Article

(De)colonising outcomes of community participation – a South African ethnography of 'ethics in practice'

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Abstract
Theoretically, community participation decolonises research ethics in settings where a 'coloniality of power' persists. We used ethnographic methods to document our experiences of 'ethics in practice', and interrogate the (de)colonising outcomes, of community participation in voluntary informed assent and consent (VIAC) procedures with 16–17-year-old Black South African youth and parents. Community participation decolonised by: (1) disrupting and problematising the power dynamics of written VIAC procedures and (2) minimally shifting power to youth and parents. However, community participation sometimes reinforced existing power hierarchies. In postcolonial qualitative research settings, community participation has potential to, but will not necessarily, decolonise ethics in practice.

The ethical procedures that guide qualitative research in postcolonial contexts mimic those designed in Western settings to govern biomedical research. However, their potential to make qualitative research optimally ethical has been problematised (Hoeyer and Hogle, 2014). Reflexive studies of 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 26) can increase understanding of how to enhance 'ethics in practice'. In postcolonial contexts, enhancing ethics may be framed in terms of decolonisation. Anecdotally, community

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participation may decolonise research (Zavala, 2013). However, there is limited empirical evidence showing if and how community participation decolonises ethical procedures. In this article, we interrogate a community-participatory approach that was intended to decolonise voluntary informed assent and consent (VIAC) procedures for 16–17-year-old Black youth and their parents, in qualitative research in South Africa. We combine Bourdieusian and decolonial theory with the concept of 'ethics in practice' to understand decolonisation in terms of shifting social, cultural and economic power dynamics.

Voluntary informed consent in qualitative research

Voluntary informed consent (permission given freely and with understanding) is a cornerstone of research ethics and the primary way in which researchers operationalise the principle of respect for persons (autonomy) (Afolabi et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2015). It refers to a process of providing potential study participants (and/or their legal guardians in the case of minors) with information about the study (e.g. risks and benefits) and allowing them to decide freely (i.e. without incentive or coercion) if they want to participate (Vallely et al., 2010). In qualitative research, study information is typically provided in writing, and people who agree to participate are usually asked to sign a form as proof of their consent (Hoeyer and Hogle, 2014). This strategy, which is a requirement of most ethical review boards, rests on the assumption that potential participants understand written information and once informed can consent freely (Corrigan, 2003). However, a considerable body of literature shows that in practice power dynamics mean that consent may be neither informed nor voluntary.

Adequately informing potential research participants is challenging, especially in postcolonial and other settings with power inequalities, because of cultural differences and social injustices, including the systematic denial of information, autonomy and rights for people with limited power (Chilisa, 2017). Study information often contains unfamiliar concepts and complex information (Afolabi et al., 2014). Evidence from African countries shows that participants in biomedical research often do not understand the potential risks as intended, tend to emphasise possible benefits and have considerable 'therapeutic misunderstanding' (i.e. assume that unproven interventions are beneficial) (Afolabi et al., 2014). Providing consent voluntarily may be a foreign notion for people who have historically been (and/or continue to be) denied autonomy (Brear, 2018; Chilisa, 2017; Molyneux et al., 2005). Participants may interpret signing a consent form as binding them to participate (Vreeman et al., 2012) and/or not properly understand their right to withdraw (Afolabi et al., 2014). Even if they are aware of their right to say no, prospective participants may have difficulty exercising their right, for example if participating in research is the only way to secure medical treatment (Kalabuanga et al., 2016) or if they experience third-party coercion to participate (e.g. from family members (Nakkash et al., 2009), community leaders (Brear, 2018), social workers (Nakkash et al., 2009) and/or service providers (Kalabuanga et al., 2016; Molyneux et al., 2005)). Further, individual autonomy and the formality of signing are sometimes considered culturally inappropriate for people who live and make decisions collectively and orally (Chilisa, 2017). These limitations of informed consent have also been noted in non-African and/or qualitative research settings (e.g. Bell, 2014).

Unlike ethics in practice, procedural (i.e. orthodox and formal) ethics (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) are informed by positivist worldviews (Sabati, 2019). These assume that potential participants are rational, autonomous subjects who decontextualize decisions about participation to focus only on the (typically written) study information provided (Miller and Boulton, 2007). This assumption is refuted by evidence. For example, in southern African settings, existing relationships (Wood, 2017) and oral information (Chilisa, 2017) influence decisions about participation, which are made in situated, relational processes. In postcolonial (and many other) societies, decision-making occurs amidst persistently unequal relations of power (Chilisa, 2017; Sabati, 2019). These power dynamics must be accounted for to optimise ethics in practice (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), including VIAC processes.

