On (the Limits of) Reciprocity:

Navigating Shared Identity and Difference in Community-Engaged Research

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Abstract

Reciprocity often forms the ideological core of community engagement, and discussions around reciprocity have encouraged researchers to pursue ethical and mutually beneficial collaborations with community partners. This article suggests that current conversations around reciprocity often presume a tacit level of difference between researchers and communities that they partner with, and that this unstated premise of difference obscures practices of reciprocity that emerge when academics and communities share similar identities or social locations. This article highlights two forms of reciprocity—deprioritizing academic outcomes and relational sustainability—that emerge when researchers work with their home communities or when their positionalities overlap. Attending more closely to similarity and positionality can add complexity to current vocabulary around community-based research and give language to

the reciprocal practices that emerge when academics work with communities they are a part of.

Introduction

The field of community-based research has long grappled with the notion of reciprocity. There has been significant discussion around how we might define reciprocity (e.g. Dostilio et al. 2012; Hammersley 2017; Powell & Takayoshi 2003), how we can enact those definitions (e.g., Smith-Sitton & Smithwick 2020; Miller-Young et al. 2015), and how we might position reciprocity as a central pillar of community-based research (e.g., Opel and Sackey 2019; Le Lay & Card 2022). At the core of many conceptions of reciprocity is a recognition that academic priorities—like producing scholarly research and/or creating learning environments for students—are too often the primary concern community-based scholars, and this prioritization occludes the goals and expertise of communities we partner with. The theoretical paradigms that have emerged around the concept of reciprocity have sought to enact more mutually beneficial relationships rooted in collective capacity building, open negotiation around power, and the co-creation of knowledge.

To contribute to ongoing discussions in community-engagement literature, this article questions how our understandings of reciprocity might change in situations where researchers and community members share common identities. I ask, "How do we, as community-engaged researchers, negotiate the practice of reciprocity when we work with communities we are a part of? What alternative approaches to reciprocity emerge when our identities or positionalities overlap with those of community partners?" I've found that discussions of reciprocity often fail to account for such

questions, and most scholarly discourse around reciprocity begins with a tacit premise that researchers or students will occupy different social locations than the communities they partner with. This unstated assumption of difference—difference in identity, difference in geographical location, difference in power or privilege—can be productive, as many university affiliates work in scenarios where there is a significant power differential between themselves and community members. However, by failing to interrogate the concepts of shared identity and difference, or how overlapping positionalities between researchers and community members might inform our approaches to relationship building, we obscure theories of reciprocity that occur when we partner with communities that we are a part of.

When listening to researchers whose identities form a starting point for community-engaged work, different understandings of reciprocity emerge. In particular, I hope to highlight two extensions on current discussions around reciprocity. First, I suggest that working from a basis of shared identity helps deprioritize academic outcomes (e.g., scholarship, teaching) and redirects efforts toward community building and enacting relationships with groups and individuals who sustain us outside of academia. Our commitments to communities exist apart from and beyond any academic expectations, and we often pursue connections with groups or people outside of academia because those communities are important to us and our lives away from the university. Second, this understanding of reciprocity acknowledges that working collaboratively along lines of shared identity places relational sustainability at the forefront of our practices. Reciprocity entails remaining accountable to our relationships over time, enacting sustained forms of action against the structural inequities that affect our communities, and continuing to challenge our academic disciplines in ways that account for the experiences of the

communities we work with. To be clear, pursuing these understandings of reciprocity that focus on shared positionality or similarity is not to say that we should ignore difference, as there are many situations where differences in power are the defining distinction between researchers, students, or academics and the communities they partner with. And even in situations where researchers share commonalities with community partners, it's still necessary to negotiate power and attend to different histories or experiences between those involved in a partnership. But attending more closely to notions of identity, similarity, and difference can support more complex models for reciprocity in community engagement.

