

Toward (Racial) Justice-in-the-Doing of Place-Based Community Engagement

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Abstract

Community and campus partners can benefit from place-based community engagement to enact a commitment to racial equity and community-driven decision-making. Racial equity is paramount in place-based community engagement. However, very little attention has been given to how whiteness in the ideological foundations of higher education shapes the work lives of professionals, faculty, and the collaborations they form to address community issues. Thus, the purpose of this case study is to foreground some paradoxes of whiteness-at-work (Yoon, 2012) in an informal place-based community engagement collaboration between the Center for Public Life at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa and members of the historic Greenwood community in Tulsa, Oklahoma. We take a reflexive stance (Ozias & Pasque, 2019), examining our own experience to explore how Yoon's (2012) concept of whiteness-at-work serves as a tool for advancing the racial equity agenda of place-based community engagement. We conclude that whiteness-at-work provides a useful lens through which to begin explicitly surfacing ways in which place-based community engagement can reify and perpetuate white hegemony. This approach also provides a starting point for racial "justice-in-the-doing," the internal, interpersonal, and institutional work to disrupt hegemonic whiteness" (Yoon, 2022), in place-based community engagement that may move us further toward garnering the racial equity to which we aspire.

Keywords: place-based community engagement, whiteness-at-work, justice-in the-doing, historic greenwood tulsa ok, anti-racist community engagement, community organizing

Introduction

At many urban-serving institutions, university structures sit proximate to Communities of Color grappling with gentrification, food deserts, shortages in affordable housing, under-investment in public infrastructure, underperforming schools, and health inequities. University leaders often articulate their motivation for place-based engagement as support for collaborations to foster positive, primarily community-driven, social transformation of neighboring communities. Community and campus partners benefit from place-based community engagement (PBCE; Yamamura & Koth, 2018) as a centralized, long-term strategy for transformation driven by a deep connection to place, authentic relationships, and opportunities to enact a commitment to racial equity and community-driven decision making (Yamamura & Koth, 2018, pp. 8-12).

In the scholarship about community-university engagement, considerable space has been dedicated to the potential of community-engaged teaching and research to address complex and pressing social issues such as these. In the same spaces, scholars also warn about the consequential material effects of whiteness embedded in higher education on People and Communities of Color (Tevis et al., 2023) such as “traditional service-learning programs [that] commodify People of Color for the benefit of white people and white-serving institutions” (Irwin & Foste, 2021, p. 419). Without “paying attention to . . . biases, expectations, and traditions,” Mitchell et al. (2012) warn, “service-learning can become . . . a pedagogy of whiteness.” Such service learning projects “have minimal impact on the community and result in mis-educative experiences . . . and missed opportunities for educators to make their own instruction more transformative” (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 613). We pause here to note an important stylistic difference in the critical literature: The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed., APA, 2020) § 5.7 directs that “[r]acial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized” (p. 142). Pasque et al. (2022) quote Laws (2020) in the *Columbia Journalism Review* to make a critical point: “for many people, Black reflects a shared sense of identity and community. White carries a different set of meanings; capitalizing the word in this context risks following the lead of white supremacists” (Laws, 2020, p. 1; see also Pasque et al., 2022, p. 15). Given the well-established identification of whiteness as a core element of academic and institutional culture (Cabrera et al., 2017; Harper, 2012), and calls for epistemic justice, we follow Pasque et al. in this article.

Racial equity is paramount in place-based community engagement. However, scholars argue, whiteness permeates the “philosophical underpinnings” of US higher education (Stewart, 2020, p. 13), and very little attention has been given to the ways whiteness in the ideological foundations of higher education shapes the work lives of professionals, faculty, and the collaborations they form to address community issues (Telles, 2019). Thus, this commitment to racial equity will be no more than words on this page without the necessary work toward disrupting whiteness as embedded in the everyday messages and practices of historically

whiteness institutions through curriculum, pedagogy, and professional norms (Gusa, 2010; Tevis et al., 2023), and thus as a shaping force in community-university interactions. One tool seems to hold promise for examining PBCE: *whiteness-at-work* (Yoon, 2012), which names paradoxical situations where self-identified proponents of racial equity – namely, higher education practitioners -- employ discursive strategies and practices that ultimately perpetuate whiteness. In short, whiteness-at-work marks misalignment between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974). “There they go,” one resident of Greenwood might say to another, “sellin’ those dreams again.”