Consent-assent for legal minors

When research involves legal minors, age-related power dynamics must be considered. Obtaining parents' consent and thereafter the legal minor's assent (agreement), is the expected procedure (Graham et al., 2015; Yanar et al., 2016). 'Minors' are people who are not considered legally capable of deciding for themselves because they are under the age of legal majority, which in South Africa changed from 21 years to 18 years in 2007. The consent-assent approach is underpinned by several unsubstantiated (and increasingly problematised) notions. These include that (1) legal minors are incapable of undertaking the moral reasoning required to consent for themselves (Montreuil and Carnevale, 2018), and therefore (2) need their parent or legal guardian (Nakkash et al., 2009) (3) to consent for them as a protective measure (Graham et al., 2015).

The assumption that parents or legal guardians are best placed to consent for minors reflects (romanticised) Western social relations, which have been problematised even in Euro-American contexts (Graham et al., 2015). Many adolescents are capable of making informed decisions about participation in research for themselves. The requirement for parental consent may present either as a barrier to young people exercising their right to participate (Fisher, Arbeit, Dumont, Macapagal, and Mustanski, 2016) or a form of coercion, because young people depend on, and are typically expected to obey, their parents (Montreuil and Carnevale, 2018). In postcolonial contexts (including African countries and indigenous settings in high-income contexts), there are further reasons to problematise parental consent. Children may not live with their biological parents and non-parent guardians rarely have legal status. The most 'culturally appropriate representative' in these contexts may be their primary caregiver, non-legal guardian or a community leader or teacher (Nakkash et al., 2009). Imposing the assumption that parents are best placed to consent implies the Western family is the only legitimate form (Bourdieu, 1996). Assuming universality of Western family relations is an example of how 'coloniality of power', a central concept in decolonial theory, persists in postcolonial contexts.

Decolonising

Decolonial theory provides a broad lens through which to understand social power inequalities as legacies of colonisation (Chilisa, 2017). The central premise is that an unjust

'coloniality of [unequal] power' persists despite the removal of colonial authorities. It exerts its effects through four inter-related domains: economy, authority, sexuality and knowledge/subjectivity (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). The knowledge/subjectivity domain is particularly relevant to decolonising research. It articulates the ways in which academic knowledge creation historically buttressed colonisation and continues to perpetuate power inequalities (Mignolo, 2007), for example, by presenting Western knowledge (including knowledge regarding what constitutes 'ethical' practice or a family) as superior (Dawson, 2020; Sabati, 2019). Colonial knowledge systems privilege 'scientific', 'modern' (Euro-patriarchal) ways of knowing as superior to all alternative paradigms (Quijano, 2007). Scientific knowledge is presented as fact, in ways that colonise people's subjectivities, that is, shape their perceptions of themselves (and others) (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Mignolo, 2007). Because scientific knowledge creation assumes Western superiority, the 'facts' created by scientists have often focused on the supposed 'deficits' of non-Western societies and people. They have been used to rationalise injustices (including colonisation) and marginalise non-Western viewpoints (Mignolo, 2007). Decolonisation is needed to enhance scientific knowledge by ensuring it acknowledges and gives equal treatment to diverse perspectives and experiences. This in turn enables alternative, more socially just and sustainable futures to be imagined and achieved (Dawson, 2020).

Pretending that scientific methods are detached and neutral is an important technique for situating colonial science as superior to other knowledge paradigms (Bourdieu, 1988; Mignolo, 2007). Hence, decolonial theory calls for 'epistemic disobedience', that is, delinking scientific enquiry from the illusion of neutrality (Mignolo, 2009). Community-participatory research is a form of 'epistemic disobedience' and a potentially important approach to decolonising knowledge creation (Ndimande, 2012; Wood, 2017; Zavala, 2013). It focuses on 'engag[ing] in knowledge making' (Mignolo, 2009: 176) people with lived experience of the phenomena being studied (Wood, 2017). Participatory approaches advocate academics working in partnership with community co-researchers who shape the research (Zavala, 2013).

In relation to VIAC, numerous community-participatory strategies have the potential to decolonise. Community members might participate in determining the best social spaces for conducting VIAC procedures and/or deciding whether (and which) adults should be present (Montreuil and Carnevale, 2018; Nakkash et al., 2009). Community participation could also inform decisions regarding whether information is most appropriately provided to individuals or groups, verbally or in writing and/or enable research to be conducted in Indigenous languages that affirm the cultural identity of the people being researched (Dawson, 2020; Ndimande, 2012). Group-based processes could situate VIAC within a relational ontology, which appreciates Indigenous people's relationality (Chilisa, 2017). Working with co-researchers from the study community to design and implement ethical procedures might make them more culturally appropriate and sensitive (or disruptive) to power dynamics (Zavala, 2013).

