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Special Theme Issue: ***Uncovering Youthspaces: Activist Voices, Productive, Materialist Methodologies, and Social Inquiry***

Guest Editor
Sophia Rodriguez
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Managing Editor
Eric C. Sheffield
Western Illinois University

Associate Editor
Jessica A. Heybach
Aurora University

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Eric C. Sheffield, Managing Editor
Jessica A. Heybach, Associate Editor

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Critical Questions in Education: Volume 8, Issue 4

Special Theme Issue: Uncovering Youthspaces: Activist Voices, Productive, Materialist Methodologies, and Social Inquiry

The Academy for Educational Studies

September 30, 2017

Colleagues and Friends of the Academy:

Before moving onto a quick word about this special theme issue, your regular Academy update: we are ready for Pittsburgh in just a few weeks and making plans for Portland! The Pittsburgh conference is “in the can” as they say and the program will be available shortly. The spring 2018 Call for proposals is available now: deadline for proposals is November 6. Don’t delay! As always, Academy “goings on” can be found on our web site: academyforeducationalstudies.org.

With that, a brief word of introduction for this special issue of *CQIE*.

When Sophia Rodriguez proposed a theme issue on the connections between activism and research, we were momentarily weary and unsure. The weariness is sourced in our record year of publication: 2017 has seen four issues of *CQIE* in print. Whew—a record breaking year. Additionally, this past year has seen us publish a series of special issues (reaching back to 2016) focused on research—and Sophia’s would add to that list. On the other hand, our weariness was quickly restrained: the idea of activism in this moment of our national history is, well, an historically crucial matter. Why might you ask? The most recent list: Charlottesville, Boston, St. Louis (again), and in athletic stadiums around the country…high school, college, and professional, to name only a few.

Our initial weariness has turned into excitement as we consider the national context of “knee-taking” in light of what research can teach us about the American tradition of activism and how research might turn teachers and their students into creators of knowledge rather than simply discoverers of knowledge. Dr. Rodriguez’s special issue takes up social and educational inquiry in the light of our current historic context and in the light of newly considered theoretical perspectives. We are pleased to have this issue as a part of the *Critical Questions in Education* series on educational research.

And so, we leave you to your reading with as always, our wish that you are visited with a good dose of peace.

PAX,

Eric C. Sheffield, Managing Editor

Jessica A. Heybach, Associate Editor

Critical Questions in Education

Special Theme Issue:
Uncovering Youthspaces: Activist Voices, Productive, Materialist Methodologies, and Social Inquiry

Sophia Rodriguez, Guest Editor

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Uncovering Youthspaces: Activist Voices, Productive, Materialist Methodologies, and Social Inquiry: An Introduction

Sophia Rodriguez, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Abstract

This article expands the discussion on youth activism, arguing for a new materialist conception of youthspaces. Centering this article around the concept of youthspaces, a term that refers to the agency, relationality and resistance engendered in youthspaces, the article urges that a new materialist understanding of youthspaces and youth studies, in particular, opens up new opportunities to observe how minoritized youth are making sense of education policy and practice as well as cultivating positive identities and affinities among each other in the context of education and social justice efforts.

Keywords**:** *youth activism; new materialism; youthspaces; qualitative inquiry*

Introduction

The focus of this issue of *Critical Questions in Education* (*CQIE*) is on the materiality and relationality of youth-generated spaces—what I term *youthspaces*. This concept is defined as spaces that are literal, relational, or symbolic, that produce meaning for youth in regard to their experiences of education, identity, belonging and social justice. This concept of *youthspace* is influenced by new materialist notions of agency, relationality, and resistance (Fox & Alldred, 2017). To this end, this editorial introduction provides a brief explanation of new materialism, its influence on research related to youth studies, and how it provides the framework for the articles in this issue.

This special issue of *CQIE* is dedicated to new understandings of materialist, critical and participatory methodologies in educational research on youth studies with particular attention to youth from minoritized communities, or with youth that occupy marginalized identities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). This call defines “minoritized communities and identities” by drawing from Gutiérrez and Rogoff’s (2003) work that posits that the practice of labeling students’ cultural differences with individual traits such as being “low-income,” “at risk,” or any “othering” language is part of the institutional, ascription process of identity that allows for hierarchies in schools and society (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). This ascription process also sets the conditions for positive and negative academic trajectories for minoritized youth and contributes to the reproduction of inequality in society. Youth identity, particularly minoritized social identities and identities related to race, class and gender and their interactions with student achievement, have been widely studied (Bettie, 2003; Cammarota, 2004; Carter, 2004, 2005; Chikkatur, 2012;

Conchas, 2006; Davidson, 1996; DeJaeghere & McCleary, 2010; Dimitriadis, 2003; Eckert, 1989; Ferguson, 2001; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ghosh, Mickelson, & Anyon, 2007; Morris, 2006, 2007, 2008; Nasir, 2004; Noguera, 2004; Pascoe, 2007; Taines, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999; Wortham, Mortimer & Allard, 2009); however, this issue offers approaches to uncover *youthspaces* that experiment outside the normative socio-cultural, dualistic paradigms of previous research.

Given the resurgence of youth activism and larger youth-generated social movements against educational injustices (Rodriguez, 2017b), this special issue expands notions of agency, identity, empowerment, and resistance within the context(s) of neoliberal ideologies that govern much of the current education policy and reform climate (Giroux, 2014, 2015; Fabricant & Fine, 2012) and globalization. As it stands, neoliberal ideologies provide the context for youth activism (Kirshner, Gaertner, & Pozzoboni, 2010), where neoliberalism is defined as a set of political ideologies and practices (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal ideologies have been applied to educational research (Lipman, 2011) to underscore the ways in which public goods such as education are subject to privatization, changing the shape of social structures and relationships (Rodriguez, 2017b, 2017c) and negatively impacting communities of color. In this issue, for instance, Goessling calls attention to the importance of youth organizing as an act of resistance by noting how Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberalism must be dismantled by not only exposing its structural manifestations, but by examining specific local forms of resistance in a unified broad scale social movement. Goessling uncovers youth spaces of “possibility” to expose the conditions for positive social change. Further, this special issue provides insight into the interworkings of youth culture(s) and space(s) with/in social movements toward educational justice, particularly in our current racialized contexts of education policy and practice (Goessling, Craven, and Moya, this issue).

Importantly, the special issue situates its inquiry within two larger theoretical and methodological concerns. First, the special issue contributes to theoretical and conceptual discussions of youth activism or organizing, agency, subjectivity, empowerment, resistance, and space. Authors engage with and theorize such concepts in order to ponder the critical questions: how do young people—often marginalized and excluded from educational policy-making—use or claim space(s) in their efforts for social change? What constitutes youth organizing and how is it (or is it not) an articulation of youth culture(s)? In what ways are youth identities or subjectivities conceived of in local contexts, and how can re-conceptualizing youth subjectivities offer breakthroughs in our current understandings of young people's role in protesting, if not overcoming, injustices both at the structural and individual, material levels in society?

Second, the special issue engages with methodologies that offer insight into youth culture, utilizing materialist methodologies as well as critical and participatory frameworks to reveal youth experiences. To build upon the previous scholarship on youth culture(s), organizing, and activism, however, the authors develop and provide nuanced methodological approaches and risks as they disrupt knowledge production in their respective communities by focusing on critical issues related to minoritized young people. For instance, authors utilize new materialist frameworks, photovoice and mapping methods to uncover the production of youth sense making in material spaces for minoritized youth in global contexts, e.g. undocumented youth in California and Nashville, TN, migrant youth in the Hudson Valley of New York, Māori youth in New Zealand, girlhood in Australia, and rural youth in Alabama (Gildersleeve & Sifuentez, Del Vecchio, Toomey & Tuck, Linville, Berryman, Eley & Copeland, Duggan, Baggett and Andrezejewski, this issue). The authors showcase multiple complexities and the unevenness of youth experiences, pushing boundaries of possible action for young people and for researchers alike. Framing the special issue with this orientation offers a nuanced portrait of interactions between youth and their social contexts and how the contexts are shaped/shape expressions of power, disruption, and justice-embodied resistance on the part of youth. Finally, the articles here privilege productive analyses of youth identity and space in hopes of excavating narratives that challenge our understanding of progress, and human agency in constrained educational and societal contexts.

Notes on New Materialism and Social Inquiry about Minoritized Youth

I have argued previously that we might think about youth experiences productively (Rodriguez, 2016, 2017a) to uncover the relationality and materiality of *youthspaces*. This issue was initiated by and broadly grounded in an interest in studying the materiality, or the "matter of things," and the plural, complex and unevenness of human experience (Fox & Alldred, 2017, p. 2; Barad, 1997) as it relates to the study of young people, particularly from minoritized backgrounds. Such youth are characterized from deficit models of thinking about identity and their voices are often unheard in educational policy-making to be sure. In the context of social theory's commonplace dualisms of structure/agency, cited earlier in the sociological and anthropological literature in the U.S., youth identity and experiences are often conceived through dualistic paradigms that produce notions of the Other and in that process reify young peoples' positioning in society and educational contexts as nondominant and lacking agency. Instead of reifying the societal positioning as one of non-dominant, the articles in this issue not only privilege *youthspace*, conceived as emergent, relational, and spatial, but include detailed accounts of how youth produced, disrupted, and made sense of space and the relations therein.

A second consideration both in the conception of this issue and in how the articles are arranged relates to new materialist philosophy's focus on power, specifically how power operates and is/can be disrupted in the social production of space (Fox & Alldred, 2015). Scholars have extended this overarching focus on power to empirical research (Fox & Alldred, 2015) by seeking to address the "desires, feelings, and meanings" that engender social reproduction processes (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). These materially, relationally, socially, and spatially produced desires comprise the articles in this issue as an experiment in demystifying and further rejecting social structures such as neoliberalism, racism or heteronormativity, for instance, as the repetitive "reason" for why things are the way they are, i.e. how societies function (Fox & Alldred, 2015; Latour, 2005). Taking these two considerations, this special issue examines how youth and space coalesces to contribute a more fruitful, nuanced, and disruptive understanding of educational sites.

Imaginings of *Youthspaces*

The first three articles (papers 1-3) comprise intentionally disruptive analyses that uncover *youthspaces.* First, Gildersleeve and Sifuentez's study entangles Latino/a youth activism with ritual culture in U.S. higher education. These authors ethnographically examine Latino/a graduation ceremonies, emplacing our analyses within new materialist philosophy, and theorizing the ceremonies as *assemblage*. These authors contribute to the knowledge-base around how Latino/a youth use/claim space in their efforts for social change as well as the burgeoning literature utilizing new materialist philosophies to develop methods that uncover socially produced spaces by minoritized youth. Second, Del Vecchio, Toomey & Tuck's youth participatory action research (yPAR) study of undocumented migrant youth in the Hudson Valley of New York uniquely introduces what the authors name, "placing photovoice," to examine the experiences of young people. Their yPAR study, combined with critical place inquiry (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) utilizes photovoice to understand how experiences of setting and place shape how youth who are facing the dilemma of precarious legal status while living in rural areas envision and plan for their futures. With guidance from Indigenous theorizations of refusal, the project explores the potential of embedding refusal into image-based methodologies to involve participants more deliberately in the collection, generation and sharing of data. Third, Linville's study of sexuality and gender in schools utilizes a participatory action research approach alongside the methodological tool of mapping. In her study, she illustrates how youth researchers understand discourses of sexuality and gender manifest in their school setting and the ways they resisted the limitations of dominant gender and sexuality identities. Linville discusses themes related to how school spaces are sexualized and gendered for students. This author uncovers material, relational, and spatial circulations of discourses on sexuality to allow young people, educators and researchers access to new understandings of LGBTQ+ youth experiences in schools, focusing on how embodied and discursive resources are used to create spaces in schools in which to explore their identities and pleasures.

The next set of articles (papers 4-7) expand the literature on yPAR and PAR in two ways. First, authors study marginalized groups in unique contexts and attempt to make meaning of *youthspaces* in rural Alabama, Nashville, Tennessee, Vancouver, BC, and southern California. Each of these authors offer intricate descriptions and *youthspaces*, including in alternative high schools, community organizing sites, and classrooms. Second, authors pay close attention to methodological uses and limitations of yPAR in their respective settings.

First, Baggett and Andrzejewski, for instance, implemented a yPAR project at a rural, alternative high school in Alabama. Youth at the school were atypical from those usually described in the yPAR literature in that they were predominantly white, working and middle class, and lived in rural neighborhoods that were geographically removed from their school. The authors provide findings in two domains, focusing on youth perspectives about community, including the ways these perspectives did not foster a sense of collective action and how youths felt (dis)empowered and cynical about community involvement and offer methodological reflections and implications for yPAR, including how their project was (mis)aligned with the extant literature on yPAR. Second, Goessling examines how young people were learning to be activists in Vancouver, British Columbia through a youth-driven organization, "Think Again" (TA). Goessling's work hones-in on creative action projects of youth and the emergent methodologies employed in this study that generated the conditions for "places of possibility." Goessling contributes to current literature by utilizing a narrative framework to examine the ways the social relationships and practices at TA enabled some of the young people to take up an activist identity and by conceptualizing "places of possibility" as literal and metaphorical spaces where people are afforded the tools and resources necessary to imagine alternative realities, identities, and systems than what currently exist.

Third, Craven, Montero, Ramirez, Robles & Robles focus on how undocumented immigrant youth in Nashville, Tennessee confront and challenge educational inequities, particularly that of affordable access to higher education. To contribute to the extant literature on yPAR, the authors demonstrate how undocumented youth engaged in both individual and collective forms of resistance can overcome educational barriers, a process we refer to as *boundary politics*. This article draws on data from 24 oral histories from a multi-year participatory action research project with members of a youth-led undocumented-immigrant organizing group. This participatory methodology was used to complement the collective action and individual forms of resistance employed by undocumented youth in this study. Uniquely, this paper includes undocumented youth authors who engaged in various forms of resistance and activism, influencing the social and political landscape of Tennessee, laying the groundwork for educational equity to become a more plausible reality within the state.

Fourth, Moya examines how youth take on critical civic identities across classroom and organizing spaces. By examining two structurally unique learning sites from a situated perspective, this paper highlights how youth critical civic identity processes are negotiated within figured worlds over time. In particular, the goals and membership expectations of the two sites positioned the study participants on different identity trajectories, with classroom students more likely to adopt an *aspirational* critical civic identity, while youth participating in community-based organizing took on more *practice-linked* identities as critical civic activists. More specifically, positioning youth as valuable contributors to critical civic action was a key resource for youth to take on these practice-linked identities as individuals with agency to address social injustices.

The final set of articles in this issue (papers 8-10) expand the conversation about studying *youthspaces*, specifically from reflective and conceptual perspectives. First, Berryman, Eley & Copeland take us into the world of marginalized Māori youth in New Zealand. The authors present three stories-over-time of the secondary schooling experiences of New Zealand's *rangatahi Māori*—or Māori youth. The stories span fifteen years of New Zealand schooling and are told from three perspectives: the experiences of the students as told in their own words; the voices of youth within the prevailing political contexts of government policy; and, the reframing and repositioning of researchers listening to the experiences of rangatahi Māori who believe they have *succeeded as Māori*. In reality, the stories are interwoven; however, in an effort to make sense of the various methodological dilemmas, risks, and entanglements across the three points of learning, the authors disentangle these different threads from the whole and follow these independent of each other. Finally, these authors offer implications for educators, policy makers, and researchers.

Duggan's article uniquely theorizes young people's aspirations through the notion of "willfulness" to consider how young people anticipate, plan for, and orient toward the future as a real and imagined space that is embedded within their relationship to everyday social, cultural, and economic practices. To do this, Duggan draws upon digital blog and interview narratives collected across a seventeen-month period from three young women in their final year of secondary school in Victoria, Australia. These narratives take up the notion of "willed" space(s) to consider the capacities, energies, and projects that these young women tell about the future over time. Throughout, this paper argues that a willful lens is particularly productive for its capacity to move beyond an understanding of educational participation as a fixed site for realizing aspirations to one that highlights multiple processes of becoming within novel spaces of identification and belonging. Finally, Thompson and Hardee engage in a duologue to explore the pedagogical and poetic openings experienced during two individual youth empowerment school-based research projects in two southern states—one a middle school poetry project, the other a high-school mentoring project. The projects engage minoritized youth with undergraduate students in colleges of education utilizing a methodology grounded in a theory of physical and metaphorical borderlands and border pedagogy for agentive participation. The authors assert that intentional formation of border spaces of participation and care within the silencing spaces of school serves as a foundation from which youth may build capacity, through coming to voice and collaborative action that speaks to their experiences, for future actions for social activism and change.

Taken together, these articles offer insight into a new materialist understanding of *youth-space* along with interrogating and building upon critical and participatory frameworks by emphasizing the activist voices within the material, relational, and spatial dimensions of *youth-space*. To this end, these articles advance our understanding of justice-oriented social inquiry from the perspectives and innovations of youth.

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Sophia Rodriguez, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She conducts research on (un)documented immigrant youth activism as well as the impact of educational and social policy on minoritized youth broadly. Her work can be found in *Educational Policy*, *Educational Studies* and *The Urban Review* among others.

Latino/a Youth Activism in Higher Education: A New Materialist Analysis of the Latino Graduation Ceremony

Ryan Evely Gildersleeve & Brenda Jimenez Sifuentez, University of Denver

Abstract

In this paper, we entangle Latino/a youth activism with ritual culture in U.S. higher education. Specifically, we analyze ethnographically-generated data from Gildersleeve's (2015; 2016) study of Latino graduation ceremonies, emplacing our analyses within new materialist philosophy. We theorize the Latino graduation ceremony as assemblage (DeLanda, 2006) and produce new sensibilities about the significance of Latino/a youth activism in contemporary U.S. higher education. The purposes of this paper are two-fold. First, we hope to contribute to the knowledge-base around how Latino/a youth use/claim space in their efforts for social change. Second, we hope to contribute to the growing literature in education that draws from new materialist philosophy and develops new methods/analyses to help reveal youth experiences.

Keywords: *Latino/a youth activism; higher education; new materialism; assemblage theory; ritual culture*

Analyzing rituals enhances awareness of cultural realities and the power of the values and beliefs that shape social institutions and the lived experiences of the people affected by them (Magolda, 2016). As Latino/a participation in higher education historically has been marked by controversial policy, achievement, and opportunity outcomes, the production of celebratory rituals is indeed significant for understanding higher education's past, present, and imagined future. Latino graduation ceremonies exist alongside traditional institutional rituals of commencement. Of particular relevance here is the particularly subaltern status of the ritual. There is an inherently oppositional politic in their practice, yet they also perpetuate the neoliberal condition systemic to American higher education today (Gildersleeve, 2015). Understanding that politic and the new realities it creates when intra-secting with youth activism can provide a more nuanced and complex understanding of how Latino/a youth activism reconfigures space(s) within dominant institutions (i.e., higher education) today. Hence, we ask the question, "How might Latino/a youth activism materialize through ritual culture in higher education?"

The purposes of this paper are two-fold. First, we hope to contribute to the knowledge-base around how Latino/a youth use/claim space in their efforts for social change. Second, we hope to contribute to the growing literature in education that draws from new materialist philosophy and develops new methods/analyses to help reveal youth experiences. In this paper, we entangle Latino/a youth activism with ritual culture in U.S. higher education. Specifically, we analyze ethnographically-generated data from Gildersleeve's (2015; 2016) study of Latino graduation ceremonies, emplacing our analyses within new materialist philosophy. We theorize the Latino graduation ceremony as *assemblage* (DeLanda, 2006) and produce new sensibilities about the significance of Latino/a youth activism in contemporary U.S. higher education.

As our paper is multi-purposed and drawing explicitly from posthumanist ontologies (i.e., new materialism and assemblage theory), we depart significantly from the canonical organization of the traditional research report. Rather, we take up Coole and Frost's (2010) conclusion for the future development of materialist entanglements:

> …new materialist ontologies demand a rethinking of, and renewed attention to, the dynamics of materialization…such a project demands, as a corollary, a radical reappraisal of the contours of the subject, a reassessment of the possibility and texture of ethics, an examination of new domains of power and unfamiliar frames for imagining justice, and an exploration of the sources, quality, and dimensions of agency. (p. 37)

We follow Coole and Frost's (2010) call for attention to the dynamics of materialization and organize our analysis as an excavation of the Latino graduation ceremony as *assemblage* of Latino/a youth activism in U.S. higher education. As such, our paper moves fluidly and sometimes disjointedly through the corollary suggested by Coole and Frost. We describe the contours of subjects-as-becoming-Latino/a activists. We provide our assessments of possible ethics, textured through the entangled discourses that engender such an assemblage. We examine the thresholds of power as it circulates through the assemblage and explore the sources and dimensions of agency afforded through the emerging assemblages that become Latino graduation ceremonies.

Latinos in U.S. Higher Education

Latino/a participation in higher education has been marked by controversial policy, achievement, and opportunity outcomes. Educational policy has had a profound effect on the ability to recruit and retain Latino/a students. It wasn't until the mid-1990s that federal and state policies explicitly focused on Latino/as in higher education (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). The rollback of affirmative action policies led Texas, California, and Florida to develop percentage plans in order to broaden college access for all students. These states, combined, enroll about 60 percent of Latino/a college students (Brown et al., 2003). A shortcoming from the percentage plans was that it did not take into consider financial need, nor that they might not be academically prepared to take advantage of this benefit (Brown et al., 2003). An important piece of state legislation that has affected some Latino/a students has been the passage in-state tuition rates regardless of residency status.

The most substantial and historical federal higher education legislation that has impacted both access and success has been the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA). This act created government funded programs such as TRIO and GEAR Up across the nation to facilitate increasing access to higher education for Latinos and other historically underrepresented communities (Brown, et al., 2003). The creation of access programs addressed the challenges facing Latino/as. It was not until the development of Title V-Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) that created a competitive basis for building institutional capacity (Arciniega, 2012). HSI designation was created with the reauthorization of HEA of 1965, the designation was revised in subsequent years and institutions must meet the following requirements: a non-profit accredited institution, 25% of the undergraduate body must identify as Latino/a and 50% must be low-income and first generation (Valdez, 2015). Since their inception, HSIs have double in growth from 189 to 409 (Santiago, Taylor, & Calderon Galdeano, 2016). There is an almost equal divide between two-year and four-year institutions (Santiago, et al., 2016). These institutions are more likely to be underfunded compared to other institutions (Calderon Galdeano, E., Flores, A.R., & Mode J.,2012). In 2010, HSIs received an average of $3,466 per student compared to $5,242 per student among all degree granting institutions (HACU, 2012).

Approximately 60% of all Latino/a college students are enrolled in HSIs; however, overall, Latino/a students disproportionately are enrolled in two-year institutions, compared to their dominant peers (Nunez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez, 2013). The appeal of community colleges is often associated with the lower cost, proximity to families, schedule flexibility, and less rigorous admission standards (Arbona & Nora, 2007). While these institutional characteristics are alluring, these same institutions often lack the ability to transfer Latino/a students to four-year institutions. Transfer rates for Latino/a students from a community college to a four-year institution are lower compared to their white counterparts, even though half of first time Latino/a community college students report aspirations to transfer (Nunez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011; Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Sherpherd, 2010). Simply put, starting at a community college decreases the likelihood of bachelor's degree completion for Latino/a students (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013).

In California, for every 100 Latino/a students who graduate from high school, only 40 enroll in higher education and of those, 30 begin at a community college, seven are admitted and enroll in the California State University system of comprehensive universities, and three in the flagship University of California system of research universities (Nora & Crisp, 2009). The case of California is representative of how Latino/a students that pursue postsecondary education are concentrated in less selective/open access institutions. Nationally, in 2013-2014, of all Latino/a undergraduate students only 12% were enrolled in selective institutions, while over 60% were enrolled in open-access institutions (Santiago, et al., 2016).

If college choice/access can be recognized as a social practice (Gildersleeve, 2010), then emplacing the condition of Latino/a postsecondary achievement, as reflected in the increasing number of Latino/a attending underfunded institutions can be understood as an expression of the broader neoliberal context of US higher education. Further, Gildersleeve, Cruz, Madriz, and Melendrez-Flores (2015) theorized a Latino educational caste in recognition of the stratified educational outcomes that ensnare Latino/a youth and the discourses of higher education institutions. In their analysis, Gildersleeve, et al. (2015), suggest that the systemic inequities in education faced by Latino/a youth become reified by postsecondary leaders' discursive productions of Latino/a college choice and build structural barriers that prevent Latino/a educational achievement outside of the Latino educational caste.

Neoliberal Higher Education

The role of American neoliberalism is to ensure that there is a constant fostering of competition (Hamann, 2009). As funding from state and federal governments continues to decline, higher education institutions have sought out different avenues to secure funding. Torres and Van Heertum (2009) argue that increased entrepreneurialism in higher education has made efforts to expand revenue or replenish state and federal revenue loss by seeking profit endeavors with businesses in research, satellite campuses, and extension programs. This disinvestment in higher education is part of the neoliberal agenda in defunding higher education as a public good. HSI policy acknowledges that Latino/a students typically enrolled in large numbers at institutions that historically have been underfunded. It is these same institutions that have benefited from supplemental funding once HSI grantee status was obtain. However, the expansion of HSIs has also made Title V grant aid more competitive. The funding associated with this status has incentivized more institutions that are seeing larger influx of Latino/a students to their campus to actually seek the designation. Despite grants only being a sliver of institutional operation budgets, they provide a flexibility to bring new programs (Santiago, et al., 2016). For HSIs the neoliberal practices of competition create a market for admissions department to target Latinos in order to increase their enrollment. Although the HSI status does not require institutions to announce their designation an institution can use this as a marketing tool.

The creation of HSI designation in 1992 did not occur in isolation to other public policies. It was and is deeply imbedded in the neoliberal doctrine of higher education particularly the importance of workforce development. Existing practices were not effectively educating Latino/as therefore innovation needed to occur. Foucault (2008) argues that

> if there is innovation, that is to say; if we find new things, discover new forms of productivity, and make technological innovations, this is nothing other than the income of a certain capital, of human capital, that is to say of the set of investments we have made at the level of man himself. (p. 231).

In other words, HSIs became a new innovation that organized this particular group of students.

Students enrolled in higher education learn to become an "entrepreneur of the self" as described by Foucault. The competitive entrepreneurialism can also be closely associated with a student's ability to succeed regardless of sociopolitical constraints. Within a neoliberal frame, Latino/as' lower graduation rates is not the failure of an institution's faculty and staff but rather the failure lies within Latino/a students for their inability to adapt and be successful in the competitive postsecondary environment.

Literature discussing the "entrepreneur of the self" has also been theorized outside of the United States, although not in relationship to Latino/a students. For example, Kelly (2006) argues that selfhood is dominated by a particular form of the entrepreneurial self. Rather than see at-risk youth negatively, the entrepreneurial self is viewed as a positive (i.e., productive/generative) enactment, as these youths seek other ways to gain access to capital. Intervention practices that acknowledge the shaping of different life choices are structured by the global process.

In the context of higher education, Gildersleeve (2016) argues that "the neoliberal sphere is the crisis of American higher education—temporal, spatial, environmental, economic, and personal" (p. 3). As neoliberalism continues to make certain truths possible and certain knowledge knowable, it is within these contexts that we emplace our analysis of the Latino graduation ceremony and produce plausible assemblages that render the Latino graduation ceremony as temporally-emergent assemblages of Latino/a youth activism.

Youth Activism in Higher Education

Student activism has been committed to public memory, as researchers have studied student activism in higher education since its rise in the 1960s (Dominguez, 2009). A review of the literature on campus activism is important in order to understand the institutional context of Latino/a activism on college campuses today. Dominguez (2009) states that it is no surprise that there has been a disagreement of the nature and extent of student activism, given the multi-faceted and comparative frameworks for understanding student activism. Rhoads (1998, 2003) for example has explored campus activism in the 1990s on multiculturalism and student resistance to globalization. Another aspect of student activism has been concentrated on the role of students in the anti-sweatshops movements on college campuses. Few articles have explored the ways in which students involved in the anti-sweatshop movement has affected their activism in the neoliberal institution (Dominguez, 2009).

The study of social movements is often based on the following components; the deconstruction of collective action from the point of view of those seeking change, those that have the influence to create the change, the claims or demands, and the tactics that are used by those seeking change to advance their demands (Barnhardt, 2014). Tactics tend to resonate when they cause disruption to normative behavior; the disruption breaks the regular routine for at least a bit of time. Conventional tactics on campus often consist of disrupting public forums, holding events in free speech zones, generally in spaces that are not designed for disruption. Walker, Martin, and McCarthy (2008) describe tactics on college campuses often are aligned with more conventional tactics that build on behaviors and values of the organization.

Student movements are most successful and gain legitimacy with targets when tactical approaches are framed in familiar contexts of administrative practices, policies, and campus norms (Benford & Snow, 1992). Barnhardt (2014) argues that while campus activists choose tactics that align with conventional activities these tactics are reconfigured with new meanings that disrupt administrators' and peers' understanding of campus life and organizational practices. These conventional tactics however, should not be seen as manufactured peaceful protest rather conventional tactics are disruptive and transgress the meanings of everyday campus occurrences. While campus policies have been designed to curb large actions such as having to gain permission to assemble large gatherings, normative events on campuses have now turned into opportunities to create alternative views and assert movement claims (Barnhardt, 2014).

Despite the mulitiplicty of frameworks used to understand student activism, there is minimal research that has examined Latino/a student activism, particularly post-2000. Student activism on campus is typically associated with actions that take place in free speech zones or the takeover (sit in) of campus buildings. We will argue and illustrate how Latino/a activism today can materialize from the material transformation of institutional ritual. Situating Latino/a youth activism via a new materialist analysis of graduation rituals expands not only the frameworks available for understanding youth activism, but also centers Latino/a activism itself.

Studying Latino/a Youth Activism via the Latino Graduation Ceremony

This article draws analyses from Gildersleeve's broader critical ethnographic study of ritual culture and Latino/a youth in higher education, particularly his studies of Latino graduation ceremonies (2015; 2017). Gildersleeve engaged ethnographically with organizers of and participants in Latino/a graduation ceremonies across ten campuses, including two community colleges, three state comprehensive universities, and five research universities. Seven institutions were located in California and three were in Texas. Fieldwork included individual and group interviews with organizers and participants (i.e., graduates), as well as participant-observation and/or video recording of the actual ceremonies, including any receptions that were included as part of the event.

In total, 72 participants were interviewed. Whenever possible, ceremonies were recorded using either audio (n=7) or video (n=2) recording devices, and major speeches, including keynote addresses and student speeches, were transcribed. In total, 26 speeches were transcribed. At stake in this article are the ethnographic descriptions that Gildersleeve produced of the ceremonies, as well as various interview data and the transcribed speeches by various keynotes, guests, and graduates. (For a more complete and in-depth description of the broader research design, see Gildersleeve, 2015.)