To illustrate some tensions around this notion of shared or different identity in community partnership, I highlight examples from extant research where academics and community members share identities, and I intertwine them with reflections on my own experiences as a community-engaged researcher and how my positionality and social location shaped the reciprocal relationships that emerged. I draw from my experiences with the Youth and AIDS Project (YAP), an AIDS-serving organization with services developed for young people located in Minneapolis, as well as the research projects that I've worked on with collaborators there (e.g., Gordon & Green 2022; Green 2021a, 2021b). I reflect on how my place within the queer community forms a basis for a partnership and how, crucially, my identity as a white HIV-negative person informs work with an organization that serves predominantly young people of color living with HIV. Attending to these notions of difference pushed me to consider my own positionality and to interrogate how my positionality shaped my own understandings of research, activism, community, and reciprocity. My work in this article is to not necessarily forward a new theory of community engagement, but to give language to the practices that sustain

much of our work as scholars who are working with communities where we share identities or our positionalities overlap, and to make transparent the values and practices that often filter into our work but do not find homes in our academic publications. This article grapples with processes of conducting research in a way that honors our positions within communities and offers an opening for more explicit representations of reciprocity in our publications and presentations.

On 'Giving Back'

Reciprocity has been widely theorized in community literacy, civic engagement, and community-based scholarship (refer to such scholars as Cushman 1996, 2002; Flower 2008; Hammersley 2017; Miller-Young et al. 2015; Opel & Sackey 2019; Powell & Takayoshi 2003; Remley 2012), and it has become a central framework for describing the relationships between academic and the community partners. While I don't want to relitigate the extensive body of literature around reciprocity, I hope to outline a few key moves in the field. Early approaches to community-based research tend to prioritize the experiences and goals of academic affiliates rather than the communities intended to benefit from those partnerships (refer to Cruz & Giles 2000). These extractive models for engagement have received significant critique. Powell and Takayoshi (2003) characterize these academic-focused approaches to community engagement as a form of "missionary activism," where the researcher is "the one in control, the paternal figure who knows best when to intervene, without invitation" (395). Such models can promote forms of altruistic charity or do-goodism, where community members are defined in terms of their deficits and needs, subject to the paternalistic generosity of academic institutions. Bortolin (2011) found that many universities leverage this altruistic rhetoric in their presentations of community

partnerships, a discourse configuring "the community as a passive recipient of the university's more active agency in designing and implementing community-based projects" (50).

These approaches to community engagement often position communities as "in need" of academic intervention in ways that obscure deeper power imbalances or social antagonisms that perpetuate inequity. Without questioning the way knowledge is produced and disseminated, our practices of community engagement and reciprocity can perpetuate matrices of domination and extraction (Bay 2019). Much of the critique around extractive research practices have come from indigenous and decolonial scholars (e.g., Mukavetz 2008; Smith 2021; Wilson 2001). These critiques emerge from histories of Western scientists performing research on and without the consent of indigenous groups, and they acknowledge that Western forms of knowledge production emerge from and perpetuate extractive colonial power relations (Reo 2019). These orientations toward community engagement isolate knowledge-producing power within the purview of Western academic institutions and obscures the meaning-making practices of local communities or subjugated groups. Some have illustrated how these extractive approaches to research have filtered into service-learning contexts, where students are invited to see their service as an articulation of their superiority over communities rendered "in need" (e.g., Cruz 1990; Hammersley 2016). It also invites questions around the politics of representation of the "Other" (Creese & Frisby 2011) and the power relationships involved when researchers write about stories that are not their own (Opel & Sackey 2019).

As a counter to the extractive research practices that sustain much of community-based work, frameworks developed around the notion of reciprocity seek to develop more equalized mutually

beneficial relationships that orient around community self-determination and collectively advantageous partnerships. Knight (2022), in her recent work *Community is the Way*, describes how the field has developed increasingly complex and rich understandings of reciprocity. Drawing from the work of Dostilio et al. (2012) and Janke (2018), she outlines distinctions between "thin" and "thick" reciprocity, where thin reciprocity refers to partnerships that are largely oriented around transactional give-and-take relationships or exchange. These types of "thin" partnerships are relatively common in many instructors' and universities' approaches to reciprocity, where classes partner with an organization to produce written materials for a group, or when community-engaged researchers offer expertise, insight, or material incentives to community groups they work with. In exchange, researchers often take data that they will use to publish, or students gain experiences that aid in their educational or professional development. For example, researchers have mobilized a commitment to reciprocity by offing financial compensation for time with participants, like donating speaking fees to the community organizations they worked with (e.g., Remley 2012), offering gift cards to participants to compensate them for their time, or royalties from books published after the partnership (e.g., Cushman 1996). It's also common in service-learning and civic engagement contexts to practice reciprocity by allowing students to produce material artifacts in exchange for working together, like posters, brochures, manuals, or other written documents or digital artifacts (Cushman 2002). These transactional forms of reciprocity structure mutual benefit around an exchange or a give-and-take, where researchers often collect data for publication while offering community members material goods that support situated priorities within their organizations.

