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Uniting Liberatory and Participatory Approaches in Public Psychology With Refugees

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Increasing inequities both within and between nations call psychologists to consider whom they intend their research and practice to serve. The purpose of this article is to propose a public psychology rooted in the values of liberation psychology and utilizing participatory research methods to enact change. To exemplify this framework, we present the work of a community research partnership between academics and individuals with lived experience as refugees. All aspects of our research process, including the development of research questions and design, data collection and analysis, and dissemination and action planning, have been conducted via community-academic collaboration. Our focus has been to gain understanding of the strengths and concerns of Cincinnati's diverse refugee communities to inform actions promoting civic engagement. Refugee coresearchers successfully administered a collectively developed survey to 291 refugees in seven languages and facilitated follow-up focus groups with 35 people. Additionally, refugee coresearchers have identified three action plans based on the research findings to promote civic engagement; thus, translating research into meaningful action. This article details phases of our research process and interprets findings in the context of liberation psychology to illustrate the benefits of public psychology for academia, social policy, and community practice. We also discuss how our research illustrates the ways public psychology has the potential to not only promote greater equity but also to improve science.

Public Significance Statement
This article describes how working with refugees as partners in the research process rather than as research subjects can make research more rigorous, just, and easily translated into meaningful action with real-world impact.

Keywords: liberation psychology, participatory research, refugees, civic participation, public psychology

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According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC, 2020) there are now more than 79 million refugees or forcibly displaced people worldwide. Although existing international agreements require that countries offer safe harbor to refugees, these agreements are increasingly neglected, and regularly prove insufficient in

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cultivating environments that foster the actualized well-being of refugees (Torres, 2018). Additionally, among the millions of people seeking safe harbor, those who are granted refugee status regularly experience substantial challenges to feeling safe, included, and empowered in their resettled homes (García-Ramírez et al., 2011). Moreover, where there has been increased attention to the plight of refugees, very little of the coverage or analysis in academic or media outlets has centered the perspectives and goals of refugees themselves.

Since 1975 approximately 3 million refugees have been resettled in the United States. In recent years, a number of restrictive and hostile policies toward refugees and asylum seekers have been imposed by the Trump administration. For example, in September 2019 the administration dropped the number of refugees who can be accepted into the United States to 18,000 a year. This is less than a quarter of historic national averages and well below the cap of 110,000 refugees set by the Obama administration in 2016. Simultaneously, migrants seeking asylum through the U.S.-Mexico border have been met with several demoralizing policies including separating children from parents and indefinite stays in dehumanizing detention centers (Torres, 2018). Immigrants and refugees in the United States have also experienced increased profiling and hostility in public spaces in connection to growing nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments (da Silva Rebelo et al., 2020; Dutt & Kohfeldt, 2019). Despite this harsh context, refugees and asylum seekers are actively building meaningful lives and making impactful contributions to their resettled homes in the United States.

It is with this backdrop in mind that we examine the challenges and possibilities that emerge in developing a "public psychology" with, and in support of, diverse refugee communities. Increasing inequities impacting groups both within and between countries call psychologists to consider whom they intend their research and practice to serve. Moreover, growing critiques of psychology as the study of people from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD; Henrich et al., 2010) societies incentivize both the inclusion of substantially more diverse voices in psychological research and the use of methodologies that contribute to justice-oriented social change. To build a psychology that serves the public good, while bridging gaps between science and society, it is necessary to interrogate the historic and contemporary impact of the discipline in civic life, and heed the calls of myriad psychologists who have long advocated for social justice to guide the future of the discipline (Fine, 2012; Hammack, 2018; Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 2012; Prilleltensky, 2001; Vasquez, 2012). Inspired by the social justice mission of liberation psychology, the goals of this article are twofold. First, we aim to establish the value of utilizing a liberation psychology framework in building the future of public psychology. Second, we illustrate the benefits to both community justice and scientific inquiry when applying this approach to research, as we outline participatory research processes, findings, and actions from our ongoing collaboration with and for refugees resettled in the United States. The scope of our specific research and action process includes seven different refugee communities living in greater Cincinnati, Ohio. However, we argue that the implications of expanding awareness and understanding of liberation psychology approaches can serve all psychologists who are seeking to contribute to the public psychology project.