Post-qualitative Analysis

While the broader project was situated in a critical ethnographic tradition (Madison, 2005; Gildersleeve, 2010), the analyses we present herein depart radically from the ontological assumptions of traditional and critical ethnography. In effect, we transpose Gildersleeve's broader study from the ethnographic to the post-qualitative, wherein the ontological foundations become de/territorialized from a humanist perspective to a post-humanist and new materialist view of reality. Reality in this view is characterized by decentered subjects, difference, and sense, in contrast to the autonomous anthropocentricity and interpretive meaning-making assumed by the historic ethnographic traditions (Gildersleeve & Sifuentez, 2016; Masny, 2016). Our goal in doing so is to transgress ethnographic description of the world as it is (traditional ethnography) and/or the world as it could be (critical ethnography) and produce new assemblages of possible realities co-existing in their becoming-qualities with the dominant contemporaneous narratives of reality common to the research literature about youth activism in higher education.

Multiple techniques have been generated to engage in post-qualitative analysis. Jackson (2013) put to work Pickering's notions of *the mangle* in order to make sense of the discursive-material entanglements produced through temporally emergent practices in relation to resistant blocks. Jackson asserted: "the point in analyzing mangled practices is not what they are but what they do" (p. 746). Masny (2016) suggested that *palpating data* could produce rhizoanalysis in seeking to understand how reading multiple literacies in language learning could be useful in asking new questions, posing different problems, and creating new concepts—using theory *as* practice. Masny's palpation resists doing interpretation of data, but rather seeks to do with data the very theory-building and concept creation called for by Gilles Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* (1990). Each of these analytic methods privilege the materiality of their respective project's inquiry engagements. We provide our rhizoanalysis of the dynamic and at times competing assemblages that constitute the Latino graduation ceremony, as Gildersleeve's becoming-inquiry sought to make sense of it. We both mangle practices and palpate Gildersleeve's data in order to learn what the Latino graduation ceremony can *do*, as well as produce newly possible concepts of Latinx youth activism in US higher education.

New Materialism and Assemblage Theory

The collection of movements that identify with new materialist thought generally share an interest in re-thinking the relationships between discursive and material productions of knowledge (Connolly, 2013). New materialism abandons old dichotomous understandings of human/non-human and subject/object in favor of more radically diverse and dynamic processes and flows of vital forces. Further, it works from non-anthropocentric ontological assumptions, wherein the "human" is reconfigured as a produced situation in relationship to broader processes of materialization. Assemblage theory recognizes that there are unknown antecedents to any operative discourse and the intra-secting collection of such discourses produce what it is that becomes an experience (DeLanda, 2006). Such a notion of reality emphasizes the historicity and dynamism of any given experience (or ritual). Thus, the action of dynamic sets of actants (human/non-human; discursive/material) must be traced in order to cultivate new understandings and forms or tactics of power.

Assemblage Theory

Assemblage theory operates from a monist ontology that transcends the classic dualisms of structure/agency, human/non-human, subject/object. According to DeLanda (2006), assemblage theory has three relational features that are in relationship with each other. The first signifies a system and the ways that elements function as both content and forms of expression. For instance, communication is not just an expression but also constitutes realities (Fox & Alldred, 2015). The second feature acknowledges the forces of deterritorialization/reterritorialization; any situation is never static and always draws towards something else as its components are emerging into new becomings (Beighton, 2013). The territories of dominant discourse are therefore moveable, malleable, changeable, yet remain knowable in stabilizing ways, even as new assemblages de-stabilize their power to protect the population of the given territory. Here, territory is not necessarily physical, but rather ephemeral, social, discursive, and material.

The third feature is the assemblage of *materiality*; insights and impressions are material components that should be understood as significant parts. Bodies are no longer seen as occupying demarcated spaces, but rather all bodies and other materials are relational, meaning that they have ontological status, but that they are produced though their relationships with other bodies, things, and ideas (Fox & Alldred, 2015). Assemblages occur around different action and events that are often chaotic networks of connections that are always in flux, which means they are reassembled in different ways (Potts, 2004). These assemblages occur on a variety of different and differential social levels.

In assemblage theory a “subject” does not exist, but rather it is an affect of *becoming*, which expresses the changes and capacities of an entity. The change can be physical, psychosocial, emotional, or social (Fox & Alldred, 2015). A becoming can alter more than one capacity, representing a social production that is non-linear, but rather a production of multiplicities. Additionally, assemblages can function as territories that have been produced by the affects between relations (Fox & Alldred, 2015). Assemblage theory challenges binaries by explicitly stating that results can have parallel outcomes making contradictory events equally possible. For example, the social institution of higher education can serve to mitigate social inequality while also serving to exacerbate it. Rather than having to “choose” to support or resist, assemblage theory problematizes such a choice by acknowledging the tensions and the multiple dimensions of any produced situation. Since assemblages are constantly changing and being reconfigured, the use of territories can be a representation of how lives, societies, and history continue along processes of becoming.

Assemblage one, in which the Latino Graduation Committee transforms the student union into el salón. The student union’s banquet hall was prepared with a couple of hours to spare before any guests arrived. Students from the *Latino Graduation Committee* had pulled favors from the custodians they had come to know and appreciate during after-hours conversations when the students were holding their meetings in the student union and the custodians were performing their regular duties. The custodians often did double-duty as event staff at *Pacifica University*, and since they grew fond of the *LGC* students—the only students in the union that spoke to them like they were equals, more than equals rather, elders—they offered to staff the end of year ceremony without charging extra for set-up and take-down. They expressed a desire to work for free for this particular event, but the union would not allow it, which the students understood, as their activism was also rooted in supporting custodians during labor contracts and the fight for a living wage.

The banquet hall was filled with a combination of 10-person round tables and long 16-person rectangular tables. Each was covered in brightly colored tablecloths with a flower arrangement in the center and individual programs placed in the center of each place setting. There were enough to seat 250 guests comfortably. Only two tables were reserved, placed at the very front of the room, but off to the side, almost hidden from the main view of the room. Against one wall was a stage setup as a wide proscenium with two lecterns about one-third of the way from each side. A screen was set-up in the center of the stage. A slide was projected onto it from the room's A/V system. The slide included an image of the university's seal, the LGC logo, and text reading, "¡Bienvenidos!" A set of steps marked the center of the stage. Two other sets of steps could be found on either end of the stage. There was a broad open space in front of the proscenium.

Two of the long rectangular tables were set up to serve a buffet dinner of Southwestern, Mexican, Central American, and South American foods, including multiple versions of tamales, rolled tacos, enchiladas, rice, beans, salad, and various pastries for desserts. Outside the banquet hall, food trucks from local vendors who had supplied the buffet were stationed around in case anyone got hungry throughout the event. As the food truck caterers worked to set up the buffet, the LGC volunteers and the custodians worked to put final touches on the tables, stage, and a small reception stand by the banquet hall doors.

Cartography of the Latino Graduation Ceremony Assemblage

The Latino Graduation Ceremony, as a ritual practice for some Latino/a youth in U.S. higher education, materializes from months of planning, fundraising, and designing. At some institutions, students elect an executive board in the preceding academic year so that early-fall term activities get off to an immediate start. At some campuses, the fall term is spent recruiting planning committee members, fundraising from local businesses, and making facilities reservations as early as possible in order to confirm a date, time, and space for the ritual event. There is a litany of tasks to complete over the traditional nine-month academic year in preparation for the ceremony, and many student groups seem to breeze through these preparations, with or without institutional support from their university. Indeed, at some campuses, the Latino Graduation Committee is well-respected as one of the most well-run student organizations.

The design element builds upon generations of prior Latino graduation ceremonies, as well as ancestral cultural practices and artifacts. While it is simple enough to connect the food choices to the cultural and national communities represented in the ceremony, the choice to use local vendors and to display their participation/sponsorship in the program, on the tables, or with signs outside, brings to the fore the intentionality of making this ceremony part of *Latinidad,* part of *la raza,* part of something that historically has been systematically relegated outside of American academe—Latino/a college graduates (Gildersleeve, 2015). A relational feature of assemblage theory acknowledges that elements function as both content and forms of expression; the designed elements are captured in this way. Thus, it becomes imperative that this ritual ceremony materialize as an expression of not just students' achievement, but the struggle of *la raza* in the face—and on the grounds—of the institutions that have been used to relegated them to subaltern status. The design choices bring cultural flows of heritage into contact with institutional flows of neoliberal bureaucracy and transform, temporally and materially, institutional spaces into revolutionary places.

Assemblage two, in which padres y madres y estudiantes become graduados. The drumming became more intense as the Aztec dancers entered the ballroom. The spring of their steps and the chimes of their costumes drew the crowd's attention as they arranged themselves into formation in the center of the open space at the base of the stage. The conch shell was blown in the four directions, and the dance resumed. It was an invocation of the ancestors and a call to ceremony for all who were there that evening.

The crowd was filled with *abuelas y abuelos* (grandparents), *hermanos* (siblings), *primos* (cousins), *tias y tios* (aunts & uncles), *vecinos* (neighbors), *admiradores* (admirers), *y mentores* (and mentors). These crowds varied from a single father waiting anxiously to see and support his daughter to extended *familia* numbering 10, 12, 15, or higher. Also in the crowd were a scattering of university professors and administrators, students/friends, and the custodians who helped set-up and were waiting to take down the event. Most of whom were Latino/as. Spanish language flowed freely throughout the hall, sometimes intermixed with English, sometimes not.

As the Aztec dancers concluded and danced their way out of the ballroom, the music of their drums and chimes slowly gave way to the speaker system fading in with *Pomp and Circumstance,* the traditional graduation processional music. All eyes turned to the back corner of the hall where the first of the graduates was beginning her march into *el salón.* She wore the traditional graduate's gown and mortarboard. It was accented with a stole made in the *serape* pattern, a nod to Latino heritage. She was accompanied, not by any academic marshal, but by her parents. Arm in arm, the three of them lead the march into the hall, through the audience, across the stage, and down into the seats reserved for the graduates. For the next ten minutes, the chain of *madres y padres y estudiantes* made its way through the room, blurring the distinction between supporter and graduate. This procession centered on *la familia,* rather than *la Universidad* (Gildersleeve, 2015).

Possible Becoming-Ethics

Latino graduation ceremonies deterritorialize/reterritorialize the cultural effects of traditional commencement ceremonies. Latino graduation ceremonies occupy physical and temporal space historically inculcated with dualisms. For example, when one is admitted there is an expectation that you will also graduate: admissions/graduation. The traditional commencement's processional is hyper-individuated yet produced on an economic scale of the population. That is, each graduate enters alone, but as part of the graduating class, which stands alone as one kind of thing, one kind of graduate. Graduation ceremonies are often static rituals that highlight a linear and efficient process of higher education: a student enters, learns, then leaves with a degree. However, Latino graduation ceremonies are not a space of linear form. Rather they are assemblages that emplace all participants in relationship to one another, while speaking back to the dominant institution (i.e., the college/university) that historically subjugates Latino communities. It is here when/where the becoming-activist attempts to reterritorialize/deterritorialize the dominant discourse of Latino in neoliberal higher education.

The Latino graduation ceremony itself is a de-territorializing/re-territorializing of both the physical space of the student union banquet hall, as well as the linear process of postsecondary education. It ruptures the university's ethics of rabid individualism and competition by making the ceremony reflect a more collective and familial experience. The format of the ceremony itself does this. For example, the procession into the ceremony does not occur as a collection of lone individual graduates, but rather the graduating student processes alongside her parents.

This design choice within the Latino graduation ceremony is not merely a cultural dimension of difference. Rather, the design of the procession produces other affects within the assemblage. While it is fair to make sense of the parent-inclusive-procession as a gesture to students' support systems (i.e., parents), it also effectively produces the act of graduation as a three-member party, rather than an individual achievement. The design choice of the procession produces the becoming-graduate as constituted by not only the student but her parents as well. They become integral components the assemblage of the becoming-Latino/a graduate.

Assemblage three, part a, in which consejos* de *activism entangle consejos de neoliberalism. The two student emcees shared the microphone and responsibility for translating back and forth across one another. "*¡Bienvenidos!"* "Welcome!" An administrative representative from the university who had worked closely with the Latino Graduation Committee offered her own greeting:

> I want to welcome you to your graduation. Because this is not your child's, your brothers, your sister, your nieces, your nephews, your *hijada*, your *sobrina, su abuela, su nieta, su viseabuela, su companera de vida, su companero de vida.* This is all of your graduation because it represents years of struggle, of sacrifices, of love and kindness, of sending gifts, of sending money, of sending prayers and of many tears shed. Tears when they say goodbye, when they first leave for campus, tears when they come home because you realize that they begin to change. And tears when they leave again and tonight there will be many tears but tears of joy.

After further obligatory welcoming remarks, the first keynote speaker was introduced, again in Spanish followed by English. Highlights of her words of wisdom included:

> *Estamos enfrentado que un día ya no exista la clase media solamente existen los multi millonarios y los que día a día estamos esforzando para sobrevivir. Le reto de ustedes es reflejar este país a la normalidad a que sea un país de esperanza, un país de donde los sueños que se convertían en realidad.* (We are confronting a day that the middle class no longer exists, only multimillionaires and those who live day to day. The problems you face reflect the norm of this country. A country of hope, where your dream can be converted to a reality.)
>
> *Aunque sus diplomas no son solamente de ustedes. Son ustedes los que pueden y deben aprovecharlos. Por lo tanto les pido que se quieren dar reconocimiento a todos aquellos que hicieron posible su graduación que levanten su mano.* And I'm going to say that in English too. Graduates if you want to recognize all of those that have made possible your graduation tonight, please raise your hand. *Y ahora les pido que si estan listos para poner su diploma al servicio de nuestras comunidades Latinas, por favor pónganse de pie.* If you are ready to put your diploma to the service of our Latino communities please stand.

> *Mi querida gente Latina a que esta nuestras comunidades y de nuestra raza por favor un fuerte aplauso.*

The crowd erupted in applause. They were clearly motivated and moved by the speech. It was, after all, impressive to see and hear a Latino member of the community from such a high station. The success story was compelling and aspirational for many of the first-generation migrant families in the room. For many, she represented what they hoped this achievement—a college degree—was making possible for their children. The adversity commonly faced by *la gente de Latinidad* (the people of Latin American descent) was a shared understanding across the room. The words of the keynote speaker spoke back to such adversity, challenged the dominant narratives that many had come to expect of the University in its dealings with Latino communities.

Contours of Becoming-Latino/a Activists

Speakers' expressions of hope and commandments to recognize the unique positionality of Latino academic achievement (i.e., struggle/sacrifice) provide an outline for the historical significance shaping the Latino/a graduates participating in the Latino graduation ceremony. These two discourses, hope and struggle/sacrifice, establish the sense-making flows for Latino/a youth to emplace their celebration within a sociopolitical context. These discourses open up options for students to emplace themselves in an oppositional politic to the dominant discourses of society, colleges and universities, and Latino/a youth.

Yet, these discourses perpetuate dominant structures as well. They rely explicitly on the economy as an authorizing and validating function of higher education's purpose and value. These discourses also dangerously reify the notion that Latino families *must* make sacrifices in order to achieve academically. Such discourse is made concomitantly palatable, because of the neoliberal conditions produced and reflected by contemporary US higher education. The power produced through the Latino graduation ceremony, as called forth and exercised by these professional speakers, brings into contact the tensions between the neoliberal condition and the symbolic, corporeal, and designed resistances of the ceremony to that condition. These dueling discourses circulate through the spoken texts and proliferate throughout the space materializing in the broader assemblage of the Latino graduation ceremony.

Assemblage three, part b: in which consejos de activism entangle consejos de neoliberalism, continued. Next, the graduates were introduced one by one by a couple of Latino/a faculty members from the Pacifica University. As each graduate stood up and walked to the stage, they paused at one of the lecterns and shared a few words of their own. Each had an opportunity to express what this occasion meant to them, who made this night possible in their lives, what they hoped to do with the responsibility of this achievement, or simply to acknowledge the gravity of the transition they suddenly found themselves in … no longer a student, not yet a professional, a heightened awareness of their own becoming.

Students connected their family and this achievement to their futures:

> *Les quiero agradecer a toda mi familia, cada miembro de me familia. A mi mamá y papá los quiero tanto, tanto, tanto, y esto solo es un principio del éxito que viene. Gracias.* (I would like to thank my whole family, every single member. To my mom and dad, I love you so much and this is only the beginning of the success that will come. Thank you.)

Family is omnipresent across these brief remarks. One graduate shared:

> Knowledge is truly power and now that we embark on the next stages of our lives we remember from our *familia* here today that actions speak louder than words. Continually allow our rich culture that streams through our veins and to the passion and dedication that has brought us here today. With our hearts in our hands and our hands in the soil remember that our *raza* has the power to unite, educate, and liberate. This is dedicated to my resilient mother and father and my *abuelito* who passed away this year.

Further Contours of Becoming-Latino/a Activists

The Latino graduation ceremony, built by and for Latino/a youth, materializes an opportunity for Latino/a activists to re-constitute the social practice of college graduation—perhaps even higher education generally. Rather than an individual, competitive, and market-driven achievement, the Latino graduation ceremony, as an expression of Latino/a youth activism, allows students to materially emplace their achievement in a collectivist orientation and the historical context of Latino struggles for opportunity and equity. As previously mentioned tactics used by student activism typically build on the values and behaviors of the organization. Yet the assemblages of the Latino graduation allow for the activist to impose upon the institution a collectivist orientation. Students then can lay claim to a subject posture as a becoming-Latino/a graduate, which simultaneously engages the US higher education materialization of college graduates (i.e., they earn a degree from a US institution), yet also speaks back to the systemic inequity that US higher education can perpetuate.

Assemblage three, part c: in which consejos de activism entangle consejos de neoliberalism, continued. Some family members were present without even being in the room:

> Um, I never thought I would be up here. *No más quiero dar las gracias a mi familia que estar aquí conmigo. Y en especialmente a mi madre quien no está presente en cuerpo pero está en los cielos está muy orgullosa de mi y celebrando…*(Just want to thank my family for being here with me. Especially my mom, who physically isn't present but is in heaven, who is very proud of me, and celebrating.)

The last graduate to walk across the stage chooses not to speak, but to sing her remarks. She begins to sing Juan Gabriel's *Amor Eterno*: *Tú eres la tristeza de mis ojos* (You are the sadness of my eyes). And with that first stanza, the banquet hall becomes *la cocina/la sala/la parranda* (the kitchen, the living room, the party). Known to most people in the room, it seems everyone begins to sing the song underneath their breath. Once the chorus begins, a groundswell of emotion emerges: *Como quisiera ayy que tu vivieras, que tus ojitos jamas se hubieran cerrado nunca y estar mirandolos* (How much I wish that you were still alive, that those eyes have never closed and I could see them.) The ceremony is ending with a similar invocation as it began, an invocation of the struggles of the past in order to honor the achievement of the present and prepare for the struggles of the future. Everyone comes together, celebrating those they wish could be there at this moment. With this homage, the song ends and the crowd ruptures in applause and cheering. During the song for a brief moment *el salón* is overtaken with emotions of love and loss. Tears fall slowly down cheeks, yet as the song comes to an end, smiles emerge, and the celebration continues.

Thresholds of Power in Latino/a Youth Activism in U.S. Higher Education

Conceptualizing the Latino graduation ceremony as contemporary Latino/a youth activism allows for a new becoming-Latino/a youth activist posture, one that incorporates the heritage of the past, the material realities of the present, and focuses the Latino/a youth activist on a collectivist future that remains economically-driven. Such a posture fractures the institutional rendering of Latino/a youth, which, as noted earlier, positions them into the Latino educational caste theorized by Gildersleeve, et al (2015). The ceremony itself materializes as a tactical refutation and reconstitution of the institutional posture afforded Latino/a youth.

Yet, the ceremony does not—perhaps cannot—disrupt nor fracture the neoliberal imperative produced and reflected through US higher education. Specifically, the ceremony does not divorce the Latino/a youth possible subject posture from economic means of production. It is the economy of Latino/a academic achievement, reflected in the corporeal and material design choices of the Latino graduation ceremony, that holds tightly to the becoming-Latino/a youth activist and promotes the connectivity to the institution. The threshold of power to resist or reconceptualize Latino/a youth activism via the Latino graduation ceremony is the connective tissue with the institution of higher education. For, even while the student union's banquet hall becomes *el salón*, and even while *madres y padres* become part of *el graduado*/a within the liminal spaces created by the Latino graduation ceremony, each hinges on the institutional degree/diploma that will only be provided by the college or university itself. The Latino graduation ceremony allows for the reconceptualization of the ritual event to focus beyond the graduate. Such assemblage provides a compelling contribution for scholarship as it interrogates and expands the idea of who participates in higher education and how. The Latino/a graduate is not the alone in generating a relationship with the institution. As Latinx parents become part of *el graduado* they also co-constitute a becoming-relationship with the institution.

Further, there are fractures of the collectivist becoming-Latino/a college graduate/youth activist within the Latino graduation ceremony. Keynote speakers' commitment to economic discourses (e.g., multimillionaires, sending money, making money, doing better than one's parents) is rife with neoliberal commitments to the marketization and commodification of knowledge (see Slaughter & Rhoades, 1997). The design choices to use local vendors for food and decorations explicitly supports Latinx businesses, which implicates the ceremony as a market-driven, or at least market-complicit, expression of achievement. The Latino graduation ceremony extends along ontologically productive flows that can turn toward neoliberal higher education just as easily as Latino/a educational liberation.

This paper has sought to render the Latino graduation ceremony as a ritual practice that emerges from the oppositional politic and tensions between Latino/a youth activism and broader institutional discourses of US higher education. By emplacing the Latino graduation ceremony within the neoliberal context of contemporary higher education and using new materialism as a philosophical foundation for our post-qualitative analyses, we described the materialization of Latino/a youth activism as assemblage that deterritorialized/reterritorialized the production of the Latino/a youth activist and the Latino/a college graduate. New materialism, and assemblage theory in particular, provides useful tools for such analyses. By focusing on what the materialization of the Latino graduation ceremony *does*, rather than seeking to interpret what the design choices, the collection and distribution of things, and the meanings made by participants, all of which constitute the ceremony, we are able to produce possible and plausible sense of the Latino graduation ceremony as a contemporary exercise of Latino/a youth activism, one that follows within Barnhardt's

(2014) suggestion that tactics of activism can include normative events (even if subaltern in expression), and need not necessitate the disruption of institutional activities in order to promote an oppositional politic.

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Ryan Evely Gildersleeve is Associate Professor and Chair of the Higher Education Department at the Unviersity of Denver's Morgridge College of Education. His research agenda examines the role of higher education in US democracy with specific focus on the philosophical foundations of higher education, educational opportunity for Latino (im)migrant communities, and critical policy studies. He is the author of *Fracturing Opportunity: Mexican Migrant Students and College-going Literacy* (Peter Lang Publishers) and received the Early Career Award from AERA's Division D-Research Methodology. Gildersleeve was a 2012-2014 National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellow. His recent work seeks to theorize higher education within posthuman and new materialist ontologies in order to address the transgressive inequities pervading the global landscape. Gildersleeve earned his Ph.D. in Education and his MA in Higher Education and Organizational Change from UCLA. He is a graduate of Occidental College.

Brenda Jimenez Sifuentez is a Ph.D. student in Higher Education at the University of Denver. Her research interests include Latino/a student activism, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and college access/success. She earned her MA in Higher Education Administration and Leadership from Fresno State University. She is a graduate of the University of Oregon.

Placing Photovoice: Participatory Action Research with Undocumented Migrant Youth in the Hudson Valley

Deanna Del Vecchio, Nisha Toomey, & Eve Tuck, OISE, University of Toronto

Abstract:

This article describes a research study that aims to better understand the life-worlds of undocumented migrant youth in the Hudson Valley region of New York State. The program design combines critical place inquiry with Youth Participatory Action Research (yPAR) and photovoice to understand how experiences of setting and place shape how youth who are facing the dilemma of precarious legal status while living in rural areas envision and plan for their futures. With guidance from Indigenous theorizations of refusal, the project explores the potential of embedding refusal into image-based methodologies to involve participants more deliberately in the collection, generation and sharing of data.

Keywords: *Undocumented migrant workers; undocumented youth; DACA; youth Participatory Action Research; image-based research; participatory photography; photovoice; critical place inquiry; refusal in research; New York state farm workers*

Introduction

We are seated on folding chairs at a long table in the South Fallsburg Community Center. A squat beige structure flanked by leafy trees, it serves as the only gathering place for residents of this 3,000-person town. The group of 12- to 14-year olds around the table are delighted to be here, spending the last two weeks of summer participating in a photovoice research project. Prior to this program, they have rarely had the chance to spend time in the community center.

This afternoon, we are looking at pictures from a series called “Where Children Sleep” (Mollison, 2010). Each of us around the table holds a print from the series, which consists of children posing in their bedrooms in various countries. We discuss ideas of audience, consent, research ethics, and the types of knowledge that are produced from such images. We ask the youth if they would allow someone to take a picture of them in their bedroom. Their answer is a resounding “NO!” “What if,” we ask next, “we wanted you to take the picture yourself?” “No!” was the answer again. “What if you were offered compensation?”

This answer is less certain. The youth cast sideways glances at each other until someone giggles, “…depends how much!” We are nearing the end of the photovoice workshop, and we have not, and will not, ask them to take such a picture. In this way our group engages a kind of double refusal: the participants refuse to take the picture, and the researchers refuse to ask them to take it.

In 2012, President Barack Obama implemented an executive order on immigration called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that aimed to provide undocumented youth with temporary relief from the threat of deportation. DACA provided young people with documentation to get a social security card, work permit, and driver's license, and apply to universities that do not otherwise accept undocumented students. For many, DACA was the sole route to employment and higher education, although it is not a path to citizenship.

This article attends to the experiences of DACA eligible migrant youth[1] who are planning their futures during an especially precarious time. We investigate the role of place in the lives of these youth through photovoice; a visual methodology that involves a critical approach to taking photographs, discussing and analyzing images, and publicly sharing visual data to inform policy (Wang & Burris, 1994). Questioning the limits and possibilities of the photovoice method, we encouraged the youth to help frame the research process as it unfolded.

While place is often considered as merely a backdrop to human activity, it informs and shapes experiences and decision-making (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Our research sheds light on how location and environment affect the way undocumented migrant youth experience their roles in society, and impacts their ability to make plans for the future, including making use of policy designed to benefit them. In these pages, we present initial findings from year one of a five-year project led by Dr. Eve Tuck titled "Deferred Action and Postsecondary Outcomes: The Role of Migrant Youth Settings in Effective and Equitable Policy." We also share reflections to contribute to a generative discussion about the usefulness of visual research methods in the context of young and vulnerable populations living with precarious status.

Project Description

Hudson Valley Photovoice aims to document the role of multiple settings in how migrant youth (aged 13 to18) gained access to provisions under the DACA program, and how policy and settings work together to improve postsecondary options for migrant youth using multiple forms of data. The photovoice workshop is one of the five-year project's three branches, the others being longitudinal life world interviews and a survey. Exploring the significance of place in the lived experiences of these youth provides a window to understanding their approach to the policy opportunities available to them. The photovoice project was designed with Mid-Hudson Migrant Education Tutorial and Support Services (Mid-Hudson METS), an organization that has provided academic assistance and advocacy support to migrant families in the region for over thirty years. Mid-Hudson METS recruited participants and co-facilitated the photovoice workshop, titled "Photography Storytelling Camp," alongside the research team. The program fit with Mid-Hudson METS' mandate, as it functioned as a rare extracurricular activity for migrant youth in the area, and generated useful data for the demographic they serve.

The Photography Storytelling Camp took place in the last two weeks of summer when the new school year was impending. Each day, sessions started at 10 am and closed at 2 pm. Though we arrived at 9 am every day to set up supplies, wipe crumbs from tables, and stack piles of extra chairs, one or two participants would already be there, leaning against the outside wall of the community center, waiting to be let in. All but two participants lived within walking distance of the center, and arrived on their own. One participant rode to the center on a much-coveted bicycle.

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[1] When this article refers to migrant youth, we are referring to young people who are either undocumented themselves, or in some cases are born in the USA but whose parents, siblings or other family members are undocumented, and compelled to travel to find work in different parts of the USA.

While the project was designed for youth of between ages 13 and 18, the group of participants who signed up for this workshop were almost all between 13 and 15 years old, for practical reasons: older youth were able to get summer employment working in the poultry processing plant on the outskirts of South Fallsburg, and so were not available to attend the two-week program. Most parents were working full time in the poultry processing plant; other jobs included domestic labor.

The majority of the young people who signed up for the program spoke some English; all but one spoke fluent Spanish. This necessitated a dual-language program where everything spoken was simultaneously translated to enable both the Spanish and English speakers to follow along. In addition to translation support from the two Mid-Hudson METS co-facilitators, some of the participants were adept at translating, so the translator role shifted among several people throughout the program.

Observing their limited English language skills, we wondered how challenging school might be for some of the participants. Although graduation rates are difficult to track for migrant students, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that only half of migrant youth living in the United States complete high school (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009). In New York state, the percentage of youth pushed out of school may be higher. Challenges to migrant youths' school completion include frequent relocations, inconsistent family income, unreliable access to comprehensive health care, and lack of access to quality instruction in their home language (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002; Shea, 2003, Cruz, 2008). For the youth in the Storytelling Photography Camp, limited language abilities had practical implications for their daily lives, such as their ability to succeed in school and their ability to navigate local streets. Through Mid-Hudson METS, they were able to access academic and other supports.

The workshop location posed challenges. Our facility, the community center, had no wireless internet. Cellular reception was limited and patchy in the area, which hindered our ability to communicate with one another when some team members had to leave the site. From the community center, it was a half hour drive to the big-box stores that were our option for purchasing workshop supplies and print photos. More than once, we made the drive only to find out that Wal-Mart was out of photo paper. We would drive on to another location with the chance they would not have photo paper either, sending us on a daily tour of the region.

The daily schedule included a mix of activities that moved between research topics, camera and photography instruction, looking at and discussing photographs, and planning for project outcomes. The actual photography work was completed by participants outside of program hours in the form of daily homework assignments, which were reviewed each morning in a group discussion with the photos projected on the wall of the darkened room. Participants would take turns sharing their images and discussing their creative and thematic choices. Facilitation was split between the researchers and Mid-Hudson METS staff. The leader of each session rotated based on our various areas of expertise.

Mornings began with committee meetings, during which participants met in small groups. During week one, there was a committee planning the exhibition, another learning how to use a video camera and recording video blogs, and a third designing the program t-shirt. For week two, these committees transitioned to the planning of the closing ceremony, a group thinking about where and how the research could be used after the program, and a new video team. After half an hour in committees, participants rotated through workshops led by facilitators covering different subjects.

Methodology: Bringing Refusal into Photovoice

Photovoice is one of three interwoven research methods we used to work with the young participants. When productively entangled with youth participatory research and critical place inquiry, and informed by an insistence on the possibilities of refusal in research, photovoice can be an avenue to explore the lives of young people and grapple with important questions about research ethics, limitations and possibilities.

The concept of refusal in research is most fully described in Kahnawá:ke scholar Audra Simpson's work (2007, 2014). We learn from her work to consider how refusal might be built in to research designs to avoid replicating certain kinds of themes and narratives about migrant youth and communities. Hudson Valley Photovoice was designed in part to learn about the possibilities and limits of photovoice approaches with migrant youth. While the method is intended to be participatory, with participants determining what will be photographed and how it will be presented, photovoice studies are often organized into a structure where researchers ask participants to take pictures of certain things. These directives and the resulting images give researchers access to worlds inhabited by the participants, but they are worlds that have been sculpted at the outset by the research questions. The ethical dilemma of what becomes of those images, where they are showcased, and the work they are asked to do is at the heart of the productive entanglement between the methods of photovoice and refusal. It is an ethical dilemma often hastily resolved under the guise of good intentions, and one that our project aims to dismantle.