In contrast, "thicker" approaches to reciprocity, according to Knight (2022), center on collaborative relationships where communities and academic affiliates engage in a mutually sustained process of generating knowledge and sharing power. Thicker approaches focus on collaboration and mutual decision making across all stages of a partnership, with an open negotiation of power and open discourse around how decisions are made (refer to Cushman 1996) and support community self-definition and goal setting (e.g., DeVasto et al. 2019). Shumake & Wendler Shah (2017) characterize this form of reciprocity as "more than the simple back-and-forth exchange of resources—rather, those involved in the exchange can work to deepen the reciprocal relationship, involving collaborative processes and mutual transformation" (9). Powell and Takayoshi (2003) further argue that this form of reciprocity highlights the collaborative mutually sustaining process of knowledge construction, where community partnerships recognize and build from the expertise that all agents bring to a partnership. This approach to reciprocity works against models of community engagement where the researcher holds unilateral power and moves away from projects deployed with fixed research agendas or priorities, instead embracing flexibly and collectively defined outcomes that adapt with fluctuating contextual dynamics. These approaches allow for a prioritization of the expertise that community members bring to partnerships, to view community members not in terms of their deficits or precarities but in terms of their expertise.

On Difference

One of the limitations of this vein of scholarship is that these definitions of reciprocity often work from a tacit premise of difference, that researchers and communities occupy different social locations—or have different goals or preferred outcomes

from a partnership—and that paradigms of reciprocity emerge as a way to navigate those differences. I suggest that there's something to be learned about reciprocity from listening to scholars who do community-based work within their own communities or those who explicitly recognize the differentials around shared positionality in community-engaged research. I'm indebted to many scholars who work with their own communities as a basis for my intervention here, scholars who taught me that our commitments to people are more important than the research we produce (e.g., Gonzales 2018; Haywood 2019; Monberg 2009; Nur Cooley 2020). In her work with women of the Somali diaspora, for instance, Nur Cooley (2020), argues,

> "What I do is not work. What I do is not research. What I do is speak to others using the languages we in the diaspora know to convey our sense of belonging… Doing work within a marginalized community I identify with and belong to, I feel ethically committed to the stories I am given, beyond academic expectations." (3).

I learned about what meaningful research does based on my time with scholars like Nur Cooley (2020), and I believe more can be done in our field's methodological and pedagogical training to focus on research practices like those who pursued similar inquiries before me.

I am particularly indebted to the scholarship of Terese Guinsatao Monberg (2008) who considers how researchers' social positioning could form a starting point for community intervention. Monberg illustrates how most service learning and community-engaged teaching projects prioritize the experiences of students from relatively privileged, predominantly white, backgrounds, and much of the institutional and pedagogical infrastructures around service-learning are designed to support the growth of those students. The

"community" then functions as a strategic space where students who have never experienced marginalization come to encounter difference, understand oppression, and emerge changed. This arrangement, according to Monberg, "positions 'the community' as the location, or the place where we hope students can encounter difference and emerge transformed" (24). Monberg argues that different understandings of service learning could be developed when we center community engagement initiatives on students from communities traditionally pushed to the margins—particularly students of color. Monberg also argues that focusing service learning on students who share social locations with community members can encourage students to move recursively within their home communities to identify spaces for action. Monberg defines this paradigm, "writing as the community" (22), an extension on—and critique to—previous approaches to reciprocity that emphasize writing for or with the community (refer to Deans 2003). Monberg's (2008) approach highlights the underlying assumption of difference between the students in our courses and the communities we partner with, an orientation that limits our vocabulary and ability to conceptualize possibilities for meaningful engaged scholarship within groups or communities that we share commonalities with.