Psychology and the Public

Psychology has had a complex relationship with the public since its emergence as an area of study. Individuals have long been drawn to the field out of an interest in serving others and improving human wellbeing, and the American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct emphasizes beneficence, responsibility to society, and the need to uphold justice (APA, 2017). Additionally, numerous psychologists over the past century have centered their careers on contributing to the transformation of individual experience and social context to disrupt harm and promote human flourishing. The subfield of community psychology, in particular, is noteworthy in drawing to the field researchers who use participatory research methods to work toward liberatory outcomes in public spaces (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Furthermore, the work of psychologists and their partners utilizing community engaged and action-oriented methodologies has led to improved realities in public and social spaces including schools, health

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Anjali Dutt

care settings, prisons, and neighborhood contexts (e.g., Fine & Torre, 2006; Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012; Lykes, 2013; Vaughn et al., 2017).

And yet, our history also includes examples wherein the discipline has been supportive of serious public harm. Perhaps the darkest example is the complicity and support of eugenics by several prominent early 20th century psychologists (e.g., Hall, 1917; Thorndike, 1909; Watson, 1919). Grounded in the belief that societies could be improved by identifying supposedly superior races and nationalities, and hereditary determinants of "weakness," several psychologists worked to develop methods and assessments that would advance this mission (Yakushko, 2019). The implications of this research lead to support of involuntary sterilization, anti-immigrant policies, and the development of asylums in the Unite States (Yakushko, 2019). More recently, psychologists were recruited to assist in developing interrogation techniques that involved torture for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (LoCicero et al., 2016). Although these examples may be viewed as aberrations in the discipline's relationship with the public, efforts to uphold values of scientific neutrality in psychology can have a far-reaching ill-effect on the public, and in particular marginalized community members. Prilleltensky (1989) made the following argument about psychology more than 30 years ago; however, the trend endures (Gokani & Walsh, 2017): "Psychology is instrumental in maintaining the societal status quo by (a) endorsing and reflecting dominant social values, (b) disseminating those values in the persuasive form of so-called value-free scientific statements, and (c) providing an asocial image of the human being, which in turn portrays the individual as essentially independent from sociohistorical circumstances" (p. 800). In developing a public psychology there can be no room for complicity with a status quo that actively perpetuates inequity and harm.

Although most contemporary psychologists would likely repudiate scientific values systems that knowingly and explicitly contribute to harm, we are not immune to the sociopolitical tides that shape ideology and public consciousness. Thus, in developing a public psychology, it is paramount that researchers are guided by value systems that are truly in service to the public, and especially communities most vulnerable to harm. Both the methods of analysis and action, and targeted outcomes of the approach should be rooted in values of solidarity, care, and justice (Dutt, 2018). We argue that a liberation psychology approach offers the necessary roots from which a public psychology can grow.

Liberation Psychology and Participatory Research

Liberation psychology is an approach to psychological research and practice that aims to develop deeper understanding of concepts and theories that affect human realities through active work toward social transformation in the service of social justice (Burton & Kagan, 2005; Lykes, 2000; Moane, 2006; Montero & Sonn, 2009). The approach is grounded in an understanding that oppression is both intrapsychic and sociopolitical (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Liberation psychology was initially developed, described, and practiced by Ignacio Martín-Baró, a social psychologist and Jesuit priest working in El Salvador during the country's civil war. Influenced by his observance of grave human rights violations, Martín-Baró wrote prolifically about the need for psychologists to anchor their work in alleviating distressed communities, and transforming social conditions that produce marginalization (Martín-Baró, 1989, 1994). Before he was murdered by the U.S. government-funded Salvadoran National Guard, Martín-Baró's work was dedicated to learning about and subsequently exposing the lived realities of Salvadorans in the context of war and developing community-based actions that encouraged transformation based on understanding of shared humanity (Lykes, 2000). Over the past three decades psychologists working from a liberation psychology perspective, especially those working in the Américas, have contributed to developing and enacting theories, methods, and analytic perspectives that deepen understanding of the consequences of injustice and processes to address exploitation (Adams et al., 2015; Comas-Díaz & Rivera, 2020; Dutt & Grabe, 2019; Fernández, 2018; Lykes, 2000; Montero & Sonn, 2009).

A central emphasis in liberation psychology is the need to de-construct ideologies that foster injustice and serve to objectify and oppress marginalized communities (Burton &

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Ernestine Manirambona

Kagan, 2005; Grabe et al., 2014; Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 2012). Rather than remaining complicit with inequitable policies, structures, and practices, liberation psychology emphasizes mobilizing processes that can produce both concrete and ideological transformations within societies (Montero, 2012). A growing literature illustrates the impact of liberation psychology in practice. For example, Mayengo et al. (2018) documented the process of working with children in two primary schools in Uganda to examine changing consciousness around concepts of peace and conflict, illustrating increased complexity in identifying roots of violence (e.g., food scarcity) and growing perception of seeing oneself as an agent of change. Additionally, Grabe et al. (2014) demonstrated that marginalized women living in rural communities in both Nicaragua and Tanzania participated in processes through which individual resistance was channeled into collective mobilization and attempts to create social change via creating opportunities for women to own land.