Colleges and universities are predominantly white in faculty, students, and curriculum, and they facilitate the reproduction of social hierarchies as well as transmit hegemonic norms and practices; thus, efforts to promote more racially equitable practices, like place-based community engagement, warrant extending whiteness-at-work further into higher education praxis (Mohajeri & Nishi, 2022). To that end, the purpose of the present study is to foreground the paradoxes of whiteness-at-work in an informal place-based community engagement collaboration between the Center for Public Life at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa (CPL) and community members of the historic Greenwood district in north Tulsa, Oklahoma. We designate the work as “informal” because authors prioritized community-driven problem-solving as the focus of efforts, absent any formal commitment from the larger university system. We (re-)present the study's findings as a portrait of engagement (Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997), situating the collaboration activities in historical, cultural, political, and socio-economic places. Then, we employ *whiteness-at-work* (Yoon, 2012) to foreground the contradictions between our commitment to racial equity in the context and whiteness as it operates in and through the culture and practices of a historically white institution and its institutional actors. Finally, we explore the implications of these instances of whiteness-at-work and offer recommendations for reflective praxis toward “justice-in-the-doing” (Yoon, 2022) by PBCE practitioners.

Methods and Evidence

For this article, we returned to previously collected case study data (Stake, 2005) exploring the involvement of urban-serving university-based actors and their community partners in PBCE activities between 2019 and 2023. Two research questions guided the study: What is the role of universities in the communities they serve? and What is the role of place in community-university engagement? New questions presented themselves as our study unfolded (Agee, 2009), drawing us to consider how individual and group positionalities (D’Silva et al., 2016), in particular our racial identities and institutional affiliations, influence our interactions with each other and between OSU-Tulsa and the Greenwood community. Changes in research questions “emerge from researchers’ capacities to examine their own roles and perspectives in the inquiry process, especially how they are positioned in relation to participants” (Agee, 2009, p. 432). The shift in our focus from the role of the university and to whiteness-at-work in the everyday

interactions among the most proximate collaborators in this partnership – the authors themselves – reflects emerging understandings of the salience of our respective positionalities, particularly for those with whom we were collaborating.

Data Sources and Data Collection

The case study design (Stake, 2005) reflected a critical, participatory action orientation (Kemmis et al., 2014), with protocol co-created by a core team of community members and CPL researchers. Participants from three projects developed additional reflection prompts and interview protocols for their cohorts. Working from the premise that “blurred genres invite better questions” (Stoler, 2006, p. 9; Agee, 2009), researchers utilized a variety of complementary methods to collect, analyze, and represent the data, as described below and reflected in the data audit provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Data audit for case study of CPL-SPH partnership

Data Source	Description
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-structured interviews* with May 6 Initiative participants (n=12) conducted via Zoom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persevere cohort members (n=6) CPL/SPH partners (n=3), OSU graduate student co-researchers (n=3) Interviews ranged in length 26 to 110 min. All interviews were recorded using video conferencing technology, and the audio file was transcribed verbatim. Semi-structured interview* with SPH staff conducted via Zoom, 62 min, analyzed using .vtt file Unstructured interviews* with SPH staff, conducted weekly via telephone and/or video conference to debrief partnership activities, ranging in length from 10 to 30 minutes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The interview approach used in this study positioned researchers as instruments, reflecting Brinkman and Kvale’s (1996) notion of “interView,” participant and researcher co-constructing knowledge.
Artifacts and Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials developed by CPL/SPH reflecting collaboration (e.g., fellowship curriculum and teaching materials) (Stake, 2005) Newspaper accounts and photographs of the Greenwood neighborhood between 1920 and 1980 (Bieze, 2010, Humphrey, 2010) #2982Tulsa storymap collection, part of The 2892 Miles to Go: Geographic Walk for Justice (https://www.2892walk.org), curated by Greenwood descendant and SPH team member Kristi Williams; https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/be2f71b037114de9a298e3387a62a78e Institutional history of OSU-Tulsa (Peterkin, 2010).

Participant Reflections	<p>Fellowship cohort participants (n= 7) co-created journaling prompts including, e.g., the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I said “yes” to participating in the XXX cohort/experience because . . . • Who were you when you applied for the XXX? Who are you now? What’s changed? Why? How? What didn’t? Why? • Who have you learned from through the XXXX experience? What did you learn? How did this other person/group contribute to your learning? • “I need to bring the vibe of me to that space.” What IS the vibe of you? How do you bring that? Reflect on a time when this happened . . . what happened?
Field Notes	<p>Participant observation* conducted during:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 160 team meetings and planning sessions for partnership activities (~ 2 meeting/week * 10 mos/academic year * years of partnership = 2 mtgs * 40 wks/yr * 4 yrs) • 62 learning sessions for organizing fellowship cohorts (Equity Fellowship = 22 sessions; Fuerza = 12 sessions; May 6th Initiative/Persevere = 22 sessions; Blue Dot = 6 sessions). <p>* OSU researchers operated in these spaces as <i>complete participants</i> (Spradley, 1980), “researchers who study contexts in which they already are members or to which they become fully affiliated” (Tracy, 2020, p. 131).</p>
Researcher Journals	<p>Journaling to “record. . . the personal” (Browne, 2013, p. 420); the journals served, in part, as “cathartic device[s]” for capturing experiences “to be reflected upon later” (p. 421) in the development of analytic memos, bringing emotions, memories, and expectations into conversation with scholarly literature, history, and community members’ perspectives.</p>

Positionality Statement

The interview approach used in this study positioned researchers as instruments, reflecting Brinkman and Kvale’s (1996) notion of “interView,” participant and researcher co-constructing knowledge. Thus, where one might expect to find a description of instruments used for collecting data, we offer this narrative of our group to “provide those who are . . . engaging with the research [e.g., our readers], with an understanding of [our] perspectives” (D’Silva et al., 2016, p. 97). When we say “our,” we include ourselves as individual authors and, taking D’Silva et al.’s lead (2016), we also present positionality as a group phenomenon in the sense that those who work, live, and play in the same community have positionality relative to one another.