On Similarity

In this section, I hope to highlight a few implications that emerge from explicitly accounting for difference and shared positionality in community-engaged scholarship. One component of this understanding of reciprocity is the recognition that we might work with communities for reasons far beyond our commitments to academia or entirely separate from our research priorities. Many discussions of community-based writing think about engaged research as an extension of our university's philanthropic

obligations to the communities where we're situated. This configuration places our identities as academics and university affiliates at the forefront, as though we work with communities as an extension of our university (and, by proxy, as an extension of our institutions' commitments to "serve" the community). These initiatives, as Mathieu (2005) and Monberg (2008) observe, often result from top-down, strategically funded programs that universities use as "selling points" (Mathieu, 96) to demonstrate their support of communities off campus. Under these conditions, it's assumed that the outcomes and forms of engagement that academics pursue will align with strategic goals of the university, like academic publication, improved teaching and learning experiences, and partnerships that academic institutions can tout to donors or stakeholders. Reciprocity assumes that academics want these types of outcomes and that partnerships must balance these priorities with those of the community.

Many of us, though, pursue connections outside of our universities to, in fact, get away from our universities. I started my work with YAP in 2017 as a volunteer at a Worlds AIDS Day event in the basement of a church in Midtown Minneapolis. I was not particularly guided by research interests at the time, but, as a queer graduate student, I felt removed from my community and the networks of activism and theory building that sustained me at other times in my life. In my PhD graduate coursework, we did not read research that placed queerness at the center of its analytic purview, and queer theory was not a central commitment of our department. So, when I began volunteering at YAP, I did so to bring me closer to my community and to find the people and conversations that I didn't find in graduate school and that had sustained me at other times in life. Accordingly, I did not pursue research as part of a paternalistic institutional charity project but as a community member whose experiences were not valued or sustained by the

institution where I studied. Over that time, I developed close personal relationships with most people who work at YAP. We attended events together, celebrated birthdays, shared meals and happy hours, and supported one another through the trials and successes of life. Our shared commitments to coalitional queer youth activism, advocacy for those living with HIV, and the way our own personal lives intersected with these commitments led to close bonds among those of us who worked there. What's crucial to note about these practices is that they had nothing to do with producing research or publishing articles but instead reflected our shared commitments around queer youth organizing and our mutual friendship. This approach to reciprocity asks us to show up for our communities, even, and especially when, it's not about us or our research projects, and to hold these commitments as a basis for sustained action around the inequities we seek to redress.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2012, 2019) has spoken about these issues at length. She proposes the notion of community accountability to describe how those engaged in community-based justice work "seek to be in ethical, sustainable relationships with the communities they love" (Gumbs 2019) and remain accountable to the people and ancestors who are central to their personal identities (refer also to Pritchard 2022; Haywood 2019). Drawing from hooks (2018), Gumbs (2019) teaches us that our theory and our efforts for justice emerge as "part and parcel" (n.p.) of our place within communities, not as a separate academic exercise that extends from our disciplinary background or expertise in a certain set of research methods. In an interview for *Feminist Teacher* (Talley 2012), Gumbs discusses her community engaged work as a way of recognizing that many queer people, people of color, disabled people, and those otherwise marginalized often pursue careers in academia to advance the changes that our communities have been calling for: "Many of us embarked on our inspiring intellectual

projects out of love for our communities and our desire to transform the world in the image of that love" (Talley 2012, 166). Too often, though, Gumbs observes that by working toward careers in academia, we are encouraged to move away from the communities that we're a part of or pursue forms of knowledge production that are only relevant within academic spheres. By returning to those groups of people that motivate our research and lives outside of academia, scholars enact reciprocity by returning to the spaces and people that motivated our academic pursuits. From this perspective, reciprocity is less oriented around the balance of academic outcomes and rests more in being accountable to the communities that are at the center of our work.

I don't want to gloss over difference and the necessary negotiation of power that happens when we work with people outside the university, even when we share common identities or positionalities with community members. Del Hierro et al. (2019) illustrate how even when we work with communities where there is shared positionality, it is necessary to navigate power difference and tensions in how we define the concepts central to our partnerships. They illustrate how our understandings of concepts like health, land, wellness, and even community may reflect researchers' worldviews, and grappling with these definitions requires an open negotiation among communities and researchers. They conclude, "we can't impose our own perceptions of injustice on lands, bodies, and histories that differ from our own, even when we do have ties to the communities that we inhabit and the community partners that we work with" (40). Attending to difference—even when partnerships are mobilized around a shared set of experiences, locations, or identities—allows us to interrogate how our definitions of concepts like reciprocity and justice emerge in relation to our lived experiences. On this point, Opel and Sackey (2019) caution, "Even seemingly progressive models of reciprocity emerge from a

western rationalist foundation that still privileges academic notions of justice and balance that might be inconsistent with community beliefs and needs" (2).