On the last day of the Photography Storytelling Camp, participants reviewed the images they had created. They determined which could be used for research purposes and which would be excluded. On a printed page of thumbnail images, the youth considered each image before marking it with either their signature to indicate approval, or an "X" for disapproval. We took time to frame and set up this activity with care and explanation, to emphasize the importance of the task and its implications.

Photovoice is commonly defined as a participatory methodology (Wang & Burris, 1997) that encourages participants to reflect on their concerns and desires to and discuss emergent issues with a critical lens. However, "this potential is not always actualized as the assumptions that undergird photovoice are often the same ones that (re)produce inequalities" (Higgins, 2014, p. 208). The focus on giving voice in research involving youth and photography has expanded, while there is a lack of attention to how researchers use voice as a concept in photography-based projects (Luttrell, 2010). Photovoice projects are often researcher-driven (Hergenrather et al., 2009) and based on the "commodification of victimization" (Truchon, 2007, p. 255). At the same time, the method has also been shown to shift power in the research process (Truchon, 2007) and act as an "effective method for sharing power, fostering trust, developing a sense of ownership, creating community change and building capacity" (Castleden et al., 2008, p. 1401).

Photovoice projects, within academia and outside of it, require an inwardly critical lens in order to be more fully participatory. Photovoice's participatory elements can lean toward being illusory, masking the fact that youth participants are being asked to photograph specific places or situations, thus revealing them for researchers and ultimately research audiences. Beyond the confines of a photovoice program, activities meant to be participatory shift when the images are presented in a new context, by people who did not create them. When images are packaged into glossy slideshows and presented at conferences by researchers, what happens to the meanings intended by the photographer? What strategies can be developed and honed to embed the photographer's intention into the image, to burn in the desired meaning so it cannot be re-shaped by others down the line, as in a game of telephone? We mulled over these questions as we planned the activities for the Photography Storytelling Camp, attempting to avoid the pitfalls of misrepresentation in the hands of researchers, as we simultaneously critiqued and worked with the photovoice method.

Our intention from the outset was to engage photovoice in a way that was critical of the romanticization of voice, and by extension, critical of research centered on narratives of damage (Tuck, 2009). We worked from a position of supporting desire-based narratives and the presentation of this work to audiences outside of the academic conference circuit. Our wish is always to prioritize audiences implicated and involved in the issues raised by the research.

To address tensions inherent in photovoice, we consider Youth Participatory Action Research (yPAR) as a method that can point to reshaping photovoice by embedding intention and ownership throughout the process. Cammarota and Fine (2008) assert that yPAR is not just pedagogy, but a means through which young people engage in resistance. They position researchers as stakeholders within an institution, beholden to a preset, if underlying, agenda. yPAR compels researchers to deconstruct what constitutes research who can conduct research projects (Fine et al., 2007; Torre, 2009). "Researchers committed to building youth as critical collaborators into reform projects need to think through the following questions: Who is in the room when research questions are being framed? Who is missing?" (Fine et al., 2007).

Using these questions and commitments as starting points, an overall goal of the study has been to stretch the photovoice method to root it in youth ownership of ideas and intentions, broadening yPAR to theorize image-based methods. Other research methods and tools that inform this method include critical place inquiry (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), refusal, and complexity. We look to other researchers who are creating modifications to photovoice in the spirit of a "critical and complicit engagement" (Higgins, 2016, p. 672) with the method, such as egalitarian relationships and ownership (Truchon, 2007), transparent analytic frameworks (Luttrell, 2010) and iteration and feedback loops (Castleden et al., 2008). Refusal and complexity refer to ways of avoiding the coopting or changing of intended meaning when work is shared beyond the confines of the project. Responding to the prevalence of pain narratives in educational and social science research, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2014) use the notion of refusal to honour distinctions between what is accessible and what is off-limits to researchers. Refusal speaks to "what you need to know and what I refuse to write in" (Simpson, 2007, p. 72).

There is a need for discussion, beyond critical pedagogy, about the role of refusal in image-based modes of inquiry, including photovoice. Refusal provides an avenue for, as Tuck and Yang (2014) put it, moving away from damage-centered narratives towards a desire-based framework (p. 231), rejecting the idea that issues around representation in educational research are resolved simply with the incorporation of participatory elements.

Refusal involves the choice to not give away *everything* in order to get *something,* and is taken up by Indigenous theorists in various disciplines. Audra Simpson (2014) refers to ethnographic refusal as "a mode of sovereign authority over the presentation of…data, and so does not present 'everything'" (p. 105). Quechua scholar Sandy Grande (2015) talks about refusal as a joint effort, such as that undertaken by a writing collective using a *nom de guerre*. Angela Morrill (2016), a Klamath scholar, discusses *reading* as a practice of refusal, reading *for* recognition and *against* disappearance. To this list of modes of refusal, we add photography. The photograph has been described as both a mask and a revelation (Bell, 2011), and the framework of visual sovereignty provides a way to determine *when* to mask and *what* to reveal. Barthes (1981) acknowledged that "photography cannot signify except by assuming a mask" (p. 34).

Theoretical Framework: Refusal and Place

Photovoice is a method that invites participants to use photography to make meaning, often by responding to questions or prompts. A question is posed based on the research focus, and participants create an answer by creating a photograph or series of photographs along with written captions. One dimension of this study as a whole is to understand the possibilities and limits of photovoice as a research method, especially in studying the intertwined roles of place, land, and mobility in migrant youth's lives. Our use of photovoice revealed intimacies of place in the lives of migrant youth, and how these intimacies connect to both experiences in the present and future planning.

Indigenous scholars attending to the visual are developing new methods and descriptors for embodying refusal in their image-based work and writing. In visual educational research, the concept of the fugitive aesthetic "chooses refusal and flight as modes of freedom" (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p. IV). Blackfoot and Sami filmmaker Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers (2016) talks about focusing on the counter-narrative in her documentary films, emphasizing that "love is what got us here, and it is through a love for each other, and for our stories, that we keep moving forward" (p. 298). Andrea Marata Tamaira (2015), a Kanaka Maoli scholar, uses the term counter-framing to describe "the production of images that subvert the distorted simulations circulated through colonialist imagery" (p. 101).

We approached the traditional photovoice structure in new ways, rearranging some key features to support our goals. Most photovoice projects entail taking photos, discussing photos, and having an exhibit or show at the end of the program to share the work with an audience. We shifted the model to place the exhibit in the middle of the program, so that it marked the halfway point. Rather than promoting an idea that the project has a conclusive end, this midway showcase communicated, to both the audience and research participants, that the work is ongoing. Further, it emphasized the ways in which audiences are capable of performing accurate and inaccurate reads of youth work, especially based on their presumptions about migrant youth life. Notions of audience and what audiences bring to their encounters of photographs made by migrant youth were a foundation for activities that built refusal and complexity into images the following week. Anticipating the audience became a meaningful analytic for the youth photographers. Sharing emerging initial work with their families gave the participants a chance to gather active and robust feedback that fed into the week ahead. The culminating activity was a future self-portrait in which the youth posed for a portrait in a pose of their choosing, with the intention to modify the print afterwards.

To be thoughtful and deliberate in our treatment of place in this project, we apply critical place inquiry to photovoice as a framework to take a critical view of places and the relationships people form with them. This means positioning place not merely as topic but as an integral part of our knowledge creation process, as something that shapes social practice and calls for specificity and rootedness (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Significantly for a project with migrant youth who may have precarious relationships to place, critical place inquiry considers mobility to be a central aspect of place. Because this form of inquiry "understands places as themselves mobile, shifting over time and space and through interactions with flows of people, other species, [and] social practices" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 19), it is particularly relevant as a tool for analysis in this project. Places that the participants deemed significant were forests, riverbanks and backyards where they could find solitude and quiet; and sites where they had the freedom to interact with their friends.

A discussion of how people relate to places must concern itself with the ways in which place is experienced differently based on lived experiences, and how those differences are part of the creation and enforcement of structural forms of oppression. Lipsitz's (2011) work exposes "networks of practices that skew opportunities and life chances along racial lines" and argues that "race is produced by space, [and] it takes places for racism to take place" (p. 5). The partitioning of spaces along racial lines leads to spatial isolation and unequal access to infrastructure and resources, factors that are significant in the lives of migrant youth in the Hudson Valley.

Context: Undocumented Youth in the United States

When this five-year study was designed, it was with the understanding that it would stretch across two presidential administrations as it explored the false starts and broken pathways of policies designed to meet the needs of youth who are called "Dreamers," for the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors), which has been failed by Congress since 2001. Though designed to track a tumultuous policy landscape and understand the lived consequences of the tumult, the Trump administration's dismantling of a modest policy like DACA has been breathtaking.

DACA had the potential and promise to change the lives of millions of families. In a January 2017 interview conducted and aired on ABC, correspondent David Muir asked President Trump directly whether Dreamers should be worried. Trump seemed not to know exactly about whom Muir was referring, and replied that

> they shouldn't be very worried. They are here illegally. They shouldn't be very worried. I do have a big heart. We're going to take care of everybody. We're going to have a very strong border. We're gonna have a very solid border. Where you have great people that are here that have done a good job, they should be far less worried. (ABCnews.com)

Inlaid in Trump's response is a framing of Dreamers as "illegal" and as safer if they are "great people." Seven months later, Trump had Attorney General Jeff Sessions announce the administration's decision to end DACA.

DACA, which approximately 1.7 million young people were eligible for, received 750,000 applications (Passel & Lopez, 2012; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016). Of these, 93% of its users applied for renewal, which points to the program's benefits (Hipsman, Gomez-Aguinaga & Caps, 2016). In a national survey, 2,700 DACA beneficiaries reported a marked increase in their income and employment opportunities, and many had applied for driver's licenses and credit cards, and opened bank accounts. These benefits served to ease the living conditions of thousands of youth, though significant barriers to upward mobility are still in place (Gonzales et al., 2016).

In 1996, the passing of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) changed the way immigrants were viewed in the USA; from welcome and beneficial to society, to excluded and potentially criminal; and caused significant distress among families and communities with undocumented members (Rodriguez & Hagan, 2004). The legacy of IIRIRA continues in anti-immigrant sentiments espoused by the Trump administration. In his extensive research with undocumented youth in Los Angeles, Gonzales (2016) argues that individuals residing "illegally" in the United States have come to represent the ultimate "persona non-grata," and that in routinely choosing to criminally prosecute those without documentation, rather than pursuing them in civil court, the federal government "categorically casts undocumented immigrants as law-breakers, deserving of expulsion and exclusion and undeserving of citizenship" (p. 219). Gonzales' (2016) study of undocumented young people reveals that this deeply negative characterization of illegality is especially difficult on those who have grown up in the US, without much knowledge or experience of the countries in which they were born. Gonzales' (2016) research additionally reveals that as undocumented young people come of age, they experience a total shift in life experience: what was once a safe environment becomes anxiety-inducing and hostile (p. 23). Gonzales (2016) finds that schooling can play an enormous role in setting youth on the path to college or to deportation, and he argues that DACA contributed to a fourfold division: between College-going undocumented youth and those who left school early (what he terms: "early exiters"), and between characterizations of "'innocent' youth and their 'lawbreaking' parents" (p. 27).

Along a similar vein, Abrego's (2011) work with residents of Los Angeles has argued that undocumented persons must not be considered a monolithic group: they express very different experiences with the law and with varied levels of vulnerability and feelings of fear or stigma depending on age, length of time spent in the U.S., and schooling. Negron-Gozales' (2009) study, which also took place in California, found that fear and exclusion became a catalyst for young people's political action when they were presented with ways to theorize and talk about their situation (p. 42). Her powerful account of undocumented young people campaigning to pass the DREAM Act reveals courage and resilience in this community, and importantly, a potential to effect sweeping political change and challenge conceptions of the nation-state.

While there have been numerous research projects undertaken with undocumented youth in the U.S., few studies have been conducted in New York state. Migrant youth living in the Hudson Valley are among those made most vulnerable by the dismantling of DACA. Research about New York State migrant youth's experiences with and recommendations for DACA is needed. Scholars who have worked on these issues in depth have recommended more interdisciplinary work that links immigration and education policy (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012, p. 19). Our study responds to this recommendation by using innovative approaches to research methodologies that center refusal and seek to provide in-depth understandings of the lived experiences of young people from their own perspectives, and on their own terms. We seek to understand how migrant youth, facing a potentially perilous situation, plan for their futures and understand or negotiate their own sense of belonging and agency within a system that places them at the edges of society.

Discussion

This section discusses the four thematic elements that emerged in the Hudson Valley Photovoice project data: future selves, parental sheltering, places that need a change, and interventions on the future.

Future Selves

One of the first activities in the Storytelling Photography Camp involved participants taking a self-portrait in the image of what they think they will be doing in the future, which we called future self-photos. Most participants expressed that they wished to be soccer stars. This aspiration was earnest: the participants spoke passionately of their plans to make it onto a college soccer team, eventually join a professional league, and live their days as stars of the international football world. Many of them created posed photos of themselves posing with soccer balls, indoors and outdoors, in various positions: chests puffed up, holding a ball in the air; throwing the ball in midair with an ear to ear smile, and holding a trophy; all while projecting into the future that one day, this would be the real thing. One participant created a photo series in the living room of his family's basement apartment. He was decked out in his shiny team uniform complete with shin pads and cleats, his curly hair perfectly styled. Standing in a nook between two couches, he posed for 12 action shots in a variety of poses with and without a soccer ball: jump-kicking the ball, heading the ball, standing with one knee up on the couch and the ball on his knee, standing with hands on hips, and others.

A recurring theme in the participants' future self-photos was the smartphone. Smartphones showed up in images in response to most photo prompts. Whether as valued objects or as props used to model other concepts, the participants produced dozens of photos of their phones. They also snapped pictures of cars taken throughout the town in response to the future self-prompt, to indicate a wish to own a car. Cars also appeared regularly as objects in photos meant to portray technical use of the camera. Another popular theme was close-up shots of a soccer ball. There were so many pictures of soccer balls, cars and cellphones that we considered creating a bar graph of these pictures and posting it on the community center wall to show the participants just how many pictures of these objects they had taken.

The materialistic aspect of the participants' photos seems to express a sense of belonging in society through possession of a phone and car. When we inquired as to how their cell phones (or a family member's phone, if the young person didn't have one) could be the response to all the photo prompts, they responded with, this is how I talk to my father back home, this is how I look at photos of where we used to live, this is how I talk to the doctor for my mother, this is how I stay connected to everything I had to leave behind.

Parental Sheltering

Of the four participants who did not express a dream of being a soccer star, one wanted to be a veterinarian, one planned to be a general contractor, and three said they would be lawyers to help people avoid deportation. Overall, there was a deep conviction expressed by all the participants that they could become whatever they wanted. In talking about their future plans, participants indicated encouragement from their parents about doing well in school and attending college. We noted a pervasive innocence, on the part of the young people, about their precarious status within U.S. society. While most of the participants would surely find out toward the end of high school how limited choices are for undocumented people, at the time we knew this group of young people, while they were aware of their status and their parents' status, they were largely unaware of the effect being undocumented could have on their future.

This tentatively demonstrated that parents desired for their children to know only a minimal amount about the potential consequences of not having status, and points to the success parents were having in sheltering their children from the realities of being undocumented in America. Gonzales' (2016) findings corroborate this observation. The transition to adulthood is, for undocumented youth, the *transition to illegality*. The youth involved in his study were often not aware of their undocumented status until they encountered barriers to teenage rights of passage such as obtaining a driver's license or getting a first job.

Places that Need a Change

Land, and a sense of place, was a recurring theme throughout our activities. While we directly addressed the idea of land and mobility in two activities, places and spaces as concepts emerged across all the photos taken by the participants. For example, when asked about prized possessions, about half the participants took pictures of pictures of themselves and/or their families in a favorite place: this varied from a city formerly lived in, a city they wished to visit, or a place where relatives currently live. In activities aimed to teach photography techniques, such as experimenting with perspective, framing, light and shadow, participants opted to take photos of natural spaces, such as forests, ravines, rivers and skies. Many pictures displayed the same soccer field. Discussions about these photos led to three themes: first, an appreciation of nature, and a feeling that natural places were a respite from daily life; second, a discussion of how natural places reminded them of their country of origin; and finally, the opinion that there's nothing else to take a picture of. A prompt that asked participants to show photos of their favorite places led to pictures of the soccer field, the local park, and personally significant place including a lone tree in a field and a front porch. A prompt about "a place that needs a change" resulted in photos of the outside of participants' homes, the soccer field, a road next to a participant's house divided by a sizeable crack and a photo of an unpaved parking lot at an apartment complex where a young girl had once been injured by flying gravel.

We followed the "place that needs a change" activity with an exercise where youth used permanent markers to draw on prints of their photos, to depict the changes they felt were needed. During this exercise, five notable interventions were made. Two of the youth visually fixed things they noticed in their neighborhood: the rough gravel parking lot was paved smooth; the large crack in the road was filled in. Another participant drew soccer nets onto the field. He explained that he and his friends played soccer on that field daily until one day the city took the nets away. Now they play without nets. One of the participants took his picture of a road bordered by forest and covered the trees with shiny silver buildings. He explained that he dreams of living in a city, and wishes someone would come and build over all the forests. Finally, one participant revamped a picture of the long-abandoned movie theater located directly next to the South Fallsburg Community Center with flower pots in the windows, a working front door, and a sign that read "OPEN."

Another activity asked participants to draw a map of South Fallsburg and mark all the places they go, and where they do not go. While the group was split in two for this activity, both maps revealed similar themes: the youth follow essentially the same paths each day between school, home, friend's homes, the soccer field and park. Their access to nearby areas seemed to be limited. While they did make regular visits to Stewart's gas station, they did not go to the few shops and restaurants located along South Fallsburg's main strip. Their mobility within the town, and participation as consumers within local shops, was limited. They were also adamant that they never went to the poultry processing plants located just outside the town, even though many of their parents and relatives were employed there.

To better understand the participants' experience within their town, a description of the region is useful. This part of the world, only two hours' drive from New York City, is freely growing with hills, swamps, sprawling forest, and homes built on centuries-old foundations. With the Catskill mountain range silhouetted in the distance, dozens of small towns are attached by narrow country roads and winding highways. Lush green hillsides are dotted with vineyards, summer holiday resorts, group retreats, picturesque lakeside neighborhoods, and enormous crop fields stretching to the horizon. Driving from town to town, the bucolic scenes are pierced by huge roadside corporate complexes: Wal-Mart, Best Buy, CVS, McDonald's, Burger King, Taco Bell. Grocery stores were few and far between. The main street of each town consists of a row of mostly boarded-up former restaurants and stores.

Local economies in these parts seem to be about sending food and monies elsewhere. As non-residents of the Hudson Valley, we observed the contours and corners of the place during our time there. In sharp contrast to the prevalent green lushness, entire sections of the population here live in relative poverty. A short drive away from New York City, this area feels forgotten: it is a land inhabited by other-than-human beings (bears, coyotes, snakes, turkeys) with the space to grow and live, but it is also exploited for its richness. Between the fields or factories for food processing and forgotten stretches of forest, there are insulated holiday communities, some in the form of apartment complexes housing extended families for the summer and longer, others in clusters of lakeside homes marked everywhere with glaring "PRIVATE PROPERTY" signs.

There is a sharp cultural separation of peoples living in this region. It is comprised of aging middle-class white New Yorkers, and of Orthodox Jews from Brooklyn whose populations inflate in the summer months, but who also live here full-time (Urban Action Agenda, 2015). Walking through these neighborhoods, there is a sense of disjointedness in these populations, who live in proximity, yet isolated from each other. Through the photography storytelling camp we intended to learn more about those barriers, using photovoice to explore intimacies of place in the participants' lived experiences. During the program, what emerged was that the combination of language and cultural differences, economic power, a sense of temporariness in families habituated to moving for work, and a dearth of activities and locations available for the participants' age group functioned as barriers to participating in their community setting.

Demographics in this region have been shifting for centuries. In her study of ghost stories in the Hudson Valley, Butler (2013) traces a restive history between populations that have experienced constant metamorphoses and flux. While Mohican, Munsee and Lenape peoples had been living as farmers in the area for thousands of years, following colonization by the Dutch and later the English, the region consistently witnessed war, power shifts in land ownership, and waves of migration to New York City. During the 18th and 19th centuries, when an economic culture of producing crops and goods for an ever-flourishing New York City began to intensify, regional writings were marked by a sense of unease and fragmentariness. This translated to a culture of ghost stories and ghostliness that "served to articulate and contain anxieties about strange places and people…historical amnesia and a sense of pastlessness were common maladies. In the Hudson Valley, the disintegration of connection to the past could seem a common condition…" (Butler, 2013, p. 493).

While the topic of ghosts may seem tangential in a research project about migrant youth, we observed that an uneasy feeling persists in this beautiful, culturally and economically disjointed region that produces large quantities of food for millions of people and difficult labor conditions for those harvesting it. Questions, like ghosts, feel stuck at the surface of the rolling horizon. Where are all the people who come through this land coming from, and where are they going to next? What did they have to leave behind? How can the broader culture justify entire populations who are not allowed to belong…and yet, be so deeply connected to these people through the food they are eating? How would the young people in our program, though compelled to be invisible within this society, fulfill the bright and vivid expectations they had for themselves?

Interventions on the Future

The last activity of the program looped back to the original future self idea, with a twist: this time, participants used markers to invoke their vision of their future self on a printed portrait taken for this purpose. They posed for their portrait in a stance that was related to their future self. Many of them chose to pose in a neutral stance. We provided 8 by 10-inch prints of their portraits and a bin full of colored Sharpies, and the youth got to work. The resulting images were varied, revealing uncertainty, resistance, personal style, and career plans. A few participants fashioned themselves as soccer stars, which was no surprise given the prominence of soccer throughout our discussions. One boy drew a scale of justice into his outstretched hand, a nod to his desire to be a judge, while another drew a briefcase and papers marked "evidencia" to represent his future career as a lawyer. One participant styled himself as a member of the activist hacker group Anonymous: "Anonymous, The Take Over: Justice is Coming" he wrote in the corner of his photo. Others created versions of themselves with references to adulthood; they drew suits and ties over their shorts and t-shirts, and facial hair onto their cheeks and chins. One girl created herself as a lawyer, drawing a desk and briefcase beside her and explaining that she hopes to work with the U.S. government one day to help stop deportation. Another colored her standing figure in black and covered the silhouette in silver question marks. The participants' interventions on these portraits represented future selves that either left the future as an open question, or saw the future with great certainty and optimism. The young people represented themselves as agentic, desiring beings with diverse plans and expectations.

Implications

Adopting photovoice as a methodological intervention enabled us to focus on aspects of minoritized, migrant youth perspectives that are often ignored within the understudied context of New York state; namely youth experiences of place, identity and belonging. Our findings contribute to a discussion of the limits and possibilities of DACA and related policies that may ultimately be limited by ideological constructs of what it means to be "American."

Migrant Labor in New York State

The New York State Department of Agriculture's website boasts "36,000 family farms producing some of the world's best food" and notes that "agriculture is a major driver of the New York State economy" (http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/). The rich black soil of this rural area nurtures an annual production of thousands of tons of crops for export. The farming industry, worth upwards of 5.5 billion dollars, depends upon cheap human labor. Farmworkers in New York are not protected by labor laws that guarantee them overtime pay, a day off each week, and worker's compensation, among other rights (Grossman, 2015; Geneseo Migrant Center, n.d.). In many cases, farmworkers overstay work visas and continue to live and work in the U.S. without documentation. Belying bucolic landscapes of rolling hillsides and farmer's markets promising organic and local produce is a population without employment rights, vulnerable to deportation, driving the agricultural economy, and living wherever there is work.

In the lower Hudson Valley, the number of undocumented people is an estimated 47% of the population (Fitz-Gibbon, 2017). In the Mid-Hudson Valley, where our study is located, the fastest growing section of the population is made up of 18 to 34-year olds from racial and ethnic minorities described as mostly black and Latino, in lower income brackets, with less than a high school education (Urban Action Agenda, 2015, p. 9). While the participants in the Storytelling Photography Camp were too young to be eligible for DACA, should the opportunity to apply for it be lost, it is highly possible they too will be assimilated into a life of low-income agricultural labor. If this happens, it would not indicate a deficit in their own skills, smarts, or self-determination. Rather, it would represent a structural failure in a system that thwarts opportunities for people from certain demographic groups before they have a chance to realize what they may have been capable of contributing.

Olsen's now classic 1997 study of a California high school with a large population of undocumented migrant and immigrant students explored how educational policies helped or hindered opportunities for undocumented students. She describes how policy makers were affected by "a pervasive and determined color-blindness" (p. 246). Rather than consider the ways that diverse populations might inform and shape pedagogies, administrators and teachers instead assumed, or insisted, that all students should fit into a schooling system informed by a narrow model of what it means to be American (Olsen, 1997, p. 240). Students did not "naturally" elect to be divided or placed on specific pathways: policies *produced* their future opportunities, and the process of integration became one of loss (Olsen, 1997, p. 242). Olsen points out that this loss is not only experienced by the young people who are compelled to define themselves within a conformist identity frame, but is also a loss for a society and culture that refuses difference. Ensconced in this xenophobic sensibility, US Congress has failed to implement policy changes that would provide people with pathways to safer and better jobs, or labor rights in difficult and dangerous jobs through legal documentation.

An unwillingness to allow immigrants to share worldviews and language and potentially change American culture operates in tandem with the power and domination required of a violent economic system characterized by predatory formations (Sassen, 2014) which require the expulsion of large groups of people from the dominant market. It is convenient to have "an immigrant class that is not fully literate and only partially assimilated…[who] fill a particular niche in the lowest paid and least protected rungs of our labor market" (Olsen, 1997, p. 250). The structure is a continuation of the white settler colonial project which requires "the import of cheap labor, first slaves and now immigrants, defined in legal code as lacking full personhood" (Patel, 2015, p. 141).

Meritocratic Measures of Who Belongs

Patel (2015, 2016) has critiqued DACA because of its inherent reliance on ideas of merit and deservingness. Rooted in neoliberal ideas of who is deserving and who is undeserving of just policies, DACA only provides temporary relief from worry about possible deportation (Nair, 2013). It is not a comprehensive policy. For those who are building resistance movements designed to rethink not only the immigration system, but also the way that capitalism and citizenship (or who gets to be a citizen) operate coterminously to exclude and oppress (Nair, 2013; Borcila, 2011), DACA created bureaucratic busywork that distracted from this important endeavor (Patel, 2015, p. 147). DACA worked to help "the racist state…gesture towards equity in order to avoid fundamentally changing the oppressive socioeconomic structure" (Patel, 2015, p. 148).

Despite the economic and social contributions of migrant workers across the United States, racist ideologies centered on a narrow view of who belongs have dominated public and political rhetoric and policy-making in education. If provided opportunities to do different types of work, to move, stay, work and study without having to worry about detention, family separation and deportation, undocumented families could bring expertise, care and attention to those they love, and different forms of knowledge and perspectives to U.S. society. Without these opportunities, families with undocumented members are denied the chance to find meaningful work, or contribute to society (to use the term favored by the participants) in diverse ways.

In the small upstate New York towns where we are conducting our research, undocumented families are villainized as either criminals or people taking advantage of the system; or viewed as lazy or deserving of their poverty, just as in studies of mostly white communities with newer migrant neighbors conducted more than 20 years ago (Olson, 1997). Within this long-standing conscription of migrant youth held by white, often middle- or low-income families,

> undocumented youths' bodies are conjoined with illegality, as their crime is defined as bodily presence in the U.S. without federal sanction...the combined identity markers of being undocumented, racially minoritized, and in low-income work overdetermine immigrant youth as exempted from laws, safety, from projects of self-determination. (Patel, 2014, p. 140)

These identity markers do not have a chance to be changed without the facilitation of policies designed to help undocumented youth embark on different life paths. Yet, compliance with policies such as DACA paradoxically required that individuals fit into a meritocratic system that was always already flawed, since it “employs a paternalistic rhetoric to ‘protect’ some undocumented youth, while maintaining absolute right to police and thus divide the immigrant community…[and] position[s] the United States as the benevolent overseer of opportunity” rather than face down the centuries old social constructs and colonial logics that have formed and informed American institutions (Patel, 2015, p. 146). This begs the question of whether young people should even bother to be included into a system that requires a narrow view of what they are or should be. It exalts the ideal or “innocent” citizen while continuing, in and through this exaltation, to posit and shape who still doesn’t, and can’t ever, belong.

At this moment in time, with the loss of DACA as a policy, it is worth noting that DACA offered young people a very narrow certainty of inclusion into society. Now that even this window may be lost, there is an administrative record of nearly 750,000 young people who applied for the policy. What the current administration will do with this record remains to be seen.

Conclusion

We’re buckled into red, yellow, green and blue Go-Karts on a race track. Engines are revving and hands are tightly gripping steering wheels. It is a hot, sunny Saturday, and we are at the midpoint of the photovoice workshop: two graduate students in their thirties versus a group of laser-focused 13-year old boys. After an intense week of photovoice activities and the work of an exhibition, we’re all equally energized, pleased to be breaking for an excursion. The ride attendants shuffle amongst us, checking seat belts. The participants chatter over the buzz of the engines, anticipating the thrill of a race with the wind in their hair. The gates open, and with that, we’re swerving around sharp bends and each other’s cars, laughing and teasing one another all the way. We’re at the Holiday Mountain Fun Park, a half-hour drive from the community center. With a $40 entrance fee, this is the first time any of the young people have visited this place. It is impossible to rein in their energy.

The park is noticeably aged, with a smattering of outdated carnival games: mini-golf, bumper boats, a rock-climbing wall. Looming high at the far end of the property against a backdrop of tree-covered hills was a structure topped with a colorful sign that reads “FUN SLIDE”: a set of three pastel-colored slides stretched down and along the ground, bordered by a rusting metal staircase. Most of the rides aside from the Go-Karts barely registered for the participants so most of the day was spent zooming around the track for as long as the attendant would let them, then lining up amongst the few other park attendees for their next turn. After coming to understand the extent to which not having a vehicle impacted life in the Hudson Valley, the vision of the participants, joyfully driving in endless loops on a circular track produced a clear irony: these boys may never be permitted to have driver’s licenses; may never, despite their motivations, be able to drive around without fear, travel without fear, or pursue their dreams without fear.

The Hudson Valley Photovoice project provided an opportunity to use images in participatory research with migrant youth. Taking and discussing photographs of their surroundings was a starting point to explore the significance of place in their lives, complicating and disrupting the prevalent damage-based narratives that tend to dominate depictions of migrant lives. A focus on place allowed us to disrupt the mainstream narrative of these youth as either victims or criminals (Gonzales, 2016, p. 219), and emphasize the future possibilities in the participants’ lives, for example in the ideas for neighborhood improvements that emerged in their “place that needs a change” image-modification activity.

