Race, Racism and CBPR:

Taming the Elephant in the Room

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Overview

- Identify some of the challenges of using CBPR to address racial and ethnic health disparities

- Discuss the importance of considering racism in CBPR partnerships and research

- Provide recommendations for utilizing racism as an analytic tool in CBPR partnerships and research

What is CBPR?

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change to improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities.

Israel et al., 1998; Viswanathan, et al., 2004

Why Use a CBPR Approach to Address Health Disparities?

- Brings together diverse partners with multiple skills, expertise, and sensitivities

- Enhances the quality and validity of intervention research

- Enhances the potential of overcoming the distrust of research by communities of color

Challenges of Using a CBPR Approach to Address Health Disparities

- Racial/ ethnic makeup of staff typically different

- Capacity, motivation and reward system for engaging in participatory research may be different

- Unequal access to policy makers, influence, financial resources, and funding opportunities

- Historical relationship between the institution (university vs. CBO) and community differs

Challenge of Addressing
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities

The disparate behaviors and outcomes that are of primary interest to public health are rooted in distal and pervasive disparities in education, justice, social and political power, and economics
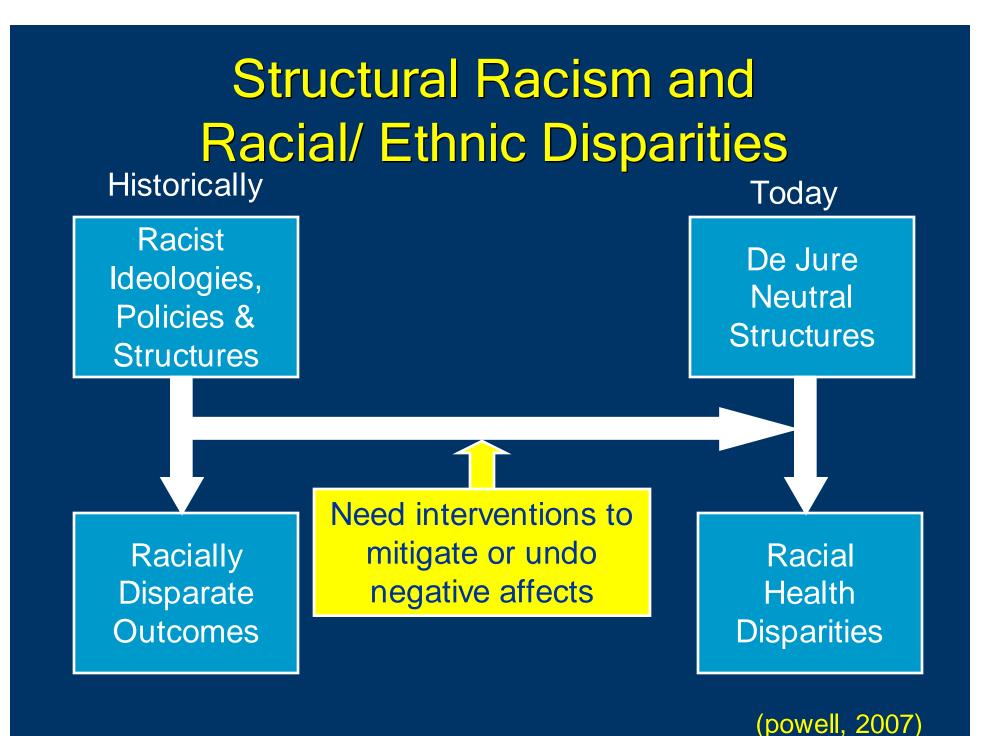
(Link & Phelan, 2005; Williams, 2003, Williams, 2005)

It is the legacy of racism—at least in part—that is responsible for the fact African Americans, since arriving as slaves, have had the worst heath care, the worst health status, and the worst health outcomes of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.

(Byrd & Clayton, 2001)

Racism is "an organized system, rooted in an ideology of inferiority that categorizes, ranks, and differentially allocates societal resources to human population groups"

(Williams & Rucker, 2000)

Structural Racism and Racial/ Ethnic Disparities

Historically

Today

Racist Ideologies, Policies & Structures

De Jure Neutral Structures

Racially Disparate Outcomes

Need interventions to mitigate or undo negative affects

Racial Health Disparities

(powell, 2007)

Structural Racism

- Incorporates the interconnections of social institutions that produce disparate outcomes

- Focuses on outcomes rather than intentions, highlighting covert, not merely overt, operations of racism

- Racism is a dynamic, rational response aligned with the normative culture

(Adams & Balfour, 2004; Grant-Thomas & powell, 2006; Osorio, 2005)

How is racism the elephant in the CBPR room?

- Race and racism are ever-present in relationships and play important roles, particularly in ambiguous situations

- Race, ethnicity, and culture are all different and all important to understanding relationships, communication and conflict

- Personal and professional socialization and experiences with race and racism influence the quality and effectiveness of interactions

How is racism the elephant in the CBPR room?

- Racial differences in power and access to resources do not disappear regardless of your position or who you are representing

- Unchecked assumptions - examples

    - Assumption of equal opportunities/ access to resources
    - Valuing/ prioritizing health & health behavior
    - Explanations for why disparities exist & what should be done to address them

Recommendations

- Insure partners have a common understanding of the following:
  - Expectations, respect, conflict resolution strategies, and acceptable behavior
  - The common vision of what you're doing and not doing
  - A willingness to be held accountable by other partners
  - Why health disparities exist
  - What research approaches and intervention strategies will be used and why

Recommendations Regarding Structural Racism

- Structural racism is useful as an analytic tool but difficult to describe or communicate

- Racism is most useful as a framework when the focus remains on the system, not individuals

- Racism is useful as a lens through which to understand relationship/ partnership processes

- Recognize the difficulty of addressing something perceived as racist in unequal power relationships

To not talk about racism is to talk about racism.

powell, 2007