Riley-Mukavetz (2014) offers helpful insight on these tensions by arguing that all research is, in a sense, intercultural research. Even though Riley-Mukavetz works with communities that she is a part of, she careful navigates how her role within academia complicates the way she approaches her relationships with community members and research participants:

> "[W]hen I talk about intercultural research, I am acknowledging that all research that negotiates multiple spaces, knowledge practices, and beliefs is intercultural research. In addition, this distinction provides the opportunity for researchers to reflect on how they are members of cultural communities within academia with their own sets of shared beliefs and practices to use for communication." (110).

When we place those academic commitments at the center of our decision-making around community-based work, we inevitably encounter situations where we act not out of respect and shared value as the people we are collaborating with, but out of an internalized set of perspectives that prioritize academic outcomes or academic end-goals. Often, our academic affiliations are primary frameworks we use to define ourselves in relation to others, and our experiences working in universities have impacted how we see the world. To dismiss our academic affiliations would be an inaccurate understanding of how we relate to the communities we research with.

Indeed, as I worked with YAP, I continually encountered spaces where difference was a condition of my time there. YAP serves

predominantly young people of color living with HIV, many of whom have been pushed to the margins through a series of compounding structural brutalities. Most of YAP's clients are young people of color, those experiencing homelessness, and those who are otherwise rendered vulnerable by insufficient healthcare systems. By contrast, I am not living with HIV, am able-bodied, white, cisgender, from a middle-class family in rural America. The policies and healthcare infrastructures designed to combat the HIV pandemic were intended for people like me, who have strong social and familial support networks, who have steady access to health insurance, who have never experienced significant trauma in medical settings. And I, indeed, have benefitted in many concrete ways from medical and social support systems around sexual health for communities most impacted by HIV—testing and PrEP, HIV rates among gay white men versus people of color, and healthcare systems are designed to support the health outcomes of those who look like me, which often facilitate outcomes which can lead to longer and easier lives. Working with YAP called on me to move recursively within my own community to encounter difference, nuance, or space for activism and social critique that I did occupy previously. It is a kind of movement that Monberg (2008) characterizes as a hallmark of her framework for community-engaged scholarship, where those working along lines of shared identity move "within their own borders or communities, so they might listen for the deeper textures present in the place(s) they might call 'home'" (22). My point here is not to suggest that sameness was the defining characteristic of my work with young people living with HIV, but that it was necessary to attend to the complexities of identity and the way that difference and commonality shaped the partnership as it emerged. Attending more closely to notions of identity and positionality throughout the partnership helped reflect on my own social location.

On Sustainability

Another component of reciprocity when we work with our home communities is the notion of sustainability, where reciprocity involves long-term commitments to the people we work with that extend beyond and apart from our work in academia. Many times, our understandings of reciprocity—even the richly developed progressive models that emphasize shared power and collaborative knowledge production—can rely on relatively finite time commitments on the part of academic researchers. That is, reciprocity can reflect collaboration as it occurs within the scope of a partnership with no expectation that researchers sustain those commitments after the project, semester, or collaboration has finished. These are not necessarily unproductive, as there are many situations where academic affiliates might work in finite, brief partnerships with communities, like class partnerships or short-term collaborations that reflect the goals of partnering organizations.

However, when we work with communities we're a part of, we continue working around issues that face these communities, often because they affect our lives and the people we are in community with. Bernardo & Monberg (2019) offer a framework for understanding this form of reciprocity, arguing that sustained commitments to the communities we work with offer a basis for reciprocal relationships:

> "[E]nacting reciprocity asks us to slow down in time and do the work repeatedly over long durations of time. To see ourselves as reciprocal beings means we see ourselves not as separate from and working with community members; we see ourselves instead as community members invested in making structural asymmetries legible and open to deep revision." (85)

It's possible to see reciprocity, then, as a sustained and recursive practice where "giving back" accounts for the ongoing relationships we

form with community partners and the way we enact and sustain those relationships over time. Bernardo & Monberg (2019) also point to a key component of reciprocity, that the injustices that we hope to remedy or the challenges facing our communities are not finite isolated phenomena that could be redressed over the course of a semester or even extended partnership; they are instead the product of systems and deep-seated asymmetries that require sustained critique and intervention. These approaches to reciprocity recognize that for many of us working in our home communities, we are motivated to intervene in the systems of injustice that affect us and those around us long after our partnerships are over or even after we move to new cities or universities.