Aim

Developing novel approaches to qualitative research ethics that reflect the growing body of knowledge about 'ethics in practice' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) can enhance and/

or decolonise knowledge creation processes in postcolonial settings (Chilisa, 2017). The ethics of naturalistic, qualitative inquiries cannot merely replicate or transfer the approaches developed and used in positivistic, quantitative, experimental research (Hoeyer and Hogle, 2014). Evidence suggests that in practice they do not (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). However, ethical guidelines are static, and some ethical review boards apply guidelines procedurally (Wood, 2017). Evidence showing that consent is often given from people who do not properly understand or are subject to varying degrees of influence suggests that procedural approaches to VIAC often fail to achieve their ethical intentions and that community participation in VIAC procedures could enhance the ethics of, and decolonise, qualitative research. Our aim is to contribute to empirically understanding the (de)-colonising outcomes of community participation for achieving ethics in qualitative research, through reflexive study of our VIAC processes.

Methods

We address this aim through a project ethnography of community-participatory VIAC procedures that we developed and implemented in Qwaqwa, South Africa. The youth participated in qualitative research about the intersections of human migration and sustainable development to inform our campus research unit's strategy. The ethnography was approved by the University of the Free State Research Ethics Committee (UFS-HSD2018/0459).

Setting

Qwaqwa is a former 'Bantustan', that is, a racially segregated area that Black people needed permission to leave during Apartheid. The densely populated settlement consists of an urban centre and an expanse of peri-urban villages. The population of 336,000 are predominately Black (98%), ethnically Basotho (81%) and relatively youthful (33% are under 15 years of age) (Stats SA, 2018).

Qwaqwa has developed little since the introduction of democratic rule in South Africa in 1994. Unemployment is widespread (42%), especially among youth (53%). Most households (80%) have an annual income of less that R40,000 (~USD2800), are headed by women (51%) and lack basic services, including refuse disposal (75%) and piped water (68%) (Stats SA, 2018). Despite lack of material change, the ideological context of postcolonial South Africa is conducive to redressing the unequal power relations. For example, decolonising, community-engaged scholarship is enshrined in higher education policy (Williams, 2018). Many South African students have embraced the notion of 'decolonising' higher education (Lewis & Hendricks, 2017).

Study design

TIME: theoretically informed methodology for ethnography. Our research was guided by a community-participatory approach to theoretically informed methodology for ethnography (TIME). It conceptualises knowledge-making as a dialectic of real-world observation and theoretical reflection (Willis and Trondman, 2000). Within TIME, we employed

decolonial theory as a broad lens, Bourdieu's 'logic of practice' (1990) as a specific lens, and reflexivity as a heuristic tool, to understand the influence of community participation on decolonising 'ethics in practice' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). As noted above, power dynamics are the focus of decolonial theory. The central concepts of Bourdieusian theory, *habitus*, *social fields* and *capital/power* are concepts that enable understanding the specifics of how and why power dynamics change. Bourdieu developed his theoretical concepts through empirical projects aimed at deciphering the interconnected nature of colonial and academic/scientific power (Go, 2013). Utilising them presupposes reflexivity (Go, 2013), an approach also advocated by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) to study ethics in practice.

Bourdieusian theory conceptualises everyday behaviours as tacitly structured by a practical logic, which is in turn constituted by lived experiences of unequal power relations that are embodied as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990). As a 'structuring structure', habitus predisposes people to know, act according to and conceive as natural, their socially constructed place within the power hierarchy of each *social field* in which they interact (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). *Social fields* (e.g. communities, universities) theoretically represent networks of power relations and social spaces of competition in which agents compete to maximise their *capital* (i.e. power) amidst the structural constraints of existing power inequalities.

Bourdieu conceptualised 'power' and 'capital' as synonymous and the value of different forms of *power/capital* (economic, social and cultural, each of which is also material or symbolic) as field-dependent (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). *Social capital*, including for example networks of academic friends (actual) and the disposition to 'act' like an academic (symbolic), plays an important role in controlling participation in the university field (e.g. by granting qualifications). However, because the primary function of the academic field is knowledge production, *cultural capital* (i.e. knowledge, especially its scientific form) is also highly valued (Bourdieu, 1988). Competing to access economic capital in the academic field (e.g. salaries, research grants) requires knowing, and acting according to tacit and explicit norms. These include employing 'scientific' knowledge creation methods, which differ markedly between disciplines (e.g. natural/biomedical versus social sciences) (Bourdieu, 1988). Different disciplinary and social norms give rise to competition and the potential to disrupt existing, and legitimise new, norms and expectations (Bourdieu, 1988). For example, the powerful symbolism of enshrining decolonisation in South African higher education policy disrupts and creates space for legitimising alternative, decolonising knowledge creation approaches.

