



NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US

Harm Reduction Research
and
Community-Academic Partnerships

NOVEMBER 6, 2023

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Summary

On November 6th, 2023, Dr. Andress hosted a panel discussion titled “*Nothing about us without us*”. The panel was a critical reflection on community academic partnerships as seen through the lens of harm reduction advocates.

The panel was presented as a reimagining of how community academic partnerships could be reformulated so that research becomes less of a priority and instead the institution makes its ‘resources available to help the community solve crucial issues of importance to the members of the community.

Dr. Andress opened the panel discussion stating that she was new to the state of New Mexico and humbly presenting these ideas with an open mind and a firm commitment to listen, learn, and be open to ideas and information.

The event then starts with a review of why the reflections from harm reduction service providers and advocates was an important element in a critical analysis of community-academic partnerships.

Dr. Andress explains that the use of voices and experiences from HR advocates are instrumental in an examination of community-academic partnerships because, while historically marginalized, HR advocates embody the right to exercise informed refusal and turn down academic partnerships unless the projects: give equal say to advocates and PWUD; incorporate respect, and freedom from stigmatization and criminalization, and prioritize the issues of concern to their population.

Key terms and ideas are introduced to set up the problem including:

1. power imbalances between the researcher and the researched.
2. the notion of informed refusal as a viable action in response to informed consent.
3. cognitive social justice and the social enablers that can make it harder or easier to stigmatize and discriminate; and,
4. a new form of partnership that is community led.

Key Ideas	Informed Refusal= Informed Consent	Illuminates the research experiences of diverse oppressed groups and their ability to both consent and also refuse to consent after informing them. An idea created by Princeton professor Ruha Benjamin
	Cognitive Justice = Social Justice	Changing the social enablerpublic views/attitudes Supporting communityled efforts to fight stigma and discrimination that lead to violence economic insecurity de Sousa Santos, B. (2015). Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide. Routledge
	Community –Academic Partnerships	Any form of relationships between community groups and large academic systems. Ex. Biomedical ForGenerate evidence that is trusted, meaningful, and useful to clinicians, patients, and their families when making health care decisions but, funding and research are orientated to disease preventionobscures broader needs.
	Community Led Partnerships (CLP)	Not restricted to research; Determined by and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community. Advocacy, campaigning and holding decisionmakers to account; Monitoring of policies, practices, and service delivery; Confronting social enablers

Next, Dr. Andress states the problem: As with most R1 systems it is often hard to determine which master the university serves. Is it:

1. research that employs community engagement?
2. the needs of the community which may or may not involve research?

She goes on to say that admittedly academic institutions try to balance community needs against the funding priorities set by other systems, but the results continue to portray communities locked in cycles of poor health and low wealth and clear messages from oppressed groups that issues, needs, and problems from those communities persist.

The event objectives were listed:

Objectives

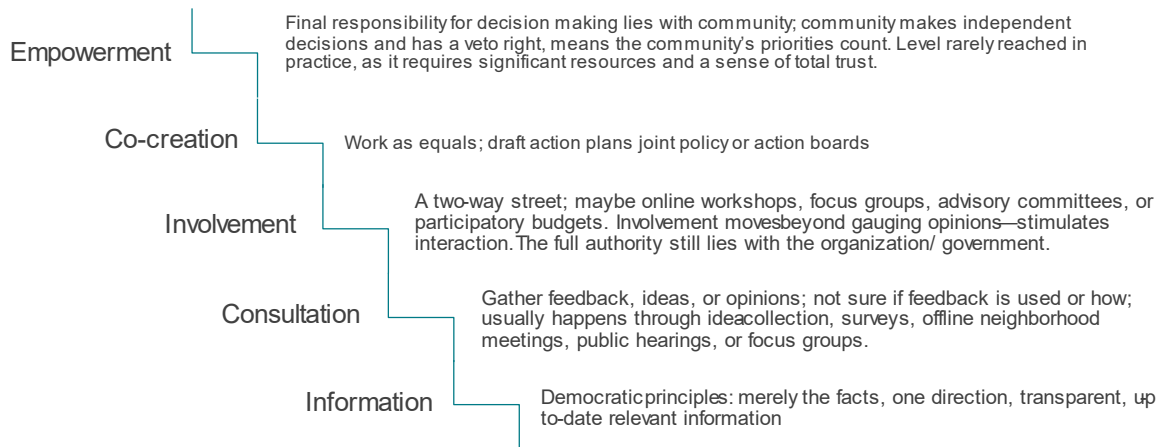
Critical Reflection	How can Academic Institutions be of Greater Service to Oppressed Communities?
Discuss	Models of Community Engagement: Biomedical Model & 21 st Century Model
Examine	Challenges to Academic Partnerships from the perspective of Harm Reduction Advocates
Explore	Informed Refusal; Power imbalances; Cognitive Justice Challenges to Academic Partnerships from the perspective of Harm Reduction Advocates