Published findings and theoretical developments utilizing a liberation psychology approach provide a strong foundation for a public psychology to include communities oppressed by inequitable power dynamics and to commit to using the discipline in the service of social transformation toward greater justice. These values that ground liberation psychology are consistent with the aims of participatory research, which engages those who typically serve as research participants instead as partners in research processes focused on local community change (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Jagosh et al., 2012; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). Participatory research is an umbrella term that encompasses any systematic inquiry that collaborates with stakeholders or community members to gain knowledge to inform action or change (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Participatory research is prolific across disciplines but goes by many names (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020); within psychology, community psychologists have historically been the most common practitioners and tend to describe research that shares decision-making with community partners as community science (Luke, 2005); community-based participatory research (Jacquez et al., 2013); or participatory action research (Kidd et al., 2018). Liberation psychology and participatory methods are connected. Martín-Baró was influenced by the developers and practitioners of participatory methods including Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire, and several psychologists have continued their work simultaneously employing both liberation and participatory approaches (Fernández, 2018; Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012; Lykes, 2000). When discerning a path to create a public psychology, liberation psychology should inform the values and participatory methods outline an approach for conceptualizing practices to develop projects.

Refugee Resettlement and Civic Life

The potential for scientific rigor and community change is amplified when applying a liberation psychology approach to research with and for refugees. The specific focus of our collaborative project has been to increase and improve opportunities for refugees to participate in the civic life of this region. Theorists, activists and others interested in the structures of governance in their communities have suggested that “deepening” democratic processes can lead to engaging communities more thoroughly in civic policies and practices (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Fung & Wright, 2003; Gaventa, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008). Efforts to increase capacity to participate in democratic processes involves creating participatory strategies to increase community members’ engagement in civic domains, creating more pathways for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and in turn, the ability for governing bodies to support more just realities for their constituents (Goldfrank, 2007). A goal is to place decision-making more directly in the hands of local communities and those who are affected most by a particular issue, supporting a sense of agency among residents in determining social outcomes (Fung & Wright, 2003; Gaventa, 2006). By opening up space to discuss and contribute to civic decision-making, individuals may come to view themselves as capable of impacting sociopolitical structures and encourage further civic engagement. Increased civic leadership may be particularly meaningful for refugee populations who are more frequently cast as individuals in need of support, rather than individuals with agency capable of contributing to change (Pupavac, 2008).

Furthermore, refugees experience unique barriers to engagement in civic life. For example, refugees are unable to apply for citizenship in the United States until they have received a green card and lived in the country for at least 5 years. Thus,

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Bryan Wright

traditional modes of civic engagement such as voting are not possible during the first several years of relocation (Hynie, 2018). Identifying and transforming sources of hardship and harm with and for refugees, and building upon existing community strengths, may be enhanced through processes to deepen democratic practices. Previous research with diverse groups internationally illustrates that developing inclusive and engaged decision-making practices can successfully increase the civic participation of disenfranchised communities. Examples include groups to increase women's participation in political decision-making in Kenya, Russia, and Uganda (Goldenberg, 2008); participatory budgetary planning in communities in Brazil (Baiocchi, 2003); community engagement in education reform within cities in the United States (Fung & Wright, 2003); and creating space for public deliberation of local politics in Brazil, South Africa, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Goldfrank, 2007). Furthermore, substantial research documents positive outcomes for marginalized communities associated with deeper civic engagement including social and economic benefits, and improvements in psychological well-being (Dutt, 2018; Dutt & Grabe, 2019; Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008).

Participatory research with disenfranchised communities is central to identifying successful methods to deepen democracy, in part because methods will vary based upon the diverse needs, concerns, and priorities of local groups. Steps toward promoting participatory practices involve providing support for local community members to deliberate and define solutions to relevant problems, decentralizing decision-making practices, and supporting a culture where civic engagement is valued and viewed as an essential component of producing effective democracy (Fung & Wright, 2003; Gaventa, 2006). Collectively, these practices support the development of both research and community policies that lend to increased public participation.

As a nontraditional immigrant destination city, with a growing refugee population, Cincinnati, Ohio serves to benefit from efforts to deepen democratic processes with and for refugees via community based participatory research. Historically, when the United States began resettling refugees, the majority of government-sponsored refugees were resettled in gateway cities such as New York, Chicago, and Miami. These are traditional immigrant destinations with extensive transit systems and established social institutions to support resettlement (Morken & Skop, 2017). However, a trend over the past two decades has been to resettle refugees in smaller cities and rural communities, in part because this is believed to assist with assimilation to U.S. society (Hume, 2015). These nontraditional resettlement locations do not have the same number of resources as traditional gateway cities, and access to needed resources can be hindered further by factors such as insufficient transportation systems and lack of existing networks to support newly arrived refugees (Morken & Skop, 2017). Given this context, there is particular need to work collaboratively with refugees resettled in nontraditional destination cities, such as Cincinnati, to develop processes and practices for deeper involvement and influence in local civic life. Moreover, through participatory research with local refugees, we can work to address identified challenges and create a more just and inclusive city (Hanza et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2009).