Community participatory approaches, despite increasing prominence, remain alternative and marginal. Their legitimacy is stilled measured against the yardstick of supposedly neutral colonial science approaches (including by some ethics review boards). Competing to legitimise participatory approaches requires a degree of adherence to existing norms (e.g. procedural ethics) (Wood, 2017). Theoretically, the decolonising potential of community-participatory approaches occurs because they (1) blur the (false) distinction and hierarchy between knowledge created in academic/scientific and other (e.g. community) social fields and (2) require academics to scrutinise their own assumptions, practices and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Participant selection, recruitment and informed consent. Our study of a community-participatory VIAC process involved two groups of participants. Group 1, volunteer youth workers (VYWs) were recruited purposively from four grassroots, community-based, youth-focused organisations in Qwaqwa (hereafter youth organisations). Eight participated in adapting and implementing VIAC procedures as unpaid co-researchers and three (all members of an artists' cooperative, including one female) as paid research assistants (RAs). All VYWs provided prospective written and ongoing verbal voluntary informed consent for Michelle to collect data about their participation in recruiting youth and obtaining VIAC. Group 2, 16–17-year-old youth, participated in qualitative research about (1) migration and sustainable development in their communities and (2) their experiences as research participants.

Research procedures. Participant observation (PO) was the core data collection method (references to PO data in the results are formatted PO:DD/MM/YYYY). Handwritten notes were collected to document: (1) co-learning workshops in which the VYWs and Michelle discussed community and academic norms relevant to, and planned, recruitment and VIAC procedures; (2) debriefing sessions in which VYWs discussed their experiences recruiting and conducting VIAC procedures; and (3) workshop-based dialogic member-checking processes (as described by (Brear, 2019) through which youth and VYWs appraised our findings). All participant observation notes were collected by Michelle as she facilitated these processes. They were expanded and transcribed within 24 h.

Interviews (referenced INT:DD/MM/YYYY) generated supplementary data. Four VYWs who participated intensively in the VIAC processes (including the three RAs) narrated their experiences in individual interviews. Participant observation and interview data were collected in English, the participants' second language and the medium of instruction in most South African schools and universities.

Data analysis. Data analysis was informed by the principles of TIME, which posits shifting between theory and data, to identify recurring ideas and refine possible theoretical interpretations (Willis and Trondman, 2000). Michelle analysed English-language transcripts from her perspective as a White woman who had grown up in a high-income country, and an untenured, early career academic with longstanding interests in power and participation. Her analytical process involved reading, re-reading and coding the data iteratively, as she considered (1) Bourdieusian and decolonial theory and (2) her informal observations made during ongoing participation in youth organisation activities. Michelle's analysis was also informed by (3) discussions about her preliminary interpretations with co-researchers and Cias, a Black father of adolescent children and a tenured academic who had lived in Qwaqwa since migrating there as a child during Apartheid.

Results

Community-engaged process

Our VIAC process initially involved establishing links with two youth organisations, one church-based, the other an artists' cooperative. The leaders of these two organisations

introduced us to their VYWs. Thereafter, we participated in the two organisations' special events (e.g. youth month celebrations) and regular weekend activities. We invited the leaders and VYWs to participate in university events, including campus-based seminars and community-based activities for visiting international academics. They introduced us to the leaders of two other youth organisations.

Thereafter, Michelle developed and facilitated the workshop-based Participatory Research and Ethics Short Course. Eleven VYWs (aged 20–40 years, including the RAs) from four youth organisations participated in six workshops, which were hosted in a university seminar room. The VYWs were transported to the campus in a university-branded minibus and provided learning materials and meals. They received a certificate of participation upon completion. Each workshop involved 2–3 participatory learning activities (e.g. debates and role plays), designed to elicit the VYWs knowledge of relevant community norms and enable Michelle to introduce academic principles, procedures and norms. Michelle attempted to position community norms as the yardstick against which to judge academic norms, for example by asking participants to present their ideas first. However, she felt compelled to 'teach' the VYWs academic ethics, because of concerns cited by the university ethics committee and human resources department.

Ethics approval was initially withheld due to concerns about us (1) inviting community members to the campus, and (2) not providing (a) names and 'qualifications' of community RAs, (b) signed declarations showing the RAs had been 'sensitised' to academic ethical norms and agreed to 'uphold good ethics standards throughout the research, including the protection of privacy' and (c) professional Sesotho translations of participant and parent information statements. The ethics committee eventually approved our application, after we agreed to provide the requested information and documentation. We requested the committee reconsider their refusal to allow research in which participants entered the university campus (which in South Africa remains a gated space). They did. Thereafter, our human resources department initially refused to employ community-based RAs (because they did not have master's degrees). They permitted their employment after we outlined the rationale for community participation in writing.

Following ethics approval and the short course, VYWs participated in recruiting youth participants. The three RAs led recruitment sessions at the four youth organisations. They introduced the research verbally and encouraged and answered questions in Sesotho and distributed English-language hand-outs. Youth were invited to submit a written or oral expression of interest (EoI) in Sesotho, Isizulu or English language. They were informed that participants would be selected from a hat (i.e. selection was not merit-based) and would need their parent's written permission (but not money, transport, specific knowledge or experience) to participate. Michelle participated in all recruitment sessions, including by transporting the RAs to youth organisations in a university-branded vehicle. Other VYWs helped organise 16–17-year-old youth from their surrounding communities to attend. For example, at one organisation when youth had not arrived at the scheduled start time, VYWs went to their houses to hurry them up. In addition, one VYW who was not an RA (i.e. had not signed a contract and declared their ethical competence) partnered with a friend and independently door-knocked to recruit

youth in their community. They also hosted a group information session at another community member's house, during which they organised youth to submit written EoIs.