I think often about the sustainability of partnerships and relationships in academia. Our profession asks us to move to different geographical areas after we finish graduate school and to seek new community partnerships or practices when we begin new positions. Our universities often have a vested interest in us pursuing connections with local groups or organizations. This is not necessarily a bad thing to pursue, as establishing connections with groups in our new homes can motivate connections, relationships, and meaningful collaborations that sustain everyone involved. But working with our communities often asks for a different kind of relationship with research or engagement. When we move to new places or new institutions, it is disingenuous to abandon our relationships with other people purely because we move to a new location. Working with our people from our home communities means that we maintain those relationships over time and continue investing in them. In my work with YAP, we did not stop working together after we finished a research project or moved to new areas of the country. Instead, because of our close relationships and mutual commitments to the queer community, we continued collaborating, presenting, and publishing together. It's important to give these relationships space to evolve over time, and there are some situations where it's impossible to maintain connections over a

distance. However, the notion of sustainability in reciprocity calls on us to not abandon relationships solely because of a change of career, position, or location.

Discussions around sustainability and reciprocity are also closely related to discussions of knowledge production, in questioning how we remain committed to the stories and experiences of community members over time. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith (2021) highlights how sharing knowledge with others is part of our long-term sustained commitments to communities. She demonstrates how knowledge production and dissemination are often negotiated with community partners, but, for academic researchers, those commitments end after the scope of a partnership. Conversely, for indigenous researchers, those commitments to knowledge sharing continue:

> "Sharing knowledge is also a long-term commitment. It is much easier for researchers to hand out a report and for organizations to distribute pamphlets than to engage in continuing knowledge-sharing processes. For Indigenous researchers, however, this is what is expected of us as we live and move within our various communities" (16)

When we begin from a position of shared identity, there is less questioning about what counts as knowledge and less unlearning—we know that our communities have been engaged in ongoing theory building and meaning making long before and beyond the scope of the academic gaze (refer also to Wilson 2001).

Those of us who work within our home communities often know that we have a responsibility to the kinds of meaning-making that circulate within those spaces and to treat the practices as a basis for theory building (Riley-Mukavetz 2014). I think of Ríos (2015), who critiques models for civic engagement that assume the academic position is one of distributing knowledge to community members. She inverts the relationship, arguing, "we should consider how our community

partners might affect the trajectory of our curriculum and pedagogy. Instead of assuming that our disciplinary standards define our commitment to communities, we might consider how our commitment to communities challenges our disciplinary norms" (Ríos 2015, 63). Bay (2019) further argues that giving back entails reciprocity on an epistemological rather than material level, writing, "a researcher does not engage a community in order to 'study' a phenomenon, but works with local communities and knowledges to highlight those specific cultural epistemologies as valid and important" (12).

In my time at YAP, I often found that the reciprocal practices that shaped our time together did not emerge out of a negotiated agreement with community partners, but out of a commitment to the queer community and out of a set of relationships that I developed with people at YAP. These commitments and relationships extended before and beyond the confines of the partnership, and they called on me to challenge how discussions of health, queer communities, and technology circulated within my field. For example, in one study I worked on with collaborators at YAP, we sought to learn more about how young people living with HIV used digital technologies and social media to find and discuss HIV-related health information, part of a larger initiative at YAP to leverage social media to disseminate HIV risk reduction messaging. Drawing from user experience and technical communication scholarship around user advocacy and end-user participation, I conducted interviews with clients to better understand their goals, values, and priorities for our proposed digital designs. These interviews were one infrastructure to involve clients as participants in the decision-making processes that affected their healthcare and to ensure that any active digital intervention that YAP designed would be relevant and useful for those intended to benefit from it. Much of the research I had encountered around sexual health digital communication framed HIV risk reduction as a problem of ineffective communication, as an inability for public health entities to

make biomedical information about HIV risk understandable for groups most likely to encounter HIV at some point in their lives.

