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Considering community psychology competencies: A love letter to budding scholar-activists
who wonder if they have what it takes¹

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Abstract

Recently, community psychologists have re-vamped a set of 18 competencies considered important for how we practice community psychology. Three competencies are: (1) ethical, reflexive practice, (2) community inclusion and partnership, and (3) community education, information dissemination, and building public awareness. This paper will outline lessons I -- a white working class woman academic -- learned about my competency development through my research collaborations, using the lens of affective politics. I describe three lessons, from school-based research sites (elementary schools serving working class students of color and one elite liberal arts school serving wealthy white students). The first lesson, from an elementary school, concerns ethical, reflective practice. I discuss understanding my affect as a barometer of my ability to conduct research from a place of solidarity. The second lesson, which centers community inclusion and partnership, illustrates how I learned about the importance of “before the beginning” conversations concerning social justice and conflict when working in elementary schools. The third lesson concerns community education, information dissemination, and building public awareness. This lesson, from a college, taught me that I could stand up and speak out against classism in the face of my career trajectory being threatened. With these lessons, I flesh out key aspects of community practice competencies.

Key words: Community psychology, community psychology competencies, reflexivity, affective politics

Considering community psychology competencies: A love letter to budding scholar-activists who wonder if they have what it takes

Community psychology is a field with deep and long-standing interests in social justice (Mulvey et al., 2000; Prilleltensky, 2001; Rappaport, 1977; Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003). Perhaps because of this commitment to social justice, many community psychology graduate programs strive to develop and/or support scholar-activists, or community psychologists who work toward social justice movement (Nelson, Poland, Murray, & Maticka-Tyndale, 2004). This objective around social justice engagement should be evident in the competencies viewed as integral for the practice of community psychology.

The empirical literature and first person accounts indicate that social justice activists engage their work with their entire bodies (Berkowitz, 1987; Gould, 2009; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1984; Rogers, 1990; Warren, 2010). Based on interviews with anti-racist white activists across the U.S., Mark Warren (2010) conceptualized engagement as being with the head (i.e., knowledge and interests), hand (i.e., building relationships and taking action), and heart (i.e., values and emotions). Indeed, many social justice activists are cognitively and emotionally engaged, and have a strong sense of what is morally right (Berkowitz, 1987; Gould, 2009; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1984; Nash, 2011; Rogers, 1990; Warren, 2010). Perhaps this is not surprising given that activism has been described as the embodiment of an ethic of caring, or talking from the heart (Collins, 2000).

Other researchers describe social justice commitments in relation to how “bodies are organized around intensities, longings, desires,...fatigues...and how these affects produce

political movements,” which is known as affective politics (Nash, 2011, p. 3). Indeed, social justice movement, by definition, includes affect (Gould, 2009). Although affect is central to activism, the way emotion has been understood has shifted over time. Gould cogently summarized this history (2009). Prior to the 1970s, those writing from the collective behavior literature posited that people engaged in protest because they were made emotionally unstable (i.e., irrational) due to structural oppression. In the 1970s, a literature around social movements developed in opposition to collective behavior theories; those writing from this perspective conceptualized protestors as rational and strategic actors, but in the process, deemphasized attention to emotion. In the 1990s, this literature took an “emotional turn” in an attempt to integrate emotions *and* rational thought when explaining activism (Gould, 2009, p. 16). These writers were situated across the social sciences and humanities (e.g., anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy), and argued that rationality and emotion are central to life, including activism (Gould, 2009; Lutz, 1995). In this conceptualization, emotion helps actors understand themselves, as well as their contexts, interests, and commitments. This ontological turn is important because it moves away from dualistic thinking regarding emotion and rationality, makes it possible to study how emotional charges can foment or foreclose action, and finally, opens up new possibilities –via increased pathways – for understanding people’s activism. To this emotional turn, Gould adds the concept of “affect” to help researchers better theorize that what we label as feelings and emotions are housed throughout the body, cannot be articulated fully, and have a visceral quality.

When considered through the lens of affective politics, social justice commitments often come from seeing a chasm between the activist's values and the world as it is (e.g., racial injustice; Kelly, 2002; Warren, 2010). This chasm is processed through the body and what develops is a "political horizon," or sense of what might be "politically possible, necessary, and desirable" and how this gets established (Gould, 2009, p. 3). For those with at least one dominant group identity (e.g., people with PhDs or MAs in community psychology), the engagement of the heart is an important component of what turns activism into solidarity work, meaning that activism is practiced *with* subordinated groups and not *for* them (Rogers, 1990; Warren, 2010). This is the case because the incorporation of an affective ontology into meaning making brings ideologies into focus and therefore helps us (re)consider power (Gould, 2009).

The goal of this paper, therefore, is to make visible some heart work I have engaged in as I have developed my competencies to practice community psychology, or my critical community psychology praxis. In doing so, I hope to begin a conversation within community psychology that aims to reunite the mind and the rest of our bodies. Through this process, I make my relationships, my connections, and myself visible, which is an act of taking this work and myself seriously (Collins, 2000; Lutz, 1995; Rich, 1978/1979). Making my relationships and myself visible also addresses the concern that community psychology competencies are decontextualized, individualistic, and outcomes focused rather than relational and process focused (Dzidic, Breen, & Bishop, 2013). Finally, these relationships

and contexts make my affective politics visible; they undergird my political velocity and commitments.