Civic Action for Refugee Empowerment (CARE) Cincinnati: A Case Study

As an example of public psychology in action, Civic Action for Refugee Empowerment (CARE) Cincinnati is a participatory research team centered on refugees developing and enacting their own agenda for empowered civic engagement. Our team includes 12 members from seven refugee communities who reside in the Greater Cincinnati community (see Table 1), as well as two university professors and the director of a local immigrant welcoming organization. The Research Coordinator on this project (and third author of this article) is a refugee from Burundi who recently became a United States citizen. Both university professors come from families with recent immigration histories (from Mexico and India), however, are not themselves refugees or immigrants. The director of the local organization has over a decade of experience working in partnership with refugees and immigrants and he also is not a refugee or immigrant. That we cannot relate to the refugees via our own lived experience requires serious reflection on the inherent gaps in our knowledge, and further necessitates a methodology that centers the knowledge of refugee coresearchers. We will describe CARE Cincinnati as a participatory research team and the results of our first action research project, an

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Table 1
CARE: CITY Team Demographic Information

Community represented	First language	Gender	Years in United States	Age
Burundi	Kirundi	Male	12	23
Iraq	Arabic	Female	3	46
Congolese	French	Male	3	75
Somali	Somalian	Female	6	19
Guatemalan	Spanish	Female	5	27
Syrian	Arabic	Male	2	44
Bhutanese	Nepali	Female	7	23
Congolese	French	Male	3	29
Bhutanese	Nepali	Female	9	25
Somali	Somalian	Female	6	16
Bhutanese	Nepali	Male	9	18
Burundi	Kirundi	Female	12	27

investigation into the social, environmental, and civic experiences of diverse refugee communities across the Greater Cincinnati region.

Cincinnati, and the state of Ohio as a whole, has a long history of welcoming refugees dating back to the early 1900s with the arrival of German, Irish, Jewish, Polish, Asian, and Eastern European refugees. More recently, in 2017, Ohio welcomed the third greatest number of newly resettled refugees, trailing behind only Texas and California. Although it is challenging to calculate accurate numbers of refugees residing in a particular region due to secondary migration (i.e., when refugees move to another location within the United States after their initial resettlement), records from local organizations serving refugee populations estimate that there are more than 25,000 refugees residing in Cincinnati and the surrounding region. Bhutanese refugees are the largest refugee community in Cincinnati. In recent years, more refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, and Iraq, asylum seekers from Mauritania, and recipients of special immigrant visas from Iraq and Afghanistan have moved to the region.

Currently, and consistent with national standards, refugee integration into the Cincinnati community occurs though an official resettlement organization. Through this process, refugees are supported in finding housing and employment, signing up for school, utilizing public transportation, and so forth, for an average of 60 days. Although these areas of support in navigating life in a new country are essential, the prescribed nature of this support does little to acknowledge refugees' own agency, nor promotes the full integration of refugees into the civic life of their new community. With grant funding from AmeriCorps, two university-based researchers and the director of an organization focused on immigrant welcoming worked with three community-based organizations serving refugees to recruit individuals to serve on a participatory research team. Through these partnerships, a team comprised of 12 members of seven different refugee communities was formed to develop and enact their own agenda for empowered civic engagement in the Cincinnati region (Dutt et al., in press). Because little was known about daily experiences across local refugee communities, CARE Cincinnati aimed to learn more about the strengths and challenges refugees are currently experiencing related to living, working, and socializing in this region, and develop insights into what is needed to increase civic engagement. After two monthly meetings centered on building rapport, trust, and understanding of collective and individuals goals, our team decided that collecting data from a large sample of refugees from diverse populations would provide the most convincing evidence to drive program development and policy change. The team chose a mixed method strategy consisting of survey administration followed by focus groups to interpret survey results. Prioritizing voice of refugees living in our community, CARE Cincinnati made action plans that addressed community needs and had high potential for impact. Throughout the entire research and actions process we aimed to prioritize the concerns and perspectives of the refugee team members, consistent with the values of liberation psychology. We also conducted a participatory evaluation interviews with refugee members of the team to ensure values of equity and inclusion were upheld (Dutt et al., in press).