Our collaboration began with Greg, a descendant of enslaved persons who settled in Black towns in early Oklahoma. After a decade of organizing national, state, and local political campaigns, he returned to Tulsa and founded the community development/engagement consulting firm

Standpipe Hill Strategies (SPH). As a professional community organizer, Greg works with communities to build power and influence systems for more equitable outcomes. He was introduced to Mike, a white male, in October 2019. Mike holds a doctorate, a tenured faculty position, and an endowed chair funded by a local philanthropy; his research has been guided by community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles, emphasizing the importance of collaborative partnerships and community knowledge and expertise. Mike's colleague, Tami, joined the work next. A white woman, native Oklahoman, and two-time OSU graduate, she left the state to work as an administrator on four college campuses and then in the non-profit sector as a community-university boundary spanner. As a tenured faculty member with a Ph.D. in education, she has invested thousands of hours in relationship-building with community partners, reflexive practice, and boundary-spanning leadership within the OSU-Tulsa community as part of her engaged scholarly agenda. Lindsey, a white woman pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership and policy studies from OSU, came to the CPL in August 2020. She is a first-generation student and former university administrator dedicated to equity-oriented praxis in higher education institutions and the communities these institutions serve. Her experience in community engagement work is in the context of public universities with predominantly White student bodies. Marshan, a Black woman with a doctorate in Public Health, knew Mike from their involvement with the Tulsa County Health Department. She has served as a faculty member in higher education at both an HBCU and a PWI institution. While working in the university setting, Marshan has blended her personal and professional interest in minority health improvement to engage in community service for over two decades.

Data Analysis and Representation

We utilized narrative research methods, including portraiture (Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997) and writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to analyze and represent the case study data. Following a similar protocol, Moore (2014a) created portraits of community-university engagement at regional four-year universities, weaving fibers/data from interviews, observations, and document analysis into what Czarniawska (2007) called “emplotted” narratives describing ‘a set of events or action put chronologically together [with] . . . a logical . . . connection’ (p. 387; see also Moore, 2014a). For the CPL case study, OSU researchers collected the data detailed in Table 1 utilizing narrative inquiry and traditional historical methods, looking for evidence of the organizational narratives of each partner entity (Czarniawska, 2007) and, from those, weaving a portrait of the collaboration, presented in the next section what would traditionally be called “findings” to explore one analytical question: in what ways/does whiteness-at-work serve as a reflexive tool for advancing the racial equity agenda of place-based community engagement?

Criteria for Evaluating Rigor

“Any narrative [portrait],” Chase (2005) argued, “is significant because it embodies – and gives us insight into – what is possible and intelligible within a specific social context” (p. 667). Simultaneously, who we are and what we experience influences how we see and make sense of places and our experiences there. The details of qualitative research are not meant to be generalized to other any larger population. Rather, qualitative methods facilitate access to participants’ viewpoints, perspectives, and meaning-making, thereby promoting further reflection by the reader on their experiences in similar contexts. Richardson (2001) outlines “high and difficult standards” for the evaluation of inquiry, such as the present work, which is “humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings, activity, beliefs and understanding” (p. 251). She offered five criteria, including substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact, and expression of a reality (p. 251); see Table 2 for questions modeled on Richardson’s criteria for evaluating this case study.

TABLE 2. Evaluating rigor of writing as inquiry

Standard	<i>Richardson’s (2001) Evaluative Questions</i>	<i>Evidence of Rigor in this study</i>
Substantive Contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? • Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) human world understanding and perspective? • How has this perspective informed the construction of the text? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warrant for analytical project grounded in PBCE literature • Portrait reflecting realities of racial dynamics in Greenwood/Tulsa
Aesthetic Merit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text, invite interpretative responses? • Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative methodologies (Czarniawska, 2007) • Portraiture (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) • Writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2004)
Reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? • Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? • Do authors hold themselves accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people they have studied? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positionality statements • Vignettes of whiteness-at-work focused on (re-) consideration of author interactions and thoughts/behavior

Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this affect me/the reader emotionally? Intellectually? • Does it generate new questions? • Move me to write? • Move me to try new research practices? • Move me to action? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analytic questions emerging from original case study dataset • Reader's response to the work (Merriam, 1998)
Expression of a Reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? • Does it seem "true" – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive passages re: Greenwood, OSU-Tulsa • Center legacy of cultural whiteness in higher education (Tevis, et al., 2023) • Reader's response to the work (Merriam, 1998)