This paper takes many turns. First, I briefly demonstrate that the writing on community psychology competencies does not adequately engage the heart/affective politics. Then, I tell three reflexive stories that privilege my heart-related work in my ongoing development as a scholar-activist. I hope these stories carve out a place for considering affective politics to be a central part of our theorizing. In short, how do we develop our heart muscles? In answering this question, I take up Sarason's (2004) call for interventionists to write about themselves in personal ways, especially around "ticklish" issues, so that we, as community psychologists, can gain a better understanding of the role we play in community-based interventions. In attempting to answer Sarason's call, I follow the path laid by many women, especially women of color, who have made their affective politics visible as a site for building theory, examining social structures, and praxis (Alexander, 2005; Brodsky et al., 2004; Johnson Reagon, 1983; Lorde, 1984; Moraga, & Anzaldúa, 1985; Nash, 2011; Mulvey et al., 2000, Ulysse, 2007). For example, sociologist Deborah Gould (2009) discusses crying when reviewing the ACT UP archives for her book on how affective politics helped facilitate political action within LGBT communities. Anthropologist Gina Ulysse (2007) describes how her activist politics and frustrations were key to her eventual study of the political economy of Jamaican women who were Informal Commercial Importers, and their roles as social actors/activists. Finally, I end the paper with a call for more community psychologists to expose their affective politics and to connect it with the community psychology

competencies in ways that make context and process visible. I ask this now because, in the wake of the police killings of Michael Brown, Aura Rosser, Trayvon Martin, Yvette Smith, Eric Garner, and many more, and the role that psychologists have played in torture, our visionary project has an urgent future.

Community Psychology Competencies

“[Because] community psychology is different from other forms of psychology...its socialization will need to be different” (Kelly, 1970, p. 525).

Since its U.S. founding, some community psychologists have been interested in competencies for graduate training. Although there has been debate around the usefulness of the framework of competencies (Dzidic et al., 2013), many would agree that graduate programs should increase the skills of students to engage in socially just community-based work.

Community psychology competencies focus largely on the head and hand, but offer little guidance about how to engage and care for the heart (Competencies, 2012; Kelly, 1970, 1971; Lykes & Hellstedt, 1987). This is the case even though community psychologists argue that capacity building for community-based engagement needs to be multi-sensory and embodied if we are to address meaning making regarding the self and others, which is essential for social justice work (Nelson et al., 2004; Thomas & Mulvey, 2008).

Even at the dawn of community psychology in the U.S., those at the forefront of the field, like Jim Kelly, asserted that the community psychology trainee needed to practice the work and be guided by an advisor who had done community-based work (Kelly, 1970). This

is an argument for the involvement of the hand and not only the head, which was path breaking at the time. In this way, community psychologists strove to connect practice and theory (Kelly, 1970, 1971; Lykes & Hellstedt, 1987). As such, early writing about competencies focused on the head and hand; for example, administration, basic research, grant writing, program evaluation, and needs assessment were all considered community psychology competencies (Walfish, Polifka, & Stenmark, 1984). Later, community psychologists included participatory observation, evaluation, social intervention, and program planning (Lykes & Hellstedt, 1987). More recently, proficiencies have included areas that allude to the heart, such as interrogating values and assumptions, and building competency around reflexivity, privilege, and self-discovery (Nelson et al., 2004). Perhaps this shift is in recognition that our inward state influences our social action; the two are therefore inseparable (Gould, 2009; Keating, 2008; Rich, 1978/1979). The most recent iteration of competencies was written by the Society for Community Research and Action's (SCRA) Committee on Education Programs and Community Psychology Practice Council Task Group. The competencies were endorsed by the Executive Committee of SCRA, and were subsequently published in *The Community Psychologist* (Competencies, 2012). There are 18 competencies, and some areas allude to heart work:

- Ethical, reflexive practice – “articulate how one’s own values, assumptions, and life experiences influence one’s work, and articulate strengths and limitations of one’s own perspective” (p. 11)

- Community inclusion and partnership – “Make positions of power and privilege (including one’s own) transparent...Develop avenues for respectful dialogue” (p. 10-11)
- Community education, information dissemination, and building public awareness – “engage diverse groups...in dialogue about information through...public speaking” (p. 12)

Although community psychology competencies have included mention of the heart, it has been abstract. For example, Jim Kelly (1971) argued that the community psychologist must be emotionally involved with the community. This is necessary because, in the face of exhausting events, it is love for the community, toughness, and risk taking that helps the community psychologist to persevere (Kelly, 1970, 1971). Furthermore, Kelly asserted that the community psychologist must learn how to resolve personal conflicts and confrontations (Kelly, 1970). This work requires “access to his [sic] own psyche” such that the person can withstand “social slights, brush-offs, stalls, confrontations, flatteries, and payoffs, and keep going” (Kelly, 1971, p. 901).

These themes are continued more recently by Geoff Nelson and colleagues (2004), who argue for creating safer spaces to discuss dilemmas and gaps between the budding community psychologist’s values and practices, as well as reflexive practices that help connect the personal and political through humility and openness. Yet, they offer no “key training activities and processes” (a central section of their paper) that relate to the heart.

The question therefore remains, how do we build our heart muscles? Put another way, how do we become aware of the role our values, emotions, and affect play in our work,

and how can we interact with our values and emotions – which are embedded within dominant structures – in ways that are productive for social justice movement? Succinctly, how do we engage our affective politics?

