ample and public credit to people like John Moland, Jr. Doing so provides capital and legitimacy for their continued momentum.

Power Can Both Facilitate and Interrupt Attempts to Bring Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to Research

Research teams almost always include people with different amounts of structural power. They may include full professors, assistant professors who are untenured, graduate students, and sometimes even undergraduate students. Given the race and gender configuration of academic rank, more often than not identities and rank intersect in predictable and problematic ways. Full professors are more likely to be white and often men, whereas the ranks of graduate students are significantly more diverse. Thus, a research team that is diverse in terms of rank and identity will likely reflect these structural differences and, importantly, produce exploitative power dynamics if diverse team members are not supported (equity) and centered (inclusion).

Similarly, structural power is also distributed in predictable ways across various types of institutions. Cisgender white men are predominant at prestigious research institutions (R1s). Comparatively, white women and people from historically excluded groups cluster at colleges and universities that are more focused on teaching and mentoring, often with fewer resources to support faculty research and fewer graduate programs. Though there are many benefits to constructing research teams that straddle multiple institutions, including the opportunities for more well-established scholars to mentor colleagues at under-resourced institutions, these collaborations are often fraught with the same tensions and status hierarchies that researchers on interdisciplinary teams experience. This might include leadership roles maintained by R1 faculty, even when faculty from under-resourced or undergraduate-focused colleges and universities have more expertise. These arrangements are typically manifestations of pervasive funding structures. When the expert faculty maintains residency in R2 or teaching institutions, even when their grant proposals include the sub-contracted infrastructure of R1 professors, they are often not awarded these grants. In contrast, R1 faculty are rewarded more often with large grants because they have the infrastructure support. As a result, this creates problematic incentive to name faculty from R1s as lead investigators on grant proposals, thereby institutionalizing power structures within large teams that cross campuses and institutions. Including a prestigious university on a grant may enhance its chances of being funded, but every effort must be made to equalize the grant benefits such that people from excluded groups, especially those working at liberal arts colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), gain access to the same opportunities for professional development as those working at research intensive universities.

In sum, lead researchers hold an incredible amount of power in the small micro-decisions that create team dynamics. This includes decisions about possible research ideas and questions to pursue, measures to include in final protocols, data analysis techniques, and theoretical lenses that are employed. Power is also deployed in ways that potentially impact junior members' professional success. For example, decisions are made about which team members receive mentorship or even opportunities to take on leadership roles on the team, authorship order, continued support and training for employment capital, and attention and priority during the job search. Power not

only shapes these potentially inequitable team dynamics, but in the more toxic environments it can temper or even completely constrain junior scholars (both assistant professors and graduate students) from ‘calling this out’ and challenging these processes. If they do, they risk further isolation from the already inequitable practices.

Case Example Seven: Allowing Space For Dissenting Voices. Large, funded projects provide a great opportunity to many graduate students to learn new skills, be part of a large team, conduct original research, and parlay these experiences into other opportunities. However, when lead researchers lack shared experience with study participants, the burden is often placed on junior scholars and graduate students to call attention to issues of power and mitigate impacts on participants. In one such project, a survey was developed that was fraught with problematic language and stereotypical assumptions about research respondents. One junior scholar, a young Black woman, provided careful feedback to the experienced lead researcher, a white cisgender woman, to help unpack the reasons survey respondents might find the language in the questions to be offensive. The junior scholar’s critiques were ignored, and the lead researcher chose to continue with the original protocol. During data collection, many respondents stopped to discuss the problematic language with the junior scholar who was asked to administer the surveys. As respondents brought up concerns, she apologized for the language and assumptions in the survey and did her best to smooth over the situation. Following this experience, the junior scholar expressed her concerns in a team meeting with other junior scholars who had worked with the lead researcher longer. Her peers acknowledged her concerns but did not take the issue to the lead researcher, despite witnessing respondents’ concerns themselves. Frustrated that other research team members with more power would not speak up and continued to use the problematic survey, the junior scholar ultimately left the team, losing the connections and capital that being part of a large-scale research project would yield.

As this case illustrates, assembling a diverse research team is only the first step toward equitable and inclusive teams which produce cutting edge research. In this case, the lead researcher prioritized diversity of the young Black graduate student at the expense of equity and inclusion. As a result, the team not only reproduced power structures but actually created and contributed to inequity when the graduate student left the team. When research teams and research spaces are diverse but *not* equitable or inclusive, scholars with historically excluded identities are either left out of the benefits associated with the research project (Case Example Six) or they get pushed out (Case Example Seven). Both of these cases illustrate the tragic outcomes of considering diversity but ignoring equity and inclusion. In discussions of diversity in the academy, white people, including cis women, will bemoan the fact that there are so few BIPOC faculty, LGBTQ+ faculty, faculty with disabilities on campus (often without acknowledging those faculty who hold several or all of these identities). As we have demonstrated here, the lack of equity and inclusion on research teams, especially those that are training graduate students, is part of the problem.