The final criteria, expression of a reality, points to the limitations of this work. Because the partnership supported community-driven decision-making, SPH's organizing network and issue agenda initially delimited the case regarding its focus on issues to be addressed through PBCE. Conversations and unstructured interviews with community members were limited to individuals involved in the learning cohorts; the authors did not speak with funders or community/institutional leaders, or decision-makers beyond the SPH-CPL partner team. Thus, the portrait reflects the perspectives of those who contributed to the dataset. We acknowledge that some details may be removed or revised if crystallized from another vantage point (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

A Portrait of Place-Based Community Engagement: Black Wall Street and Historic Greenwood

In the late 19th century, after reconstruction ended, entrepreneurial Black people looked for places to call their own. Black pioneers inundated not only Tulsa but the entirety of Indian Territory. They, in turn, established Black towns large and small, including Muskogee, Boley, Dawson, Rentiesville (Knight, 1975), and Snake Creek, founded by Greg's people. Tulsa grew due first to its location along a rail line and proximity to gushing oil fields. O.W. Gurley, an early landowner in the area, by either dumb luck or incredible vision, decided to sell his land only to Black people. These Black landowners created an incredible haven of opportunity, a burgeoning Black community with tremendous potential. Dubbed "Black Wall Street" by Booker T. Washington, the 40-block area called Greenwood became the de facto economic center for Black people in the new state of Oklahoma (Crowe & Lewis, 2021; Luckerson, 2023).

In 2023, two years past the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre, the Greenwood community and their allies, more often than not, gloss over the story of May 30 to June 1, 1921. They focus instead on what happened next: Just a few days after the massacre, despite the streams of people already leaving for Chicago and California, the rebuilding of Greenwood began. Those who stayed rebuilt homes and businesses, experiencing the heyday of their community between 1930 and 1960. Eventually, 1970s-era urban renewal efforts split up the neighborhood with a cross-town expressway, effectively destroying the hyperlocal economy (Perry et al., 2021). The promise of making something better in Greenwood became essentially a false promise, and the community today looks like every other Black community tortured by “urban removal.”

In 1921, Greenwood residents enjoyed various social and health-related benefits of living in one of the wealthiest black communities in the United States. A century later, equality indicators showed residents of north Tulsa commuting further to work, earning less, having less access to banks and grocery stores, and experiencing shorter life expectancies than their counterparts in more affluent south Tulsa zip codes (CUNY et al., 2023). University-trained “experts” frame present-day Tulsa by naming systemic racism, the impact of historical trauma and adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al., 1998), the political determinants of health (Dawes, 2020), and economic under-investment by generations of developers and municipal authorities. Rather than systematic neglect, Greg focuses on what he described as a genetic-level impulse to continue the battle for potential success. In the face of death, lost homes, stolen property, and unpaid insurance claims, the remaining residents of Greenwood “just got the materials and rebuilt. Right now today, Black Tulsa is still getting told no. And they just keep coming. . . . that is just somewhere in the DNA. Somebody is gonna keep coming.”

The Center for Public Life at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa

Located in the heart of the historic Greenwood district, OSU-Tulsa now occupies land where the first campus of Booker T. Washington High School sat in 1921, at the time of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Employees traversing the sidewalk from the parking lot to the north doors pass the Ellis Walker Woods Memorial (<https://tulsa.okstate.edu/ewwoods>), honoring the school’s first principal. Four-inch by six-inch plaques embedded in the sidewalk identify residents and business owners once thriving on Greenwood Avenue. Today, as a result of land transfers by the Tulsa Urban Renewal Authority, OSU’s government body is the largest single property owner in the 40-block district. Perhaps the most painful evidence of this ownership is a tower built in 2014 displaying OSU’s logo as though staking a claim on the sacred ground of Standpipe Hill, home to some of Black Wall Street’s wealthiest and most influential residents in 1921.

In 2018, newly inaugurated president Dr. Pamela Fry announced OSU-Tulsa as an “urban-serving, metropolitan research university.” OSU-Tulsa is one of four branch campuses in the Oklahoma State University system. Each OSU branch campus has its own president. The tenure-

granting unit for all tenure-track faculty with appointments on the Tulsa campus is located on the main OSU campus, in Stillwater. President Fry and senior leaders sought to express a commitment to engaging with the surrounding community at the campus level, carried out by students, staff, and faculty (Fritz & Iwama, 2019). The Center for Public Life at OSU-Tulsa was one such expression. Over the course of a robust four-year collaboration with individuals and organizations rooted in the legacy of Black Wall Street, we prioritized the relationship-building work of PBCE (Milne & Hamilton, 2019) over the outcomes of any particular project outcome (Moore, 2014b), got some things right, made missteps, repaired relationships, and successfully leveraged the institutional resources of a predominantly white institution. In all this work, we followed the lead of key representatives from Tulsa’s Black communities. As a team, the CPL developed a solid reputation for good work among progressive Black organizations, as well as white decision-makers and funders. Within the university, we were seen more as an interdisciplinary research group with a desire to support community-driven problem-solving in north Tulsa.