Finally, we organised VIAC procedures with youth and their parents. Thirty-three youths submitted an EoI. Six could not be contacted, and one later opted out. The remaining 26 were contacted by an RA to arrange a parent to undertake the VIAC procedures in a group session at a youth organisation's premises ($N = 11$ parent–youth pairs) or individually at their home ($N = 15$). An RA and Michelle drove in a university-branded vehicle to meet potential participant-parent pairs and conduct VIAC procedures. The RAs typically distributed both Sesotho and English language information statements then read the English-language information statement aloud and translated it to local Sesotho vernacular, stopping frequently to invite questions.

Other VYWs participated in organisation-based VIAC sessions in numerous ways. For example, they introduced Michelle and the RAs, transported parents, took cell-phone photographs, shared their positive experiences participating in the Participatory Research and Ethics Short Course workshops and/or showed-off their certificates of participation. The VYW and friend who independently organised a recruitment campaign led (instead of an RA) five home-based VIAC sessions in their community.

Outcomes

Disrupting procedural ethics norms

Working with VYWs who were long-term (mostly lifelong) residents of Qwaqwa ensured that community norms were incorporated into the VIAC procedures.

Communicating. All the VYWs spoke the Sesotho vernacular of Qwaqwa as their mother tongue. Their disposition to speak this vernacular was demonstrated by their putting aside the Sesotho-language information statement, in favour of reading and translating the English-language statement. One RA explained, 'I didn't like the Sotho, the way it was written. . . it was very hard' (INT:10/01/2019). Cias agreed that the professional translation (which Michelle never bothered to have checked by a lay-person *because* it professionally translated) was very difficult. The VYWs were apparently unaware that they were breaching procedural ethics norms (which Michelle felt she need to follow quite exactly given the ethics committee's concerns), by providing the study information in a non-standardised format (i.e. not reading the 'very hard Sotho').

The VYW who organised the door-knocking recruitment campaign disrupted procedural ethics assumptions about autonomy by incorporating what might be termed either 'relational decision making' or 'influencing' into VIAC sessions they led. They explained, 'I wanted to show the parents how lucky their children are. . . just to sensitise them. . . [that] when you refuse [to consent] it means you are depriving your child' (INT:08/01/2019). The ways in which various people (including parents, teachers, youth organisation leaders, best friends and girlfriends/boyfriends) normally influence each other, and might influence decisions about research participation, were highlighted by VYWs discussions in the participatory workshops (PO:11/10/2018). Influence and relational decision-making were also observed in the community. For example, one VYW explained that a group of women

neighbours came into one home-based VIAC session, 'because they saw the university car outside. . . [saying to the potential participant] "go, we are behind you, we are happy for you". . . the mother was like, "if these people could be so happy [I can't] refuse to sign for [my child]"' (INT:08/01/2019). The VYWs (including those who visited houses to hurry youth to recruitment sessions) conceptualised these practices as necessary and positive ways of 'encouraging' youth to participate. Several VYWs perceived that some youth, knowing the workshops would be hosted at the university campus, would not have been 'brave enough' (PO:12/07/2019) to submit EoIs without such encouragement.

Navigating community spaces. Michelle might not have been 'brave enough' to navigate the community social field and its physical spaces without the VYWs' encouragement and knowledge. Most potential participants lived on unpaved, unnamed roads, in houses without numbers. In this context, finding participant–parent pairs often relied on Indigenous knowledge and norms. To arrange home-based VIAC sessions, the RAs sometimes arranged to meet potential participants (and/or their younger siblings) at road junctions or other potential participants' houses and/or asked potential participants or youth organisation leaders for directions. The RAs who asked for directions were apparently unaware that they were breaching the procedural ethics privacy norm that they had declared they would abide by, by identifying potential participants to each other and/or youth organisation leaders.

Negotiating 'parental' consent. We developed community-participatory, face-to-face VIAC procedures that required Michelle to enter community spaces, partly to ensure parents provided consent. The potential for youth to exclude their parents was highlighted by VYWs in the participatory workshops, for example in a role play about a teenager caught by her father 'trying to sign the consent form herself' (PO:11/10/2018). The issue of youth needing a non-parent to sign because they were separated from their parents did not arise, seemingly because having a non-parent, primary caregiver was so normal that VYWs assumed, contrary to procedural ethics norms, that these adults should consent for youth they cared for. Working in partnership with VYWs, we conducted VIAC procedures at youth organisation premises with the non-legal guardians of four potential participants, whose parents had migrated out of Qwaqwa to access employment. In all these cases, VYWs and/or youth organisation leaders who knew the guardians personally (e.g. one lived next door), participated by confirming that the relationships were legitimate despite not being legal arrangements.