Migrant labor is ineluctable to the U.S. economy: states that successfully deported or barred undocumented migrants from working have lost billions of dollars (Serrano, 2012). Yet, being undocumented is criminalized and stigmatized. Despite migrant families’ necessary presence and undeniable capital contribution within a society that venerates capital gains, the forces that profit from these laboring bodies simultaneously mark them as undesirable and inadmissible. Political rhetoric around who does and does not belong denies undocumented workers the right to have a place within the United States; even while the economy necessitates their work on the land; even while everyone eats food that is harvested by migrant workers.

In this article, we described our observations of the early stages of a research project that weaves the theoretical frameworks of yPAR, photovoice, critical place inquiry and refusal together to nurture a more complete understanding of how undocumented young people negotiate presence and plan for their futures in the Hudson Valley. As we continue this study, we expect to delve deeper into the ways that identity and belonging in the United States are contrived and compelled by definitions of citizenship within a shifting policy landscape that is increasingly precarious for undocumented people. As we enter a phase of Machiavellian immigration policy under the Trump administration, it is more evident than ever that there is a need for policy changes that do not rely on ideas of meritocracy, but instead venture to re-imagine citizenship and belonging altogether.

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Deanna Del Vecchio is a doctoral student in Social Justice Education at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Her research uses participatory photography methodology to explore young people's relationships to place, drawing on Indigenous theorizations of place, refusal, and resistance. Deanna's career in education has included classroom teaching from primary to post-secondary, community-based learning, outdoor education, and teacher training.

Nisha Toomey is a community organizer, educator, and Doctoral student in the Department of Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto. She has been working on migrant justice issues for over 10 years. Her current studies explore mobility, migration and travel, who gets to move freely and who does not, and the border and identity imaginaries that both cause harm, and create spaces for resistance and futurity.

Dr. Eve Tuck is Associate Professor of Critical Race and Indigenous Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. She is the author of two recent books, Urban Youth and School Pushout (Routledge, 2012) and Place in Research (co-written with Marcia McKenzie, Routledge, 2015). She is Unangax and is an enrolled member of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Alaska.

Unexpected Bodies and Pleasures: Sexuality and Gender in Schools

Darla Linville, Augusta University

Abstract

In this article, I argue that schools are public spaces for the public they serve—the students of that school. Access to public space and the public forum is necessary for diverse groups to create justice in a pluralistic society (Jacobs, 1961; Young, 1990). This participatory action research project examined the language and behaviors that circulate in schools about sexuality and gender, and visualized the ways those discourses manifested in the spaces of schools and impacted bodies. To this end, I used a mapping exercise to allow the youth researchers to show how discourses of sexuality and gender appeared in their school setting and the ways they resisted the limitations of dominant gender and sexuality identities. Three major themes emerged upon describing and discussing the maps: school spaces are sexualized as well as gendered, spaces where sexuality and gender can be spoken allow students to examine their desires and pleasures, and adults can create a public forum for justice about sexuality and gender identity. Spatial studies such as this one give researchers access to new understandings of LGBTQ+ youth use of embodied and discursive resources to create spaces in schools in which to explore their identities and pleasures.

Keywords: *LGBTQ+ youth; schools; public space; sexuality; gender*

Introduction

This article explores the meanings of public spaces and public forums, in particular in the ways scholars have theorized that gender, sexuality, and safety are created or regulated in public spaces and public discourses. This frames the discussion of the spatial distribution and significance of sexuality and gender in maps that student researchers created of sexuality, gender, and gender transgressing behavior and discourses in their school buildings. Access to public space and the public forum is necessary for diverse groups to attain justice in a pluralistic society (Jacobs, 1961; Young, 1990). Hegemonic discourses have remained uncontested by denying certain bodies and voices access to public spaces (Katz, 2006; Spain, 1992). It is therefore important to examine not only the language and behaviors that circulate in schools about sexuality and gender, but also to visualize the ways the discourses manifest in the spaces of schools and impact the movement of bodies.

In a youth participatory action research (YPAR) group (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) with lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, a spatial and conceptual mapping exercise (Low, 2000; Tuck et al., 2009) allowed the youth researchers to show one another, and me, the ways the discourses we had talked about appeared in their school setting. Youth researchers were asked to draw and describe their "Gay School," or spaces in the school where sexuality and gender could be expressed in ways that did not conform to heterosexual or binary gender expectations. These maps took the form of outlines of rooms and floors, or sometimes isolated closets and bathrooms, with notations about bodies that inhabit and desires that could be spoken in those locations. Research questions that guided this inquiry were: a) What are the discourses of sexuality and gender that circulate in schools? and b) Do youth redeploy discourses in order to create spaces of resistance? Three major themes emerged upon describing the maps for one another and discussing as a group what we saw represented: school spaces are sexualized as well as gendered, spaces where sexuality and gender can be spoken allow students to examine their desires and pleasures, and adults can create a public forum for justice about sexuality and gender identity. In these maps the youth researchers and I began to see, in embodied ways, students' resistance to negative hegemonic discourses in schools, their strategic use of supports and role models, and the creative ways young people enact their desires in school spaces. In this paper I use lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning plus (LGBTQ+) to designate a comprehensive community that the literature examines, unless a more specific group is being discussed. Although issues of gender and sexuality are not perfectly aligned, and the needs for trans students may not be the same as the needs for LGBQ students, because of the ways that youth in this project talked about gender as central to the way that they present themselves as non-heterosexual, the discussions are intertwined in this paper.

In the public spaces of schools, some discourses of heterosexuality are designated as age-appropriate and innocent (Lesko, 2001; Pascoe, 2007), and some discourses of sexuality and gender and gender expression, often including homosexuality and trans expressions, are considered inappropriate, dangerous, or off-topic, and so are censored (Fields, 2008). For example, Pascoe (2007) shows how teacher talk in the classroom often references heterosexual couples in both academic examples and informal bantering. On the other hand, states have enacted laws, called no-promo-homo laws, that interdict mentioning non-heterosexuality in classrooms, even sex education classrooms (McGovern, 2012). This censoring of discourse in the public space renders some bodies unspeakable, and therefore misunderstood (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010), discriminated against and silenced in the public arena of the school community (Heck, Poteat, & Goodenow, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). Discrimination may result in punishment for public displays of affection and gender transgressions that become dress code violations. Students who protest discrimination are often blamed for their own victimization (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). Students also recognize that discourses circulating in school spaces about sexuality and gender may increase the likelihood of LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming students becoming the target of bullying and violence (Goodenow, Watson, Adjei, Homma, & Saewyc, 2016). These discourses can have an inhibiting effect on LGBTQ+ youth participation in school spaces. In the next section, I situate this research in literature concerned with public space and the spaces of public schools.

Public Spaces and Schools as Public Space

The value of public spaces presented in social theory is in providing areas in which people from different social locations can gather together (Delaney, 2003; Jacobs, 1961) and ideas can circulate (Burrington, 1998; Katz, 2006; Young, 1990). These spaces are designed to offer free, open access to everyone, without requiring an invitation, an entrance fee, a schedule, or an introduction (Young, 1990). All members of the community can access and use the space, and no groups' entrance is barred based on their group identity. Additionally, there is no required activity for using the space. For example, access is available to a park, even for people who are not playing basketball. In fact, many activities can take place simultaneously in the park. That is not to suggest that behavior is not controlled within the public space, indeed certain behaviors are discouraged, others are encouraged by the arrangement and messages of the space (Conlon, 2004). The public space user is interpellated by signage, lists of rules, unspoken etiquette transmitted by other users, and the presence of many other people with expectations of what will happen in the public space (Spain, 1992). These "eyes" (Delaney, 2003; Jacobs, 1961) on the public space are what make public spaces safe in large, urban areas, such as New York City.

Within public spaces, strangers may meet one another and share brief encounters of spontaneous help or friendliness which make the community feel less anonymous and isolating (Delaney, 2003). Delaney calls these exchanges "contact" moments, unplanned encounters that arise from the situation presented, and they are characterized by their lack of self-interest. In public spaces and in these contact moments, residents of a city may meet others who are not like them in terms of class, race, profession, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, and have the opportunity to interact without prejudice. Although not all random encounters have such beneficent consequences, they offer the possibility of pleasures (Delaney, 2003; Young, 1990). They are vital to the project of living in multicultural areas and getting along, rather than retreating into closed enclaves of sameness (Ruddick, 1996).

Public spaces also serve as a forum for ideas. The ideal of the right of free speech guarantees the rights of the populace to hear ideas presented and to evaluate them in a public forum. Ideas that find believers or backers have the opportunity to become values, beliefs, and systems. Ideas that can be kept out of the public forum, isolated as fringe, private, or immoral, cannot receive a public hearing and remain silenced. Speakers of silenced topics must breach the rules of polite conversation, pushing forward their agenda against formidable, if unspoken, opposition (Burrington, 1998). Keeping certain ideas out of public space effectively isolates their speakers as extreme. The reasons articulated for the interdictions on speaking certain topics may be framed as less about keeping certain persons out of power, and more about appropriateness, however, "spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater power can maintain its advantage over a group with less power" (Spain, 1992, p. 15). For example, by labeling homosexuality as always referring to sexual acts, discussions of homosexuality are often framed as inappropriate for school, especially among younger children (Boas, 2012). The issues may also be framed as a discussion about keeping irresponsible and dangerous bodies out of spaces. Communities often say that they wish to keep homosexuals away from children, to keep children safe from being recruited into an immoral lifestyle. These discourses that label conversations about or the bodily presence of LGBTQ+ people as dangerous further marginalize young people engaged in identifying their sexuality and gender.

Iris Marion Young (1990) advocated that public forums are required in order to allow dialogue on contentious issues. "In such public spaces people encounter other people, meanings, expressions, and issues which they may not understand or with which they do not identify" (p. 240). For Young, this constitutes the realm of politics, which must be available to all groups in order for society to work toward a form of justice that allows for differences among strangers. I use these ideas of public space, public forums, and politics to think about the ways students, teachers and administrators of various identities can exist together in schools and the kinds of political activism and shared knowledge that must occur in order to create institutional or educational justice for all students. As spaces that engage in social as well as political structuring of society, schools are the public spaces in which LGBTQ+ youth contest the limitations on their speech and actions, to speak and perform their identities and their desires.

School as Public Space

School is not a public space in the strictest sense, but can function as a public space for its public, the students and teachers who belong to the school community. In this community forum, some interactions are scripted, through lesson plans and curricular goals, but some interactions, both in classrooms and in the more casual spaces of the school such as the cafeteria, the halls and after school clubs, allow for more spontaneous contact. In particular, public school spaces become places where students and teachers from various backgrounds and educational expectations come together to learn to work with one another. In highly tracked schools students may be kept mostly segregated by class or race during the curricular day, but may interact between classes, during lunch, or after school (Galletta & Cross Jr., 2007). In these moments schools can fulfill the function of teaching students to live in a diverse society.

Schools are thought of as incubators of culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), where students' sense of civic engagement and political involvement are learned (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Rasmussen, 2006; Russell, 2002). In this structure, students learn to engage politically while they are in school (elementary, secondary and tertiary institutions), to petition for their rights, to argue their points, to understand the history and social structures of the culture and engage within them (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). This civic engagement encompasses persons engaged in the workings of the institutions that affect their lives, responsible to others in the community they belong to and active for rights and liberties of others and self (Noddings, 2013). This is a noble goal for education, and one that is not always or even often achieved, especially for poor students and students of color. However, imagining schools as a space that *should* be working to teach these skills and entitlements to students, it becomes necessary to create spaces in which LGBTQ+ youth and adults can "exist as part of the public landscape upon which citizenship is enacted, to circulate in public life freely and unmolested, and to be granted the same standing or status, recognition and respect as our peers" (Burrington, 1998, p. 129). As Burrington suggests in her analysis of the public discourse around student activism to start a gay-straight alliance in a Salt Lake City high school, students in the school and LGBTQ+ adults in the city were denied access to civic engagement and agency by being denied access to public life when they were constructed as different and dangerous. "Both access to public discourse and access to public spaces create the territory within which a political geography of citizenship can be written" (p. 130). Again, if we imagine that the role, called citizen by Burrington, should be equally available to all students in schools, then access to public discourse and public spaces must also be available to them.

If bodies are not allowed in spaces, either because of rules or because of harassing interactions, then the perspectives, knowledge, and views from people who inhabit those bodies are not allowed either. Using this framing, this project asked youth researchers, high school students, to document the spaces in their schools and students' uses of those spaces. It looks at the suppressed discourses and the promoted discourses, and the ways that students act to challenge and subvert the limitations placed on their identities within schools.

Gay Straight Alliances as Queer Space

Within schools gay-straight alliances (GSAs—also called gay-straight-trans alliances, GSTAs, or gender-sexuality alliances) may provide access to the public space for students who claim the identities represented by the GSA. Mayo (2004) finds in her analysis of the impacts of GSAs on both school cultures and student subjectivities that,

> …as they are working together, these students are more aware of how different identities potentially clash with one another. Additionally, as they face obstacles within the school setting, they become more aware of the political stakes in improving the school climate for others. Because these alliances require difference, they maintain their ties through an ethical curiosity, not only of what others who are different might be like, but what it might mean to be different than one is at the present. (pp. 27-28)

In her conception of the GSA's importance, she identifies several positive outcomes for both LGBTQ+ students and the school community. GSAs provide spaces in which students can organize for political activism within the school and their larger community for LGBTQ+ rights, and safe spaces in which they can challenge one another's definitions of LGBTQ+ identities and their stated political goals. In other words, these spaces provide opportunities for non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming students to speak to one another about the primacy of sexuality or gender or both in their own sense of subjectivity, and to work together toward political goals identified by the group—to present a united political front to the school and larger community. Mayo also describes the GSAs with which she worked as spaces of contested definitions of sexuality and gender, as well as other identifications. Students in these spaces ally across differences to find common political ground and define political goals that will create greater justice for their members in schools.

However, other researchers on GSAs have questioned the ability of these groups to engage with differences (McCready, 2004), and have also criticized the marginalization within the larger school community that GSAs sometimes represent (Rasmussen, 2006). Spaces in school may exclude LGBTQ+ students based on the assumptions that other students make about them. Also, students who are non-heterosexual and gender-nonconforming, but who do not conform to the standards of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer identities may be excluded from the spaces that are created by schools to protect them.

Race is another way that GSAs may divide rather than support students and advocate for them in schools. Although Mayo's research shows that students may become critical about racism and the work of race in schools when engaged in the work of the GSA, McCready (2004) points out that in schools with students from many racial backgrounds students of color may feel that belonging to a GSA would separate them from their racial identity group. For the students McCready interviewed, the space of the GSA was racialized as White and the spaces of color or Blackness were sexualized as heterosexual. Many students chose to belong in the heterosexual spaces of color, rather than in the White non-heterosexual spaces.

Although GSAs offer spaces for non-heterosexual bodies and gender non-conforming bodies, and offer support for LGBTQ+ students, they may not be equally available for all students who want to access them, and they may not challenge the hetero- and cis-sexism present in many other spaces in the school. They may function as a private space, in which members do not have a forum to speak publicly. This section has outlined the literature on public space, how

LGBTQ+ identities are allowed to be visible and spoken about, and how GSAs contribute to this function within schools. Next, I explain how queer theory helped the youth researchers and me reimagine the uses of spaces in schools.

Theoretical Reimaginings

Queer theory has been used in education research to counter these spatial enforcements that students may encounter in schools. One argument against spatial segregation of LGBTQ+ students is that it requires an essential definition of sexuality for students. In other words, essentialist identity politics has at its roots an assumption that students who are LGBTQ+ are different in a way that they cannot change—they are born that way or otherwise essentially gay and Other (Rasmussen, 2004). The qualification for protection by schools from harassment, bullying and name-calling often requires that students must claim the naturalness of their queerness (Rasmussen, 2006). Schools reflect the belief that young people do not have sexual subjectivity, dismissing student desires as either inappropriate displays of sexuality or inevitable and something that the student cannot help being. However, it is possible to imagine heterotopic spaces as “a place where the subversion of normalization can occur” (Burrington, 1998, p. 130). This is how Mayo (2004) imagines the political work of GSAs as well, as places where students can form alliances regardless of their exact location on sexuality or gender continua, or even if they refuse to locate themselves, to ask questions about the intersections of identity and work to make schools more welcoming to all students. Burrington (1998) reminds us, as well,

> It is one thing for marginalized groups to fashion a space in the world in which to empower themselves and create a sense of community together, but it is quite another for the marginalized to be forced into the periphery of public life. (p. 130)

Youth may counter these marginalizations through organizing and asking to be included and accepted, but they may also subvert the norms and work to upset the expectations around sexuality and gender. Negative stereotypes or images that adhere to youth in some settings are simultaneously countered, resisted, and reformed by youth in their self-understandings and identifications (Kehily & Nayak, 1996; Nayak & Kehily, 2014). As a group, the youth researchers and I kept this in mind as we read the maps of school spaces created by the youth researchers. We also remembered that LGBTQ+ students must be served by the school in some way, because they cannot *be* otherwise (Butler, 2004), meaning they must be recognized as legitimate students and eligible actors in the political landscape of the school.

Methodology

This qualitative youth participatory action research project asked youth to examine the experience of being lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and sometimes gender nonconforming, within their New York City high schools. I recruited youth to participate through word-of-mouth by reaching out to New York City librarians, youth education and leadership program mentors, and other adults working with LGBTQ+ youth and distributing a recruitment flyer to them. Youth then contacted me, filled out an application, provided assent and got parental consent, and began coming to weekly meetings. In one case I met with a parent before the young person was allowed to attend.

Context

The Resisting Regulation Research Group met for one year to document and analyze the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning youth in New York City high schools. I was a graduate student who identifies as a White lesbian. I was the principal investigator on the project, and I also secured the funding for the group, and provided research methodological expertise, and connections to agencies and teachers interested in making schools more welcoming for LGBTQ+ youth. At the time the eight youth researchers identified as two gay boys, two lesbians, three bisexual girls, and one bisexual boy. None of the participants were trans. Racially, ethnically, or culturally they claimed Afghan, African, African American and Brazilian, Barbadian, Dominican and French Canadian, Haitian, Puerto Rican, and White as identifying labels. Socioeconomically, they came from poor to middle class homes. They all lived in New York City, and six attended NYC public schools. One student attended a Catholic school, and one a private school. Research questions that guided this inquiry were: a) What are the discourses of sexuality and gender that circulate in schools? and b) Do youth redeploy discourses in order to create spaces of resistance? This paper documents the spaces of resistance that youth described in their schools, and the ways that they were invited or able to inhabit those spaces.

Mapping Spaces as Method

The mapping exercise was completed with the youth researchers after working together for five months, participating in research meetings, discussing social theories, and conducting data gathering with other teens. Five youth researchers completed maps, and all five of the maps are presented in this essay. Creating maps of the school spaces in which members of the research team existed daily excited the researchers from the beginning. Because they all attended different schools, they connected strongly with the idea of visually showing one another what their schools were like, as a contrast to the writing, reading, and talking we had done during the first several months. I introduced the idea of mapping by describing the identity maps students had made to describe their identity as Muslim-Americans (Fine & Sirin, 2007; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007), mapping of the central square to understand the ways urban residents use public spaces (Low, 2000), and educational maps (Tuck et al., 2009). We were also inspired by work done by Hersker and Leap (1996), in which researchers asked gay men in Washington D.C. to map the “gay city” by showing the routes that took them to important gay landmarks and community events and Patricia Krueger-Henney’s mapping of the school-prison nexus (Krueger, 2010).

The youth researchers were very excited to show one another where they sat, ate, made out, flirted, felt good, hid, found time to talk and felt uneasy in their schools. They also thought about their movements through the school and talked to one another about how they navigated the different spaces. Rather than draw maps at the beginning, we decided to save it until the end of the process—in this way we would work to identify and classify the discourses, then, with them in mind, the youth researchers could draw more detailed visual representations of the schools. The maps created a more concrete representation of the discourses circulating in the schools, the locations for freedom and the locations of danger in the schools, and provided a new lens through which we could see the material impact of these discourses on the bodies of students. They also provide a lens for us to examine the effectiveness of policies and their enactment in spaces in order to provide emotional and physical safety for students.

The youth researchers and I decided the drawings would represent the "Gay School," or spaces in the school where sexuality and gender could be expressed in ways that did not conform to heterosexual or binary gender expectations as determined by adolescent peer culture and popular media that typically dominated their school spaces. Although gender transgression is not necessarily non-heterosexual, and the boundaries of sexuality and gender identity or expression do not fully overlap, youth researchers felt that gender boundary-pushing, such as girls wearing clothing designated as for boys, or boys wearing makeup, constituted part of what identified some students in their schools as non-heterosexual. Because of the ways that they played with gender and assessed others on their gender presentation, they thought spaces that allowed gender transgression were important in their schools.

Each youth researcher was given a large sheet of paper and a set of markers, a pencil, and pen. No code was established before the drawing began, in part because we thought that the experiences and discourses at the different schools would be diverse enough that we should not standardize the representation. Youth researchers drew pictures of hallways, classrooms, bathrooms, stairs, closets, locker rooms, auditoriums, and entrances and exits. Within these spaces students marked spaces where their own sexuality and gender identity found expression and affirmation, and where they noticed others demonstrating expressions of non-heterosexual and gender-expanding identities. Youth researchers then narrated the maps to the rest of the research group, and told how the discourses in the spaces affected their bodily movements through and within the school. Below I describe the maps and discuss the meanings that the youth researchers and I made of these representations.

"Gay School" Maps

In this section I will narrate the drawings and labels in the photographs of each of the maps and then "read" them as the youth researchers and I analyzed them together in our research meetings. This will give the full context of the maps as they were described by their creators and discussed in our analysis meetings. In the next section, I will elaborate on the themes found across the maps about school spaces, sex in schools, and the roles of adults in schools to teach about sexuality, gender, relationships and identity and connect these with other data.

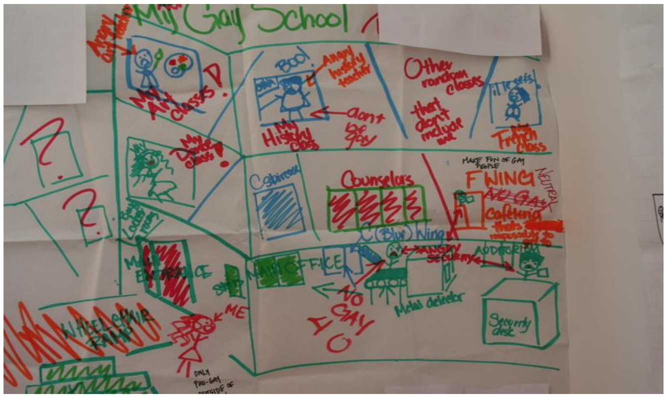
My Gay School
Angry art teacher
My Art classes
Boo!
Angry history teacher
don't be gay
My History class
Other random classes that don't include me
French class
My Dance class
Stairwell
Counselors
MAKE FUN OF GAY PEOPLE
F WING
NEUTRAL
~~NO GAY~~
Cafeteria
C (Blue) Wing
ANGRY SECURITY
AUDITORIUM
MAIN ENTRANCE
MAIN OFFICE
NO GAY
ME
Metal detector
Security desk
WHEELCHAIR RAMP
ONLY PRO-GAY OUTSIDE OF

Figure 5.1: My Gay School by Sally

Narration of Sally's Map

The picture shows three floors of a school with a student standing outside. Sally, the bisexual girl student is labeled "Me" and "Only pro-gay outside of school." Inside school, she has labeled the security guards, a security desk, a metal detector, the main office and auditorium. The security guards are labeled, "angry security guards" and "no gay 4 u." On the second floor, the cafeteria takes up the right end, the counselors and C staircase are in the middle and "My dance class" is at the left end. The cafeteria says "no gay" but that has been crossed out and replaced with "neutral." A note has been added that clarifies that students "make fun of gay people" here. In the dance class the student is smiling. On the third floor, Sally show us three classes, "My Art Class" with an "angry art teacher," "My History Class" with an "angry history teacher" and the admonition, "Don't be gay." Past "Other random classes that don't include me" she shows "My French Class."

Analytic Discussion of Sally's Map

The drawing first looks very chaotic, filled with overlapping colors, big writing, hallways headed off in several directions and many teachers marked as angry. In fact, Sally's school is very chaotic and she does not feel that she fits in it very well. She identifies as bisexual and outside of school is very vocal about her identity. She almost always dresses in very feminine clothing, with makeup and her hair done, but she makes a point of letting people know that she is not heterosexual. She complains about the burden of being read as a straight girl. In school, however, this misperception serves her. Sally does not feel safe being known as bisexual at school, even though her school, like many others, allows for tacit acceptance of bisexual girls as long as they date boys at school. In her school, Sally allows herself to be read as heterosexual in order to avoid the exoticizing gaze that would single her out as a "freaky" girl if her bisexuality were known. She feels because of her small size and the lack of support system in her school – she is new there and doesn't have a large group of friends—she would be exposing herself to too much attention. The chaos of the large school, with a sometimes violent reputation, makes her wary, too. She has not identified any teacher or principal who would stick up for her if she felt herself in danger due to sexual harassment or heterosexist verbal or physical violence. She does not see any LGBTQ+ roles models among her teachers, and hears some of them participate in anti-LGBTQ+ slurs and jokes.

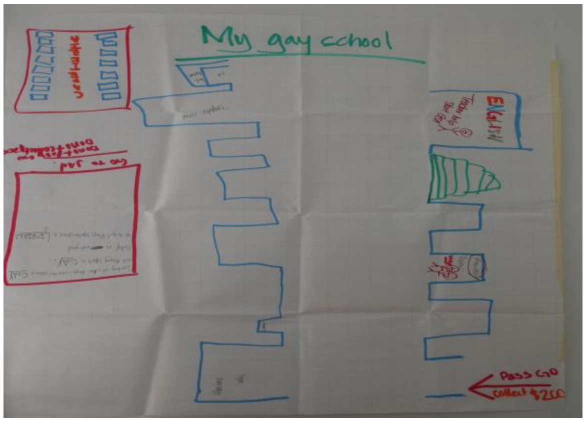

Figure 5.2: My Gay School by Mikey

Narration of Mikey's Map

Mikey has identified only areas in his school where gender and sexuality are noted or contested. On the right side he marked his English teacher's classroom. It is labeled "Teacher help start GSA." Lower, he labeled the Principal/Dean's office, depicted with smiling faces. Other classrooms, the hallway and stairs, are not labeled. On the other side of the map, Mikey has labeled the cafeteria and the gym. In his school, these rooms are on another floor. There are no notes on the cafeteria, but in the gym, Mikey has noted, "Looking at other boys in locker room is GAY," "Not playing sports is GAY," "GAY is not good," "If a girl plays sports she's a LESBIAN." At the entrance to the school, Mikey has labeled the map, "Pass GO. Collect $200." Outside of the gym, between it and the cafeteria, are the words, "Go to jail. Do not pass Go. Do not collect $200."

Analytic Discussion of Mikey's Map

Mikey labeled only rooms where he feels comfortable, or where gender and sexuality are at the forefront of conversations. The English teacher's classroom is an important site of contestation because she helped start the GSA last year, and even though it was not successful, she remains a source of support for non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming students. The dean is very supportive of Mikey, and takes time to recognize him and his gay identity. She comments on his clothing, eyeliner and hairstyles, letting him know that he is seen in the school by an adult figure in a positive way. Rather than just tolerating him, she actually accepts him on the terms in which he presents himself.

The gym represents the most overtly gendered and sexualized space in Mikey's school. Here boys openly taunt one another with words like "fag," "homo" and "bitch." Boys police one another's gaze, assuming attraction and even sexual overtures from "fags" if gazes linger too long on another's body. This is the location where fights might start, when other boys' harassing language leads Mikey or another gay boy to retaliate with words or fists. Gender is regulated very strictly in this gym, whether by other students or by the teachers. Both girls and boys are expected to fulfill gendered roles by not playing or playing sports.

Mikey reported that the school climate is not always as hostile as the locker room portrayal above. He describes an LGBTQ+ student's experiences in his school as "depending on the day you get there." Some days the student body seems indifferent or even welcoming of him and the small group of students who identify as non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming. The LGBTQ+ students are not outcasts in the school, and the group of harassers may be as small as the group of students who regularly gets harassed. However, some days there is outright bigotry about sexual and gender conformity, and Mikey, as well as other LGBTQ+ students, must measure the climate each day when they arrive at school, monitoring the safety situation for themselves and their friends.

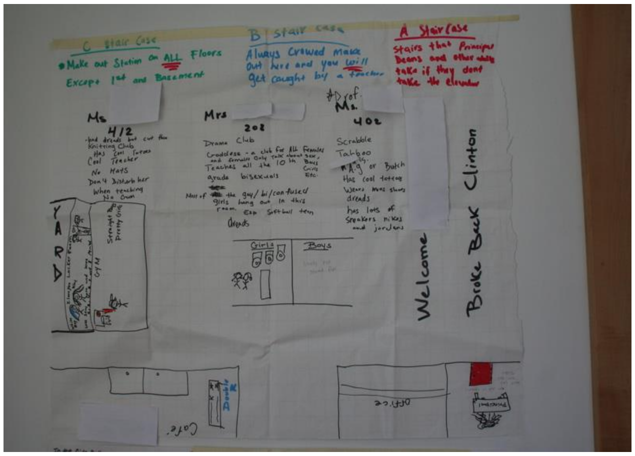
C Stair Case
Make out Station On ALL Floors Except 1st and Basement
B Stair Case
Always Crowed make Out here and you will Get caught by a Teacher
A Stair Case
Stairs that Principal Deans and other adults take if they dont take the elevator
Ms 412
Mrs 208
Prof Ms. 402
Drama Club
Scrabble
Girls
Boys
YARD
Welcome
Broke Back Clinton
Cafe
Office

Figure 5.3: Welcome to Broke Back Clinton by Sankofa

Narration of Sankofa's Map

Sankofa drew some of the spaces of her school, but uses much of her map space to detail the people and uses of the spaces. On the right side of the map she welcomes the viewers to her school, which she and her friends call Broke Back Clinton. At the top of the map she tells us about each of the staircases in the small school—A Staircase, B Staircase, and C Staircase. A Staircase is the "stairs that the Principal, other Deans and other adults take when they do not take the elevator." B Staircase is "always crowded—make out here and you *will* get caught by a teacher." C Staircase is a "make out station on *all* floors except 1st and Basement." The center of the map shows the girls' bathroom and the boys' bathroom. In the girls' bathroom two girls are shown kissing. The boys' bathroom is labeled "smelly pee-stained floor." On the left side of the map are the gym, locker rooms, and yard. In the gym are "straight boys and pretty girls" and a basketball hoop. Off to the side of the gym are a "white boy" and a girl. The boy says, "I love you Kay. Let's stay here and kiss 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 period." In the girls' locker room girls are shown kissing. At the bottom of the map are the cafeteria and the principal's office. In the cafeteria Sankofa shows the table where she and her friends sit. The principal's office is labeled "not safe in general – don't get your hat taken." Above the girls' and boys' bathrooms in the center of the map Sankofa lists three women teachers in the school—Ms. 412, Mrs. 208 and Prof. 402.

- Ms. 412 "had dreads but cut them, [started a] knitting club, has cool tattoos, [is a] cool teacher, no hats, don't disturb her when teaching, no gum."
- Mrs. 208 is in charge of the "drama club and Goddess—a club for all females and females only. Talk about sex, boys, girls, etc." She "teaches all the 10th grade [English]." "Most of the gay/bi/confused girls hang out in this room, especially the softball team." She wears dreads.
- Prof. 402 has "Scrabble, Taboo" in her room for students to play. She is "AG or butch, has cool tattoos, wears men's shoes, dreads, has lots of sneakers, Nikes, and Jordans."