After listening to stories from young people living with HIV, I learned that I was asking the wrong questions, and that many scholars invested in using social media for HIV-related healthcare were also asking the wrong questions. Public health initiatives often assumed that people living with HIV merely failed to understand biomedical information about HIV risk or needed to have access to more reliable information about sexual health. This perspective fails to acknowledge the situated expertise that young people living with HIV had developed to communicate about a virus they live with and to navigate the complex network of health risks that they navigate daily. For instance, I found that many young people avoided discussing HIV-related topics online, citing fears that interacting with HIV-focused organizations on digital platforms would reveal their serostatus to their friends or social circles. Given the data sharing policies in place for most social media technologies and the persistent stigma surrounding HIV, these risks weighed heavily in young people's decision-making regarding communicating about HIV online (Green 2021a). I also learned that the risks that most impacted people living with HIV were different than the risks prioritized by public health institutions. Things like serostatus disclosure—a hallmark of many HIV risk reduction initiatives—placed people living with HIV at risk of violence, stigmatization, or rejection from sexual partners. These risks compounded when serostatus disclosure was part of the interface design on dating apps as these digital infrastructures tended to place people at risk of extractive capitalist data sharing policies that made vulnerable sensitive personal information about a stigmatized and criminalized health condition (Green 2021b). I drew on the extensive expertise of young people living with HIV and their perspectives on the network of risks that mediated their lives to identify new opportunities for communicating about HIV using digital technologies and social media. In this way, challenging how knowledge is created and disseminated in our field helped me

develop more reciprocal relationships with YAP and the community there and to intervene dominant narratives that circulated around young people living with HIV.

Conclusion

My attempt in this article has been to suggest that when we work with communities that sustain us, when our primary identity is not that of a researcher or academic but as community members motivated by relationships and goals that are separate from the university, or when we pursue connections with others not for teaching or publication or service expectations but to deepen our relationships, new understandings of reciprocity emerge. In particular, I've noticed that most discussions around reciprocity have positioned difference between community members and academics as a tacit premise for "giving back," and that this unstated reliance on difference occludes the reciprocal practices when communities and researchers occupy similar social locations. By attending more explicitly to the tensions between difference and sameness and the way that positionality affects our mobilizations of reciprocity, we can give language to engaged practices—like community building, sustaining relationships, working together beyond and apart from research—common for most of us who work with communities that we share positionalities with.

While the perspectives on reciprocity that I've outlined in this article—I hope—contribute to discussions around community-based work, I want to be clear about a few potential limitations of focusing on shared identity. First, concepts like similarity, shared positionality, or even community could become diluted blanket-statements that end up encompassing any range of commonality between researcher and community members, like occupying the

same geographic location or having similar professional backgrounds. While these commonalities may be true, relying too heavily on those similarities as indicators of solidarity can obscure key differences or imbalances of power that are salient factors impacting a partnership. Further, even when people do occupy similar social locations, they may hold drastically different views about what justice looks like or what productive collaboration should lead to. And even when people do have similar backgrounds or communities and have similar worldviews, those similarities do not always mean that those in community with one another will pursue social justice. That is, researchers may collaborate with people that they are similar to but the nature of their partnership may not advance the goals of social justice or lead to more equitable relationships between academics and their communities. To that end, I don't want to suggest that we should abandon the established theories of reciprocity that (tacitly) focus on difference as they can help us navigate these complicated relationships and understandings of power. Holding explicit conversations about how similarity, overlapping positionality, and difference operate in relation to one another, though, can offer a more complex vocabulary to describe our practices of reciprocity and move us away from a vein of discourse that tacitly centers on academics and academic outcomes.

Academics and graduate students are encouraged to think about community-based research in particular ways. We're taught to consider concepts like participant risk (insofar as it's defined by IRBs and academic organizations), to center on the established methodologies in our fields, and to prioritize academic outcomes (teaching, dissertations, articles) that support university or disciplinary strategic goals. These perspectives often facilitate a mindset that when we work with communities outside of academia, our priorities are structured around those academic infrastructures

and, as a result, often at odds with community outcomes. In that way, we can forget why or for whom we perform research in the first place. By instead focusing on our relationships with others and the way those relationships direct us toward outcomes (academic or otherwise), then we can develop fuller approaches to reciprocity in community engaged research.

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