   The extent to which parents were not (according to community norms) necessarily considered the most appropriate people to consent was further demonstrated by a potential participant's grandmother and mother. Both listened to the study information. When it came time to provide consent, which both women indicated they agreed to do, the mother, who worked long hours in a factory, insisted that the grandmother sign the form because she was the potential participant's primary caregiver (PO:11/12/2018).

Perpetuating procedural ethics (academic) norms

Division of responsibility and power. Working at the intersections of procedural ethics and community norms constrained power for the VYW who independently recruited youth.

Unlike the RAs who were official university employees who signed declarations, the VYW was not supposed to access potential participants' 'confidential' information. Michelle refused to share the list of participants' contact details, as per ethics approval, which stated these details would only be shared with university staff. This prevented the VYW from officially contacting youth to verify their VIAC sessions had been arranged, something they wanted to do and told Michelle they did informally, using a list they had compiled themselves.

Community members tended to valorise, and be proud of the association that their participation in our research created with, the university. For example, VYWs reported feeling important when they were picked up by the university-branded minibus (PO-11/07/2019), which we had organised to transport them to the campus with the intention enabling participation of those who could not afford transport. They showed off their university-branded certificates of participation, which we had provided intending to recognise and legitimise participatory (as opposed to didactic) learning approaches and community (as opposed to academic) knowledge. Some VYWs emphasised our academic titles (e.g. despite Michelle requesting they drop her title). Some explicitly suggested our knowledge was superior. For example, one VYW who misrepresented our participatory co-learning research process as a didactic teaching experience said they wanted youth to 'get that glimpse or taste of being at the university, being taught by Dr Michelle (INT:08/01/2019). This VYW also reinforced the epistemic/knowledge hierarchy by misrepresenting the lottery-style participant selection process as competitive. For example, they explained to youth how to, 'write their [EoI] letters. . . Because I didn't want them to write something. . . irrelevant. . . Only to find that maybe they are not going to be even nominated [to participate]' (INT:08/01/2019).

Discussion

Bourdieusian theory conceptualises the power shifts that constitute decolonisation in terms of multiple types of (economic, social and cultural) capital/power within and/or between social fields (in this case academic and community). Disruptions and change are inherent to social fields because various actors (e.g. academics, community RAs) are predisposed to act according to norms embodied from their unique historical experiences of unequal social power relations (Bourdieu, 1988, 1990).

Disrupting academic norms

Community participation in the VIAC procedures for our qualitative study disrupted several procedural ethics norms, by demonstrating that they failed to achieve their intended purposes, in social realities to which they were poorly matched. This finding concurs with the results of other studies of community-participatory research processes (e.g. Kamuya et al., 2013). It extends previous research by analysing the mismatch theoretically in terms of postcolonial power dynamics.

Presenting study information in potential participants' vernacular is an important way of shifting power to community members (i.e. decolonising research) (Ndimande, 2012; Wood, 2017). The procedural ethics focus on written information ignores the (originally)

oral form of many African (and other Indigenous) languages and the persistent orality of indigenous languages in contexts like South Africa where a colonial language is typically used for written communication. Whether the aim is to ensure understanding or symbolise lay people's vernacular as equally legitimate, imposing a colonial form (written) of an Indigenous language failed to achieve these aims in our study. Communicating in vernacular meant communicating orally. Reading the imposed form of Sesotho presented in the professional translations would reasonably have increased misunderstandings while simultaneously symbolising lay-people's vernacular and the knowledge it represented, as inferior (Bourdieu, 1991; Ndimande, 2012). It would have eliminated the (albeit minimal) identity-affirming opportunities that communicating about research in potential participants' vernacular provided (Ndimande, 2012).

Informal presentation of study information is apparently common in practice and accepted by some ethics committee. Our ethics committee's insistence on seeing a professional translation implied that they wanted study information provided in standardised form. We interpreted their willingness to adapt (and potential to decolonise) some academic norms (e.g. by enabling community participation) as conditional upon us abiding by others (e.g. providing standardised information and maintaining privacy).

Ethical norms regarding confidentiality are based on assumptions that people volunteer to participate in research individually and secretly, want their identity kept private and may experience harm if they are identified (Graham et al., 2015). These assumptions were unfounded in our qualitative research about migration, in which participants put forward their names in groups and being part of a group was fundamental to having the courage to disrupt norms, which exclude most Black youth from the physical and social spaces of universities. Following academic confidentiality norms reinforced distinctions between university and community by vesting the power to know (e.g. youth's names and phone numbers) only in the university-employed researchers (Bourdieu, 1988).