The Collaboration

Standpipe Hill Strategies (SPH) and the Center for Public Life at OSU-Tulsa (CPL) began working together in November 2019. Our recollections of the beginnings of our collaboration reveal the influence of white cultural norms (Mer, 2020) on several fronts, so we provide these details in two columns to allow the reader to examine two different accounts of the same three-year period leading up to our (SPH-CPL) collaboration, presented one beside the other in Table 3. Reading the data in this way recreates our experiences of analyzing the data, looking at elements of the portrait of engagement in relation to one another, and making meaning of what we saw.

TABLE 3. SPH-CPL pre-collaboration activities

Year	Center for Public Life Pre-Collaboration Activities	Standpipe Hill Strategies Pre-Collaboration Activities
2016		Standpipe Hill Strategies’ work to rebuild Black Wall Street began several years earlier, shortly after the shooting of Terence Crutcher by a Tulsa County sheriff’s deputy in 2016.
March 2018 to February 2019		By 2018, the SPH team trained about 60 community members, who in turn engaged nearly 300 other north Tulsa residents in small group settings on one core question: what is impacting your quality of life as a north Tulsa resident?

The team synthesized the data, identifying five theme areas:

- trauma in schools;
- jobs and economic opportunity,
- home ownership opportunities,
- criminal justice, and
- community policing.

Next, 30 people ran ResilienceU, a year-long community research action involving:

- Reverse panel discussions w/ decision makers within Tulsa on each issue, hearing how community members were internalizing or receiving those efforts;
- Local/national data relevant to local problems
- Promising solutions from other communities.

At the end of the program year, a slate of 25 recommendations to address each problem identified through the listening phase were presented at a community forum attended by more than 100 people, who voted to prioritize topics for further engagement/negotiation.

2019	In mid-October, 2019, a program officer at a local foundation mentioned they would like Mike to meet with SPH to discuss the possibility of conducting a systematic program evaluation of SPH's various programs, and training the SPH team to incorporate evaluation activities going forward. The foundation would fund	<p>As of October 2019, the teams had been working to advance the policy recommendations for six months. Greg met with a major decision maker to discuss continuing a financial commitment to the organizing and capacity building programming benefiting individual community members. The program office demurred, encouraging Greg to seek partnership with Mike, with a focus on building program evaluation into SPH project planning and reporting.</p> <p>Following the traditional organizing cycle (relate-act-reflect), Greg reflected on the outcome of this conversation, in the context of other other recent experiences and make a decision: Despite all that effort, and the intentional, inclusive, community-driven way they had gone about it – they were not gaining the</p>
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SPH, who could then contract with the Mike/CPL for services.

Mike invited Tami to join the meeting, suggesting that this might be a nice funding opportunity for the new CPL. She agreed. Mike arranged a meeting for early the next month.

sort of foothold he expected the approach would garner.

Evaluating the situation, he understood the decision maker communicated what they saw as a weakness in their approach: no involvement from a major research institution. The ability to potentially partner with a well-known research institution in this area could, Greg decided, provide an element they had been missing, and thereby legitimize the group’s standing to push the community recommendations further.

Greg invited the CPL team to meet with his SPH staff in early November.

SPH and CPL staff met for the first time the next month, gathering at the SPH offices in a co-working space for “a diverse community of starters [and] do-ers” (<https://www.36n.co>) located just west of Greenwood in revitalizing downtown Tulsa. Very little in that meeting focused on program evaluation. Perched on chairs at a high-top conference table in an industrial chic conference room with exposed brick walls, Mike and Tami listened to Greg review the work described above, concluding with two ideas for future collaboration. First, he expressed interest in leveraging a relationship with a university to advance community-driven change. Second, he solicited ideas for capacity building for (emerging) community and organization leaders, separate from the broadscale work.

Over the next two months, working closely by email, text, and long phone calls, Tami and Greg worked out the project details and a budget for the collaboration. Ultimately, the funder awarded the grant directly to SPH those who, in turn, contracted CPL with a June 2020 start date. See Table 3 for a description of the activities undertaken through this collaboration and indicators of initial ripple effects (Emery et al., 2015) visible in the Tulsa community.