Phase 1: Greater Cincinnati Refugee Experiences Survey

Surveys were completed by 291 refugees representing seven refugee communities (43% Bhutanese, 17% Arabic, and 13% Somalian, 10% Congolese, 10% Guatemalan, and 8% Burundian), over the course of 3 months. Survey respondents were fairly balanced in gender (55% female) and marital status (56% married). Age ranged from 18 to 62 (M = 31.11, SD = 12.39). Average time in the United States ranged from 3 months to 20 years (M = 6.74 years, SD = 3.85).

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CARE Cincinnati team members collaboratively developed a survey to capture experiences of refugees across a broad spectrum of daily life. Items focused on topics that team members identified as most salient in their daily lives, including transportation, employment, safety, health care, social support, civic engagement, and family life. Designing the survey in this manner allowed for members of the refugee community to determine the areas we should examine, and is consistent with the values of liberation psychology. Concerted efforts were made to ensure the survey was accessible across communities that involved a rigorous process of ensuring each question could be translated accurately into the different languages that the survey would be administered. We also opted to limit response categories for each question to: yes, somewhat, no, do not know, and no answer, to increase ease of survey completion (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). The survey was piloted before administration and edits to questions were made such as eliminating questions for redundancy, reordering items, and editing wording.

University researchers provided research training in survey administration and data recording procedures to CARE Cincinnati team members over the course of three monthly meetings. Following training, refugee coresearchers approached other refugees and invited them to participate in a survey about refugee life in Cincinnati. Coresearchers explained that names would not be associated with answers and any question could be skipped. Those who responded yes to the initial screening item (Did you move to the United States as a refugee or as someone fleeing hardship?) were verbally administered the survey and the study team recorded responses on paper. Participants received $10 gift cards after the survey was completed.

Table 2 depicts responses to each item by refugee community. Responses were dichotomized into positive endorsements of the item versus other responses. Items in which groups differed significantly on frequency of positive responses are noted in Table 2. Overall, refugees were reporting relatively positive experiences in Cincinnati. Most respondents liked their living situation and felt safe in their neighborhood. Most were happy with the amount of time available to spend with family and reported that they had places to go to spend time with family (except for Burundian community). Most said they had friendships and a person to count on at any time and could network and make connections in the city. At least three quarters of participants from each refugee community said that they felt welcomed in the city and the majority said they wanted to become more involved in civic life.

Refugee experiences were less positive in two areas. First, employment-related items tended to have lower positive responses. Fewer refugees reported feeling good about their job situation, with most participants in the Congolese and Burundian communities reporting some level of dissatisfaction. It is worth noting that the history of anti-Black racism in the city likely contributes to a exacerbated discrimination among Congolese and Burundian refugees due to their race and migration status (Taylor, 1993). The ability to use education and skills in one's current job situation was especially concerning; less than half of Arabic, Congolese, Latino, and Burundian communities responded positively to this item. Second, positive endorsement related to navigating life in the United States and the city were relatively low. When asked "Do you ever feel like you do not know the rules in US?," positive endorsements were almost uniformly lower than any other item. Similarly, when asked, "Do you feel like you understand how to get through the system here?," positive endorsements ranged from 23–60%.

Phase 2: Data Interpretation Focus Groups

To help interpret survey results, refugee members of our team facilitated focus groups with other refugees in community locations. Focus groups began 1 month after completing the initial analyses of the surveys, and occurred over a 2 month period. Participants were recruited through existing social networks. Focus groups were approximately 90 min and participants received a $25 gift card as an incentive. Facilitators conducted focus groups in their primary language and a second team member took extensive notes. In total, 35 people participated in the focus groups: 8 Bhutanese, 5 Arabic, 12 Congolese, 6 Latino, and 4 Burundian. Scheduling challenges prohibited an interpretation session in the Somali community.

During the focus groups, facilitators shared a summary of the preliminary survey findings. This was consistent with the liberatory aims of the project because it ensured that the findings from the survey would be shared with the refugee communities. The discussion was then guided by five collaboratively developed questions: (1) What is most surprising to you about these findings? (2) Which of the areas covered concerns you the most? (3) What are some actions you would like to see happen in Cincinnati to address the concerns listed? (4) Is there anything else you would like us to know about refugee experiences? And, (5) Are you interested in getting more involved in the Cincinnati community? If so, in what ways would you like to do so?

After all focus groups were complete, the two academic team members completed thematic analysis of the extensive notes. This process involved reading and rereading the notes, and identifying codes that were then collapsed into overarching themes in a systematic manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three predominant themes arose that reflected areas in which the team could develop actions that could contribute to addressing barriers and sources of hardship. After completing this initial analysis, we shared the themes with the larger CARE Cincinnati team for confirmation of accuracy, discussion of themes across communities, and to determine consequent actions.