A first answer is, of course, that we must recognize and honor the fact that we have hearts. This can be a struggle in that academe often denies the visceral, and is also situated within white Western patriarchal structures, which champions rationality (Gould, 2009; Kelly, 2002; Lutz, 1995; Ulysse, 2007). Although community psychology often operates within the context of the academy, its goals are not like most fields, in that there is a social justice aim. Yet, this aim can be in tension with post-positivism and attempts to maintain a paradigm that policy makers, other psychologists, and other academics can understand (Fox, 2010; Kelly, 2002; Langhout, 2006). Put bluntly, Perkins (2010) says the problem may be that our “self-interest in getting funded, published, getting tenure or the next contract have too often distracted us from our greater ...goals” (p. 531). A turn toward affective politics can perhaps assist us in addressing this sobering assessment. Certainly, many community psychologists would agree that something does not feel right. Affective politics can help us create spaces to explore our unease. To develop the next generation of community psychologists, and to continue to develop ourselves, we must make visible our heart-work, and connect this to community psychology competencies.

It is also necessary for us to interrogate our social positioning, processes, and relationships within the community if we are to develop into scholar-activists who have an orientation that holds us accountable to the communities in which we work (Dzidic et al.,

2013). Indeed, how can we collaborate to create the conditions that facilitate empowerment if we are unable to reflect upon our own power and depower ourselves? Therefore, I argue for an affective political conceptualization that will bring the head and hand into conversation with the heart, rather than dismissing these attempts as superstition or New Age (Anzaldúa, 2000; Keating, 2008; Pérez, 1998). An affective ontology can create the space and framework for such inquiry as we explore motivation and behavior, social reproduction and change, and movements and meaning making (Gould, 2009), areas central to community psychology.

Three Heart Stories

Story 1: When Tough Girls Cry

“Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought the anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (Lorde, 1981/1997, p. 280).

The set-up. I grew up in a white working class family. My typical family activities resembled some dominant stereotypes of white working class cultural communities. The men drank Bud, our family went to local drag races, we watched NASCAR on our TV (which was the obvious focal point in the living room and always on), and there were clear boundaries that separated book smarts and street smarts. Some research indicates that white working class girls are raised to be tough (Bettie, 2002; Mikel Brown, 2003; Waldron, 2011). Yet, when I was very young, I was known as the “crybaby” in the family. Eventually, I think

around first grade, my mother hung a sign in my room -- that my grandmother had made -- of a child crying with the saying, "Wednesday's child is full of woe." I took this as a constant matriarchal reminder that I should stop crying and toughen up. Eventually, I was able to become that tough girl. Childhood activities included riding my 80cc Honda XR dirt bike through the dusty foothills of Northern California, learning to shoot when I was 8, and rebuilding the engine of my Ford Pinto when I was 16. When I graduated from high school, I joined the Navy Reserves and volunteered for an assignment with the Marines. For the most part, I had stopped crying.

The story. The backdrop is graduate school. The scene is an elementary school that served primarily low-income African American children. When I was collecting my dissertation data, which was an observational study designed to assess children's school-related experiences, one form of my data collection was following children around the school and taking notes on what happened in places they nominated for me to visit.

One day, I was in the gym, sitting on the bleachers while the students were taken through various physical drills. The gym teacher, a very tall and imposing man in his 50s, was becoming progressively angrier with the children, who were not enthusiastically participating in the drills. He pulled several children aside and yelled at them in front of the class and me. While pointing in their faces and standing quite close to them, he yelled that they should stop messing around and that if they wanted to tangle with him, they would quickly learn that he would win, every time. He yelled at several of the children to get down on the floor and give him ten push-ups. The children obeyed and I felt like I was back in

boot camp. After one of the children finished his push-ups, he walked past me and asked me what I was doing. I gave him my standard reply: I said I wanted to learn more about what this place was like for the students in the school. This 8-year-old African American boy looked me in the eye and told me to be careful, because I might learn that this is not such a good place. He then headed to the back of his class' line.

I excused myself from the gym and walked as quickly as I could to my car. Once inside my car, I sobbed. I was angry and could do nothing but cry. And shake. As I sat there, it occurred to me that I would not continue with this kind of research. I could not take witnessing these moments. In the process of sitting and crying, I came to understand that this is precisely *why* I do this work. If, at any point, what I am witnessing does not bother me, then it is time for me to change my research program, because I cannot be an effective scholar-activist if I am numb.

If we consider heart-work, then this process was significant for my development as a scholar activist. Anger is an important stage for the activist (Gould, 2009; Rogers, 1990; Warren, 2010). Indeed, anger can teach us about solidarity (Lorde, 1981/1997; Rogers, 1990). Specifically, anger can come from injustice, being excluded, or from witnessing others' unquestioned privilege (Lorde, 1981/1997). I was angry at the privilege the teacher was using in an unjust way and angry that I felt excluded from stopping it. My reason for being there was to observe, not to intervene. Although this positioning is often used to lessen anxiety when researchers feel we have colluded with oppression by not acting (Behar, 1997), for me, it did not. Indeed, as Lorde (1981/1997) affirms, and as I eventually came to see, my anger

was not useless, disruptive, or inappropriate; instead, it helped me clarify where and with whom I stood.

When I cry now, I find it useful to discern if my tears are connected to sympathy or anger. When associated with anger, I am positioned to act in solidarity. Some activists who follow the Alinsky/Industrial Areas Foundation tradition call this “cold anger,” which is different from “hot anger” (Rogers, 1990). Hot anger was what I first felt; this is what compelled me to flee the school and sit in my car. This is burning, impulsive anger. I know I am experiencing hot anger when my body is shaking with rage. What came to me later was cold anger. This is the anger that feeds us to make social change because it reflects hope (Rogers, 1990). This anger at injustice is a strong motivator because it is tied to deep feelings, often of loss and grief. For these reasons, anger is full of information and energy (Lorde, 1981/1997). This is one type of affect that propels us into action to create the world as it should be (Gould, 2009). Turning away from our anger therefore means turning away from our insights.