Analytic Discussion of Sankofa's Map

Sankofa and her friends call the school Broke Back Clinton for the perception among the students that there are so many lesbian, bisexual and curious or questioning girl students who attend. Girls can be seen kissing in several of the more hidden, or students-only, spaces in the school, such as the bathroom and locker room. However, gender norms may be transgressed in any area of the school, publicly or privately. Sankofa's group, made up of AG girls,[1] are called the Double Rs—for Riding Rainbows, a group name they chose for themselves that references the popular use of rainbows to signify gayness. She and her friends are out AGs who get lots of attention from the bisexual, curious and questioning girls, and who are very popular with other students and with teachers.

Gender performance is part of Sankofa's narrative, and she details butch presentation by teachers as well as other students. These performances are important ways that students recognize one another as non-heterosexual, and can serve as the announcement that someone is newly identifying as lesbian. Students recognize gender fluidity in one another and understand that there is pressure to be legible as lesbian (Martin, 1996), but that not all lesbian students will continue to present as butch. This visibility, however, makes the non-heterosexual presence at the school noticeable to all students.

The focus of teachers and students in this school is less about heterosexism and more about sexism and girls' empowerment. In addition, most girls feel supported by these three teachers, who demonstrate a variety of gender expressions. The teachers' gender transgressing dress and expressed out sexuality in the case of Prof. 402 are welcoming signals for girls who dress in gender non-conforming ways and have non-heterosexual sexual identities. The fact that these teachers are African-American, and most of the students are people of color (as is typical in New York City high schools) helps students reconcile their sexuality, gender expression, and racial belonging.

Sankofa's presentation confirms that sexual acts, where they happen in the school, need to be hidden from teachers eyes no matter who is participating. Teachers address sexuality in many forms, and although there are teachers who openly disapprove of non-heterosexual sexuality, their voices do not dominate the spaces.

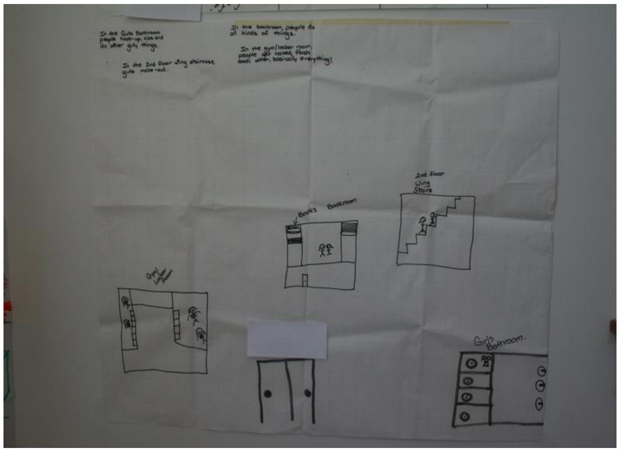
In the Girls Bathroom people hook-up, kiss and do other girly things.
In the 2nd floor wing staircase, girls make-out.
In the bookroom, people do all kinds of things.
In the gym/locker room, people get naked, flash each other, basically everything!
Books Bookroom
2nd floor wing stairs
Gym/locker room
Girls Bathroom

Figure 5.4: Untitled by Tayla

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[1] AG is short for aggressive, a term used by butch, or more masculine presenting, lesbians in some communities of color. AG was the term used by Sankofa, for her teacher and for herself.

Narration of Tayla's Map

Tayla's map shows the front doors of the school, the girls' locker room, the bookroom, the second floor wing stairs and the girls' bathroom. In each of these enclosed spaces, girls are shown kissing one another. The rest of the space is left empty, except for the description she provides at the top. Tayla wrote, at the top of her map, "In the girls' bathroom people hook-up, kiss, and do other girly things." "In the 2nd floor wing staircase, girls make-out." "In the bookroom, people do all kinds of things." In the gym/locker room, people get naked, flash each other, basically everything!"

Analytic Discussion of Tayla's Map

Tayla is a bisexual girl who attends an all-girl Catholic school. In her map of the sexual and gendered spaces of school, she showed only enclosed spaces where students escape the eyes of the adults. In this school, Tayla tells that even though many of the girls are experimenting sexually with one another, very few girls claim the identity labels bisexual or lesbian, and her fellow students may be very discriminatory about girls who have claimed these labels. Even from fellow students, with all of the sexual activity portrayed here and all of the bi-curiosity in the school, there is much disapproval of the students who claim to be lesbian or bisexual, rather than just experimenting or fooling around. Girls "fool around" with other girls, but do not assume that their sexual experimentation means anything about them or that it would put them in the same category as the morally suspicious girls who claim non-heterosexuality. In this school, prevalent attitudes define homosexuality as a sin, say that gay people will not go to heaven, and claim that young women should not be sexual beings. Tayla said, "They hate you if you gay." Conversations in this school about sexuality and gender are very traditional. Gender roles for girls are expected to conform to very traditionally feminine. No teacher or adult in the school gives recognition to girls' sexual experimentation except to condemn it. Homosexuality and gender non-conformity are not up for discussion in classes, and no sex education beyond abstinence as the only choice is offered.

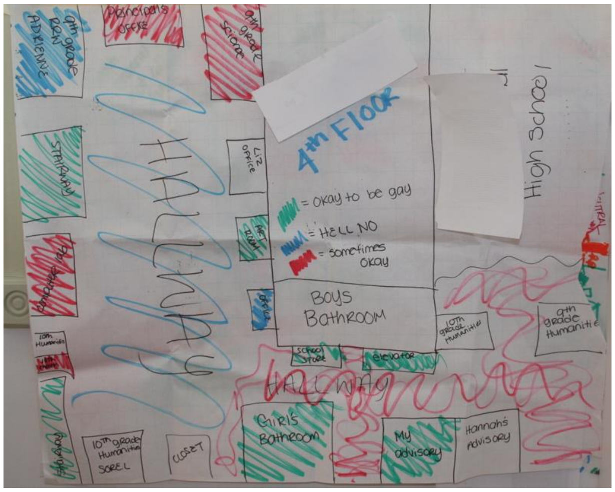
9th grade REW ADRIENNE
Principal's Office
9th grade Science
STAIRWAY
HALLWAY
LIZ OFFICE
ART ROOM
OFFICE
4th Floor
= Okay to be gay
= HELL NO
= sometimes okay
High School
BOYS BATHROOM
10th grade Humanities
9th grade Humanities
School Store
elevator
HALLWAY
Girl's Bathroom
My advisory
Hannah's advisory
10th grade Humanities SOREL
CLOSET
STAIRWAY

Figure 5.5: Yajaira's High School

Narration of Yajaira's Map

Yajaira's school shows two hallways, one marked blue and one marked red. The key she created for the map shows that green areas are places it's "okay to be gay," blue places "hell no" one cannot show non-conforming gender or sexuality there, and red means it's "sometimes okay." The hallway on the left of the map is colored blue, where one teacher's room in the corner and the small main office are also blue. The other hallway is marked in red for "sometimes okay." Other spaces marked red include the principal's office, the computer lab, 9th grade science and 10th grade math. Green spaces, or places where it is "okay to be gay" include: the stairways, the girls' bathroom, Yajaira's advisory, the elevator, the art room, and the school store.

Analytic Discussion of Yajaira's Map

Yajaira's school, although full of color like Sally's, does not exhibit the same chaos. Yajaira is able to clearly locate spaces in her school where she feels comfortable and finds support and where she does not. The discourses and contests in this school are overt rather than covert. Adrienne, the teacher in the blue corner, is very disapproving of the gay students in the school, and she will "make a scene" if she catches two girls kissing or two boys holding hands in that hallway. Red spaces show where students find at least somewhat supportive teachers or the principal, and where other students' language and behavior toward LGBTQ+ students will be monitored and regulated.

In green spaces, students feel free to show their affection for their same-gender girlfriend or boyfriend by holding hands and kissing. The teachers in these spaces are known by the students to be gay or lesbian or allies, and their openness in talking with the students about the relationship choices they make creates an atmosphere in which students enjoy discussing their personal decisions within the context of national and community debates about sexuality and gender expression.

Some of these spaces are "student only" spaces, like the girls' bathroom and the stairways. In these spaces, out of the eyes of teachers, students sometimes perform sexual activities beyond hand-holding and kissing. However, these activities are not isolated in private spaces in the same way in this school as they are in the previous school. At Yajaira's school, students know they can go to other students or a teacher for advice or help if the situation feels out of their control. Teachers have intervened for students being harassed in the school, and the principal has also made a public statement to the school community that he would not tolerate students exhibiting bias toward one another in the school. Yajaira reports on the principal's interactions with a student, Melvin, who was spreading rumors about Yajaira and her girlfriend last year,

> No, he had a talk with him. And then, I guess Melvin told [other students]…" Oh, yeah, they took me in the office and then [the principal] said this and that, this and that." [The principal] was gonna suspend him, cause he felt that you shouldn't have to be in the school if you feel like…We shouldn't have to be in the school like trying to hide your identity, basically.

The principal supported the assertion that the public forum of school belonged to LGBTQ+ students' as much as it belonged to the harassers, and therefore protected their right to exist and speak in the public spaces of the school.

Where Our Maps Lead Us

Students resist the limiting identities endorsed and ascribed by schools in many ways. In terms of sexuality and gender identity, they resist normative categories with the presence of their bodies that transgress, overlap, and spill outside the lines of categories that are approved of or taught about. The maps above demonstrate the ways that young people find spaces of freedom and room to explore relationships, bodies, and pleasures at school.

Sex in School Spaces

Sex happens in school spaces. Since at least the turn of the twentieth century, schools have been sites of regulation of sexuality and gender expression among students (Lesko, 2001). In social activities, classes on hygiene, and later, sex education classes, students have been encouraged to engage in appropriate dating activities that will lead to socially sanctioned marriages and children, as a part of their healthy sexual identity construction (Blount, 2005; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002). "It has been well-documented that sex, though only one facet of social life, is crucial in the construction of identity" (Hubbard, 2002, p. 365). Schools are recognized by young people and adults as places where teens experience attractions, experiment with flirting, acknowledge desires in themselves and others, and begin dating.

Sexual activities often considered age-appropriate for adolescents, such as flirting, holding hands, kissing, and hugging between youth of the opposite gender may be allowed or encouraged in school spaces or in after-school, school-based social activities. However, these same activities may not be allowed between students of the same gender, or may or may not be allowed based on the religious and cultural values of the community. Also, other sexual activities are forbidden in schools and often considered inappropriate among adolescents, such as touching of one another's genitals, arousing one another to the point of orgasm, oral sex, intercourse, and masturbation. These sexual activities are considered private, and young people who engage in them, either in schools or outside of schools, are often labeled immoral, psychologically damaged, physically at-risk, or at least misbehaving (Tolman, 1994, 2006; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003).

From the maps we can see that sexual behavior often happens in schools where students can steal a moment of privacy within the public spaces of the school building. Adolescents often have very little private space or time they can claim, and so carve privacy out of public spaces – in cars, in parks, in restrooms and in school stairwells and closets. In the schools depicted in the maps, students have found privacy for sexual exploration in stairwells, under the bleachers in the gym, in the locker rooms, in the bathrooms, in the book room, and in the school store (a large closet out of which school supplies are sold). In these spaces, consensual sexual activities – mostly kissing and some touching—happen, and these private spaces in public provide opportunities for young people to explore the boundaries of their desires. In gender segregated spaces, for example, girls experiment with their desire for and desirability to other girls, when they flash one another, kiss and flirt in the girls' locker room and bathroom, or in the all-girls school. Girls and boys also may kiss in the public spaces of the school.

Non-consensual sexual activity also happens in school spaces, though, and often in the public spaces. These activities are not always noted or responded to by teachers. Students reported regular touching, commenting on and suggestion of sex activities between girls and boys as a regular part of the passing periods in the school hallways. Sometimes teachers, security guards, and other adults participate in the sexualized talk aimed at girl students (Krueger-Henney, 2013). This sexual activity is seen as normal, expected and what girls, or boys who are viewed as gay or not masculine enough, just have to deal with on the streets and also within the public spaces of the school building (Pascoe, 2007). Heteronormativity allows for the sexualized behavior of straight boys toward girls, especially where the boys are not otherwise Othered, or racialized as different.

In her "normative ideal of city life," Young (1990) suggests that public spaces offer four virtues of social relations, including "social differentiation without exclusion," "variety," "eroticism," and "publicity" (pp. 238-240). The erotic is defined "in the wide sense of an attraction to the other, the pleasure and excitement of being drawn out of one's secure routine to encounter the novel, strange, and surprising" (p. 239). This element of the erotic also exists in schools, where students meet others different from themselves, who come from different neighborhoods and have different backgrounds. In schools, students can explore many pleasures, including the new pleasures of sexual desire and desirability. These pleasures are not limited to the sexual, however, and students of all sexual identities may also enjoy the pleasures of gender expression, social interactions, academic engagement, and many others as they are subjected to and also resist the discourses of adolescence (Foucault, 1978; McWhorter, 1999).

Spaces in which to Explore Desires and Pleasures

Two maps stand out as representing schools where sexuality and gender can be and are spoken about. Sexuality and gender become part of the public forum in Yajaira's and Sankofa's schools where sexism, discrimination, intersectionality of identities, and safety in relationships are topics that students engage. In Sankofa's school, the Double Rs claim space in the cafeteria, they flirt with girls who show interest in the gender expression and sexual experiences they claim, and they find older students at their school who recognize them and mentor them through the coming-out process as they name their sexuality and gender expression. These spaces at Sankofa's school provide guidance for younger or less experienced girls who express a desire to date a girl or dress in a non-feminine way in which they find a supportive community and positive feedback for their choices.

Students also offer one another an education in the politics and history of the social category homosexuality. Students in Sankofa's school engage in political and historical discussions of race and class groups in the United States and in New York City. They actively pursue academic and leadership programs that focus on issues of gender inequalities and social revolutions. Within this setting, students feel empowered to ask for their rights to present their identities in school and to challenge normative practices and policies. Sankofa chose for her English final research paper the place of homosexuality in the Black community. Although her English teacher did not agree with Sankofa's argument that the discrimination non-heterosexual identified people face is equal to racial discrimination, Sankofa pursued her line of argument and drew on her experiences as an activist in other settings to educate herself and other students about the history of sexual identity categories and their intersections with racial identity categories.

In Yajaira's school, students know their rights to exist in the spaces of the school and so feel empowered to claim their spaces. Although last year the school was a much less friendly social climate for LGBTQ+ youth, and some students were ridiculed and told they were "disgusting" for being suspected of or claiming LGBTQ+ identities, the situation changed dramatically in the past year. Several students spoke up and initiated a Diversity Club. The group meets weekly during lunch and loosely follows a discussion of topics brainstormed by the students. Teachers were enlisted as sponsors for the club, but the agenda is guided by the interests and needs of the student members. LGBTQ+ students also complained to the principal about experiencing harassment from a particular group of other students. The LGBTQ+ students' demand for redress for the ostracizing moves of their harassers brought a response from the principal, which reinforced the LGBTQ+ students' feeling of belonging and political power within the school community. Rather than organizing only around identity, students organized around a precipitating injustice to demand justice for themselves and their peers. Students in Sankofa's and Yajaira's schools changed the discourse about LGBTQ+ youth, from problem or disruption in academic spaces to an important addition (Nayak & Kehily, 2014). LGBTQ+ students claim their identities in these schools as positive attributes that give them insights into social justice and provide commonalities around which they can organize and demand safer, more inclusive school spaces.

Sally and Mikey do not encounter these supports in their schools, and seek outside of school for information, community, and political agency. Mikey finds recognition for his gender expression and sexuality from the dean, but it does not translate into spaces in which students can challenge heteronormativity in the school community. Instead, he searches in the public library and online for stories, both fiction and nonfiction, that resonate with the way he understands his identity and help him define the communities that he wants to align himself with. Likewise, he and Sally find others who share their ideas and support their identities in online communities. Sally in particular searches for essays, stories and other texts that explore the meaning of bisexuality and uses her own writing to engage the ideas she finds. She actively struggles with definitions of bisexuality that demean it in relation to gay or lesbian identities and construe bisexuals as confused or in transition. Mikey and Sally, already friends outside the research team, support one another in their explorations of what it means to claim a gay or bisexual identity, who they want to be within that identity, and how they will express it.

Teachers and Spaces in Schools

The youth researchers identified, where available, teachers who recognized the issues important in the lives of students and educated students to be critical thinkers about gender roles, sexual behavior, racism and culture. The critical nature of classroom and casual discussions in the schools makes space for students to introduce questions about how sexuality and gender expression fit into the school community's discussions of identity and justice. Spaces in the school where students' questions can be asked and answered in a respectful way invite students to initiate discussions of ethical behavior and practical concern. Teachers' classrooms in which non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming bodies are welcomed and not scrutinized send powerful messages that these bodies are a legitimate part of the school community and have as much right to be within the space and to advocate politically as any student. This is aided by the inclusion and participation that adults and other students expect from non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming students, who are viewed in these spaces as belonging to many interest groups, not just those related to sexuality and gender expression. Students are viewed as having complex identities not limited to "victim," or "pathological." Teachers' bodies that represent non-normative gender expressions or signal non-heterosexuality also visually represent that those identities have authority and voice in the school. Similar to the discourse-changing work done by student groups, LGBTQ+ teacher bodies challenge discourses that describe queer as dangerous in schools, and help to define positive contributions of LGBTQ+ people (Nayak & Kehily, 2014).

Another ideal of public life offered by Young (1990) is "social differentiation without exclusion…[in which] groups will differentiate by affinities but the borders will be undecidable, and there will be much overlap and intermingling" (pp. 246-247). Birden (2005) described a school using Young's structure for affinity grouping in schools for sexual identity organizing, and suggests that Young's ideal offers groups within schools opportunities to organize to make changes without claiming an essential or permanent identity or affiliation. The groups can be contingent and local, created in response to the needs of a group of students or an event that happens during a school year. Having groups with porous boundaries, such as the groups of girls that hang out in Ms. 208's room (Sankofa's map) without having to declare a sexual identity, but where issues of sexuality and gender get discussed, helps create the opportunities for the group to rally to respond if issues arise about sexuality or gender identity in the school.

Likewise, in Yajaira's school, a group called the Diversity Club has formed. In addition to the advisories, where students are assigned to teachers for academic and social advising all school year, the Diversity Club offers students a chance to particularly discuss issues about identity and discrimination. It has been used to talk about incidents of racism and sexism, and is also the space in which LGBTQ+ students come to assert new identities and get support for speaking their identity publicly in school and outside of school. Because the group focuses broadly on diversity, students feel free to bring their whole selves, not just sexuality or gender identity to the group, and they educate one another about many issues of diversity, making them ready to respond politically to any discrimination that might arise in the school.

Social theorists describe how hegemonic discourses remain uncontested by denying certain bodies and voices access to public spaces (Katz, 2006; Spain, 1992). It is therefore important to examine not only the language and behaviors that circulate in schools about sexuality and gender, but also to visualize the ways the discourses manifest in the spaces of schools and impact the movement of bodies. Mapping allows LGBTQ+ youth to visually represent their bodily existence in schools. Examining spaces through mapping allows students to explore the possibilities for public expressions of their identities within these "public spaces" or social spaces that exist in schools. The youth researchers and I were able to understand the moves youth make to resist dominant discourses or narratives about sexuality and gender identity in schools.

Conclusion

This project asked young LGBTQ+ people about the discourses circulating in the school about sexuality and gender identities, and the ways that students act to challenge and subvert the limitations placed on their identities within schools. In a sexually just education, sexuality would not be impelled to assimilate to heterosexist norms, nor would non-heterosexual students have to renounce sexual behaviors (Rasmussen, 2006). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ+) student relationships would not necessarily have to follow the dating/relationship/prom model of their heterosexual norms (Lesko, 2001). Trans students would not be required to subscribe to one or the other of the two binary genders, but would be allowed to fashion their gendered bodies as they feel they should. LGBTQ+ students would not become only gay or trans, to the exclusion of their racial, gender, ethnic, religious or class identities. A queer lens would advocate for an understanding of sexuality outside of the normative, romanceto-marriage-for-life paradigm (McWhorter, 1999). It would advocate an understanding of sexuality and gender expression as always contingent and in the process of forming, within relations with others (Butler, 2004). It would also disrupt the formal sexuality education model currently in place that frequently implicitly or explicitly positions girls as victims of sexual violence and boys as sexual conquerors (Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 2006). It would create possibilities for different sexual subjectivities regardless of one's sexual desires or partners.

This queered notion of sexuality and gender offers an opportunity for all students to interact with others different from themselves, and with ideas that may be strange or unknown to them. As public spaces for students who attend them, schools also serve as a forum for ideas. As noted previously, ideas that find believers or backers have the opportunity to become values, beliefs, and systems. Ideas that can be kept out of the public forum, isolated as fringe, private, or immoral, cannot receive a public hearing and remain silenced. LGBTQ+ youth in schools must sometimes breach the rules of polite conversation, advocating for recognition and against formidable, if unspoken, opposition (Burrington, 1998). This is the only option, because keeping certain ideas out of public space effectively isolates their speakers as extreme (Young, 1990).

Sexuality and gender expression are elements of young people's subjectivity. Although they are formed within a historical moment and a social setting, they are still expressions of selfhood and freedom, and are explorations of young people's interactions with others and with the world. Schools provide social locations in which young people meet one another and recognize their attractions. This has long been supported as an activity of schools for heterosexuality (Lesko, 2001). Schools have operated as locations to reproduce normative masculinity and femininity, often in the name of community or family values (Lugg, 2015). For example, schools may line students up by gender in the hallways in order to keep girls safe, have gendered bathrooms and locker rooms that assume easily recognizable bodily differences between boys and girls, or teach science curricula that discuss biology with male and female as binary gendered categories, without addressing other gender possibilities in humans or other animals. Even school policy language on forms that addresses children's caretakers as "mom and dad" assume "natural" gender roles that may not be relevant. Normative masculinity and femininity are taught as binary categories, naturally existing in nature, and historically unchanging or evolving. The social categories of gender are assumed in much of elementary and secondary policy, curriculum content, pedagogy and interpersonal relationships to be based in immutable natural laws.

Through their explanations of their maps, youth researchers demonstrate the ways teachers can help students think critically about categories, and who gets to belong to them and who does not. Schools could become a site of discussion about the ways people are divided up, the definition of categories and the historical and cultural contingency of those categories. Sex education classes could also provide opportunities for students to discuss sexual ideas before acting on them and a place to think about the ethics of being in relationships with one another. Students perceive health education to contribute to their safety in schools (Linville, 2011) and they seek adult guidance in sexual decision-making and in thinking about sexuality and gender choices with which they are presented. Teachers could be educated and authoritative about decisions about sexual and gender information they present in sex education classes, but also in responding to student questions and content in other areas such as English, science and history (Britzman, 2000). LGBTQ+ student look to teachers to have reliable and authoritative information about LGBTQ+ lives that they can share with straight-identified students, to dispel myths and counter discrimination.

Although the youth researchers whose maps are presented here advocate for mixed-use spaces in which sexuality and gender can become the focus of advocacy work and social support, they reiterated in several of our research meetings that gay-straight trans alliances were not the solution to the problems in their school. GSAs, students felt, would be too revealing for students who would not want to claim a firm identity by joining the group. However, multi-focus groups that allow for political advocacy on many issues would bring together students who claim non-heterosexual sexualities, gender non-conforming identities and other students who could work as allies on those issues but not claim the identities (Birden, 2005). Although the name gay-straight alliance would seem to allow for this as well, the perceived focus of the group strictly on sexuality and gender issues might discourage other students whose political goals focus more broadly on diversity from joining.

LGBTQ+ students are asking for an opportunity to participate in the erotic public and social spaces of schools. They are also asking to hear their experiences and identities reflected in conversations in the public forum, including in the curriculum, class discussions, in peer conversations, in after-school programming and in the recognition they get from adults in the building. They want their bodies to exist in the spaces of schools.

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Dr. Darla Linville is an Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations at Augusta University. She has conducted participatory action research in collaboration with youth in New York City, Maine, and Georgia. In her research with and about LGBTQ+ young people, she has unearthed tensions and contestations about queer and gender nonconforming bodies in schools. The findings in her work have reshaped discourses about queer youth identities. Currently she is researching the application of anti-bullying legislation in school settings, and its effectiveness in combating the most prevalent harassment students experience.

"Man, Somebody Tell that Kid to Shut up": YPAR Implementation at a Rural, Alternative School in the Deep South

Hannah Carson Baggett & Carey E. Andrzejewski, Auburn University

Abstract

This paper explores the implementation of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) at a rural, alternative high school in Alabama. Students at the school were atypical from those usually described in the YPAR literature in that they were predominately white, working and middle class, and lived in rural neighborhoods that were geographically removed from their school. Data included observational field notes, responses to survey items that explore conceptions of community engagement, focus group and individual interviews, and artifacts from the YPAR class. We organize our findings along two domains. The first focuses on youth perspectives about community, including the ways these perspectives did not foster a sense of collective action and how youths felt (dis)empowered and cynical about community involvement. The second includes our reflections on the development and implementation of this YPAR initiative and explores how this implementation was (mis)aligned with the extant literature on YPAR.

Keywords: *Youth Participatory Action Research; Reflective Practice; Alternative Schools; Rural Schools*

Introduction

We turn off the main four-lane highway onto a county road. We stop at the railroad crossing and, to the right, is an antique store. Rusty wrought iron outdoor furniture and vintage signs populate the exterior of the store. On a picnic table set, we see a figurine of a painted black boy in blue overalls who is seated, fishing. We make another left onto the crumbling road where the school is located. The porch of the first old house holds unpainted figurines like the ones sitting outside the antique store. We surmise that these are new, 'old' figurines that speak to the area's racist past and present. We wonder what Camden,[1] as the only African American student in our class, thinks of these figurines, or if he's noticed them. A few houses down, we see an expansive yard that boasts two large signs: a "Choose Cruz" official campaign sign, next to another, homemade Cruz sign that says "Cruz will abolish the IRS!." So many potholes—this road could use some tax dollars. There is another dirt

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

> road that has been gated off, with multiple flood lights perched at the gate's closure. Perhaps they are lit up at night? As we make the turn into the school's parking lot and stop the car, we see David drive up in his huge truck with the CB antenna out the back. He has a "Salt Life" sticker on the back of the truck, with some other hunting logos. When we first interviewed him last week, he talked about hunting and fishing with his buddy, Howard. (Field Notes, 2016)

This excerpt from field notes, taken in spring of 2016, provides a snapshot of the day-to-day setting of the school, and sets the stage for our work implementing Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) programming at an alternative high school in rural Alabama. The purpose of this paper is to detail an empirical study that explored the implementation of YPAR projects at the school. Explicitly, we worked to understand youth perspectives about the nature of community and community engagement as reflected in their contributions to class and their research projects. Implicitly, we explored the ways that critical research and pedagogy intersected in our work (Lozenski, 2016). Namely, we queried our efforts to implement and facilitate YPAR in an atypical school context, with particular focus on engaging students in meaningful research and action in and about their communities. In the following sections, we first review the literature regarding YPAR and its implementation. Next, we describe our positional and epistemological orientations to the project and the students. Finally, we detail the ways in which our students differed from those usually described in the YPAR literature, how they viewed community involvement, and the challenges that we encountered during this work.

Related Literature

YPAR is a research model framing youth expertise and perspectives as vital resources for communities, positioning youth themselves as change agents (McIntyre, 2000; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). YPAR has its roots in critical pedagogy and praxis (e.g. Freire, 1970) and Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is guided by several core principles: a focus on collective, rather than individual investigation; a privileging of insider knowledge, and inclusion of voices traditionally silenced in research; and the willingness to engage in action to address a community problem (McIntyre, 2000). Further, YPAR engages youths not only as participants in the research, but also as the researchers, with an emphasis on collective action to address sociopolitical issues that affect their everyday lives (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). There is robust emerging literature surrounding YPAR and its promise for supporting students' academic and social engagement, motivation, and achievement. For example, research suggests that students who engage in YPAR projects experience positive academic outcomes, such as increased test scores, graduation rates, and school engagement (Cabrera et al., 2014), and that YPAR projects support the development of youths' community-based intergenerational networks (Mitra, 2005), networks among diverse groups (Flores, 2007), and professional networks (Rubin & Jones, 2007). Proponents of YPAR have demonstrated its value in contemporary schools by mapping its goals to national standards (Kornbluh et al., 2015), and situate YPAR spaces as potential sites to develop students' academic literacies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) and preparedness to participate in school reform (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011). Finally, YPAR affords youth the opportunity and the agency to critique schools and systems that disenfranchise and disempower students from disparate backgrounds (e.g. Tuck et al., 2008).

YPAR projects are often based in community settings (for an anthology of these projects and further theorizing about YPAR, see, for example, Cammarota & Fine, 2008), but have been increasingly instituted as part of regular school curricula. For example, Kornbluh, Ozer, Allen, and Kirshner (2015) reported various YPAR projects undertaken by students whose middle and high school teachers were participating in courses at UC-Berkeley and the University of Colorado Denver. Students' projects included a focus on improving teachers' culturally responsive instruction with the goal of increasing graduation rates at their schools, increased access to sexual health education, and exploration of school-based policies to promote student diversity (for other examples, see Giraldo-García & Galletta, 2015; Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, & Hubbard, 2013; Ozer & Wright, 2012). School implementation may have the potential to engage more groups of students than YPAR programming in extracurricular, outside settings (Kornbluh et al., 2015) since an estimated 40% of students do not participate in after-school or community-based activities, often due to inequitable access or resources (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006, p. 3). YPAR is often implemented with groups of adolescents who are frequently labeled as 'at risk' of academic failure and exclusion from school contexts (e.g., Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Indeed, much of the YPAR literature problematizes those labels that position students as deficient and frames YPAR as a way for youth who are often labeled and disenfranchised from school contexts to become empowered and challenge those deficit perspectives (e.g., Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). School-based YPAR provides opportunities for cultural change within schools (Mitra, 2005), which generally omit student voice in decision or policy-making processes (Langhout, 2005; Kornbluh et al., 2015).

Our contribution to the YPAR literature is two-fold: first, we report our findings from implementing YPAR with a group of working and middle-class students who were predominantly ethnoracially white[2] and attending a rural alternative school; next, we describe the messiness of our implementation, and the students' critique of expectations for community involvement and, to some extent, the YPAR model. Specifically, our interactions with the students at the school and our reflections about the project in its beginning stages quickly prompted us to (re)consider this work not only as an outreach project, but also as a meaningful scholarship endeavor that filled several gaps in the extant literature about YPAR, which we address again in the 'Positionality' section below. Specifically, there is little to no research that reports on YPAR implementation with students who live and attend school in rural contexts and who are predominately ethnoracially white. Further, very little has been written about the initial stages of implementation of YPAR. For example, Anyon and Naughton (2003) described challenges and "barriers to full participation" (p. 3) that their students faced in completing YPAR projects, such as eviction, community violence, and truancy. And, Ozer, Newland, Douglas, and Hubbard (2013) described "constraints" (p. 19) on the degree to which students are empowered within school-based YPAR implementation; those constraints occurred particularly in 'issue selection' and 'taking action' phases of YPAR. But, there is a dearth of literature that reports on what YPAR programming 'looks like' from curricular and relational perspectives at its initial stages with students who are academically disengaged. While some YPAR literature explores students' descriptions of marginalization in school contexts (e.g., Tuck et al., 2008), no empirical studies to date report on YPAR in alternative educational contexts or non-traditional high schools. This struck us as a significant gap in the literature considering students in alternative schools often have less freedom and participation than those in typical school settings (Khalifa, 2011). And, the benefits of YPAR participation may be more marked for students placed at risk who have otherwise limited access to positive adult interactions and of whom expectations for achievement are low (Anyon & Naughton, 2003).