Table 2
Percent Responding Positively to Each Survey Item, by Refugee Community

Survey item	Bhutanese% of ($n = 124$)	Arabic% of ($n = 49$)	Somalian% of ($n = 38$)	Congolese% of ($n = 28$)	Latino% of ($n = 28$)	Burundian% of ($n = 24$)
No trouble with transportation[a]	63	78	66	70	18	67
Feels safe where living[a]	89	78	94	93	82	71
Likes living situation[a]	83	78	89	70	79	57
Able to get healthcare needed	77	88	89	79	81	78
No trouble communicating with doctor or nurse[a]	58	69	66	58	55	79
Feels good about job situation	66	63	61	42	52	36
Able to use skills in job[a]	52	47	57	24	27	39
Happy with the amount of time with family[a]	65	69	94	58	69	68
Has places to go to spend time with friends[a]	81	76	92	64	54	58
Can make connections and network in city	75	82	64	69	67	78
Has a person to count on at any time in city[a]	89	75	69	85	79	96
Happy with friendships in city[a]	86	84	95	71	83	58
Knows the rules of life here in the United States	33	53	35	36	25	48
Knows how to get through the system in city[a]	48	65	52	60	23	50
Feels they are treated fairly in city	54	65	86	62	74	50
Feels welcomed in city	82	76	84	96	96	82
Proud of life created in city[a]	87	74	100	71	81	54
Wants to become more involved in the city[a]	59	94	76	92	67	74

[a] Indicates chi-square analyses reveal significant differences among refugee communities, $p < .05$.

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Across all five focus groups much discussion centered around issues with employment. In both the Arabic and Bhutanese communities, attendees emphasized the desire for existing skills and education in the community to be acknowledged and considered when seeking employment. Bhutanese attendees also explained that an inability to obtain better jobs had hindered their ability to improve their life circumstances. In the Burundian interpretation session, attendees explained instances where they had to pretend to like their jobs and endure exploitation (e.g., not receiving payment for working overtime) for fear that they would lose employment. Latinx attendees also explained that they were treated and paid poorly, and noted that challenges such as not having a driver's license exacerbated difficulty in obtaining descent jobs.

A second theme prominent across all five focus groups was a desire for more support during the transition to life in the United States. Most groups noted that they would have benefited from more time to learn English, and in learning about the rules and norms of life in U.S. society. In the Arabic, Burundian, Bhutanese, and Latinx groups, issues related to housing, especially during initial relocation also arose in discussion. Some explained that housing in Cincinnati, while not ideal, was better than what they experienced in refugee camps. Additionally, some attendees explained that they eventually obtained housing that allowed them to feel safe and satisfied, many felt they were initially placed in housing situations that were either unsafe or otherwise inadequate when they first arrived in the United States. Bhutanese attendees further explained that the 90 days of support that is typically provided during relocation from an official resettlement agency is insufficient because after this period, people are left unsure of how to navigate systems that becomes a source of fear and hardship.

Attendees in all communities also expressed a desire to have more opportunities to connect with other refugees, including refugees from communities other than their own, and for opportunities to become more involved in local civic life. However, attendees expressed uncertainty about how to do so. In the Latinx session, attendees also explained that the racism they experienced made them fearful of engaging with the community outside of their homes.

Phase 3: Action Planning

About 1 year after convening as a team, we turned our focus toward developing actions. Based on information gathered through the survey and community interpretation of survey results, the CARE Cincinnati team weighed two factors in developing action plans. First, we identified areas that were highlighted as sources of hardship in the survey and data interpretation sessions. As a research team guided by the values of liberation psychology, we shared a commitment to ensuring our actions were supported by data; thereby, reflecting community voice rather than our own perspectives. Second, we prioritized actions that were most feasible in our local context and had the highest potential impact. Three major action plans were identified.

First, difficulty in understanding how to navigate the systems of our city was identified as a challenge in both survey findings and focus groups. Participants also showed strong interest in becoming more involved in civic life in our region. With an interest in both addressing the challenges associated with lack of knowledge about navigating life in the city and supporting capacity to become more involved, CARE Cincinnati decided to create a series of civic leadership workshops that would provide both information and opportunities for refugees to become involved in civic life.

We have piloted a five session series of virtual meetings with civic leaders, including representatives of mayor's office, city council, and advocacy organizations to provide information about how local government works and to identify leadership positions (e.g., board memberships) that can be held by CARE Cincinnati's refugee coresearchers. We are currently revamping the series based on pilot feedback and will roll out the full version to fifty immigrants and refugees in Cincinnati in Spring 2021.