Community psychology competencies. The competency to which I most directly connect when reflecting on this story is ethical, reflexive practice. This competency encourages community psychologists to articulate our worldviews, values, assumptions, and experiences in order to interrogate how positionality influences the work of the scholar-activist. An affective ontology provides some tools by which to do this work (Gould, 2009). This experience helped me to articulate my own values as a white working class academic, and to discern the difference between solidarity work and “white savior” work, the latter

being easy for white folks to take up due to power and privilege (Armstrong & Wildman, 2012). I know that I am positioned to engage in solidarity work when I mainly feel cold anger, and I am positioned to engage in white savior work when I mainly feel guilt, shame, and/or sympathy. This distinction is important because solidarity work transforms structural relations via second order change, whereas white savior work reinforces current structural relations. This distinction is also important because in an unjust system, where I benefit from unearned privilege and those privileges are often rendered invisible to/by me, I am likely to engage in unjust behaviors; I therefore need to engage all my understandings, including listening to my heart if I am to re-work and remake myself to transform my praxis to one that is liberatory (Nash, 2011). Finally, my initial impetus to move away from this work because I wasn't tough enough for it, is a marker of white privilege.

Through reflecting on this process, I also learned that I could not devote my life's work to solely examining problems, nor could I be positioned as I was in this school. I did not interrupt what was happening because it was not the understanding I had with the school about my role. Furthermore, my social identities help to organize my social relationships and experiences, and having poorly developed strategies for intervening in racism, is due, in part, to a social order built on white supremacy (Collins, 2000; Douglas, 2012). It is also the case that, as a graduate student, I did not feel I had the power to change this situation. Perhaps this issue of me not thinking I had power is unsurprising given my positioning as a working class woman (Armstrong & Wildman, 2012; Miller, 1986; Moane, 2011). Although I published articles from these data, I never discussed the results with school

personnel because I did not know how to do so. I failed regarding my accountability to these school children, due to of my lack of follow through with that setting. This positionality was a limitation. Moreover, through this process I learned I had to be deeply involved in interventions. These were the affective politics that cemented my interest in power imbalances in schools, and led to my eventual commitment to participatory action research, especially youth participatory action research. Indeed, the way to survive is to participate in processes that are creative and give life to speaking truths (Lorde, 1978/1998); this is what participatory action research does.

Can we be (Critical) Friends?: Dealing with Conflict

“Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn’t look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the success of a coalition on whether or not they feel good... They’re not looking for a coalition; they are looking for a home!” (Johnson Reagon, 1983, p. 359).

The set up. After graduate school, I wanted to position myself differently in my next community partnership to increase my accountability to and solidarity with children in schools.

The story. I was a new assistant professor, recently relocated to New England, and was eager and nervous to start my own research collaboration. I read the local newspaper, and saw that a new principal had been hired at an elementary school. In the article, she said one of her goals was to develop a relationship with the university, which was nearby. I made an appointment to see her; we discussed what I had done as a graduate student (assisted in

developing and maintaining a community garden at an elementary school), and some of my views on education (ideas about the importance of teacher expectations for student success, the role of racism in shaping teacher expectations, and the importance of anti-racist education). She got excited and jokingly threatened to lock me in her office so I could not leave the school.

We agreed to collaborate. She invited me to a staff meeting and the following transpired:

The principal introduces me. She says that I will be working in the school this year, and that she's excited. I stand and tell them my name and say that I'm a community psychologist. I say that the principal said that I'd be working in the school, and I'd like to work in the school, but that is really up to them and if they want to collaborate and if they want me in the school. I say that what I'm interested in is education, and that I think kids learn when learning is joyful for them, and I think that happens when [...] there are strong classroom-community ties. (Some head nodding [yes] here.) I also say that I think anti-racist education is an important component. (RDL 8/28/02)

That year, I had undergraduates work in four classrooms. At the year's end, an undergraduate and I gave feedback to one of the teachers. I felt this was an important step to increase my team's accountability to the students in the school. I wanted to be a good critical friend (Perkins, 2010). A critical friend is a person who mindfully engages others to live up to our shared values and goals when there is a gap between theory and practice. Below is an

abridged abstract from the paper eventually published from this study (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008):

Results indicated that students were required to show their engagement in ways that related to control and conformity. When they did not, they were reprimanded, which led to academic disengagement and the transmission of the hidden curriculum's message that school was not a place for them. This process was especially salient for Black and Latino boys, which indicated that the hidden curriculum was institutionalized. Results also showed that the hidden curriculum was a structural limitation for the teacher, as she was often thwarted in her attempts to create an academically engaging learning environment.

We verbally presented the results and gave her a report. I thought the teacher was open to the findings and saw it as a good sign that she was supportive of the student and asked about how to do things differently within her classroom. I thought we had had a productive discussion.

Over the summer, we learned that the principal unexpectedly resigned. The interim principal discussed our group's collaboration with the teachers and reported the following:

It seems that Mrs. [Teacher], 1st year, 1st grade [teacher] heard some disturbing info re last year's program [...] Another 1st grade teacher was in tears over a meeting that was held with the [...] student and prof (you? don't know). Anyway, this proved to be disconcerting to this year's teacher who has come to me. [...] Please get back to me if you have any info on last year's problem. I want to reassure this teacher as to the

exact expectations so that there is a productive comfort level in the class. (email, 10/1/03)

I knew this incident was in reference to the conversation we had around the behavioral practices in the classroom. I felt confused and bewildered because this was the first I had heard of the aftermath. Although I thought our team had developed a good relationship with this teacher, she had not come to me. It seemed that although I believed I had been clear about interests in anti-racist education, the teachers and I were not in agreement about what this meant and/or this teacher was engaged in her heart work around the results. I had not communicated clearly about my team's goals. Furthermore, teachers feeling discomfort and crying were considered undesirable at this school, which may limit the possibility of enacting more anti-racist practices.