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[2] In this paper, we are intentional about the usage of a lowercase "w" to indicate our resistance to white supremacy and our commitment to anti-racist work.

Methods

Site: CFL

With this understanding of the literature, we began our YPAR instruction at the Center for Learning (CFL, pseudonym). CFL was situated in a geographically remote location, removed from students' home schools and their neighborhoods, which were in rural areas of the county. County leaders designed CFL in 2015 to meet the needs of students for whom traditional high schools were not a good fit, as deemed by both the students and their school leaders. For example, students at CFL had failed many classes at their home high schools, and described having high levels of social anxiety at their schools. They also described experiences of persistent bullying and a history of bad relationships with teachers that resulted in a desire to manage their own learning time and set their own learning pace. Indeed, students had the flexibility to set their own schedules at the school. Further, CFL was not a typical alternative context in that students were required to apply for admission (all applications had been accepted to date), and their curricula were delivered online via credit recovery modules. The school was comprised of about 25 students, situated across two computer labs and a larger, open room where students ate lunch and met with us during our weekly YPAR sessions. The school staff included a building principal and a former high school football coach who helped with logistics, such as lunch distribution. We offered a YPAR class that was available to all students at the school for one elective credit.

Participants

This project focused on participatory methods with youth who inhabited marginalized spaces, both as residents of rural communities in the Deep South and as students who chose an alternative school in lieu of their more traditional high school. In this project, our students were predominately white and from rural communities; they were also at the very margins of public schools, at the literal and figurative 'last stop' before dropping out of school altogether. Our work to support these students' efforts to conduct participatory action research afforded us an opportunity to explore their ideas about community and the ways in which they were, and were not, empowered in educational spaces. Students volunteered to participate in both the class and the study; we made explicit that they were able to earn credit for the class even if they chose not to participate in the study.

The class had an enrollment of nine students (eight boys and one girl), and all nine assented to participation in the study, subsequent to the active consent of their parents/guardians. See Table 1 (next page) for demographic information.

Table 1
Students' demographic information

	Age	Ethnoracial Status	Interests
Henry	16	white	Movies, taking photos, making Instagram videos and Snapchats
Bryan	17	white	Masonry, "fixing stuff," football
Rodney	17	white	Sports, interested in becoming a coach when he turned 18
Howard	17	white	Hunting and fishing, riding dirt roads, hanging out with friends
Collin	16	white	Hanging out with friends, riding around, liked to "chill"
Brooke	16	white	Fashion, "doing hair," sang in a band at church, interested in pursuing nursing
Camden	17	African American	Basketball, fixing bikes, giving advice to friends
Mark	17	white	Wrestling, football, baseball, welding
David	17	white	Competitive fishing, working on cars

Description of YPAR Course at CFL

The course featured a combination of weekly whole-group and individualized instruction with the nine students. We tailored lesson plans from existing YPAR curricula, such as those available online (Ozer, Tam, Hubbard, & Piatt, 2015), and materials that we had collected during presentations at national education research conferences (e.g. IUME, n. d.). We also recruited a graduate student to assist with development and implementation of the lessons. During instruction led by the graduate student, we focused on data collection (field notes) and instructional support with individual students during group and independent activities. Throughout the semester-long implementation of YPAR programming, our guiding research question was: *How do alternative school students describe their communities and make sense of community engagement in the context of a YPAR initiative*?

Data Collection/Instruments

Since these students are not often represented in the extant YPAR literature, we wanted to capture the ways in which the experience shaped their views about community engagement; thus, we began by administering the Active and Engaged Citizenship Scale (AECS, Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009), which was developed to examine emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components of citizenship engagement. For the purposes of our study, we used these items as a way to explore youths' perceptions about problems in their communities and their sense of responsibility for community membership. After students completed the measure, we conducted a semi-structured focus group interview where we honed-in on one or two broad items on the measure related to each of the three components of engagement, and asked students to talk out their responses, with our probes (see Appendix for protocol). Then, we formally began instruction with the students and began to problematize some of their concerns about their communities, such as feeling uncared for at school and feeling unsafe in their communities.

During the instructional period of 14 weeks, we generated field notes during each class session, totaling approximately 50 hours of participant observation. We also collected artifacts of students' work, including their in-class brainstorms and writing, and their final presentations. After the instructional period, we again administered the AECS with concurrent cognitive appraisal interviews (Silverman, 2010) with individual students. In this study, we used cognitive appraisal interviews to explore students' sense making about specific items on the AECS, and to assist us in "how to appropriately interpret findings" (p. 11) after they self-reported on the AECS. See Table 2 for a chronology of all data collected during the study.

Table 2
Summary of data sources and time points

	Active and Engaged Citizenship Scale (AECS)	Focus Group Interview	Observational Data	Cognitive Appraisal (Individual) Interviews	Student artifacts
Time point: beginning of semester	x	x	x		x
Ongoing			x		x
Time point: end of semester	x		x	x	x

Analysis

We transcribed focus group and individual interviews, and constructed a frequency table to review the AECS items in aggregate and to look for trends and themes across all students' responses. Data analysis began by considering initial focus group data and individual cognitive appraisal interview data in conjunction with both AECS responses and observational notes. We generated data-driven, holistic codes (Saldaña, 2016) from the interview data, and viewed aggregate responses on specific items on the AECS that corresponded with our interview protocols (focus group and individual). For example, our interview protocol included the question: *How important is it to you to contribute to your community?* When analyzing our focus group and individual interview data regarding this question, we triangulated those data (Denzin, 1978) with students' responses in conjunction with survey items that were intended to explore students' sense of civic duty. We used peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout data analysis, and crafted positionality statements to explore the assumptions that undergirded our process of teaching and learning with students in the context of YPAR. Finally, we journaled (Schön, 1983) after meeting with students in order to reflect on our instruction and students' participation, and to document our sense-making of our observational field notes.

On Positionality and Epistemological Assumptions

Our work with the students at the alternative school began as an outreach project, and we acknowledge several assumptions that guided our work as we entered the school context. First, we knew the alternative school principal, and she had expressed interest in having her students at the school get more 'face time' and interaction with both adults and their peers, as all of their instruction at the school was computer-based and delivered as a series of videos and quizzes. Thus, we were interested in using part of our institutional outreach allocation to work to meet this expressed need of a school leader in our area. Next, we were confident that we could interact with adolescents in meaningful ways, based on our experiences as K-12 teachers, and looked forward to the sense of grounding we both felt when working with students in area schools. At the time of the study, we were both instructors of research methods at our institution, so we felt prepared to translate the principles and practices of research and scholar-activism, including the sense of agency that can stem from both conducting research and presenting findings, into valuable instruction for high school students who were interested in YPAR.

As we began this work, we were intentional about positioning our students in the YPAR class as empowered knowledge creators rather than as objects of study (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ozer, 2016). Based on our experiences working with adolescents, we anticipated working with students who were far smarter than their academic records might have indicated. We wanted to engage in work that centralized and honored students' intellectual capacity, especially since the students in our group carried the burden of repeated academic failure in their prior school contexts; the attribution we made about that failure was inherent in their school systems and teachers, not localized to them as individuals.

As previously stated, the population of students with whom we were working were atypical of those described in the YPAR literature. Our students were predominately white, and came from rural and working and middle-class families; thus, we did not presume that their experiences would be similar to those students who are systemically marginalized because of perceptions about identity markers and who often engage in YPAR around issues of marginalization and disempowerment (i.e., collective action to address experiences of racial discrimination in public and social contexts, such as school). Further, we were conscious of our desire to have students name their own experiences, albeit as members of a relatively privileged social position.

We wanted to begin the conversation with something concrete, so we chose the Active and Engaged Citizenship Scale (AECS) as a platform around which to engage in conversations about citizenship and what it means to be a member of a community from a dominant, empowered perspective (*i.e., I often think about doing things so that people in the future can have things better; I help to make my city or town a better place for people to live)*. It should be noted that this measure is not directly related to participatory models; however, we chose it because it provided us with a benchmark around which to generate conversations with students that detailed perspectives on what community involvement might look like. As we worked through conversations about expectations for what being a "good citizen" entails, from dominant perspectives, we began to understand that the students in our class did feel marginalized and disconnected from school and from each other as members of a cohesive community.

Juxtaposing their stances against dominant ideas of engaged citizenship gave us an entrée to how to explore the ways in which our students rejected those dominant ideas as futile or inaccessible. Therefore, as we moved forward with our YPAR implementation, we operated under the assumption that our students were in fact from marginalized communities in rural Alabama; further, their desire to attend the alternative school indicated a second level of marginalization in that they indicated feeling excluded from the social and academic contexts of the traditional schools for which they were zoned. It also indicated they had the agency to pursue a different school space, suggesting they were "doubly" marginalized *and* also empowered to some extent. Taking all this into account, we felt an obligation to facilitate genuine relationships and create spaces for them to voice their truths and engage with topics of personal import.

Findings

We organize our findings along two domains. The first details our findings related to our overarching research question, including how students at the school described their communities and made sense of community engagement in the context of YPAR implementation. The second includes our reflections on the development and implementation of YPAR programming with the students and explores how this implementation aligns with the existing literature on YPAR.

Students' Perspectives within YPAR

In this study, we collected observational data during YPAR implementation, focus group, and individual interview data from students. After analyzing these data sources, we recognized patterns in the data that manifested as conceptual tensions. We defined tensions as competing, sometimes irreconcilable ideas that coexisted in students' articulations of their perspectives about community. In the following sections, we explore these tensions: students' ideas about economic and service-oriented contributions to community; altruism and cynicism; and violence as a community problem and solution. These tensions existed both within and among participating students' perspectives.

Altruistic and Capitalistic Participation as Contributions to Community

We began our work with students by initiating conversations about community—what their communities "looked like," the different types of communities of which they were members, and how they made meaningful contributions as members of those communities. We started these conversations by asking students about what types of places they considered to be sites of communities. Some identified general places such as their "town," "church," and "school." Others referred to specific people: their families, people who "help each other in times of need" such as after the death of a loved one, teammates and coaches, or those with whom you share other activities like hunting or fishing. We found many of their responses to be very school-focused, including comments about kinds of students (i.e., cliques) at different schools. Several students who shared the same home high school mentioned the "Dollar General" as the only site near them to meet friends, buy food, and shop for household necessities or extras, and described their community as "the houses on my road." To further scaffold these conversations, we used items on the AECS to explore students' perceptions of communities as they aligned (or did not) with dominant conceptions of community engagement, (e.g., *How often do you help make your city or town a better place for people to live?*). Initially, students' responses aligned with these conceptions about the service-oriented nature of contributing to the community. For example, Camden spoke about contributing to his community by "picking up trash" in his neighborhood or on the side of the road. Some participants, however, were clear that making a contribution to their community meant being gainfully employed. Collin evidenced this belief when he stated, "Well pretty much really, you got a job, you're pretty much contributing to the community already." Some classmates echoed this sentiment during the focus group, and after this idea was introduced we had considerable difficulty in prompting a conversation about what contributions might "look like" other than jobs. In addition, some students expressed that contributing to communities in the ways conceptualized and defined by the AECS (e.g., *volunteering, helping make your city or town a better place for people to live, helping to reduce hunger and poverty)* were only somewhat important to them. Instead, having a job appeared to resonate with most of the students as the first and foremost contribution to any community. During these conversations, some students made harsh comments about the homeless and jobless and situated these issues as related to morals, personal "choice," or failure. Many students appeared to have internalized capitalist notions of community and equal opportunity, and their comments appeared to reflect an ideology akin to "taking care of me and mine." The differences in views about what 'service' to community looks like posed a contradiction in an educative space that was intended to encourage empowerment. These views were also in some ways incongruent to the aims of YPAR as it is usually conceptualized in the literature; that is, goals of YPAR often include problematizing and becoming action-oriented as a collective (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

Altruism and Cynicism

Although much of the content of students' discussion about contributing to their communities was focused on actions (i.e., doing volunteer work or staying employed), they also discussed competing ideas about the importance and impact of their efforts; they were at once altruistic and cynical. Some students in the focus group spoke multiple times about a desire to make a positive difference in their communities and in the world, and feeling capable of doing so via grassroots efforts; we interpreted such comments to be evidence of altruism. For example, Mark said, "So if you get one person to stand up, you can get a bunch of people to stand up." Despite agreement with this sentiment, some students remained skeptical about the degree to which their efforts would be persuasive to those in positions of authority or power. David commented, "I mean we have a say so, it's just limited." Bryan repeated this idea when he said, "Limited say so, let's put it that way." Students also described multiple barriers that may impede their altruistic efforts; survey responses pointed to the existence of these barriers, as none of the students agreed with the item, *Adults in my town or city listen to what I have to say*, at either administration of the AECS. During the focus group, students explained that that their age prevented them from being taken seriously when they tried to speak truth to power. Collin further crystallized this point: "They see us as, 'man, somebody tell that kid to shut up.'"

Students identified another barrier when they indicated that they had few opportunities to participate in altruistic volunteering and contributing. For example, a section of items on the AECS asked students about how many times in the past month they had participated in service-oriented activities in their community. Many students chose "never" as their response; when asked to explain their answers, some described the types of volunteer efforts in which they would like to engage. For example, Brooke indicated that she would like to volunteer in a hospice environment if she could. Similarly, Camden remarked that, if given the opportunity, he would like to "go visit sick people" and help out with kids at daycare centers. Despite their desire, students made it clear that they had never had the chance to participate in these kinds of service activities, and/or were not sure how to initiate participating in them.

Students also expressed cynicism about the effectiveness of policy-based solutions to community problems. This cynicism was evidenced by Rodney: "Like, just say like they pass a law, or something like that, saying we have to treat everybody equal, there's gonna be those people that don't, cause, people are gonna do what they wanna do." Brooke, Collin, and Brian all spoke of adults in their community who did not abide by laws in their neighborhood; they reported adults speeding and littering in their neighborhoods despite signs that were posted. We interpreted this cynicism as yet another barrier to students' engagement in service-oriented community contributions.

Violence as a Problem and a Solution

Throughout the semester, we were surprised by the prominence of violence in participants' descriptions of their experiences and their communities, though we were aware of the literature that documents students' concerns about violence (e.g., in urban communities, McIntyre, 2000). None of our interview prompts or AECS items specifically mentioned violence, but instances of violence, especially gun violence, came up repeatedly in the focus group, our normal weekly class routine, and students' exit interviews. For example, during class one week, Mark said, "A girl got killed in our neighborhood like a week ago." This comment clearly pointed to violence as a problem, but students also mentioned the safety provided by the presence of guns, the need for more guns, or hypothetical situations in which they believed guns, and by extension, violence, would be beneficial. Bryan made a comment that was indicative of this theme: "Well my neighborhood watch is a whole bunch of different rednecks with shotguns, so, I think we're good." It appeared that some students believed that guns could prevent violence, without realizing the contradiction that guns are a means of inflicting violence (even if that violence is supposedly defensive in nature). We saw this as a natural contradiction in a space where children were learning that "killing is bad," but "killing bad people is good." We know that students receive these messages in neoconservative spaces and elsewhere, and that these messages perhaps naturalize this contradiction.

Some students appeared to be grappling with this tension throughout the course of our class. For example, Mark was asked during his group's final presentation about community safety whether he thought that guns made people safer. Put on the spot, he hedged and said that the presentation was not about his opinion, but was instead an opportunity to present the data they had collected regarding their topic. His classmates pressed him, but Mark did not disclose his personal thoughts. We reflected that Mark had met a learning goal in his understanding of research; but we also interpreted his reluctance to express his own opinion about guns in front of his classmates as indicative of the ways in which he was struggling to reconcile the competing notions of guns as problems and guns as solutions.

Reflections on Implementation

In addition to the formal data we generated with the students enrolled in the YPAR class, we also situated ourselves as reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983) regarding our dual roles at the school. That is, we were there as researchers, and we were there as YPAR instructors and facilitators. In the latter role, we were committed to ongoing reflection to better understand and improve our practice. What follows are our insights about YPAR implementation that resulted from that reflective work.

YPAR and its Pedagogical Aims

At the onset of the project, we acknowledged and aspired to the notion that "YPAR can be seen as a strategy to help young people develop critical capital and share their knowledge with society in order to agitate for social justice" (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016, p. 25). After one semester of implementation, we were definitive in our assessment that we had not facilitated development of students' capacities to become empowered and feel confident to affect change in their communities, however those were defined. Further, our semester consisted of progress in "fits and starts" that resulted in student projects that felt decidedly "academic"; these projects were a model of the other schoolwork students had been asked to do before coming to the alternative school. That is to say, students reluctantly presented posters about their chosen topics of inquiry for the semester (perceptions about teacher care and community safety) to a small group of stakeholders at the school. Students expressed pride that their presentations had cultivated interest, as evidenced by attention and questions from stakeholders; however, students were unwilling to discuss what impact their projects may have beyond the formal presentations for school credit. They were adamant that they not be compelled to share their work again beyond the classroom setting.

Mirra, Garcia, and Morrell (2016) posited that "development of and engagement with one's "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1970) is a key prerequesite to engaging in the research process" (p. 59). Although data suggested that our students were capable of thinking critically about the world and their places within it, students were not used to being asked to articulate those critical perspectives, or to think critically in academic contexts. This was evident at the beginning of the semester when our efforts to facilitate conversations about topics of concern were stunted and generally limited to ideas that replicated projects about which we had viewed videos. For example, we watched a video about middle school students engaged in YPAR projects around school lunch, and our students became fixated on the quality, or lack thereof, of their school lunches. In addition, many of our students struggled to move beyond their own answers to the research questions they ultimately developed, and that struggle was ongoing, even after they had collected data and were working to analyze it.

Moreover, our students were not used to being acknowledged as having a voice that "matters." Many of them expressed doubts about the degree to which adults would listen to kids. Others expressed having explicitly been told to shut up when they tried to voice concerns. When we thought about these expressions alongside the students' chosen topics and projects as well as their reluctance to voice original topics, we wondered about how reasonable our expectations were that students were motivated to express original concerns. After reflection, we wonder if our students expressed reluctance to bring up original concerns because their voice had not mattered in the past, and their prior efforts to speak about concerns were a part of the narrative that brought them to alternative school. That is, not only had they been silenced, but they had perhaps been punished for their attempts to express themselves. As we read the YPAR literature, there are few stated barriers in eliciting topics of concern from students, beyond those that are external to the student (Ozer et al., 2013). As a result, there is little or no acknowledgement that expressing concerns is risky, especially for a population of students who have been penalized for doing so. Our students, many of whom had experienced negative consequences for taking that risk in the past—however improvisational and emotionally-laden—required a great deal of scaffolding, and the scaffolding we had to do to initiate students' identification of topics of concern felt inauthentic to YPAR as it was described in the literature.

YPAR and Context

The context of the alternative school where we worked with students on YPAR projects was an atmosphere focused almost exclusively on making measurable progress toward earning credit. Students kept graphs at their work spaces that showed how much progress they had made toward their credit goal for the week, month, and semester. Several of our students spoke about the freedom and opportunity to earn credit very quickly as a key reason they had chosen to attend the alternative school. This environment meant that students expected to have clear benchmarks for making progress and earning credit for the course. We found that this expectation, although well-aligned with prepackaged YPAR curricula, was not conducive to authentically engaging in YPAR.

In developing our lessons for YPAR implementation, we closely examined existing YPAR curricula. We did not anticipate using existing lessons exactly as written, as we are well aware that context matters and that curriculum should be transformed across contexts and be responsive to students (Greene, 1995; Ketsman, 2013). But, we found that many of the lessons we explored appeared to be formulaic, or recipe-like, in that they presented YPAR as a series of linear steps to be completed. Many of the lessons took for granted skills such as reading, skimming, summarizing, technological literacies, and thinking critically—skills that some of our students simply had not developed during their time in public schools. And, the task-focused nature of the prepackaged curricula contributed to a particular mindset around "work"; that is, when we implemented some of the lessons, even with substantial modifications, students often asked about the "work" they needed to complete that day, or "so what do I need to do before our next class?" to keep them on the path to progress for earning course credit. Because all of their other coursework was housed online with no expectation that they would work on assignments outside of school hours, our students also were not accustomed to keeping up with hard copies or digital copies of materials such as data, nor were they accustomed to doing work outside of school. This was a significant limitation in terms of their collecting data. In sum, we found it difficult to engage students in authentic learning that was intrinsically motivated when we employed lessons from existing curricula.

Despite these critiques of our implementation process and the outcomes of the semester, there were features of YPAR that we were able to realize with our students. As earlier stated, core principles of YPAR include collective investigation of a community problem, an emphasis on insider or "indigenous" knowledge and inclusion of marginalized voices, and motivation to collectively engage in action (McIntyre, 2000, p. 128). We feel we were able to realize the first two principles. First, the students collaborated with each other and with us to explore topics of concern (e.g., teacher care and community safety). We were able to engage these students with us, with each other, and with content in ways they would not have otherwise been engaged at this school.

Since all of their other curricula were delivered online, no two students were working on the same content at the same pace. That is, they had no other opportunities for collaborative work with peers or adults. During our group instruction, students listened to each other and us as they worked to grapple with explanations about community engagement and their roles as adolescents in those communities. Second, students engaged in conversations with people in their lives in ways that this school had not previously asked them to do, and their projects included the voices of their classmates, neighbors, and family members. Students conducted short interviews and distributed brief surveys that asked respondents questions about school experiences and perceptions about community safety, violence, and guns; by collecting data from the members of their immediate families and neighbors, students were able to engage in a meaningful activity for school credit and to create space for members of their immediate communities to share their own experiences and perceptions.

With regard to the third principle—a desire and willingness to take action—our work fell short. As already mentioned, our students were unwilling to share their work beyond what was required for credit in the class, and their cynical views about their own agency and power overshadowed any desire they may have had to do something about the problems their communities faced.

Some of our critiques and concerns may seem to be pointed at our students. We want to be clear that we have no desire to cast these students in a pejorative light. In fact, we liked and respected them very much. We thought they were smart, funny, interesting, and capable well beyond what their school work and record demonstrated. We felt genuine fondness for them, talking about them often and missing them when we had not seen them in a while. Instead, this work aims to shed light on the challenges of YPAR implementation and their particular nature in rural, alternative school contexts. We also want to be clear that what may sound like critiques of our students are really critiques of the school systems that had heretofore not served them well.

Discussion

At the onset of this project, we anticipated that students would have an idea of a cohesive community that was clearly defined. Indeed, a majority of the YPAR literature to date has focused on students in urban communities, which may be more densely populated, and may have community centers that are easily accessed by youths. However, we found that students in this rural setting may have conceptualized their communities in different ways because theirs were more expansive—their interpersonal and geographic relationships to neighbors may have been different, and the hubs of their communities may have been more commercial (e.g., general or grocery stores, etc.) than communal (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA). That is, our students' concerns seemed disparate perhaps because they did not share a neighborhood. Even when they expressed the same kinds of concerns (e.g., neighborhood safety or litter on their street), they were not speaking about the same neighborhood, the same street. Further, adolescents' schools are often the most salient community with which they identify; but, as evidenced by their enrollment in an alternative school, our students had been marginalized or underserved by the schools most proximal to their homes. Thus, students' articulation of their communities was different from our own conceptions, and this forced us to spend considerable reflective time during and after instruction to: 1) examine our own class-laden, perhaps more urban or suburban expectations of communities; and, 2) prepare to scaffold our students for future discussions of community, how they may be a part of one or multiple communities, how those communities are contextually bound, and how they might contribute to them as empowered researchers and members.

In this study, students held particular ideas about community, altruism, participation, and violence. They generated contradictions around these ideas that appeared to be natural to this particular context, as those contradictions were left unexamined, even as we pressed students to consider them. Students reported that many of their beliefs about community and what participation and citizenship "looked like" were learned from family members and teachers, suggesting that these conceptions about capitalistic participation were natural since they were voiced by authority figures. In a model like YPAR, with its aims towards liberatory education and empowerment of adolescents, an emphasis on capitalistic participation as an approach to community contribution generated contradictions that may indicate students in rural spaces need more scaffolding to engage with ideas that diverge from this neoconservative ideology. We anticipate that future work with students will include more foundational development of students' critical consciousness around types of participation in a community that extend beyond notions of commerce, consumption of goods and services, and individual gainful employment. YPAR situates problematization of community issues in a framework where youth may become action-oriented; thus, we emphasize the importance of critical-consciousness development as integral to a process of collective empowerment for change instead of individualized, market-based notions of what it means to be part of a community. This work may be especially important and difficult for students in rural contexts, where decision-making about community involvement, and whether to stay in rural contexts, may be linked to perceptions about economic opportunity (Schafft, 2016). And, since many YPAR models engage students of color around critical consciousness about intersectionality, racism, and oppression (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), this work may also be especially challenging with white students who do not readily identify systems of oppression and who embrace (the myth of) meritocracy and hard work as the primary avenue for access to economic opportunity (McNamee & Miller, 2009).

Thus, future directions in research about YPAR should explore how to support a sense of collective agency and action for students whose ideas about participation are not congruent with the aims of YPAR. In addition, further research is needed to explore how students whose only "collective" is at school make sense of YPAR. Topic selection and collective action appear to be components of YPAR that are most constrained in public school settings (Ozer et al., 2013). Inasmuch as those facets are known to be constrained in urban contexts, we posit that the particular nature of those constraints is different in rural contexts than in urban or suburban schools. Future inquiry should examine how these constraints manifest to better enable YPAR facilitators in rural contexts. In addition, future research should investigate the kinds of topics and actions that students perceive as risky in order to better enable facilitators to support students in navigating that risk, especially those students who have experienced consequences in risk-taking.

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Hannah Carson Baggett is an assistant professor in the College of Education at Auburn University where she teaches graduate courses in introductory methods for education research, and introductory and applied qualitative methods for social science research. Her primary line of inquiry integrates critical theories with psychological research about educators' beliefs to examine how colleges of education prepare educators to engage in justice-oriented teaching and leading, and to meet the needs of all students. She also has particular interest in using qualitative and participatory methods to promote equity in educational contexts and beyond.

Carey E. Andrzejewski is an associate professor in the College of Education at Auburn University where she teaches courses on diversity in educational environments, evaluation of educators, qualitative research methods, and mixed methods research. Her research is focused on pedagogy for preparing critically conscious teachers and the use of participatory methods in public schools.

Appendix: Focus Group and Cognitive Appraisal Interview Protocol

1) What community are you a member of?
2) How important is it to you to contribute to your community?
    - Probes about individual items related to community contributions (ie. volunteering, tutoring, mentoring, other things that students are interested in).
3) What kinds of problems do you see in your community?
4) If you found a problem in your community that you wanted to do something about, what would you do?
5) How much do adults in your community listen to what you have to say?
    - Probes: How do you know they're not listening?
6) How important is it to you to speak up for equality?
7) What have you learned in this class?[3]
    - Probes about conduct of project and about final presentations to stakeholders.

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[3] This question was only asked at the end of the semester.

Youth Learning to Be Activists: Constructing “Places of Possibility” Together

Kristen Goessling, Penn State University—Brandywine

Abstract:

This paper draws from a critical qualitative study that took place in Vancouver, British Columbia and focused on a group of young people learning to be activists through participation at a youth-driven organization, “Think Again” (TA). In this paper, I focus on one aspect of the youths’ participation at TA—their creative action projects—and the emergent methodologies employed in this study that generated the conditions for “places of possibility” to emerge. I conceptualize “places of possibility” as literal and metaphorical spaces where people are afforded the tools and resources necessary to imagine alternative realities, identities, and systems than what currently exist, primarily through creative and activist practices. Specifically, I utilize a narrative framework to examine the ways the social relationships and practices at TA enabled some of the young people to take up an activist identity.

Keywords: *youth activism; places of possibility; neoliberalism; participatory methods*

Following Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is understood as a set of policies, ideologies, practices, ethos, and values that advocate for free trade and small government, favor privatization, and infuse market rationale into all domains of social life. The influence of neoliberalism on the field of education can be seen in the rising rhetoric of school choice, the push for privatization, the emphasis on high-stakes testing and the standardization of curriculum and assessment. The prevalence of neoliberalism in learning and education bring to the fore the need for alternative places of learning that prioritize equity and justice where innovative and creative practices are valued. Holland and Gómez (2013) articulated a “politics of possibility” to describe a way of thinking, acting, and imagining of alternative sociopolitical realities that could mobilize radical social change for the greater good. I conceptualize “places of possibility” as literal and metaphorical spaces where people are afforded the tools and resources necessary to imagine alternative realities, identities, and systems than what currently exist, primarily through creative and activist practices.

Holland and Gómez (2013) utilized Gibson-Graham’s theory of social change that “builds on possibility rather than probability,” to assess the transformative potential of social movements (p. 130). This paper explores two of Holland and Gómez’s proposed ten criteria for effective social transformation in relation to “places of possibility”: 1) “Purposive shifts in subjectivities and identities” and 2) “Orientation to a collective and a building of community – an ‘us’ that includes reflection about power” (2013, p. 156). This dual focus attends to youths’ learning to be activists as socioculturally situated phenomenon. This reflects a central assumption of this work, which is the understanding that humans and the social world are dialectally related, mutually constitutive, and involved in historical processes of being and becoming (Holland & Lave, 2009).

This paper draws from a critical qualitative study that took place in Vancouver, British Columbia and focused on a group of young people learning to be activists through participation at a youth-driven organization, "Think Again" (TA). In this paper, I focus on one aspect of the youths' participation at TA—their creative action projects (CAPs)—and the participatory methodologies employed in this study that generated the conditions for "places of possibility" to emerge. Specifically, I utilize a narrative framework to examine the ways these practices enabled some, but not all, of the young people to take up an activist identity. This paper responds to the special theme issue call by elucidating the complex ways in which youth activists and youth activist organizations negotiate the cultural terrain of neoliberalism (Holland & Gómez, 2013) in order to create "places of possibility."

This article is divided in four sections. I begin by briefly reviewing the literature on contemporary neoliberalism and youth activism. Second, I describe the research practice, and expand on three emergent methods as supporting the conditions for "places of possibility." Third, I present data-driven narratives of participation. This paper concludes with a discussion emphasizing the ways in which creative activist and research practices generate places of possibility for and by youth learning to be activists.

Toward "Places of Possibility": Youth Activism in a Neoliberal Era

The contemporary sociopolitical context is marked by neoliberal policies, practices, ethos, and ideology. Harvey (2005) defined neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). Harvey (2005) argued that neoliberalism must be brought down through the linking of theory and practice that connects specific local forms of resistance in a unified broad scale social movement that is grounded in class struggle and a fight for economic equality. Holland and Gómez (2013) echoed Harvey's call for a broad social movement and illustrated how the pervasiveness of neoliberalism actively undermines the potential for such a broad movement. They elaborated that collaboration across geographic locales and disparate movements and causes is necessary in order to effectively challenge hegemonic views of neoliberalism toward a "politics of possibility."