TABLE 4. Activities of the CPL standpipe hill collaboration rebuilding black wall street

Activity	Timeline	Other Key Collaborators	SPH funding	CPL funding	(Early) Ripple Effects
Equity Fellows: advanced capacity-building for organizational leaders with four	8/2020 to 10/2021	Met Cares Foundation	George Kaiser Family Foundation (GKFF)	Contract for services from SPH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 participants completed fellowship • 4 of the 10 used knowledge gained to apply for grants; organizations led by

modules: program evaluation, CBPR, grant writing, policy advocacy.			Birth through Eight Strategies Tulsa (BEST)		members of the cohort have been awarded nearly \$2M to date
Program Evaluation comprehensive evaluation of four SPH initiatives developed by SPH based on community recommendations	10/2021 to 7/2022	Met Cares Foundation	George Kaiser Family Foundation (GKFF) Birth through Eight Strategies Tulsa (BEST)	Contract for services from SPH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logic models developed for four programs • Program evaluation report presented to funder and Met Cares Foundation board of directors • Training provided to SPH staff; Ripple Effect Mapping training included in Equity Fellow curriculum
Fuerza: basic community organizing training; cohort engaged community members around experiences during COVID with children in schools; developed policy recommendations , and presented to partner entities	12/2020 to 8/2021	City of Tulsa Mayor's Office of Resilience of Equity	George Kaiser Family Foundation (GKFF/BEST)	OSU President's Fellows Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 community members completed cohort; 3 community educators trained by CPL served as mentors for the cohort, and facilitation assistants w/ Greg during content delivery • Engaged nearly 100 community members • Recommendations based on community member experiences presented by Fuerza members to GKFF/BEST team. Outcome: BEST created: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a Community Advisory Group (CAG) engaging 60 parents/community members to work alongside their

					<p>existing Policy Advocacy Team (PAT).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intercultural competence training and support for PAT and CAG ● 3 Fuerza cohort members training as community organizers now leading FuerzaKW bilingual intergenerational organizing initiative, in a second Tulsa neighborhood ● 15 community members w/ lived experience of negative health outcomes completed the cohort ● Engaged with 40 community members through listening campaign ● Identified to themes for further work: Economics and Humanity in Health Care develop policy priorities for future research and advocacy work ● Curriculum/community co-research design adopted for a second cohort
The May 6 th Initiative employs basic organizing curriculum and CAG model as participatory research approach to improve Black reproductive health equity in Tulsa area.	4/2021 to present	Tulsa area hospitals, Tulsa city/county health department	Contract for services from CPL	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Research for Health Equity grant (36 mos.)	
The Blue Dot Cohort employs basic organizing curriculum to teach participatory research	4/2023 to present		Contract for services from CPL	Ascension St. John Foundation Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 20 agency representatives engaged in learning sessions ● Listening phase complete, engaged 45 community members ● On-track to merge with May 6th Initiative Phase

approaches in service to addressing maternal mental health in north Tulsa.	Health Equity Catalyst Strategy program (12 mos)	II for policy research, and campaign work
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In 2024, SPH and CPL partners are applying the organizing strategy at the heart of this collaboration to a new issue, also identified by north Tulsa community members: Black reproductive health equity. With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), CPL contracted with SPH to teach organizing strategies to community co-researchers who are learning to build power for systems change, with the involvement of university faculty collaborators, and using university facilities and resources to manage logistics and host the cohort meetings.

Whiteness-at-Work in a Portrait of Engagement

From an organizational development perspective, ideologies become institutionalized as culture and practice, shaping individuals' interactions within the institution's context (Tevis et al., 2023). Thus, analysis of whiteness in place-based community engagement reveals the ideological foundations of the educational culture into which university-community professionals and engaged researchers have been socialized. Whiteness is co-constructed, dynamic, and, therefore, best understood as situated in particular social contexts, resulting from specific processes.

Whiteness-at-work emerged as a conceptual tool from Yoon's (2012) case study of a single public school to explain comments and behaviors misaligned with the espoused values of the school. *Whiteness* was *at-work* despite extant commitments to racial equity in that school community because, Yoon (2012) argued, "individual participation and social context interact [in those spaces] to perpetuate racism . . . despite intentions or cognitive awareness" (p. 609). Hence, "whiteness-at-work" denotes strategies which reinscribe rather than disrupt white normativity. She presented "conversation episodes" as representative of major themes in "the story of this group" (Yoon, 2012, p. 597); each reflects a particular instance of whiteness-at-work. We take a similar approach in the following discussion. We look at two themes emerging from the data: individuals external to OSU – a foundation program officer and a community member – viewed, or assumed others would view, university researchers as "experts" based on their knowledge and/or credentials; and the behaviors and actions of OSU-affiliated (emerging) researchers shaped by a market-oriented culture of productivity (Gildersleeve, 2017).

Whiteness-at-Work as Expertise

Even in places where the physical geography and social realities of campus and community are less distinct, university leaders – particularly community engagement professionals and faculty directly engaged with communities – commit epistemic injustices (Cooper, 1988/1892; Fricker, 2007) by overshadowing community wisdom through scholarship and other writing that centers the university story or academic expertise, masking the ability of communities to solve problems when supported with adequate resources and capacity building opportunities (Cummings et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2022). This is whiteness-at-work.