As a scholar-activist, I felt good about supporting research aligned with an anti-racist agenda. As a white woman who was raised working class, I felt sick to my stomach about the conflict; I felt shame and anxiety for not having respected the authority of the people in the school. Although affect can be productive, it can also be a repressive force (Gould, 2009). In this case, my affective response could keep me aligned with the social order. This is perhaps not surprising given that white working class children are often raised to respect and obey authority (Lareau, 2011). Girls are also socialized to be compliant, especially to school-based authority (Bettie, 2002; Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). Furthermore, girls are not raised to deal with conflict (Miller, 1986; Moane, 2011). My affective response, when considered with the research, shows the (visceral) power of social forces (Gould, 2009). I had many sleepless

nights trying to figure out how to conduct community-based research that examined power and oppression in collaboration with communities, and how to be a scholar-activist given my internal conflict. I imagined these feelings would not lessen over time. Furthermore, I knew I had to learn how to deal with conflict if I wanted to engage oppression and liberation (Miller, 1986; Moane, 2011).

Unsure of what to do, I turned to *The Creation of Settings and the Future Societies* (Sarason, 1972). I was reminded of common mistakes made when initiating a setting. I resolved to be more transparent regarding my values and goals, and the values and goals of community psychology. I also decided to start asking future partners about their values and goals, and the values and goals of their institution. I felt these steps would be consistent with what Sarason (1972) recommended because underlying values and assumptions would be made explicit, and we could re-visit these values when practices were inconsistent with our theory.

Soon, a new principal was hired. I approached her and we had a frank conversation, touching on these issues. I changed the way I started partnerships with how I talked with her:

I told [the new principal] that community psychology [CP] has specific tenets like social justice, respect and celebration of human diversity, and building collaborative relationships. I said CP tries to find strengths and take a strengths-based perspective [...] I said that my training is in schools and how to think about schools being a joyful place for children. The way this happens is through building strong classroom-

community collaborations, [...] and working toward anti-racist pedagogies. When I was at [Midwestern graduate school city], I worked with community members to establish a community garden because this was a strength in the community and it created a bridge between the school and community. I said that parents don't always feel comfortable in the school especially when their contact has been filled with contention. If the only contact they have is being called when their child does something wrong, then this doesn't build a good relationship. [Principal] agreed. She said that she has been walking some kids home and jumping in cars when parents drop their kids off so that she can have more contact with the parents [...] I said we would like to work with [the school] on whatever [the school] wants [that's aligned with these goals], and that these were our goals, but that we can't do it alone and that we are just waiting for [the school] to step up and tell us if they are interested in the same things. If so, then we are ready to go and work collaboratively with them on these kinds of issues/projects, but that we can't do it alone. (field note 12/13/03)

Eventually, we came to agreement on a collaboration the school would find useful and that was aligned with the goals of empowerment and community inclusion, and the values of social justice and wellbeing. This collaboration led to work that was beneficial to the school and me.

For reasons that will become clear in the last heart story ("flipping the lens, taking the heat"), I decided to leave this job. When I left New England and moved to California, I made a few more adjustments to my collaboration development model. I had the conversation I

outlined above with the school's principal, our teacher collaborator, and other school support staff connected to my new collaboration in California. To it, I added a section on conflict and critical friends. Consistent with Sarason (1972), I tell possible collaborators that I assume we will have conflict, and we therefore need to develop a plan for it. I prefer this method because it means we can continue a conversation when conflict occurs, rather than starting a new conversation.

Yet, I still feel sick to my stomach when I have to question (in my female working class mind) or disrespect authority. One such moment was when I confronted our teacher-collaborator regarding shutting down a conversation children were having about a possible intervention they were debating: putting white boards in the bathroom to reduce graffiti. My edited fieldnote describes the altercation.

I said that there were some concerns about the white board and that if they [the 4th and 5th grade students] wanted to try to move forward with this, they were going to have to address the concerns raised by [the principal]. The teacher spoke in a loud and passionate voice, and said that we (the university group) should not be leading the kids to talk more about white boards because that would encourage kids to write in the bathroom and we need to discourage that. She said that she didn't want white boards in the bathrooms and the teachers would not support that. She said that kids needed to be in class, not in the bathroom drawing. She said more and it felt to me like it went on and on and like she was getting more and more heated, talking louder and louder about how it was irresponsible for us (university group) to be taking the

kids in this direction at all and that this should not be an option. She finished and I decided not to engage this conversation, but instead, I said that these [issues she had raised] were some more concerns. (None of the kids seemed to have a visual reaction to this, in my perspective.) (RDL fieldnote, 052208)

Once the program was over for the day, I approached the teacher. Although my heart was racing and I was sure she could hear it, and although I was certain my face went from sheet white to crimson red to sheet white as the conversation progressed, I still confronted the issue in the way that we had agreed to address conflict. I had based my concerns in our shared values and simply continued a conversation we had already begun. The conversation ended this way:

[The teacher asserted] the kids aren't the ones in charge here and that they don't get to make all the decisions. She then smiled, that kind of sickly smile that someone gives when they are done talking and they don't want to talk about it any more and it doesn't matter because you're not going to change their mind because you are clearly wrong and they are clearly right. It's that "end-of-discussion" smile. (RDL fieldnote 052208)

Although the conversation did not go the way I had hoped, a few months later, at the end of year interview, the graduate student interviewing the teacher asked her if there was anything she (the graduate student) should have asked about in the interview but did not.