For example, Gulbrandensen and Holland (2001) examined the effects of neoliberalism on local environmental activism resulting in what they called, "hybrid forms of environmentalism" (p. 124). They explained that this hybrid form of activism blurs agendas, politics, and goals through a reliance on partnerships between environmentalists, local businesses, government and non-governmental organizations, and development agencies in order to win grants and gain funding opportunities. These partnerships tended to privilege economic interests, creating what they call the "super-citizen" out of business leaders who are cast as apolitical in relation to politically motivated activists. All of which, Gulbrandensen and Holland (2001) argued, pose significant challenges to grassroots activism and "blunt[s] the critical edge of the environmental critique" (p. 124).

Central to this paper is Holland and Gómez's (2013) later work, wherein they examined a specific feminist movement and an alternative local food movement as a means for assessing the transformative achievements of contemporary activist movements. They identified a lack of collective and structural analysis within the movements as detrimental to their effectiveness. Holland

and Gómez defined a "politics of possibility" as "a politics that not only aims to challenge the hegemony of capitalism as an economic system, but also to think about politics in a different way—as a politics of possibility." This view focuses on the "here-and-now" as a means to construct alternative non-capitalist economies that are enacted in the present that catalyze "processes of becoming in place" (p. 132). Following Holland and Gómez (2013), I conceptualize politics and politicization as efforts to change policy as well as "struggles in inter-personal and intra-personal arenas as well" (p. 133). This reflects my interest in better understanding and supporting conditions for positive social, environmental, and economic change as interrelated with individuals' lived experiences. I take up this concept of places of possibility below as a unique contribution to the study of youth activism and meaning making.

In the same way that neoliberalism has influenced social and activist movements it also has shaped youths' lived experiences. The present work is situated in a growing body of interdisciplinary scholars focusing on youth-driven social movements and activism from explicitly critical perspectives toward sociopolitical aims with a wide range of foci (e.g., Gordon, 2009; Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Zimmerman, 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Kwon, 2013). The present work shares Kirshner's (2015) commitment to a sociocultural perspective of learning and development that attends to the interrelatedness of social and personal transformation. Important to this work is Kirshner's (2015) exploration of different sites of youth activism as "learning ecologies" that generate meaningful youth participation. Jenkins et al.'s (2016) work provided an overview of youth activist projects that utilized various forms of media toward "greater political participation" (p. 39). The authors put forth a concept of "civic imagination" defined as "the capacity to imagine alternatives to current social, political, or economic institutions or problems" (p. 29). They illustrated the value of the role imagination in the political sphere as central for envisioning and constructing a more equitable and just world.

Kwon's (2013) critical ethnography of a group of Asian youth activists involved in a non-profit youth activist organization in California utilized a governmentality[1] framework to expose how youth development programs that aim to empower youth can have the opposite effect. She traced the historical deficit-based constructions of young people as "at risk" that contributed to the emergence of the field of non-profit youth activism that served to regulate and control youth of color thereby "molding them into productive citizen-subjects" (p. 27). Also concerned with youth as a social category, Gordon's (2009) work provided an important critique of the ways in which "age constitutes an axis of social power" that intersects with and emerges through youth activism and in youth activist spaces (p. 5). Viewing age as social inequity, Gordon argued, is important for understanding youths' organizing practices. In her research on youth activism in Canada, Kennelly (2009) found that young activists commonly experienced feelings of personal responsibility, burden, anxiety and stress associated with their activist work. She concluded that "[w]ith individualization comes the particular blend of emotional constellations associated with neoliberal subjectivity: namely, an enhanced sense of one's own responsibility for oneself, and the forms of self-perfection and self-focus this requires" (Kennelly, 2011, p. 29).

The present work is informed by these scholars concerned with youth activism and sociopolitical participation who align in a dual focus of young people as active agents engaged in collaborative practices of identity construction and world making. This study explores how TA, as a place of learning and activism, might generate the conditions for "places of possibilities" to emerge wherein youth actively construct identities as activists through their participation and transformation of social practices geared toward a collective social movement. In this paper, I offer "places of possibility" as a conceptual and methodological tool that can enhance youth participation and activism.

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[1] Briefly, drawing from Foucault, governmentality is a system of liberal governance or "the conduct of conduct" in which the state directly and indirectly controls individuals and collectives (Lemke, 2002).

The Research Practice

This paper draws from a critical qualitative study that took place in Vancouver, BC and focused on a group of young people engaged in social justice and critical education activities in a youth-driven organization, TA. Think Again engaged youths in creative social actions and as peer educators to go into schools and community settings around British Columbia to facilitate popular education workshops on a wide range of social and environmental justice issues. The educational work of TA was explicitly political and utilized a popular education framework, drawing largely on Freire (1970), to work with young people toward social change. Popular education is based on the idea that critical consciousness can be developed through group dialogue geared toward identifying root and systemic causes for problems and working together toward social transformation (Freire, 1970). This framework reflected TA's desire to support youth in making the shift from thinking to doing something about social justice.

The Youth and Gender Media (YGM) project was first implemented in 2011 with the explicit goal of reducing violence against women and girls through education and social action. The youth participants in this study were the third YGM cohort and were involved from September 2013-September 2014. I began attending YGM meetings in October and data generation took place from April-September 2014. Participants in the study included eight YGM youth volunteers and two educational coordinators, Hermione and Veronica. Each of the participants selected their pseudonym and the demographic information they wanted to be included in this study (see Table 1). The youth committed to participate for one year in the following YGM practices: 1) popular education workshop training and facilitation, 2) mentorship, 3) monthly meetings, and 4) designing and implementing a creative action project. The creative action projects were the culminating action piece for the YGM and are the focus on this paper.

Table 1
Participant Chosen Pseudonyms and Demographic Information

Participant pseudonym	**Age**	**Preferred gender pronouns**	**Participant Chosen Demographic Information**
Aliza (Youth Volunteer)	19	Cisgender Female: she and her	Fem-lesbian, Queer, Filipina, Italian, Youth of color,
Amanda (Youth Volunteer)	19	Cisgender Female: she & her	Asian, Chinese, Immigrant, Scientist
Aria (Youth Volunteer)	19	Cisgender Female: she & her	Muslim, Arab, Filipina, Student

Participant pseudonym	Age	Preferred gender pronouns	Participant Chosen Demographic Information
Brenda (“Youth” Volunteer)	32	Cisgender Male: he & him	Uncomfortable with the term “youth identified” Gay, Married, White, Middle-class
Elia (Youth Volunteer)	24	Cisgender Female: she & her	Feminist, Heterosexual, First generation Chinese-Canadian (“hyphenated identity”), more Western than Asian, Can speak conversational Cantonese
Hermione (Ed Coordinator)	21	Cisgender Female: she & her	Muslim, Bangladeshi, South Asian, Youth
Sarah (Youth Volunteer)	23	Cisgender Female: she & her	Heterosexual, Caucasian, Mid-upper class, Child of early divorce
Stacy (Youth Volunteer)	24	Cisgender Female: she & her	Caucasian, Scientist
Verity (Youth Volunteer)	22	Cisgender Female: she & her	University student, Able bodied, White, Living in Vancouver, but originally from the interior of BC
Veronica (Ed Coordinator)	25	Cisgender Female: she & her	Lesbian, Romanian, Mixed-race, Sephardic Ashkenazic Eastern European Jew

Methods

This paper draws on data from my dissertation, a critical qualitative study utilizing ethnographic and participatory methods. The research design was grounded in two related commitments: first, a commitment to recognizing youth as active agents within and across sociocultural contexts; and second, a commitment to learning from and with youth as we co-constructed narratives about their participation in TA. These commitments provided the foundation for the participatory methodological contributions that emerged through this research practice. The assumption that young people are both holders of valuable knowledge and experts on their experience reflects epistemological commitments held within the collaborative and participatory research paradigm (Ayala, 2009; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). These researchers employ various qualitative and quantitative methods, frequently citing a need for flexible and creative research designs that are ideologically congruent with the youth participants (Cambre, 2009; Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Researchers working within the youth participatory action research (yPAR) paradigm often position themselves as collaborators working alongside their participants, rather than the traditional objective/expert researcher position (e.g., Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine, 2009; Ginwright & James, 2002; Pritchard, 2004; Wright, 2015). Wright’s (2015) work unpacked the explicitly pedagogical nature of yPAR and provides a resource for understanding the teaching and learning that goes on throughout the research process. The yPAR tradition provided valuable tools to think with and through TA’s youth-driven framework, as well as their focus on supporting youth to take action through praxis.

This was not a yPAR study, but the methods I describe are novel participatory methods that I designed with the youth in this study. I was interested in how the youth made meaning of their participation in youth-driven social justice work. Toward that end, I took on a participatory and collaborative stance with the youth and provided opportunities for collaboration throughout the process. This collaboration was based on reciprocity and I worked alongside the youth to support their learning and CAPs and they had the choice to also work alongside me as I studied and made sense of their participation. For example, on the least active end of the participatory spectrum each youth had the opportunity to review and revise their interview transcripts and on the most active end they co-analyzed the data with me. This flexible design allowed for the youth to participate in research activities as their interest and availability varied throughout the research process.

This critical qualitative study took place over ten months with a total of 10 participants between 18 and 32 years old from diverse social locations (Table 1). The participants in this study constituted what Torre et al. (2008) refer to as the “contact zone” as a “space where very differently positioned youth and adults are able to experience and analyze power inequities, together” (p. 28). Data was generated using various qualitative methods, including: participant observations of the monthly meetings, experiential interviews, cultural artifact elicitation interviews about the youth-produced creative action projects, gathered and generated cultural artifacts. The interpretation and analysis of the data was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based upon the themes, and informed by Bruner (1990, 1991, 2004), I then constructed narratives of participation from the data. Additionally, I conducted two iterations of participatory analysis with the youth in order to attend to both youths’ lives and experiences as well as the structural constraints that mediated them (Weis & Fine, 2012). This paper focuses on the cultural artifact elicitation interview and participatory analysis #1 (PA #1) as productive methods for generating the conditions for “places of possibility.”

Cultural Artifact Elicitation Interviews

The CAP was a new component to TA’s programming and I agreed to take a lead role in supporting youths’ projects at the beginning of our research partnership. The CAP was framed as a way for youth to take action in their own communities with the underlying premise that creative processes provide a safer space for youths to express their ideas and experiences with gender and violence. Veronica, the educational coordinator, described the CAPs as a way to extend TA’s work beyond the classroom and into youths’ communities, thereby creating a broader network that might enable more long-term action and engagement (personal communication, April 11, 2014). The CAPs were youth-driven, based on a topic or theme of their choice, and were open to any creative format: visual and/or textual compositions, public art, social media, zines, social action, performance, song, dance, group dialogues, and so on.

I drew upon artifact mediated research methods (see Cole, 1995; Pahl & Roswell, 2011) to engage participants in a cultural artifact elicitation interview. This method extended Liebenberg’s (2009) claim that visual research methods are considered valuable tools for researchers working as “border crossers” in communities and cultural contexts that are not their own, in that they enable different ways to confront issues of power, representation, collaboration and participation in research contexts to cultural artifacts. This approach shifted the interest from the image or artifact as a static representation of meaning to a view of cultural artifacts as mediational means (Pahl & Roswell, 2011). Drawing on this idea, I used cultural artifacts to elicit stories from participants about their creative action projects that occurred within TA and community settings. This focus on artifacts in relation to participation shifted agency to the youths and foregrounded their processes of meaning making and identity construction. In this way, the participants’ cultural artifacts were cultural tools that constituted and expressed ways of knowing and identities in the making that moved with youth across their various communities. Another strength of elicitation interviews is the potential for participants and researchers to develop a collaborative relationship and negotiate power by having the participants decide the focal point of an interview (Clark-Ibanez, 2007). I encouraged them to sketch their meaning making practices through a focus on something that was important and relevant to them by inviting the participants to determine the initial content for the interview.

The cultural artifact elicitation interviews took place toward the end of the YGM project after the youths had completed their CAPs. I asked each participant to bring a cultural artifact that they felt represented their CAP to the interview. I invited participants to tell me about their artifacts and followed up with probing questions aimed to solicit information about the meaning of the artifact in relation to their CAP. The goal of this interview was to examine youths' meaning making in practice: the participants' acting with mediational means (cultural artifacts) across the contextual layers of their participation (the CAPs). Cultural artifact elicitation interviews were conducted with with Aliza, Brenda, Elia, Sarah, and Verity. The interviews lasted between a half an hour to two hours and were audio or video recorded based on the participants' preference and later transcribed. Descriptions and images of the creative projects are presented in the following participation narratives.

Participatory Analysis

Weis and Fine (2012) advocated that researchers utilize a "critical bifocality" when investigating people's lives and communities by paying equal attention to the structural constraints that mediate them. Fine (2014) described participatory analysis as a means for practicing bifocality that could potentially destabilize dominant narratives and result in co-constructed counter-narratives. A participatory analysis is a method of analysis whereby researchers engage with their participants as experts and co-researchers to help refine understandings of the research and data (Fine, 2014). Particularly valuable to this work is the potential for participatory methods to destabilize dominant narratives through the co-construction of counter-narratives, such as a "youth activist."

In this study, I conducted two iterations of participatory analysis of the data. The first is referred to as PA #1 because it was conducted first chronologically at the August monthly meeting with Brenda, Elia, Hermione, Sarah, and Verity. It focused on the experiential interviews and contributed to an evolving understanding of an activist identity within the TA framework. Participatory analysis #2 (PA #2) took place after the youths' commitment to TA was complete and focused on the video data of the monthly meetings. It was conducted with two participants—Brenda and Sarah—over two coding sessions. In this paper, for the sake of brevity, I focus on PA #1.

The experiential interviews took place at the beginning of the research with the aim of getting to know the participants and began with an invitation for them to tell me a story of how they came to social justice work. The interviews were the first time I sat down one-on-one with most of the youth and they were invaluable to relationship building. The timing of these interviews coincided with Veronica's resignation and Hermione's appointment as the interim educational coordinator, which situated me as the constant for the group. The timing of and the interviews themselves created a strong relational foundation with the youths that is evidenced in the following participation narratives. The change within TA and the YGM leadership created an additional layer of complexity to this work. I was not a part of TA, yet I found myself feeling responsible for the youths' participation experiences. I grappled with this throughout the final months of the research and reconciled it by prioritizing my relationships with the young people. Participatory analysis #1 took place after all of the experiential interviews were conducted and transcribed. I provided the participants with their interview transcripts to review, edit, and clarify them as they wished. I then conducted two close readings of each interview transcript and additional readings to identify themes and stories across the interviews. Based on these readings, I constructed two emergent themes: 1) the value and role of community, and 2) social justice as a learning process. These themes provided anchors for the opening dialogue in PA #1 while being vague enough in the aim of opening up broad discussion and debate in a relevant and meaningful way.

I brought the initial findings to the August monthly meeting and conducted an hour-long participatory analysis with Brenda, Elia, Hermione, Sarah, and Verity that was video recorded. The purpose of PA #1 was to check my own emergent understandings of the data with the participants' understandings and to co-construct meanings together with the participants. This participatory analysis included three distinct activities: 1) analysis dialogue, 2) writing reflection, and 3) dialogue. I presented the two emergent themes as prompts to guide the analysis dialogue. Through this conversation, the participants clarified TA as a particular kind of community—to be in relation to and with others—and elaborated upon what it meant to them as a place of activism and learning. I then began a ten-minute writing exercise by reading the following prompt: "Write a letter to anyone, dead or alive, about either or both of the narratives and how you hold them in your body." With this prompt, I aimed to engage participant reflections on their embodied experiences in order to link their consciousness with their actions (Bruner, 2004) toward a deeper meaning of the data and their participation. After the letter writing session, Brenda and Verity read their letters out loud to the group while we listened, responded, and shared ideas. All of the participants discussed their personal experiences and unique activist trajectories.

I took extensive field notes before, during and after the participatory analysis. After the meeting, I watched the video of the participatory analysis while taking notes two times to examine the dynamic process of the group as we co-constructed and negotiated new meanings and understandings of the data together. I used these field notes to revise the initial findings according to the participants' reflection and dialogue. At this stage, I also drew upon cultural artifacts (i.e., organizational documents) to elaborate upon and develop the narrative findings.

The research design and participatory methods generated "places of possibility" with the participants. I prioritized relationship building in the experiential interviews which provided a solid foundation between the youth and me. The timing of the leadership change centralized and privileged my role and relationships with the youth. The PA #1 then provided an opportunity for the youth to do important relational work together as we made meaning of their participation. Relationships were key to both of the emergent findings and something all of the youths hoped to gain from TA. The reflective activity shifted the focus to the embodied aspects of social justice work and prompted affective responses. Immediately following PA #1, Elia shared a personal story about her strained relationship with her brother. For the first time in their 10 months of participating at TA, the youth shared about their personal lives and struggles with taking on an activist identity. Around the table, we all shared stories about feelings of isolation and alienation from loved ones due to our engagement with social justice work. This conversation would not have taken place if it had not been for the relational work that had come before it through the research practices.

Fine (2008) argued that in participatory projects, expert validity must include "plural and subjugated expertise" to the traditional standards of expertise because there is an explicit commitment within the paradigm to support, honor, and develop varied knowledges and explicitly trouble traditional and hegemonic notions of who is the expert (p. 223). This research practice was designed to recognize and elevate the youths' local knowledges as research practices through conversations, contestations, and agreements. The data, interpretations, and meanings that were constructed through these emergent methodologies provide the foundation for the descriptive narratives that follow.

Narratives of Participation

This analysis draws upon the data corpus to explore how youths' participation at TA and in this collaborative research practice generated the conditions for "places of possibility" to emerge. This analysis was guided by the following question: To what extent did participation in TA generate the conditions for "places of possibility" and catalyze youths' emerging activist identities? I present three data-driven narratives of participation: Sarah, Verity, and Brenda[2]. The narratives include descriptions and reflections of their CAP and focus on youths' identity construction at TA. This analysis generated two key themes related to a youth activist identity: 1) the importance of relationships and community, and 2) the value of taking action. I maintained the informal tone and loose grammatical structure of the youths' speech in order to provide a sense of their voices. The narratives are told from the first-person perspective of the participant. These co-constructed stories bring to the fore the "places of possibility" that emerged through the intersections of neoliberalism and youths' participation.

Sarah

My creative action project was very personal and it was a way for me to not just think it, but move towards expressing it. The goal was to work against the identities that society sanctions and assigns. We (Aliza, Sarah, and Kristen) created an event called, US: Un/limiting ourSelves. I'm really interested in the idea of "passing" which comes from the idea of being able to pass as the dominant race, sex, gender and so on. To me, passing implies failure because it means we are "*trying to be*" and fit into narrowly defined "norm or acceptable (passable)" identities, rather than just being. When we are trying to pass we are reinforcing yet another binary or criteria in the multitude of prescribed identities. I wish that we could stop trying TO BE and we each just WERE.

We set up a space at an Arts and Craft Market and invited people to write their identity statements on pieces of muslin and then put it in a jar and afterwards they could reflect and paint on the mural structure we had and/or make buttons with Aliza. I wanted to reach as many people as possible and I just envisioned like passers-by either being like: "Oh, it's just another bunch of those activist groups or whatever" or really kind of straight ahead people approaching it and being intrigued, even if they're not going to contribute to the art.

I choose this *journallll*, which is very *emmmpty*, as the artifact that represents my CAP because it speaks a lot to my, like, I think when I first brought this idea to Kristen and I was like, I'm all about ideas and abstract thoughts and I am always thinking and I'm very insular and I never put anything into action. That has been every journal I've ever started. Despite knowing how cathartic it can be for me and how I love writing and I love poetry, but I never make the time for it as strictly as I would school work or whatever. This one is the only one where I kind of was like: "don't put guilt on yourself for not filling the pages." And so I have three or four things in here, but they're super meaningful. Tying it in to this project, like, this is the first time that, with a little bit of encouragement from Kristen, that I put something into action and I think that's really, for a lot of us at TA that may be the harder part for our personalities; that shift to actually doing it. I think a lot of people were like: "I can't believe I could do that, you know?"

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[2] These narratives were selected to highlight the breadth of forms and topics of the CAPs and their potential to illustrate Holland and Gómez's (2013) criteria in relation to "places of possibility."

I was reflecting on the CAP a bit and there were stages along the way that felt super empowering. Getting rejected for the grant and from certain people, but then getting connected to others and meeting with the city and even building the structure all felt empowering. It didn't feel as good on the day of the event. I thought that maybe once we hung up the web of identity statements (see Figure 1) I'd have more of a feeling of success or accomplishment. What I did get from stringing up the statements was that people who came by wanted to contribute and that made me think that maybe if we had done the project in a different setting, like by ourselves or not in such a kind of contrived setting of an arts and crafts market where people are more focused on consuming, rather than creating, then maybe we would have been received differently and I would have felt differently. It just *needs more.* It needs a little bit more confidence and development and a different setting and...I compare it to what I think a public art installment is "supposed to" look like. I definitely have that "supposed to" perfectionism thing. I mean, I don't even know if there's a standard for public art installations, but there was something that I can't put my finger on that was missing. The big thing for me was that this was the first time, with a little bit of encouragement, I put something into action and I think that's really what I got from TA.

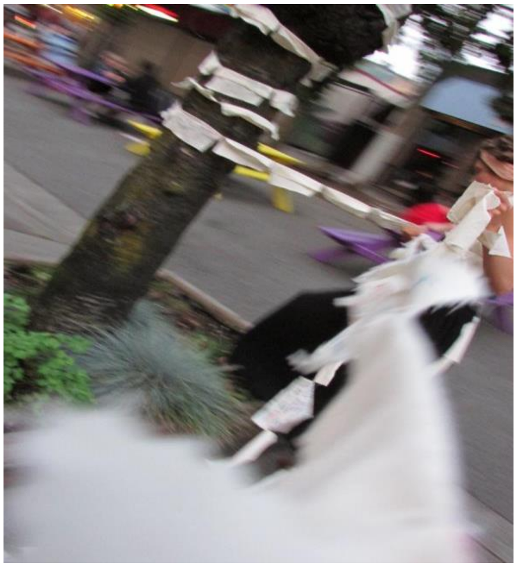

Figure 1. Sarah hanging 'web of identities' after CAP.

I'm very much in my own head so TA has really been about building my own self-awareness. Right now I'm practicing being honest about what I know and don't know and what I'm good at and not good at. I want to educate myself and reach out to other people that maybe don't have an in-depth knowledge, but don't want to admit it. There's a difference between saying and doing. I'm just at the point where I'm starting to do. I'm becoming an advocate. The YGM group and TA was a space for me to be around people that share my curiosity and love of learning. This is the first time I've been part of a group where we have these kinds of conversations and just be in a group of likeminded people. I got the sense from most of our group that we all just wanna know more about diversity and meet new and different people.

I don't feel like I've been able to commit as much as I had thought I would or wanted to. Just in terms of like work and availability and timing. So, that's made me feel a bit removed and distant from the YGM group. I'm still glad I did it. I definitely learned and grew from the experience so I'm happy. I ended up getting a lot of facilitation experience at work because of my participation, which was really my main purpose for joining TA. I got to co-facilitate a group that was focused on employment-related skills for "at risk" young people and once that group was over I was allowed to co-facilitate a group on social entrepreneurship. Both of these were great experiences that I feel good about and that I think will help me towards my goal of becoming a counselor.

To me social justice is about ideals that we're just working towards, but will probably never attain. I'm really excited about raising awareness and just prompting people to think about things differently. To be like: this is cool and it's OK to talk about. I think that's the only way we're gonna make diversity and tolerance acceptable is by educating ourselves and modeling. I think TA is great exposure to that and then showing and teaching that kind of tolerance in schools and with younger kids.

Places of possibility. The narrative of Sarah's participation was centered on learning as a process of self and social transformation. Sarah's activist trajectory was one of personal growth and raising awareness toward a goal of acceptance and appreciation of diversity, which also reflected her values. TA was a significant juncture in Sarah's activist trajectory where she constructed knowledge about social issues and methods of action that shifted her from a place of thinking to doing and becoming an advocate. While she narrated her participation as peripheral, she attributed her membership to the YGM community as central for negotiating the inherent risks involved in her shift toward action.

Sarah's participation narrative reflects the nuanced influence of neoliberalism on youth participation. While Sarah's motivations for joining TA were driven by her ideals of social justice and a love of learning she also was driven to participate to advance her academic and work goals. Also evident in Sarah's narrative are the burdens of responsibility that Sarah has taken on for her own and society's well-being and success. The neoliberal ethos of individuality, competitiveness, and achievement had severe consequences for Sarah and she developed a chronic medical condition during her undergraduate career because she "pushed herself too much." Through a market-focused discourse lens, TA was a volunteer opportunity that would make Sarah a competitive graduate school applicant. Through her participation she also gained evidence of her facilitation skills that enabled her to successfully acquire a desired role in her workplace. At the same time, these neoliberal influences intersected with the social practices and relationships of TA that generated "politics of possibility" (Holland & Gómez, 2013) particularly through her CAP. The CAP generated a distinct shift in Sarah's participation narrative whereby she actively embodied social justice and became an activist. As a metaphor for her participation and a place of possibility, Sarah's CAP was about creating a space where people could "be" their many selves and together they could co-construct identities. Although Sarah was initially motivated to join TA for individual gain and career advancement, which she accomplished prior to her CAP, she was compelled to engage in a deeper more personally meaningful way. Sarah's motivation for personal transformation coupled with the relational and embodied nature of the CAP created the conditions for a place of possibility that enabled Sarah's identity construction. This is an inherent contradiction to neoliberal ethos and exemplifies how youth spaces like TA are important because of these generative moments.

Verity

For my CAP I created a workshop called “Let’s Read-efine YA Lit” on diversifying young adult literature. I choose these documents as artifacts that represent my CAP (see Figure 2, next page). The first was my original project timeline printed on recycled paper that have essays of mine that I’ve submitted for class, um, and the other was the email exchange that I had with the librarian that was like my pitch for the project and her response. It’s really hard to live up to my own standards of what it means to accomplish something. I basically wanted to kind of show a comparison of what I had initially thought the project would be and then what it eventually became.

I tried to relax and just roll with the momentum for my CAP. I’m lucky that what I study—English and Gender Studies—is so close to what I like, live and feel and, and breath every single day. It’s what I’m most interested in and my friends would tell you I talk about them all the time. So partnering with the library to create a workshop on diversity in books was in a way a representation of me and what I am passionate about. When Hermione first suggested I contact the library I was totally apprehensive, but I am so glad that I did. I’m still elated that the library was so awesome to work with and the folks at the #WeNeedDiverseBooks Campaign were totally on board. I could not have imagined it any better. I think this project was successful, and I feel good about it because I do value teamwork and working with people you can trust. It was really fun and I think having [author] and Hermione there to, um, assist with the development of the workshop itself was extremely valuable because that was the part that was mostly new to me. This experience kind of showed me the value of working with others as also worthwhile helps me resist my impulse to do everything by myself.

I was a tiny bit disappointed that there were so few people at the workshop, but I feel like this is just a starting point and it doesn’t have to stop there. This doesn’t have to be the only time I talk about or do this kind of thing so it doesn’t really feel like the end. So, yeah, I’m really proud. I know that at the beginning of TA I talked about how I was reluctant to identify myself as an activist because I feel like I hadn’t done anything yet; this feels like I actually did something. Now I’d tentatively call myself an activist and that’s pretty cool. I’m totally thrilled with the entire project. Another really cool thing is that now I have these connections to the Library and to the #WeNeedDiverseBooks Campaign. Being a teen librarian or building a Canadian counterpart to the #WeNeedDiverseBooks Campaign would be total dream jobs! I do think that being a part of TA has been a really valuable experience, and I’m glad that I did it. I would consider being involved with it in the future or will probably do something similar.

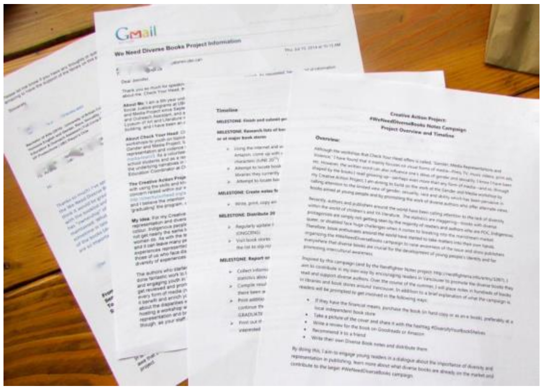
Gmail
We Need Diverse Books Project Information
Timeline
Creative Action Project:
#WeNeedDiverseBooks Notes Campaign
Project Overview and Timeline
Overview:

Figure 2. Verity's cultural artifact for her CAP

My first foray into activism is embarrassing, and I think about it a lot when I'm working in schools or with young people. I wish some teacher or adult would have sat me down and said: Look, this is why what you are doing is wrong, it's bad. I kinda feel a responsibility to do that now. To explain to kids the ethics behind issues and why certain types of activism and campaigns are actually wrong. It makes me want to put up warning signs on how to not have a white savior complex. It's really subtle, but so important with activist work that there is explicit attention to power dynamics so that we don't just go into situations with the attitude like: I know what's right and I'm here to save you. Cuz, ya know, that's really dangerous and oppressive, but just in a different way. That's part of why I joined TA. I really wanted to make an impact with the students and young people who participated in the workshops. Over time, I ultimately came to see the value in the workshops as social action and as a place where we were able to build skills and confidence that enabled us to go out and do our own thing.

I'm beginning to see how I might be able to blend my values and my passions toward a potential career or future opportunity. I love books and I appreciate those books that generate a community of readers. For example, a book might be aesthetically good, but I'm really impressed by books if there's really great community that builds up around it or a lot of people that talk about it or connect to it on a personal level. I want to be the kind of author not so much that people would say like: "Oh, this author's a genius," but rather: "I really connected to this." Being able to create that for other people is really important for me, like, building community and make people feel welcome and that they have a place, whether that's through a book or a space.

As a writer and lover of young adult fiction a metaphor for my activist trajectory is like a superhero in the movies who is just realizing his powers and he does something unexpected and then he just stands there looking at his giant hands being like, what? I'm still learning so much and I feel like I have this unwieldy power. I feel clumsy in the way that I potentially deal with things and I worry about that. Then I try to think about how I could carry that differently, and instead of looking down at my hands, once in a while look up at the rest of the world and take a step forward even if it does involve some risks. Trying not to worry about learning everything first before you jump in. That's something I'm still working out.

Places of possibility. The narrative of participation crafted for Verity illustrates how books and stories are tools for creating connection and community, or a "place of possibility." Verity described her activist trajectory through her participation at TA and in the stories she told about herself. She talked about the power of stories in shaping our perceptions and identities, and she used books and stories to communicate and connect with others. By talking about herself through stories, Verity articulated that her participation in TA bridged different aspects of her selves toward an activist identity that centered arounds values of fairness and loyalty.