The SPH-SPH collaboration emerged from Greg’s hypothesis that leveraging support from a “renown research university” for the organizing work his group had done would result in (more) forward progress on the community-driven policy recommendations. He was in effect counting on the leveraging the influence (or “power” in organizing terms) of academic expertise and scientific research methods. Indeed, the ability to translate from community organizing into the language of participatory research seemed so valuable that Tami, Lindsey, and Mike developed and facilitated an Equity Fellow learning session reframing activities in the listen-act-reflect organizing cycle as the iterative methods of participatory action research. We encouraged the group to use this new vocabulary when talking about their work to potential funders or policymakers. In doing so, looking through the lens of whiteness-at-work, we also enacted epistemic injustices (Cooper, 1988/1892; Fricker, 2007) by overshadowing community wisdom about making change with the language of culturally white ways of knowing grounded in logic and an objectivist epistemology.

Cynthia, a Black Puerto Rican woman participating in the May 6th Initiative, regularly asked the OSU team about their research project and expressed interest in becoming more involved. She joined Lindsey, Tami, and two other CPL representatives to present a paper on the cohort experience at an academic conference. By the end of that trip, Cynthia had decided to pursue a doctoral degree, with an eye to more effectively advocating for including children’s authentic voices in decisions affecting them. Tami enthusiastically encouraged her on this journey, suggesting one goal might be an even more developed ability to “code switch” from the vernacular to the language of the scientific method as necessary in conversations with policymakers and systems leaders. The suggestion to change how one speaks to be more influential or better received reflects white normativity (Irwin & Foste, 2019), another sort of whiteness-at-work. Where Tami thought she offered capacity building for an emerging community leader, Cynthia saw “a silent requirement to code switch my intellect to prove I have intellect at all. Why,” she asked, “should I have to change the dialect of my critical thought? When my thoughts are conformed they are no longer my thoughts but your thoughts in my voice.” Preach, Cynthia!¹

Those familiar with the call and response tradition in the Black church may recognize our exhortation above as a common encouragement for the speaker to continue their powerful message. Others, trained as academic writers, will recognize the instruction to end paragraphs with one's own words, rather than a quote from someone else. In this situation, the elders of the church have the right idea, and they have also helped us align with stylistic expectations. We gratefully acknowledge Cynthia's contribution from both ways of knowing!

Whiteness-at-Work as Productivity

Kezar (2011) described significant cultural differences between universities and non-profit organizations; her observations remain salient, particularly in noting differences in values and orientation, decision-making processes and expectations related to formalization of partnerships (pp. 221-224). Each of these elements of the collaboration has the potential to be a site for whiteness-at-work to interrupt the commitment to racial equity. Greg has been clear from early meetings about the Equity Fellowship: "I am not in the business of creating fellowships. I'm trying to build my community. But, if you need to call it that because that's a university word, fine." That exchange marked the first of many recorded field notes, meeting summaries, and research journal instances pointing up the mismatch between university policies and procedures and the dynamic circumstances of individuals and organizations in the community.

Tami and Marshan received nationally competitive funding for The May 6th Initiative, which is focused on Black reproductive health equity. With this funding, Greg led a cohort of community members learning to build power for systems change, involving university faculty as resources, and using university facilities and resources to manage logistics and host the cohort meetings. Tami and Lindsey led a separate research project, collecting data about this grant as an example of community-university engagement. Thus began a waltz as Tami sought ways to connect this grant from a major funder to her research agenda in support of an upcoming application for promotion to full professor of education without commodifying our community partners.

The following exchange, recreated from field notes and a research journal entry written after the meeting, exposes further the potential for disconnect between a faculty-driven research agenda and the values and orientation of changemakers outside the university.

Lindsey: There will be two research questions, and we want to get your feedback on them. The first one is "What is the role of universities and hospitals as anchor institutions in addressing reproductive health equity?"

Community Partner: What is an anchor institution?

Tami: The idea is that this is an entity that won't leave the community for a tax break. So, it's usually hospitals, universities, museums, that sort of thing. People writing about universities as anchor institutions are saying that university leaders should be involved in supporting communities with problem-solving. So, I would like to learn more about how they do that in the context of reproductive health.

Greg: When you answer that question, what good is it going to do for north Tulsa?

Tami: If we learn about what works well and what doesn't, we can publish and present about that, and share the information.

Greg I'm not interested in helping universities and hospitals learn how to work together better if all they are going to do is act like they can do it without the community, or that it would be as good as if they worked with the community.

Greg's critique of the research questions Tami and Lindsey developed highlights the way in which research on communities can actually cover up the wisdom of communities. Whiteness is at work in this episode in the normative thinking about the superiority of institutions as public problem solvers and professionals within those institutions as leading interactions with communities.

Greg also made obvious the danger of unquestioningly following well-established lines of inquiry or accepted practices. With this funding, Greg led a cohort of community members learning to build power for systems change, with the involvement of university faculty as resources, and using university facilities and resources to manage logistics and host the cohort meetings. Tami and Lindsey led a separate research project, collecting data about this grant as an example of community-university engagement. Struggling to frame a manuscript recently, Lindsey asked an important question: "Did we just call this CBPR so there was a reason for us [OSU researchers] to be there [at the organizing/learning sessions]?" After more than one conversation with Greg, we decided the answer could well have been "yes" if not for the SPH team's participation in shaping research questions and participants' involvement in designing data collection strategies. The question that must always be posed is whether the community benefits from the activities without the presence of the university represented. Framing the involvement of university-located personnel as a value-add in every situation reflects white ascendancy, the superiority of white culture, and ways of knowing (Tevis et al., 2022).