Recommendations

Developing and assembling diverse research teams holds an incredible amount of purchase for conducting cutting edge research that explains social problems. However, if teams produce and reproduce inequitable power structures and are fraught with challenges to inclusivity, they can do more harm than good. In this final section of the paper, we offer recommendations that address three areas of concern: the power dynamics of conducting social science research, the power dynamics between the researcher and the ‘researched,’ and the power-driven tensions in diverse research teams.

Acknowledging the Power of Conducting Social Science Research

As Black feminist theorists argue, science is not purely objective. Failing to acknowledge this allows for embedding inequalities directly into every aspect of research design: from the choice of research question, to the theoretical framing, to the analytical strategy and dissemination. In order to combat structured inequality in the research design, we must first acknowledge it. As we have argued here, assembling diverse research teams that are inclusive and equitable is a critical strategy for ensuring that structural inequality does as little harm as possible through the process of scientific research. In addition to the cases we have already provided, we offer several more concrete suggestions.

Black feminist theorists suggest that each individual researcher engage in a self-reflexive positionality exercise (Clemons, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984). Scholars who write from a Black feminist perspective often include positionality statements in their research. This allows the reader to have a better, fuller understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the research. We recommend that early on, perhaps at the very first meeting, research teams participate in a group positionality exercise. Not only will this illuminate people’s complex and intersectional identities, but this process also offers an opportunity for individuals to express their preferences for their role on the team.

Write Positionality Statements and Discuss Prior to Research Design and/or Data Collection

We provide three author positionality statements as examples. Each of these comes from published or forthcoming work:

- The researcher’s in-group status contributed to gaining access to the group to recruit participants. The researcher is a part of a stigmatized racial group (African American) and gender group (women), is a survivor of sexual assault and IPV, and comes from a working class, system-impacted community. This allowed ease

of access to the participating community organizations and functioned as a way to assist in garnering participants and establishing rapport with participants (Evans-Winters, 2019). The researcher's out-group status also contributed to the research process. Unlike her participants, the researcher was a social scientific researcher, has a master's degree in sociology, and consistently used reflexivity as a crucial qualitative research practice to maintain reliability and validity (Darawsheh, 2014; Finlay, 2002).

- Through interviews with high school students, I explore what teenagers understand about sex and relationships, where they learn it from, and what they wish they knew. The purpose of this research is to center the perspectives and experiences of teenagers in a conversation typically reserved for older groups of people. In public and academic discourse, sexual assault and IPV focuses on college-aged adult samples. I reflect now on my personal victimization experiences in high school and early college. Recognizing the privilege that I have as a cisgender, heterosexual, white woman of middle-class status in learning about the subject matter through an academic lens, I now understand ways that one can navigate trauma without having learned the knowledge and the skills necessary to do so. I did not learn about healthy relationships or red flags for unhealthy relationships in high school, I did not want to talk about these experiences with my parents, and while I talked to my friends later on about my relationship, it is likely they had the same (lack of) sex education foundation as I did. I can confirm from personal experience, and from eye-opening conversations with my friends over the years, that not only do such experiences happen earlier, but they are uniquely impactful when they occur earlier.
- I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman with a Ph.D. I was not the first in my family to graduate from college or even to earn a postgraduate degree. And, as I reflect back on my childhood and adolescence to see these years were filled with experiences that I would now catalog as various forms of sexual violence, it was not until I went to college that I learned two important lessons. First, I began to witness gender-based violence as a tool of exclusion and, second, I witnessed firsthand the ways in which institutions refused to hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable. Though the focus of my paper is not college campuses, my experiences in college critically inform my commitment to contributing as a scholar, teacher, and activist. I call for increasing our understanding of gender-based violence and the development of policies and practices that prevent it, intervene when it occurs, and ultimately reduce it and create safe institutions where people of all genders can thrive.

While powerful, simply writing positionality statements is not enough. They must be prepared, read, and discussed by the research team. This reflexive practice is a strategy for identifying power as well as biases and hidden assumptions among members of the research team and can be a meaningful tool for facilitating dialogue such that the team is not only diverse, but also equitable and inclusive.