The teacher said:

Over the summer I thought it was funny 'cause I thought about the time when I got a

little bit angry at one meeting because the kids wanted to put white boards in the (I: oh right) bathrooms (I: mhmm) and I was sitting here going ‘there’s just no way we’re gonna allow that (I: uhuh), I don’t care if [the principal] says it’s’, you know the teachers would have a fit (I: right)...but then what I was, what I heard [the professor] say afterwards was that she was trying to get the KIDS to that point (I: yeah), to where they could see my side (I: right) of it, all by themselves without me jumping in there (I: right) and I thought a lot about that afterwards (I: ok) and that it was really good for me to say yeah they probably would have come to that decision if I would have just shut up, hahaha... I could see you guys were doing a better job of helping the KIDS understand it too (I: hahaha), so there you go, I wanted to say that, haha.

(Teacher interview, AY 2007-08).

Although we have had critical friend conversations since then, in the intervening six years, none have felt as acrimonious. Most now begin with an acknowledgement of the shared value (e.g., “I know the kids get to make the final decision, but I was wondering if you had thought about...”).

Community psychology competencies. One competency this story connects to is community inclusion and partnership. This is the work of coalition building. This competency includes “[making] positions of power and privilege (including one’s own) transparent, and [working] to facilitate empowerment among those with less power and privilege” (p. 11). As a community psychologist, I am committed to studying power imbalances, which includes examination and movement of the boundaries around children’s,

parents', and teachers' participation in the school. Within this framework, I emphasize students given they have the least institutional power. I do my best to use my privileged positioning to create openings for students to reflect on their experiences. Yet, conducting this work in settings with institutionalized oppression means there will always be conflict and tension. This fact connects to another key area of this competency: "[developing] avenues for respectful dialogue and listening, and [promoting] this dialogue through one's own actions" (p. 11). Given my social class and gender positioning, I have to find ways of creating structures that allow me to have dialogues where I can call out power imbalances while not going into seemingly existential crisis.

I have learned that my values and emotions – both rooted in the heart – come into conflict in these moments. Through the incorporation of an affective ontology, I understand that some of my emotions (e.g., shame, anxiety) serve to further the social order, which works against my values and goals. I prioritize my values and move forward with these conversations. I understand my emotions as an indicator that important heart work is happening; discomfort is not a reason for silence. I am never comfortable in these moments, but I have come to accept that this tension is inevitable and that my affective response indicates movement in the setting (Gould, 2009; Miller, 1986; Moane, 2011); I am able to navigate these situations slightly better thanks to the initial conversations I have at the beginning of each collaboration, and the way I choose to honor my values and emotions, or my heart. Finally, as these stories demonstrate, I had more of an effect on both teachers than I initially thought. My lack of awareness of my own power is not terribly surprising given

that those with more social power are often unaware of it (Armstrong & Wildman, 2012; McIntosh, 1988). Moreover, my inattention to my power is unremarkable given my gender training (Miller, 1986; Moane, 2011). Yet, it is essential I analyze and understand my power if I am to transform it so that I may use it for social justice (Nash, 2011); incorporating an affective ontology as one of my many lenses helps me to do just that (Gould, 2009).

Flipping the lens, taking the heat

“While we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us” (Lorde, 1978/1998, p. 44).

The set-up. As that new assistant professor in the northeast, not only was I eager to begin a research collaboration, but also to expose students to community psychology. I was fortunate to teach a community psychology class my first year. Part way through the semester, we had a unit on classism. I explained that social class is difficult to define in the US, and I asked the students how many of them identified as middle class. About half of the students raised their hands. I then said that if they were not receiving financial aid, maybe those students should drop their hands. About half of the hands went down. I then said that this might be a way to operationalize social class. Students started yelling—literally yelling—at me. They told me that I was out of line for saying that they were not middle class. I reminded them that their families had the equivalent of US household median income (at the time, \$35,000 a year; in 2014 dollars, \$55,000, although tuition and board was over \$61,000 annually in 2014) to send them to school each year, which amounted to \$140,000 (\$245,000 in 2014) of disposable income over a four-year period. I asked them if they still thought it

was okay to identify as middle class. The students then said that class did not really matter, but what mattered were their values. After leaving the classroom, I went back to my office and began to develop a plan to study social class at this college.

The story. My research team and I had put together a questionnaire and surveyed the undergraduates at “Hilltop University.” We had just submitted our first paper for publication, where we psychometrically validated our measure of classism in the academy. Shortly thereafter, some students approached me and asked me to give a public talk regarding the survey results. I agreed to do so. The event was publicized.

Thereafter, I received a call from a person in the university’s administration. He asked me what I planned to say. He said the students who asked me to give the talk were troublemakers and asked if I wanted to work with them. He said the press would likely be invited to the talk. He said that I did not have to give the talk if I did not want to. He said it was not too late to back out, and he asked me when I was scheduled to come up for tenure. He asked me to reconsider.

I was terrified. I called a colleague and she confirmed that my tenure case (to be filed in 18 months) had been threatened. I experienced this moment as a moral shock, or an event that raised outrage in me and propelled me toward action (Gould, 2009).