Second, based on the relative difficulty reported on the survey with understanding the rules in the United States and navigating systems, as well as refugee coresearchers' own experiences, CARE Cincinnati prioritized the creation of a "How to Live in Cincinnati" guide. The guide will consist of both written material and linked videos detailing information that is often unfamiliar to those transitioning to life in the United States, and in Cincinnati in particular. We are currently creating videos on topics including tenant rights, worker rights, availability of ESL classes, and an overview of processes such as completing taxes and how to enroll youth in school. We are also meeting with partner organizations that support refugees and local ethnic-based community organizations with refugee leadership to learn more about their ideas about the contents of the "How to Live in Cincinnati" guide, and further circulate the guide upon completion.

Third, the CARE Cincinnati team was collectively struck by the overall positive survey findings, which were interpreted as a reflection of the resilience and strength in refugee populations. In addition, reflecting on our experience collaborating as a diverse team representing a wide range of refugee communities brought to the surface a strong feeling of solidarity and incentive to work for justice and care for all refugees in the region (Dutt et al., in press). Whereas we are fortunate to have many strong ethnicity-based advocacy organizations in our city, they are largely siloed and focused on one community. In the focus groups, participants said that they knew many refugees in their own communities, but had few to no connections with other refugee communities. To amplify community building and collective solidarity, we planned a large event celebrating diverse refugee communities to occur in April 2020. Music, dancing, family photographs, and other celebratory activities were scheduled in addition to information dissemination activities (e.g., how to participate in the Census). Unfortunately, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic indefinitely postponed our celebration event. Although disappointing, CARE Cincinnati's pandemic pivot exemplifies the flexibility and community relevance that is a major strength in participatory research. Refugee coresearchers witnessed the severe negative effects the pandemic was having on their communities (and in several cases, in their own lives). They wanted to identify ways to make sure refugees had access to resources and support. CARE Cincinnati decided to use the funding for the celebration to instead conduct a survey to document the affect COVID-19 was having on refugees in our area. In just 1 month, coresearchers collected 157 surveys that illuminated the deleterious influence the pandemic was having on local refugees. Whereas our first survey documenting experiences in Cincinnati yielded unexpectedly positive responses, the COVID-19 survey made clear that in situations of turmoil, refugees were suffering as much or more than other Cincinnatians. Results of the survey were quickly shared with city council and local support organizations, who adapted their outreach strategies to more effectively reach refugee communities.

Challenges

Despite the accomplishments of CARE Cincinnati in a time when the United States was in the midst of public health and social justice crises, our liberation-oriented participatory research with refugees is not immune to persistent obstacles to successful research for action. We struggle with many of the beaurocratic challenges that are likely all too familiar to academics who work with community partners, particularly the consistent struggle to share resources that are held in university coffers. CARE Cincinnati's academic partners have spent innumerable hours working within the complex university administrative system to get payment to refugees who have earned it. The difficulty and delays in paying community coresearchers for their work is not only unjust, it also threatens the trust that is crucial in academic-community partnerships built on liberatory values. In addition to issues with financial red tape, we have experienced ongoing challenges with relationship maintenance and consistent research engagement. Maintaining genuine, authentic relationships across languages and cultures has been a hurdle from the beginning, but virtual meetings have forced us to identify new ways to connect and collaborate (with varying success). Relatedly, the degree to which individual members of the CARE Cincinnati team have been actively engaged has also waxed and waned over the 2.5 years we have worked together. Despite these challenges, most refugee coresearchers have remained passionate and flexible; their commitment undergirds all success.

Liberation-Based Participatory Research With Refugees

Refugees, who by definition escaped persecution to seek better circumstances, represent the fundamental asset of human resilience; however, refugees are marginalized in the United States and face significant barriers to civic participation. To reach its full potential, a public psychology

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must prioritize and meaningfully engage refugees and other oppressed communities in research aimed toward real-world change. Psychologists aiming to engage in public psychology must ensure that their values reject a status quo that perpetuates inequity. Thus, we argue that public psychology should be guided by the values of liberation psychology and utilize participatory methods to allow those most affected by oppression to become the drivers of justice-oriented change.

The purpose of applying a liberation psychology approach to research is to use the tools of the discipline to actively work against ideological and concrete sources of oppression and injustice. With an explicit aim of working to address inequities from the lens of liberation psychology, CARE Cincinnati was formed in 2017 with the intention of using participatory research to gain greater insight into the lived experiences of refugees, and work to improve the realities, opportunities, and civic representation of refugees in this region. Through surveys and focus groups we have been able to cast a light on sources of hardship and inequity in the communities, and challenge narratives that portray refugees as dependent or inferior by highlighting strengths, resilience, and solidarity within the communities. We are working to disrupt oppressive contexts and shift perceptions of refugees to a more accurately complex and humanized portrayal. Furthermore, we are currently working collaboratively to address identified barriers and challenges through specific actions with the aim of increasing justice for refugees in the region. Although there is much work to be done, we will remain committed to the values of liberation psychology in our goal of building a community wherein diverse refugee voices are equitable participants and leaders in the civic domain.