Honoring the Power Between Researchers and the Researched

The social problems that are most pressing in the U.S. and globally are also the most ripe for the exploitation inherent in the power differential between the researcher and the 'researched.' There are many examples of methodologies explicitly designed to address the power differential between researcher and researched, including Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community Based Research (CBR). What we argue here is that critical elements of the practice of methods like PAR or CBR can be infused into more traditional research methods in ways that reduce the power differentials that lead to hyper-exploitation of those being researched (Dillard, 2000). Among the strategies we recommend, not surprisingly, is to first acknowledge that any research that involves 'human subjects' is relational and that researchers hold all, or almost all, of the power in this relationship. This acknowledgement goes well beyond 'checking the boxes' of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and requires additional reflexivity practices. In a previous example, we described a research study that involved partnering with a community organization. These kinds of partnerships, when structured with care and attention to power, can result in sharing power between the researcher and the researched, if not directly with the individuals participating then with community organizations advocating for those participating in the research. These kinds of partnerships allow for involvement of community partners in all stages of the research design, from honing the research questions, to designing measures and sampling strategies and shaping analysis. These partnerships also offer obvious opportunities for the dissemination of findings, by holding community meetings or offering to contribute to proposals for funding or final reports to stakeholders (McDavitt et al., 2016).

Finally, as feminist methodologists (Leavy & Harris, 2018) propose, we recommend that researchers always consider outlets for dissemination that ensure that important research is accessible. As we all know, the academic jargon that is often required (or we think it is) by top journals is inaccessible to the vast majority of the population, including undergraduates. This type of gatekeeping prevents not only the general public but also specialists in other areas, such as policy experts and journalists, from utilizing the most cutting edge research to inform their practice. Top academic journals are also often pay-walled, preventing anyone without a college or university affiliation or subscription to gain access. We suggest strategies like considering publishing in open access journals as well as widely accessible outlets. Write an opinion piece, record a YouTube video, or disseminate research via social media platforms. All of these forms of public engagement serve to democratize the research process.

One final consideration is acknowledging that junior members of a research team may not be able to afford to publish in open access or publicly available outlets. Because they still face the gatekeeping practices of the job market and tenure and promotion processes, they must demonstrate their expertise through traditional dissemination outlets. This is an example of the ways in which communication within diverse research teams is critical to ensuring inclusivity and equity. Avenues by which senior members of the research team can amplify and uplift the work of junior

colleagues ensures that some of the research findings are published in the highest ranking journals, while they simultaneously pursue public outlets as well.

Unpacking Power in the Team and Dismantling in-Team Power Structures – Commit to Inclusive Practices

As we have argued throughout, it is clearly not enough to commit to building diverse research teams. Those on the team with privilege—be it identity privilege or positional privilege or the intersections of both—must commit to equitable practices that ensure inclusion. As we suggest above, a starting point for this process is the writing, sharing, and discussing positionality statements. Initial discussions will provide the transparency needed for further actions to be taken. In the following pages, we offer some strategies to implement at nearly every stage of the research process, which shift the burden of equity and inclusion to those with more power rather than those with less. People with social or structural power, regardless of their identities, can be allies, mentors, and sponsors to those with less power. This kind of allyship can be done quietly so as not to draw attention to the situation or make a marginalized member of the research team feel uncomfortable or unseen. One can imagine scenarios with regard to any marginalized identity, including race, gender, sexuality, disability, or religious practice. For example, when some of the authors were doing research in prisons, we routinely observed the correctional officers using heterosexist and cissexist language. A cisgender member of our team offered to conduct interviews with these officers so that a transgender member of our team who expressed discomfort would not be subjected to harmful language or assumptions about their identity.

We all have privileges in certain settings. For example, regardless of our race or gender identity, each of us is far more educated than the vast majority of the population. That being said, our level of privilege changes across micro settings like research teams and research sites. Those with privilege in these micro settings must continuously commit to re-educating themselves and not rely on those with marginalized identities to educate them. Only when they come to the table fully confronting their privileges can they participate in creating an environment in which all members of the team are able to thrive. Through conscious centering of marginalized voices, allies have a responsibility to educate themselves and not burden those with marginalized identities to educate them. As they progress along their own journeys of self-reflection and enlightenment, this responsibility expands to the team.

For example, allies may choose to lead discussion groups or book club readings. Depending on the size of the team and the budget, they may advocate for engaging a formal training program in diversity, equity, and inclusion. This might include attending, as a team, an existing training offered on campus or in the workplace, attending a conference or workshop together, or even hiring an outside consultant. The point is that allies have a responsibility to relieve people with marginalized identities of the burden of educating the team. One of the authors of this paper, a white cisgender woman, was concerned that some team members were using problematic language related to race and sexuality of both research participants and other team

members. The author was particularly concerned because of the impact this language had on both Black and trans members of the team. Rather than asking her transgender and Black colleagues to address the issue, she sought to inform herself of best practices around inclusive language. Next, she offered to lead a book group with the team. She selected an appropriate reading, made it available to other members of the team, and prepared questions to frame the discussion. During team calls, she began to model best practices associated with pronoun use and terms, changing her Zoom profile to include her pronouns and consistently introducing herself with her name as well as pronouns. These actions, which began with educating herself, aimed to create a safer and more inclusive environment for all team members. Our use of this example is not intended to praise an empowered team member for ‘going the extra mile’ but rather to depict what the norm *should be* in prioritizing inclusivity on all research teams.