Expertise and productivity reflect white cultural norms and what Dr. Tema Okun (n.d.; Mer, 2020) called characteristics of white supremacy culture. For instance, an overemphasis on academic expertise may be experienced by those with other educational backgrounds as "little appreciation for the work that other are doing;" or expressing appreciation toward the experts, "who get most of the credit anyway" (Okun, n.d., p. 1). Productivity may be characterized as "quantity over quality," with all the human energy or resources "directed toward producing measurable [outputs and outcomes]" and placing a higher value on "things that can be measured than things that cannot" (Okun, n.d., p. 3). Okun's comment on this point is salient in terms of

attitudes about processes versus outcomes (Moore, 2014b): “things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot. . . [such as] quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, [and/or] ability to constructively deal with conflict” (p. 3).

Other characteristics associated with white supremacy culture as defined by anti-racism teachers and trainers include individualism, perfectionism, a pervasive sense of urgency, either/or thinking, and fear or discomfort with open conflict; see the Race, Research and Policy Portal (<https://rrapp.hks.harvard.edu>) for a complete discussion of the characteristics as well as and suggested antidotes for each. These cultural norms, and thus whiteness-at-work, “are damaging,” dRworks practitioners have argued, “because they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named and chosen by the group.” However, because we live and work in institutions and communities historically shaped by white culture (Tevis et al., 2023), “these attitudes can show up in any group or organization, whether it is white-led or predominantly white or people of color-led or predominantly people of color” (p. 1).

“Justice-in-the-Doing” in Place-Based Community Engagement

The work of community-university engagement is deeply relational, built through pre-existing and emergent personal relationships (Milne & Hamilton, 2019). Exactly so, the collaboration between Standpipe Hill Strategies and the Center for Public Life at OSU-Tula emerged over chicken wings, coffee cups, and some of the best Jamaican cuisine in Oklahoma, cooked by restauranteurs from the family of one partner’s high school girlfriend. The nationally competitive funding awarded to CPL researchers began with a Black woman and a white woman singing together in a church choir. The design for that project emerged from 18 months of Thursday morning 9:00 am meetings. Community-engaged scholarly praxis, as practiced by the CPL team, was always already inherently place-based. Engagement should be seen as a dynamic process rather than a static outcome (Moore, 2014b). In the same vein, Yoon (2022) offered “justice-in-the-doing” for disrupting white normativity. In her epilogue to a special issue on whiteness-at-work in higher education, she borrowed from crip theory (McRuer, 2006) a celebration of “the unachieved status and on-going processes” as “the something bigger we seek” (p. 447). From this perspective, she suggests, the work toward making sense of, in hopes of doing differently than, whiteness-at-work is not an outcome to be checked off the list, but “a process. It is always partial.” The cracks of not-quite-yet are “beautiful,” she argues; “Wholeness is a sham. Justice-in-the-doing might be tentative and temporary – but completion . . . [just] to be . . . done with it is a desire of whiteness-at-work. Justice-in-the-doing is the future-present” (p. 447), building toward peace.

Dr. Okun and dRworks identified “antidotes” for the characteristics of whiteness lifted up through this case study. Translated to the work of place-based community engagement, we suggest embracing processes such as the following:

- Maintain a learning organization culture within the PBCE partnership; decide together what knowledge everyone needs or wants to learn.
- Co-create “a values statement which expresses the ways in which you want to do your work” together, and outlines processes of the collaboration; “make sure this is a living document and that people are using it in their day-to-day work” (Okun, n.d., p. 3).
- Develop learning objectives and identify “ways to measure process goals” (Okun, n.d., p. 3); university-located partners may need to take the lead/responsibility for this work if higher value is being placed on this by productivity or accountability goals, but do not overlook opportunities to share learning about developing skills for writing learning objectives if these are of interest for the community partners.

Recognize that many outside the partnership will expect norms of white culture to be employed; those with white privilege can use their positionality to create space for identifying alternative “ways to get the same goal,” and honoring decisions made by the group “even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen” (Okun, n.d., p. 3-4).

Co-creating solutions with a team of community members and university representatives was not without complexities stemming from the general historic distrust of research done *on* or *to* Communities of Color by white researchers and from the specific harm done in Greenwood over a century. Reading this case with an eye to whiteness-at-work underscores the necessity of acknowledging the power of the university to determine the culture of the partnership and taking necessary steps to disrupt the practices that serve to devalue local communities and their ways of being, knowing, and doing to address the issues they prioritize. Doing the internal, interpersonal, and institutional work to disrupt hegemonic whiteness is the justice-in-the-doing in place-based community engagement that may garner the racial equity to which we aspire.

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