Treating information about potential participants confidentially was futile because it was never a secret. Even if it was, our potential participants were proud of participating in a project that associated them with the university (and all its actual and symbolic power) and wanted to be identified. Participants' desire for recognition rather than secrecy has been noted in other participatory research processes in South Africa and high-income countries (e.g. Wood, 2017; Yanar et al., 2016). Our results concur and suggest that when information is not sensitive, qualitative researchers could enhance the ethics of their research by incorporating mechanisms for participant recognition, rather than assuming confidentiality is universally the best practice (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Although VIAC is not a legally binding arrangement (Librett and Perrone, 2010), procedural ethics norms require legal guardians, typically biological parents, to consent for minors (Montreuil and Carnevale, 2018; Nakkash et al., 2009). This requirement was inappropriate in our study, because some youth did not live with their parents, and parents were not always considered the most appropriate consent provider. Again, this is not a novel finding. It concurs with evidence from other African (Nakkash et al., 2009) and high-income country (Hopkins, 2008) research settings. Given that researchers are not required or advised to verify identities in VIAC procedures (Librett and Perrone, 2010), our results suggest that insisting on parental consent is futile. It may contribute to parents

and/or participants misunderstanding VIAC as a legally binding arrangement from which they cannot withdraw (Vreeman et al., 2012) in postcolonial contexts where formalities like signing are uncommon and/or symbolise formal legal arrangements (Brear, 2020). Undermining such misconceptions is an important step in decolonising qualitative research in contexts such as South Africa, where one legacy of colonisation is considerable family separation due to work-related migration. In our migration research project, obtaining consent from non-legal guardians known to VYWs, decolonised by enabling us to include the youth who had direct experience of parental migration. It also shifted power by legitimising different forms of family, which may have subtly been stigmatised, if we had denied non-legal guardians the right to consent for youth who they primarily cared for (Bourdieu, 1996).

In procedural ethics, autonomy is often also conflated with deciding for oneself, without external influence (Campbell, 2017). This is one reason why individual VIAC is considered inappropriate in indigenous societies, with relational decision-making norms (Chilisa, 2017). Participants in our study considered relational decision-making appropriate and normal. Our theoretical lens, which conceptualises all individual choices as socially structured by *habitus* (i.e. embodied historical knowledge of unequal power relations) (Bourdieu, 1990), situates people influencing each other's choices (i.e. relationality), from various positions of power, as not only normal but inherent. It indicates, as do our results, that relationality in decision-making is unlikely to be specific to Indigenous people. The interactions between the authors (one Black Indigenous man, one White Western women), ethics committee, human resources staff, RAs, VYWs and youth demonstrate a high degree of relationality for all participants in this study. For example, Michelle's decisions were influenced by the ethics committee's concerns, the practices of the RAs and historic experiences conducting informed consent procedures in postcolonial research settings (as described in Brear, 2020). Situating relationality as an exclusively Indigenous norm perpetuates the colonial focus on intrinsic differences. It implies that social differences are inherent (biological, unchangeable) rather than logically constructed responses to social, cultural and economic circumstances, especially unequal power dynamics. In showing that relationality is inherent, our findings suggest that other dichotomies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and practices are socially (scientifically) constructed. Our theoretical interpretation of a community-participatory approach disrupts the assumption that VIAC is or should or could occur in the absence of social influence. It suggests the need to reconceptualise autonomy as deciding for oneself in a relational context, rather than without external influence (Campbell, 2017). The inherently relational nature of individuals should at least be acknowledged, probably embraced, in research ethics.

Relationality is an accepted feature of community-participatory approaches. They purposively utilise existing relationships and the subjectivities inherent to them, to enhance knowledge creation and disrupt unequal power relations (Wood, 2017; Zavala, 2013). Existing relationships we had formed with VYWs made important contributions to enhancing the ethics of our study. Particularly important are the ways in which the RAs and VYWs influenced (encouraged) participation in a project they perceived would provide youth opportunities to acquire valuable forms of social and cultural capital (e.g. new friends and certificates of participation).

Perpetuating hierarchies

Enabling VYWs and youth to access a symbolic form of cultural capital (i.e. a certificate) potentially represents a decolonising outcome. However, only to the extent that it legitimised the value of participatory co-learning and disrupted norms that conceptualise knowledge-worthy-of-a-certificate (i.e. legitimate knowledge) as something created only by experts and reproduced only through didactic teaching (Mignolo, 2007). Our results show that participatory learning was not legitimised, and only minimally acknowledged, in the community. Even after experiencing participatory co-learning for themselves, some VYWs assumed and indicated to potential participants that our research would involve 'teaching'. Potential participants and parents informed by them assumed that the participants would be subjected to a 'merit-based' selection process and 'taught', when we intended to learn from youth selected 'lottery'-style. Community participation thus had the unintended and undesirable effect of presenting academic knowledge as something participants should be striving to acquire, and as superior.