In parallel to our use of a liberation psychology approach, we utilize participatory research methods that engage refugees as coleaders who share decision-making in research processes. Liberation psychology as a framework fuels the "why" in our public psychology; participatory research is the "how." The quality of CARE Cincinnati's research was significantly improved by the perspectives and lived experiences of the refugees on our team. For example, the survey was purposely designed to be as accessible as possible to ensure a large sample across diverse refugee communities. The team prioritized obtaining a large sample size to show the local community how large and diverse refugee communities are, but they understood the data costs of a short, simple survey. The team decided to follow up the survey with focus groups to provide more context, and were able to obtain much-needed information to interpret survey results. For example, a high percentage of survey respondents reported feeling safe where they lived, which was surprising because refugees are often resettled in high crime neighborhoods. In focus groups, it became clear that perceptions of safety were relative; in comparison to refugee camps, for some, even the higher crime neighborhoods in Cincinnati feel safe, and others had been able to move to desired neighborhoods over time. Additionally, participants in some of the focus groups highlighted how experiencing the consequences of racism impacted their lives allowing for a more complex discussion of how systematic injustice influenced the realities of refugees in this region.

The goal of this article was not to present the research results as a theoretical contribution, but rather to illustrate how the marriage of a liberatory value system to a participatory research process serves as a pathway for public psychology to develop in a manner that centers the knowledge and perspective of communities who have long been neglected in research development. The deliberate integration of participatory research and liberation psychology contributes to public psychology in two significant ways. First and perhaps most obviously, research designed for and with individuals who have experienced an issue has the most potential to make a felt impact on that issue (ICPHR, 2013; Reason & Tobert, 2001; Vaughn et al., 2018). The growth in participatory research in this century is likely driven by the intuitive possibility for transformative social change (Minkler, 2005). In addition to the benefits to society, participatory research for liberation also has power to improve science. Psychology has historically been the study of middle class college students, limiting the generalizability of results to about 5% of the population (Arnett, 2008). Engaging marginalized community members as partners allows science to more accurately represent a broader range of human experience, improving the "rigor, relevance, and reach" of research (Balazs & Morello-Frosch, 2013). Maximizing research rigor is important in participatory research for liberation, as reputable high quality research is needed to advance policy agendas and local strategies for equity and social justice (Warren et al., 2018).

Creating a public psychology that is wedded to liberation psychology and participatory methods is not, and will not be easy. Perhaps the biggest challenge is the balancing act between what is desired and what is feasible. Researchers often become accustomed to a slow, deliberate process in work that might someday lead to change, whereas people who are experiencing injustice need change now. In our research, refugee team members regularly made clear that the most desired change was to be reunited with family members who are currently prohibited from entering the United States simply because of their nationality. Although we could have focused our project entirely on working to change federal law, the likelihood of actualizing change that would be felt in the communities was low. Instead we focused on areas that could have meaningful impact locally. Similarly, both our survey and focus group results

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highlighted the lack of desirable jobs as a prominent source of dissatisfaction across refugee communities. Given our capacity, the team decided to take a long range approach, creating actions that would ideally position refugees in more empowered positions to create lasting changes in the employment landscape. As both examples illustrate, our team must constantly confront the complex power dynamics that are inherent in participatory research (Wallerstein et al., 2019). A public psychology must never become a static set of rules and practices, but must seek to resist silencing and exclusion and subvert existing power imbalances for emancipatory purposes.

We write, and continue our research and action, during an era of serious political turmoil in the United States. Evidence of the consequences of growing economic inequity, ongoing racial injustice, a global pandemic that disproportionately harms low-income and communities of color, and environmental catastrophe in direct link to neglected care for the environment are seemingly ubiquitous. Perhaps now more than ever it is obvious that we must eschew any tendency toward neutrality in issues that impact the public domain. In building a public psychology, we must be on the side of individuals and communities who are oppressed. We cannot view ourselves as experts on the lived realities or visions of actualized justice of oppressed communities without their equitable inclusion in research and action processes. Rather than simply opening the academy doors to the public, we must prioritize invitations, leadership, and power to those whose voices are most often excluded. As we do so, we will push the discipline, and society more broadly, to address the most pressing challenges of our times.

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