When I met with the students, I explained the phone call and asked their intentions. They had wanted to have a campus-wide conversation for months, and had been asking to meet with the administration, but had received no response. They thought if they organized a conversation that included empirical data regarding our campus, and if that data had been

collected and explained by a faculty member, they could begin the process of having a community-wide conversation. They said that they had not invited the press and had no intentions to do so. I agreed to give the talk, but used a pseudonym for the school.

The intervening days were challenging. Perhaps naively, I had not realized that working toward social justice on my campus would put my career in jeopardy. I had not realized, until then, that the academy only entertains specific forms of activism (Ulysse, 2007). Although it terrified me to give the talk, I knew that addressing classism at this university would not be served by my silence. In the end, I could not live with myself if I was disciplined into silence.

Around 75 people attended the talk: 15 administrators, 5 junior faculty/friends, and 55 students. The climate was tense. I was afraid throughout the entire event. Fear is another affective state that can serve to reproduce the social order. I learned, however, that I could give the talk, albeit with the aid of my friends in the audience and extra-strength deodorant. Based on my experience with this entire process, I went on the job market the following year.

It has been suggested to me that speaking out was an act of courage³. Courage is about overcoming fear, yet is it about more than this (Poland, 2007). The origin of the word courage is from Middle English, and it is *cuer* or *cor*, which is Latin for heart. Courage is not impulsive, even though it can seem that way. Rather, like most affective politics, it is rooted in a set of values and develops in relationship (Gould, 2009). Like my field, I held the value

³ I thank Bob Majzler for this suggestion.

of social justice in high regard. This value was developed in relationships spanning from childhood through graduate school and beyond. Although no one in my working class family would have called themselves social justice advocates, I grew up hearing stories of how my family had stood up for something they thought was right. I heard stories from my grandfather -- a Navy veteran of World War II, Korea, and Viet Nam -- about how he would petition his Commanding Officer and request changes so that the enlisted men would be treated more fairly. I heard stories of my mother getting a principal fired because he was not working toward the best interests of students. In my graduate program, our research group discussed our work within the school and community, with an eye toward strategies and tactics that would move toward social justice. And of course, there's Sarason's (1984, p. 25-26) often-quoted passage:

As for the scientists who enter the arena of social action...the problems will change before and within them...there will be no final solutions, only a constantly upsetting balance between values and action; the internal conflict will not be in the form of 'Do I have the right answer?' but rather, 'Am I being consistent with what I believe?'; satisfaction will come not from colleagues' consensus that their procedures, facts, and conclusions are independent of their feelings and values, but from their own convictions that they tried to be true to their values; they will fight to win not in order to establish the superiority of their scientific facts, concepts, and theories, but because they want to live with themselves and others in certain ways.

Sarason grew up working class. Perhaps this is a strong pull for working class faculty. Indeed, Constance Anthony (2012, p. 312) is quite direct about it: “If you do not reject your working class origins, changing the world will be as, if not more, important than becoming a success in your field.” And finally, there were my junior faculty colleagues at my institution, including the person with whom I spoke after the phone call, and those who attended the talk to support me.

Community psychology competencies. The competency to which I connect this story is community education, information dissemination, and building public awareness. Through public speaking, I hoped to engage multiple stakeholders, educate them, and begin a conversation about what to do regarding classism on our campus.

As a scholar-activist, I strongly believe that transformation needs to happen in the academy as well as in other places. Others also write about these necessities (Alexander, 2005; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, & González, 2012; Kelly, 2002; Martín-Baró, 1994). More and more, the university is becoming a place that privileges transactional relationships, values efficiency, and sells itself as worthy of public funding because it trains students for high paying jobs and readies them to work in “multicultural” or global environments (Douglas, 2012; Napolitano, 2014). Much less visible is rhetoric that universities are places for developing an engaged citizenry that will ensure a robust democracy, and that universities should be engaged in creating the world we wish to see. Universities that view themselves as progressive can be especially reactionary when institutional discrimination is brought to their attention (Alexander, 2005). In these cases, the seemingly bland competencies of

community education, information dissemination, and building public awareness become very challenging to navigate, especially for an assistant professor without tenure.

One important lesson I learned is that the competencies must be considered in relation to our core values as a field. In this case, there was an opportunity to move the conversation forward on my campus. I had to weigh the relative cost of remaining silent to the relative cost of harming my career. We cannot make these decisions by only focusing on competencies; we must also search our hearts and determine if our actions are consistent with our values, and affective politics help us gauge our commitments. Even in fear, it is possible to move forward.

Conclusion

In telling these three heart stories, my goal has to been to engage affective politics by incorporating an affective ontology to reconnect the head, hand, and heart (Gould, 2009; Warren, 2010), make connections to my own development as a scholar activist with the literature on activism, and provide some context in which to consider a few of the community psychology competencies. I take each of these goals in turn, and end with some possible ways to incorporate affective politics into community psychology and implications.

Academe tends to privilege adherence to masculinity, which may be partly responsible for why more community psychologists have not written about their hearts and how their values and emotions connect to their work (for exceptions, see Brodsky et al., 2004; Kelly & Song, 2004; Mulvey et al., 2000; Williams & Lykes, 2003). Yet, in my experience, junior scholars crave these stories and see them as humanizing and making a path visible for

them. Making heart stories available is an act of generosity for budding scholar-activists who are struggling to find their footing in the ambiguity of community psychology. I therefore tell these stories to create a public culture that makes affective politics accessible to develop a collective sentiment as we move toward critical practice (Gould, 2009; Nash, 2011; Ulysse, 2007). I want to connect with others who may be unsure about their futures, as I was throughout graduate school and in my first years as an assistant professor. Indeed, I wondered if I should drop out of graduate school throughout my first year, and as I was nearing completion, because I felt I could not navigate the academic systems and structures. It is for these reasons that I recount heart stories that deal with anger, shame/anxiety, and fear; these feelings and emotions can be sites for productive movement. It is also the case that heart work can be joyous, energizing, and fun. I have focused on emotionally challenging heart work because I think these experiences are more useful for developing community psychologists who may be questioning their suitability for this field.