It is important to note that in the above example the author held some power in the larger research team that allowed her to compel others to participate. Not only is she a white, cisgender woman, but she is also an advanced graduate student who was regularly trusted to make decisions for the team in absence of the higher ranking faculty. She was able to leverage her positionality in positive ways, but we acknowledge that without her privileges, she likely would not have been able to engage in this strategy. In short, the ability to engage in allyship activities is strongly impacted and shaped the intersection of positionality and power on the team.

Finally, allies should ‘read the room’ and notice when marginalized people are ignored or dismissed. An ally can open up space in the conversation by leaving room for team members with marginalized identities to speak. Rather than speak for them, allies show support for their perspectives and amplify their voices. This strategy not only ensures that historically excluded people are included in the conversation, but it also intentionally shifts power away from dominant voices. Moreover, if those with marginalized voices are able to highlight the lack of inclusivity, those with privilege should consider it an ethical obligation to listen. As a point of caution, inviting people with marginalized identities into the conversation does not mean asking them to speak for everyone of their identity. And, though people with marginalized identities may use their positionality to contribute depth and ideas to the research process, they should not be pigeon-holed.

Mentorship and sponsorship are critical to professional success, and historically many people with marginalized identities find that they are locked out of the social networks where mentorship and sponsorship take place. Therefore, allies should seek every opportunity to offer to serve as a mentor or a sponsor to people with marginalized identities. To be clear, mentorship or sponsorship should never be forced on anyone, but allies should identify opportunities to mentor and sponsor, offer to serve in these capacities, and most importantly follow through. This is part of walking the walk. Graveyards of hollow promises dot the landscape of those with marginalized identities, and allies should not contribute to this. For example, on a research team, a mentor can offer support and guidance to other team members in a variety of ways, including offering to provide feedback on work, suggesting outlets for publishing research findings, offering advice (if solicited, of course) for navigating the

research team and other aspects of professional work, and perhaps most importantly creating opportunities to teach and publish. Mentors can and should also engage in cultivating people with marginalized identities so that they are fully prepared to take on professional roles when these become available, including accepting positions as instructors or research assistants, seeking leadership roles in national organizations, and so forth. Mentors often play a critical role in helping their mentees build their professional networks, by inviting and creating opportunities for them to meet and engage in meaningful ways with senior scholars and leaders. For example, at professional meetings a mentor should invite their mentees to join them for coffee or a drink with senior scholars in their own networks. These kinds of activities are precisely those that frequently take place in ‘old [white] boys’ networks’ that are the bedrock for building social networks and from which people with marginalized identities have historically and continue to be excluded. Whenever possible, mentors should craft opportunities that allow members with marginalized identities to take the lead on research and writing and receive appropriate authorship. It is one thing to be cognizant of not stealing other people’s work; it is another to offer them an opportunity to advance their own.

Different from—but often corresponding with mentorship—is sponsorship. A sponsor’s role is to offer support for professional advancement, which is equally important to professional success. Sponsors are people who help to open doors of opportunity for others. For example, sponsors may share professional opportunities, including job postings; nominate (with permission, of course) people for leadership roles on key committees or in national organizations; and often serve as references. Sponsors may ‘coach’ people through application processes, offering to read letters of application, statements for tenure and promotion, and even practice interviews. Like mentors, sponsors provide access to their social networks, make introductions to senior scholars, and help to solicit external reviewers for promotion and tenure, and so forth. Once again, these kinds of activities have long been critical to the advancement of cisgender, heterosexual, white people, and individuals with marginalized identities have routinely been excluded.

Conclusions

Diverse, equitable, and inclusive research teams and approaches are not only critical to addressing society’s most complex social problems, but they create such unique spaces of scientific process that it is an ethical imperative that we, as researchers, build these types of teams (Cheruvilil et al., 2014). These types of research teams are not only better at solving problems, but they create a more satisfying experience than homogeneous teams. As many DEI experts are fond of noting: there is no lack of talent, there is only lack of opportunity. But, assembling diverse research teams is not enough. Research teams must constantly seek equity and inclusion, not just diversity. In short, though no one can do it alone, the success of diverse research teams begins with the lead researcher. Although it is true the origin of DEI commitments come from executive university leadership, it is the street-level bureaucrats of the university, the research

faculty, who are the true implementers of change. Lead researchers must do their own equity work first so that they are equipped to build spaces that are inviting and welcoming as they recruit diverse team members (diversity), support those who have been historically excluded (equity), and center and amplify these voices (inclusion).


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