Dr. Andress then explores the history of community participation starting from the ladder of citizen participation introduced in the 1960s by UK sociologist Sherry Arnstein.

Developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969.

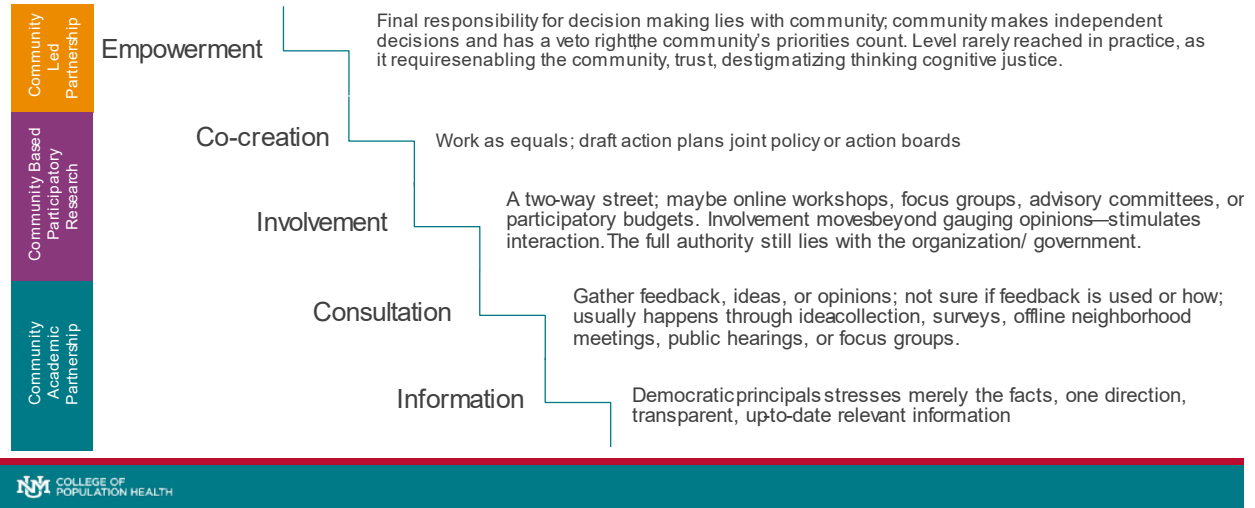
The Ladder of Citizen Participation



Dr, Andres examines how citizen participation became a tool for research and out of this came different forms of research partnerships at the community level.

Developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969.

The Ladder of Citizen Partnership



She explores a traditional biomedical framework for citizen engagement and the discourse around why it is positioned as a good model. She explains subsequent research demonstrating that the culture of biomedicine can be reductionists only engaging with groups simply because of their characteristics while not treating them as co-equal partners and only working on narrowly defined issues that refer to biomedical problems or healthcare issues as opposed to problems central to the community that are the root causes of the health problems.

Her presentation goes next to the middle of the 1960s ladder of engagement juxtaposed against CBPR. Finally, Dr. Address looks at the 1960s Arnstein ladder and proposes community lead partnerships as the future of community academic partnerships. Here the institution focuses less on research and the funding priorities of other systems and more on the needs of the oppressed community groups.

The event then uses these ideas to begin a discussion with the harm reduction advocates where their experiences are centered as examples of narratives that exemplify the power imbalances and less helpful aspects of academic partnerships thus highlighting the need for a community led model of community academic partnerships.