I have connected my development as a community psychologist to the literature and to the community psychology competencies to demonstrate how my stories fit into the broader field. I hope these connections allow my three heart stories to move beyond myself as a focal point, and into the theorizing of community psychology competencies. Others could tell or have told similar and different stories. I encourage us to view these stories as theory building up close rather than from afar (Gould, 2009; Lutz, 1995; Ulysse, 2007). In a field such as community psychology, where the goal is to develop and support scholar activists who will engage in the work of transforming social structures, up close theory

building is essential, and incorporation of an affective ontology can provide some tools for engaging this work. To not take up this task, to live in disjuncture, is dangerous because we commit epistemic violence (Ulysse, 2007). Furthermore, in the creation of a corpus of stories, we create space for others to imagine what they will do differently and we can stoke our public political imaginaries (Gould, 2009). Scholar-activists such as Geraldine Moane (2011) and Jean Baker Miller (1986) especially call on men to make their affective politics visible. I add my voice to theirs. For men, especially white men, this will mean making vulnerabilities visible and connecting their struggles to their growth and theories of change. We need to see their subjectivity too. Moreover, the time is now. There is clear movement against oppression and dominance, and we as community psychologists must do the hard work of figuring out our positions within these movements. Additionally, we cannot wait until scholars are nearing retirement to tell their stories. I therefore call especially on mid-career scholar-activists to make their stories and theory building visible. Perhaps, over time, a qualitative meta-analysis of these stories – recounted by many community psychologists with differing positionalities – may be possible, providing a clearer understanding of the development of community psychology scholar-activists, as well as contextually grounded practices for praxis.

Not only have I discussed my stories in relation to the literature, but also in connection to the community psychology competencies. For these competencies to be understood and practiced, they must be examined in context. Additionally, demonstrating a competency in one context does not necessarily mean the scholar-activist will possess that

same competency in another context. Competencies and their development happen relationally, and the associated heart work should be supported in graduate programs. Tools and theories I have found useful come largely from women, especially women of color (e.g., Cindy Cruz, Deborah Gould, Aida Hurtado, Brinton Lykes, Peggy Miller, Anne Mulvey, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Gina Ulysse, Aaronette White). These include assigning reflexive papers as part of theory building; creating an affective political community (Nash, 2011) by holding “check-ins” at the beginning of graduate student group research meetings where I also make visible my heart work and connect it to an affective ontology and theory; counseling graduate students to keep a journal in tandem with their fieldnotes; working collaboratively in multiracial groups to develop “color insights,” or racial awareness by marking how our insights are often connected to our social positions (Armstrong & Wildman, 2012, p. 233); and (more recently) recognizing heart work in end of year graduate student evaluation letters.

As a discipline, I have several ideas for how to support the development of our hearts and a turn toward affect politics. First, more of us could to adopt the methods I have described above, or other methods that other community psychologists have found useful in developing heart muscles. We could analyze these methods by interviewing graduate students about their experiences with them. Second, we could create “brave space sessions” at biennial conferences as a new format (along with symposia and roundtables). Brave spaces, rather than safe spaces, are zones where social justice work can be explored, provoked, and supported; this conceptualization disentangles safety and risk, but still maintains honesty,

sensitivity, accountability, and respect (Arao & Clemens, 2013). Relatedly, we could create a “brave space” column in *The Community Psychologist*. Third, there could be an *American Journal of Community Psychology* special issue on affective politics as a way to jumpstart this conversation within our field. Jim Kelly (2002) suggests other possibilities, which seem worth repeating over a decade later. He encourages us to visit the history of our field (broadly and heterogeneously defined) regularly so we can stay grounded in our roots and values, and so we can remember the struggles others who came before us faced. A regularly offered graduate course in the history of community psychology is one way to do this. Kelly also encourages us to build a culture where we make the time to listen to one another and develop relationships with each other. The more we, as community psychologists, can do to make our paths legible and to support developing scholar-activists, the better chance junior scholars will have in reaching their goals and the goals of our field, hopefully with humbleness and reflexivity.

Implications

A reflexive practice is essential for the community psychologist who holds dominant social positions. As a white woman who is now upper middle class and embedded in higher education, which has been a site for imperialism and colonization (Douglas, 2012), a reflexive practice equally grounded in my head, hands, and heart provides a framework for examining my motives, intentions, and practices. When I am not acting in solidarity, there is often a part of me that knows something is amiss. Unfortunately, ignoring my heart can lead to me acting in dominating ways. Solidarity is also an affective state; through reflecting on my

heart, I can assess what is not right with my head, and behave differently with my hands (Gould, 2009).

In terms of my own actions, I am most comfortable engaging in participatory action research. Yet, PAR is not the only way for a community psychologist to be accountable to themselves, the field, and the broader community. There are many ways to be accountable, and this should be negotiated with the relevant stakeholders. In the end, I hope we each take up Sarason's questions: Am I being consistent with what I believe? Am I behaving in ways that are true to my values? Equally engaging the head, hand, and heart through an affective political lens enables me a better vantage point to answer these questions.

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