In this context, getting a certificate or travelling on the university bus became a source of pride, but not because VYWs and youth conceptualised these as symbols legitimising their Indigenous knowledge. Youth and VYWs wanted to access (albeit minimal) actual and symbolic forms of capital/power available in the academic field, rather than to shift that power to the community field, as accounts of community-participatory research imply should happen (Zavala, 2013). Theoretically, it is unsurprising that colonised people (i.e. those with limited power) would participate in academic research with the intention of gaining capital/power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The youth's and VYWs' subjectivities/*habitus* had been shaped to accept the superiority of academic/scientific knowledge, showing how 'coloniality of power' (Mignolo, 2007) continues to exert colonising effects, decades after the official end of colonialism in South Africa.

In postcolonial settings where many lack economic and cultural capital, participation in health research has previously been shown as motivated by expected economic/material (e.g. healthcare or food) gains (Kamuya et al., 2013). Gains in social and cultural capital, which our study showed also to be important, have received less attention. Participatory research principles imply that accessing social and cultural capital by working in partnership is valuable for community members and academics. However, the tensions have not been drawn out and are glossed over in conceptualisations of participation as decolonising research by catalysing community 'ownership' (Zavala, 2013). Academic institutions and their epistemologies maintain great (social, cultural and economic) capital/power in postcolonial contexts (Mignolo, 2007; Wood, 2017). Community members wanted to participate in our research in order to gain social and cultural capital that might enable future opportunities (including economic) (Brear, 2020). Community participation was driven as much by a desire to secure a place in the academic hierarchy, as to usurp ownership of the academy or disruptively problematise its knowledge creation processes.

The Bourdieusian conceptualisation of capital/power having multiple (social, cultural and economic) exchangeable forms has important implications for decolonising research. It suggests that decolonisation will be limited while ever efforts focus narrowly on the academic field. Universities occupy an elite position within broader hierarchical relations of (social, cultural and economic) power (Bourdieu, 1988; Wood, 2017). Our results

suggest that economically marginalised lay-people will valorise the social and cultural power of universities, while ever scientific knowledge can be exchanged for relatively large amounts of economic power (e.g. relatively high salaries), and that academic research cannot truly be decolonised, without broader shifts in economic power relations (Wood, 2017). Paying community-recruited RAs who did not have the expected formal qualifications represented a minimal shift in both economic and cultural capital. It provided them actual economic power (i.e. money) for a short period of time and symbolised the (economic) value of their lay-knowledge. It enabled them to dedicate time to participating intensively and develop dispositions that better enabled them to 'compete' in the university field. However, colonial ways of thinking and doing research were not intentionally challenged; rather, the select group of RAs and VYWs tried to assimilate to university norms (Dawson, 2020).

Strengths and limitations. Our project ethnography examined a specific aspect (VIAC) of ethics in practice (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) within a specific qualitative research and community setting. Rather than statistical generalisation, the results are intended to provide theoretically transferrable insights (i.e. concepts and ideas that should be relevant to other similar contexts, characterised by unequal power relations). Working closely with community members and eliciting their opinions about (and/or inferring from their behaviours what constituted) community norms enabled us to consider a variety of lay-people's opinions. It forced us to objectify the assumptions we bought to the study. Nonetheless, we maintained control. The representation of the VIAC process and its decolonising outcomes is our own, and one of many possible representations. Given limited empirical evidence about the outcomes of community-participatory approaches, and the urgent need to decolonise (qualitative) research, including by developing alternative ethical procedures, we believe it makes an important contribution.

Conclusion

Participatory approaches have the potential to decolonise procedural and practical ethics in qualitative knowledge creation. The decolonising potential arises through community researchers introducing new, sometimes conflicting ways of doing research, informed by Indigenous knowledge and dispositions. Because they are predisposed by their historic experiences to act in particular ways, associated with their sociocultural and economic position, lay-people who participate in qualitative research can disrupt and reveal inadequacies which question the legitimacy of procedural ethics norms and highlight the need for ethical guidelines that acknowledge the flexibility needed to make research ethical in practice. They can present new, alternative ways of operationalising ethics in practice in real-world, postcolonial (i.e. power unequal) qualitative research settings. Using community participation to incorporate community norms into ethical processes such as VIAC decolonises research by shifting power (albeit minimally) to lay-people, via making information more accessible and positioning lay-knowledge as valuable. However, lay people's dispositions to enter the university field accepting the prevailing knowledge hierarchy and/or with the intention of accessing the power associated with academic knowledge, limits the potential for decolonisation in the absence of broader shifts to equalise capital/power relations.

Community participation cannot be assumed to decolonise qualitative research. To optimise the decolonising potential of participation, qualitative researchers must consciously scrutinise their own and community members' practices, cognisant that either may disrupt or perpetuate colonial power hierarchies. Our experience suggests that decolonising outcomes will be optimal if co-researchers lead VIAC procedures, using their vernacular and lay-knowledge and have opportunities to access cultural and economic capital. Bourdieu's 'logic of practice' theory, and its conceptualisation of capital/power as having multiple forms, provides an insightful framework for examining the dynamics of 'coloniality of power' in, and conceptualising how participatory qualitative research might decolonise specific processes that constitute, 'ethics in practice'.

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