TA served as a critical point in Verity's activist trajectory where she shifted from telling stories about activist as a future identity (hope, wish, someday) to telling stories about herself as an activist. After her CAP, Verity tentatively spoke about herself as an activist because she felt she had done something, which was how she defined activist. The tentative nature in which Verity took on this identity highlights that identities are inherently dynamic and contextual as is reflected in her metaphor of an activist as a superhero with giant hands that became tools over time and through practice. Verity exemplified her activist trajectory through her CAP, which was about building connection, and community through art/books. Verity came to see her participation at TA as valuable through her CAP, which she relied on, and applied her workshop facilitation skills in overlapping valued social communities: the library and the #WeNeedDiverseBooks Campaign.

ForVerity, TA actively organized and created "places of possibility" whereby she negotiated access to valued social communities and envisioned desired futures. Evident in Verity's narrative was a sophisticated critique of the structures of domination, especially schooling, that shaped TA (Holland & Gómez, 2013). Verity drew on valued aspects of her participation, especially the facilitation and workshop experience, in order to create a CAP that analyzed power structures in traditional education and contributed to a broader social movement.

Brenda

The CAP was really not my thing. It actually created a lot of anxiety for me, and I didn't finish it. I might finish it later, but I don't know. I took this class on film and research and I really loved it. I thought this would be a good opportunity to practice those skills. I met with all the TA staff and we decided I could make a short film about the CAP and about social action in general. I only wanted to make something that would be useful to them otherwise it would feel like a waste of time. I choose the bag that I used to carry the film equipment in as the artifact that symbolizes my CAP. It was a gift from a friend's wedding that I really love and it says: "Have a Nice Day" on it and makes me smile, which is the opposite of how I felt whenever I looked at it with the cameras and stuff in it.

A few things contributed to me just fizzling out on this. It was originally Amanda's idea, but then she quit. The revisions on my thesis were a bit unexpected, and so I pushed everything else in my life to the side. I'm a perfectionist and the film equipment I have access to is so shitty. I mean, really, I don't want to make a shitty film that TA isn't going to use. What's the point of that? I went to a few of the folks' CAPs and they were all pretty cool. But when I watched the footage that I shot at the US event (see Figure 3) I realized just how shitty the equipment was and how bad the film might be. Then I also just started to lose interest in this whole thing. I want to facilitate workshops. That's what I'm interested in and that's what I want to do. So, my film for the CAP, we'll see, whatever, I may finish it, but I doubt it. The only thing that is motivating me to do it is that I told TA that I would do it, and they are excited about it. I don't want to disappoint them, and I do want to practice filming, so we'll see.

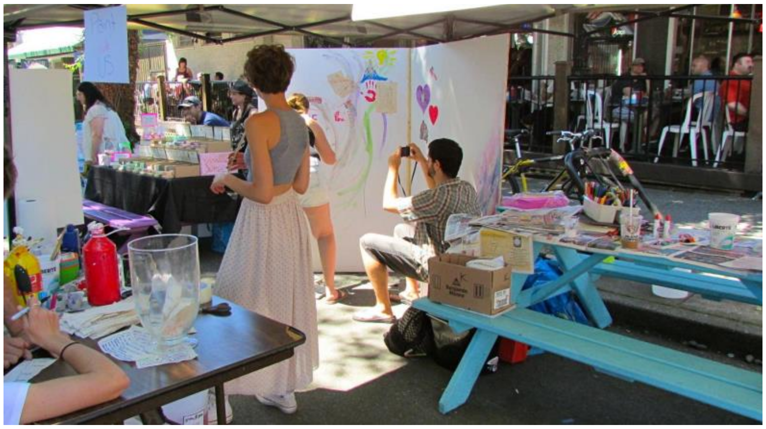

Figure 3. Brenda working on his CAP at the US event

I've always felt very deeply that the world is an unjust and fucked up place. It's taken me a long time to figure out my place and role in social change. I mean, the activist community is not the most welcoming especially for a middle-class white dude, yeah. I don't necessarily see activism as necessarily being a catalyst for social change, but it's also just the idea that registering dissent is powerful and important. When we moved to the Westside [neighborhood], I started to get more involved in the queer community and randomly going to marches and stuff. Sometimes, I would go to protests that would have absolutely nothing to do with me. I wanted to be there, so I'd just go and stand there and scream and get mad and be in solidarity with people.

I like being in service of people. In a way, I feel that's a way of getting around a lot of the problematics is by being in solidarity, you're supporting instead of leading, which to me is also a safer space. I've learned from my membership to other communities the value and importance of the background work. Setting up chairs and cleaning bathrooms are just as important as being the face of a movement. Well, maybe not as important, but pretty damn close.

I was looking for a way to be more active and I wanted to have a commitment to a cause that I believed. A friend of mine from school told me about TA so I applied right away. At first TA rejected my application because I'm a grandpa. Seriously, because 32 is too old! Then they were like: oh, join us. You're youth-identified! I was like: no, I'm not. And they were like: well, whatever. So, I showed up and decided that I would go ahead and do it. Anyway, it was so awkward and that was the first time I was branded as "youth identified," it was also the first time I'd ever heard that term before I had a visceral reaction to it. What the f--- does that even mean, youth-identified? I have never and would never call myself a "youth." That set the tone for my whole time with TA; I felt like an outsider or interloper.

It's funny, but I came full circle with TA. They were hiring for the educational coordinator position and at one time that would have been my dream job, but the whole age thing kept me from applying. I absolutely love facilitating the workshops. I hadn't been in a high school since my own shitty experience back in the day and I was totally blown away by the students and everything. It was amazing to see what would happen working with young people – it was really inspiring! I've actually thought about becoming a teacher. The cool thing now, though, is that I'm going to continue to volunteer and facilitate workshops at TA, which is what I always wanted to do. Who knows what will happen in the future, but this definitely looks good on my resume!

I reflected a bit about my experience with TA and besides the age thing it has been an amazing opportunity. So, I decided to call Hermione to talk to her and I was like: congratulations on the job, I'm kind of jealous cuz it's a dream job, but I want you to know what's happened. I told her that I've been made to feel uncomfortable because of the fact that I'm 32 and like, apparently, that's really old and I told her about a negative experience I had with Veronica. So, I had this conversation with Hermione and she was like: yes, that is really awkward and we've had a few other people talk about this with us too and she said that she would talk to Jacelyn [TA Executive Director] about it. Anyways, she came back to me later and was like: it's about ally-ship. And I was like: *yessss*. I can say that: I am an ally. So that was great! I love what TA does, and I've really enjoyed getting to know and work with Hermione who I feel is a really special person.

Places of possibility. The narrative of Brenda's participation centered around feelings of in/exclusion and finding a place within the activist community and TA more specifically. TA's loosely defined criteria for participants to be "youth identified"—which he was vehemently averse to—resulted in him feeling like he was on the periphery or an outsider. Implicit within Brenda's resistance to "youth" as a social construct was a critique of what it means to be a young person living in a neoliberal era and included having access to valued participation opportunities. Brenda's participation narrative illustrates how neoliberalism generates significant feelings of burden and anxiety for individuals. For Brenda, these feelings related to the "youth" classification and what that means in today's society; as well as his uncompleted CAP, which made him feel guilty and anxious. Brenda's activist trajectory arched toward his identification as an ally who works in solidarity with others and this paralleled his participation at TA.

Similar to Verity, Brenda offered an overt critique of the "structures of domination" that influenced TA. His narrative highlights the nuances of how neoliberalism has influenced youth participation, generally speaking as well as specifically at TA. Brenda told stories about his desire to be a part of something bigger, "an us" or a broader social movement that was working toward the ideal of social justice (Holland & Gómez, 2013). At the same time, he recognized the value of TA as a volunteer opportunity that would result in individual benefits and a stronger resume. Through his participation, Brenda understood learning as transformation—"changing the way people think"—and the workshops were exactly the kind of social action that he wanted to do. It was in the local places of practice, the workshops, that Brenda found an opportunity to work in solidarity with youth toward social change. Brenda also actively took on the role of co-researcher and participated in all of the data generation as well as both rounds of the participatory analysis. The activist and research practices generated a place of possibility for Brenda where he was able to do things he loved—researching and learning—while gaining skills and experience that would make him more competitive in the neoliberal era.

Discussion

The participation narratives are woven together with two of Holland and Gómez's (2013) criteria for assessing the transformative potential of social movements, first is youths' constructions of identities and subjectivities, and second is an orientation to building a community and broader social movement. Most yPAR and youth activist scholarship focuses on specific campaigns or projects (see Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2016; Kirshner, 2015) while much of the civic participation literature tends to address either the impact on individual development or the ways structural factors influence youth engagement (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Youniss et al. 2002). This work builds upon and extends this body of scholarship with a perspective that focuses on the potential of youth activist and research practices for generating individual *and* social transformation through a lens of "places of possibility." I defined "places of possibility" as literal and metaphorical spaces where people are afforded the tools and resources necessary to imagine alternative realities, identities, and systems than what currently exist, primarily through creative and activist practices. Conceptualizing TA as a "place of possibility" began with the youths' shared "love of learning" and desire to connect with others to create change.

TA provided a place where youth grappled with identities and subjectivities *in relation* to the broader activist community that extended beyond TA. Both Sarah and Verity's CAPs were framed by their desire to generate connection and build community. Simultaneously, the CAPs enabled Sarah and Verity to construct their activist identities by taking action toward creating a collective "US." Brenda's participation involved contentious negotiations with TA and other activist communities, but over time he constructed an activist identity based in solidarity and allyship where he was "in service" to the broader collective. As a "place of possibility," TA was a space where youth explored who they were and who they could become as activists.

Perfectionism and high standards were issues all of the youth at TA struggled with and the CAPs heightened this for many of them. The narratives illustrate how the relationships, dialogue, and learning practices of TA enabled the youth to make meaning of those challenges through their participation. Importantly, in the neoliberal era "places of possibility" also provide youth opportunities to develop skills, experiences, and expertise that translate to job and education markets. These "places of possibility" are significant in that they center youth experiences, foster learning and identity construction, and contribute to the imagining and building of a broader social movement.

Conclusion

The youths' participation narratives shed light on the multiple, fluid, partial, and situated nature of youth activism and participation. They elucidate what it means, feels and looks like to be an activist in neoliberal Canada for the young people in this study. Together, with the youths, we explored many different renderings of social justice, including: what it means to be an ally and in solidarity with others, advocacy, tolerance and acceptance, art as activism and artist activists. The YGM group co-constructed stories about the benefits of an activist identity that entailed expressions of hope, joy, inspiration, excitement, and determination. Throughout this study, participants described the various struggles and challenges along their activist trajectories. During PA #1 the youths articulated their similar experiences of alienation and isolation in particular, from their families. This moment of sharing was an emergent "place of possibility" where the youth connected around their vision for different more socially just world that contributed to the creation of a collective "us." Their stories reflected the idea that to be an activist involves understanding that you can never learn enough, know enough or do enough. Occupying an oppositional stance to the status quo required critical thinking, reflection, action, and provocation. Also evident were traces of burden and guilt that Kennelly (2011) associated with youth activist culture in Canada from situating responsibility solidly on individuals for making themselves and the world better. This privileging of the autonomous individual reinforces the illusion that individuals are fully agentic beings while denying the reality of structural and contextual constraints. These constraints and pressures imposed on youth by neoliberalism expose the need and value of "places of possibility" for young people to survive and thrive.

The participation narratives illustrated how research practices can reinforce youth activist spaces and youths' lived experiences. Moments of connection and community emerged through personal sharing of experiences and contributed to the conditions of a "place of possibility" were enabled by the research practices. Although TA failed to provide all of the participants with access to a community where they built long-term sustainable relationships, it proved to be an important and valuable "place of possibility" for the youths—some more than others—to reflect upon, discuss, envision, experiment, and practice to construct a personal understanding of an activist identity. In particular, the CAPs enabled some of the youths to take up an activist identity as they translated their vision of a better world into action. The emergent methods described in this paper provide a way of thinking through the ways in which research that is explicitly relational and participatory in order to generate "places of possibility" with young people.

In this paper, I have argued that in the current neoliberal era "places of possibility" are increasingly rare, yet increasingly important for diverse urban youth. This work points to the significance of narratives, relationships, and creativity in creating fissures in the neoliberal conditions. Narratives are tools that enable us to build relationships with others and to make meaning of our learning in relation. Through these relationships with others we are able to face the risks involved in imagining and creating new narratives, identities, and possibilities. Building social movements that challenge oppression and work toward justice relies on our ability to connect and build relationships with others. It is these relationships that will support creative risk-taking in places of learning and the kind of critical engagement that can create new opportunities and "places of possibility."

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Kristen Goessling received her PhD in Human Development, Learning and Culture from the University of British Columbia in 2015. She is currently an assistant professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Penn State University, Brandywine. Dr. Goessling's interdisciplinary scholarship is grounded in critical and sociocultural theory and spans the fields of child and youth development, educational justice, qualitative research methods and critical youth studies. Central to all of her research is the understanding that people are active cultural producers in relation to the social practices and systems in which they are embedded. Her work utilizes collaborative and visual research methods that seek to amplify participant voices and perspectives.

“Don’t Let Our Dreams Die”: Undocumented Students’ Fight for Educational Equity in Tennessee

Krista Craven, Guilford College
Diana Montero, Jazmin Ramirez, Maria Robles, & Rodrigo Robles, Youth Organizers

Abstract

Educational equity for undocumented immigrants has become a widely discussed issue in both the political and public realm of Tennessee, in large part as a result of the individual determination and collective resistance of undocumented youth living in the state. This article focuses on the ways in which undocumented immigrant youth in Tennessee confront and challenge educational inequities, particularly that of affordable access to higher education. Specifically, we suggest that the undocumented youth in this study engage in both individual and collective forms of resistance to overcome educational barriers, a process we refer to as boundary politics. This article draws on data from 24 oral histories from a multi-year participatory action research project with members of a youth-led undocumented-immigrant organizing group. This participatory methodology was used to complement the collective action and individual forms of resistance employed by undocumented youth in this study. Overall, we argue that by engaging in a combination of various forms of resistance and activism, undocumented youth are influencing the social and political landscape of Tennessee, laying the groundwork for educational equity to become a more plausible reality within the state.

Keywords: *undocumented immigrant; youth-led activism; resistance; tuition equality*

On a warm, sunny day in May 2012, twenty-four undocumented immigrant high school seniors clad in their graduation caps and gowns gathered in a mid-sized city in Tennessee. With a crowd of allies, media, and interested onlookers standing by, undocumented students shared their feelings of uncertainty about if and how they would be able to pursue their dream to attend college. “It's hard not to give up hope when we have to pay so much more than others, especially when we have to pay three times as much for college tuition…Many of us have the potential to do great things; we just need to have the chance to prove it,” Rafael[1] explained to the crowd who had gathered to honor the graduating high school seniors. Several other students at the rally shared similar stories of encountering significant barriers to pursuing their education, as well as their desire to persevere despite the obstacles standing in their way. Rafael and his peers shared their stories to illuminate the harsh reality facing undocumented immigrant youth throughout Tennessee, such as having to pay high out-of-state tuition rates no matter how long they have lived in the state.

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[1] This is a pseudonym. All subsequent names of study participants in this manuscript are pseudonyms.

This mock graduation event signaled the beginning of a multi-year statewide campaign for educational equity for undocumented youth in Tennessee that continues to this day. Propelled by the individual determination and resistance of young immigrants, as well as their collective efforts to address injustice, educational equity for undocumented students has become a widely discussed issue in both the political and public realm of Tennessee. This article focuses on the ways in which undocumented immigrant youth in Tennessee confront and challenge educational inequities, particularly that of affordable access to higher education. Specifically, we suggest that the undocumented youth in this study engage in both individual and collective forms of resistance to overcome educational barriers, a process we refer to here as *boundary politics*. To illustrate the multiple ways in which the youth in this study engage in boundary politics, we detail some of the key challenges undocumented youth confront in pursuing their educational goals and how they often find creative ways to navigate these obstacles. In addition to these individual forms of resistance, we illustrate how the undocumented youth in this study have engaged in a larger collective effort to transform the educational landscape of higher education in Tennessee through their involvement in an undocumented youth-led group called Tennessee Youth for Immigrant Justice (TYIJ).[2] In particular, we detail the 2014 tuition equality campaign led by TYIJ to illustrate the creative ways in which undocumented students have exerted significant pressure and influence on members of the Tennessee State Legislature. We argue that through the aforementioned forms of resistance and activism, undocumented youth are influencing the social and political landscape of Tennessee, laying the groundwork for tuition equality to become a more plausible reality within the state.

Undocumented Youth and the Fight for Higher Education Access in the U.S.

The 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* U.S. Supreme Court decision ensures that students cannot be denied a public K-12 education due to their immigration status, but this ruling does not provide a mandate regarding undocumented students' access to post-secondary education. However, some federal legislation, such as the 1996 *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act*, attempts to preclude undocumented immigrants from receiving any post-secondary education benefits. While several states have interpreted this as a mandate to prevent undocumented youth from accessing in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities, approximately 18 states have adopted language that allows individuals who have met certain state residency and high school graduation requirements access to in-state tuition regardless of their immigration status (NCSL, 2015).[3] However, undocumented youth in states without such policies are required to pay tuition as if they were out-of-state or international students (Flores, 2010; Rincón, 2005). In Tennessee, out-of-state tuition is almost triple the cost of in-state tuition. Tuition equality is a particularly important issue for undocumented students, as this demographic disproportionately experiences economic hardship in relation to the overall U.S. population (Terriquez & Patler, 2012) and most are precluded from access to state or federal government financial aid for post-secondary education (Gildersleeve, 2010; Gonzales, 2016). As such, many undocumented youth cannot afford to attend public post-secondary institutions due to the aforementioned economic constraints.

Limited opportunities to pursue higher education can also have social and emotional consequences for undocumented students (Gildersleeve, 2010; Gonzales, 2016; Muñoz 2015; Rincón, 2005; Terriquez & Patler, 2012). For example, Gonzales (2016) suggests that as undocumented youth transition to adulthood they often face significant barriers in achieving their educational and career goals as a result of their immigration status, which can lead to disengagement and profound feelings of frustration and uncertainty. Despite the often-distressing challenges encountered by these young adults, scholars have also found that several undocumented youth have a strong sense of optimism (Gonzales, 2016) or “critical hope” (Hinga & Conchas, 2015) that helps them persevere and attempt to overcome these educational injustices. Moreover, individuals and networks (e.g., families, academic advisors, undocumented student groups) who provide support and guidance to undocumented youth are crucial in helping these students to gain access to and succeed within post-secondary institutions (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Pérez et al, 2015).

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[2] This is a pseudonym.

[3] As of June 2017, Tennessee does not offer in-state tuition to undocumented students.

Additionally, many undocumented youth have taken an active role in fighting for access to higher education as part of the immigrant justice movement. When the federal DREAM Act was first introduced in 2001, undocumented youth were central in advocating for this proposed bill, which would have provided undocumented youth with a way to adjust their immigration status to become legal residents and expanded opportunities to pursue post-secondary education. As various iterations of the DREAM Act were introduced throughout the 2000s, local undocumented youth-led groups grew in number, and networks connecting these groups emerged, such as United We Dream. As of 2017, over 100,000 youth and 55 youth-led organizations were affiliated with the UWD network. TYIJ, the undocumented youth-led group profiled in this article, is an affiliate of UWD and was initially founded in 2009 to advocate for passage of the DREAM Act.

In an effort to push for the passage of the DREAM Act, undocumented youth-led groups and networks employed a variety of tactics. For example, in 2009, UWD hosted a “DREAM Graduation” for undocumented students. The mock graduation ceremony was held in Washington, DC, to bring attention to the tens of thousands of undocumented youth who graduate from high school each year but who cannot gain access to higher education. As illustrated by the vignette at the beginning of this article, groups of undocumented youth around the country adopted similar tactics to advocate for the federal DREAM Act as well as pursue educational equity at the state level. Despite the failure of the DREAM Act to garner the necessary votes in the Senate to become legislation in 2010, undocumented youth have remained a particularly strong force in the immigrant justice movement and educational equity has been one of the key elements of undocumented youth-led resistance and activism (Nicholls, 2013).

The aforementioned studies have clearly documented the barriers undocumented students face in accessing higher education, in addition to some of the ways in which these youth contend with such challenges and find valuable sources of support in doing so. Yet, few studies illustrate the *combination* of multiple individual and collective strategies employed by undocumented students to resist the multiple barriers they face. Moreover, several of these studies are conducted in states that have a high proportion of undocumented immigrants, but few studies focus on the ways in which undocumented youth in the Southeastern U.S. contend with the abovementioned challenges. This article therefore aims to add to the current literature by delineating the ways in which undocumented youth in Tennessee both individually and collectively resist the policies and practices that preclude them from accessing higher education opportunities.

Theoretical Framework: Boundary Politics

In the case of this study, undocumented youth challenge educational injustices through a combination of everyday acts of resistance and collective action (Collins, 2000), a process we refer to here as *boundary politics*. This notion of boundary politics is informed by Patricia Hill Collins’

(2000) conceptualization of political activism and resistance, which entails both an individual's day-to-day acts of resistance as well as a collective struggle for institutional transformation, and Jane Mansbridge's (2001) conceptualization of oppositional consciousness.

A primary component of Collins' (2000) definition of political activism involves individual acts of resistance. Collins suggests that such acts of resistance denote a struggle for group survival, whereby members of marginalized groups attempt to create spheres of influence within their own social networks and the social institutions they regularly encounter. Due to the complexity and nuance of such forms of resistance, conceptualizations of individual resistance are varied among scholars. Most relevant to the findings in our study is Solorzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) conceptualization of *internal and external transformational resistance*. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal provide the example of a Chicana student who pursues a path toward acquiring a college degree as an illustration of *internal transformational resistance*. These scholars contend that while this student may appear to be conforming to societal norms by aspiring to acquire a college degree, she is actually engaging in transformational resistance because she intends to challenge the cultural and economic marginalization that she and other Chicanx individuals experience. *External transformational resistance* involves a "conspicuous and overt type of behavior…[that] does not conform to institutional or cultural norms and expectations" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 325), such as participation in protests or the production of political writing that challenges dominant ideas and discourses.

In addition to everyday forms of resistance, collective action to change inequitable policies, practices, and systems is another integral component of effecting social change (Collins, 2000). According to Snow and Soule (2010), these forms of collective action are often "positioned outside the authority structure in question either because of the absence of recognized standing or access to it" (p. 16). In the case of the immigrant justice movement, undocumented persons are excluded from legal participation (e.g., voting, running as candidates) in the political system, and thus, must put pressure on the system from outside. Mansbridge (2001) argues that this process of identifying and explicitly challenging systems of oppression illustrates the emergence of oppositional consciousness. This scholar further argues that the role of oppositional consciousness in leading individuals to engage in collective struggles for social justice and group liberation is historically contingent. Thus, for oppositional consciousness to facilitate the emergence of a social movement, Mansbridge suggests groups must simultaneously experience a collective sense of injustice that produces "righteous anger, solidarity, and a belief in the group's power," (p. 7) and have access to the political and financial capital of established or emergent institutions to support the collective interests of the group.

Formal engagement in collective action for structural transformation and acts of daily resistance together make up an interconnected and comprehensive form of political activism and resistance (Collins, 2000). We consider this to be a bidirectional relationship, in which everyday resistance and formal engagement in social movement activity are always informing and influencing actions in both spheres. As such, in this study, several undocumented youth view their experiences of operating within, navigating, and resisting oppressive elements of the social context in which they live as informing their decision to participate formally in the immigrant justice movement. Similarly, many youth may view their involvement in collective action as informing and shaping how they engage with the social networks and institutions they encounter on a regular basis. Overall, we contend that Collins' theory of political activism and Mansbridge's concept of oppositional consciousness are both essential to understanding the boundary politics of undocumented youth, and helps elucidate how undocumented immigrant youth understand, reframe, contest, and endeavor to transform the unequal social and structural contexts in which they are situated.

Study Methods

This article draws on data from 24 oral histories from an ongoing multi-year participatory action research (PAR) project that began in 2013 with members of TYIJ, a youth-led undocumented-immigrant organizing group. PAR is both an epistemological and methodological orientation toward research. Epistemologically, PAR suggests that individuals that are most marginalized in society have a right to research the conditions that facilitate their oppression (Fine, 2009). Fine (2009) suggests that, "oppression breeds multi-generational wisdom, desire and tactics of subversion" (p. 3). Thus, those who experience marginalization possess "critical expertise" (Fine, 2009) regarding structural inequities, which must be drawn upon to imagine and work toward the transformation of unjust social and structural arrangements. Methodologically, PAR involves elucidating the main issues that are of relevance to a particular group or community through dialogue and collaborative data collection and analysis, and then creating and implementing a plan of action to address these issues with the intention of improving conditions within their social contexts. Thus, PAR is a collaborative and potentially transformative way to address the issues and inequities that youth face in their local communities and broader society.

For this PAR project, members of TYIJ proposed chronicling the stories of undocumented youth activists in Tennessee in relation to their migration to the U.S., their experiences growing up in the U.S., and their involvement in immigration activism. This project was developed for two primary reasons: 1) to guide the recruitment and movement-building strategies of TYIJ, particularly in terms of understanding catalysts for involvement in the Tennessee immigrant youth movement; and, 2) to systematically document and analyze key issues affecting the well-being of undocumented students via the collection of these stories, and bring these findings to legislators to influence their policy-making decisions.

This PAR project sought to democratize the research process by ensuring that undocumented youth leaders led the design and facilitation of the project. As such, the lead author of this article (who, at the time, was a graduate student) trained interested members of TYIJ in data collection and analysis methods. The first training session focused on developing interview protocols and conducting interviews. Following this session, participating TYIJ members conducted interviews with each other that explored the aforementioned themes. Next, several sessions were facilitated in which TYIJ members learned about qualitative data analysis and collaboratively coded interview transcripts.

Four TYIJ members were interested in engaging more deeply in the data collection and analysis process. As a result, these four undocumented students and the lead author formed a core research team called the TYIJ Research Collective. This core team met three to four times per month over the span of a year to analyze the 24 oral histories and to develop various dissemination strategies. To analyze the oral histories, we employed a grounded theory approach in which we sought to identify key patterns and significant processes that emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006). Via these analyses, the theme of tuition equality was particularly prevalent in participants' narratives of the individual challenges with which they contended and their motivation for engaging in collective action. As a result, the TYIJ Research Collective authored this article to illustrate the ways in which undocumented youth in Tennessee individually and collectively resist educational injustice.

As we engaged in this PAR project, the TYIJ Research Collective often discussed the ways in which we understood the role of PAR in shaping the political and academic discourse in Tennessee regarding undocumented immigrant students. For example, during a group conversation, one member of the research team stated:

> I like [PAR] because you're the one who's going through the stuff, you're the one who's doing the research, you're the one who can connect that personal story with other people and create research that most likely other people will understand instead of, like, just reading it, using all these big academic words, and professors just writing something that they don't have a clue about.[4]

This TYIJ member suggests that PAR is a way to be involved deeply in research that provides an avenue for sharing findings in a way that is accessible and relevant to the public. Similarly, another TYIJ member shared his view that PAR challenges the traditional power dynamics of research by democratizing the research process via collaboration:

> I like [PAR] a lot because looking at other ways that people have researched, there's more of a power structure to it where a few people get to decide what the voices of many are. And, with [PAR], everybody works together and everybody can be a researcher, everybody has something to say and put their ideas into it and where it's headed.

TYIJ members also communicated the importance of PAR in influencing political discourse and shaping social movement activity. For example, one TYIJ member stated:

> When you're trying to fight back against the political system…people don't pick just one person that's supposed to be the smartest to represent them, everybody represents themselves together, everybody's a family…So, that's why anybody in any activist movement or any type of revolution they're trying to start should know about [PAR]…because you have to speak the language of the people you're trying to fight against. They speak language by showing statistics and data and analysis, then we have to do the same thing.

Here, PAR is understood by this TYIJ member as having the potential to bolster social movements, as it equips individuals with the tools and information required to "speak the language of the people you're trying to fight against." This sentiment encapsulates one of the main reasons why TYIJ members decided to engage in this PAR project. As such, this participatory methodology was understood as an important tool in bolstering the collective action of TYIJ members and fighting the daily injustices they face as undocumented youth.

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4. In relation to the point about "professors just writing something that they don't have a clue about," the week prior to this discussion, this TYIJ member had participated in a roundtable discussion on immigration with a group of professors at a local university. She described being frustrated with the lack of knowledge the professors on this roundtable seemed to possess regarding immigration policy and their use of the term "illegal" to discuss undocumented immigrants.

"I Didn't Let All Those Noes and Shut Doors Stop Me": Navigating the Educational Landscape of Tennessee

Many of the youth participating in this study discussed how being undocumented has shaped or curtailed their educational experiences, particularly in terms of accessing and navigating post-secondary opportunities as an undocumented student. One of the key challenges in accessing higher education opportunities discussed by many participants in this study is the prohibitive cost of college tuition, a theme that is reflected in several other studies with undocumented youth (Gildersleeve, 2010; Gonzales, 2016; Rincón, 2005; Terriquez & Patler, 2012). As noted earlier, undocumented youth in Tennessee are required to pay out-of-state tuition to attend public universities (approximately three times the cost of in-state tuition) and scholarships that do not require U.S. citizenship are few in number (Rincón, 2005; Terriquez & Patler, 2012). Rafael describes being unable to apply for many scholarships because of his immigration status:

> I know that had I been legal, and throughout high school and most of my education right now at college, I wouldn't be paying, I'd have it pretty much all paid for with the scholarships that I could have gotten but couldn't apply for because I wasn't documented.

Alessandra concurs: "I knew that I could get a lot of scholarships, but I couldn't because what limited me was that nine-digit number."

Considering the aforementioned challenges, several participants in our study remarked that their undocumented status caused them to *initially* disengage in secondary school, believing that academic success would not matter if they were unable to afford college—a pattern that corroborates findings from Gonzales' (2016) study. For example, Rafael suggested that he felt "surrounded by apathy" as he came to understand the challenges that being undocumented would create as he pursued his post-secondary aspirations in Tennessee:

> There came a point where I just kinda felt really, like, just surrounded by apathy because I just couldn't, I couldn't see the point to it…I started questioning, I'm like, well, what's the point? It's not really going to do me any good if I get straight A's…and graduate with honors or distinguished honors because I'm undocumented. There's probably no way I'm going to get into college.

As a result, Rafael's grades dropped, although not significantly. Lorena similarly discusses how she began to feel depressed upon realizing that her post-secondary options might be limited:

> I was getting kind of depressed with seeing that there weren't so many opportunities for undocumented students, and how my friends just ended up working or dropping out of college, community colleges…they were as smart as me, they were going to community college and dropping out, they were automatically coming out of high school and going in to work, and they were just, like, super bright students. So, I thought that the opportunities were limited, so that made me really sad; it made me realize, like, maybe I'm wasting my time trying to pursue education.

Lorena was initially concerned that she would be forced to enter the labor force rather than attend college because she witnessed many of her undocumented peers doing so. Another participant, Eliseo, also reflects on this pattern:

> Once you get older, you realize that most of the scholarships and most of the opportunities are not there for you, so…you can either go two ways, you can get the mentality that you do want to go to college, regardless, or you get the mentality that you're not good enough or you don't have the opportunities, so you become a day laborer and you just kind of get sucked into the system of cheap labor and just getting paid under the table.

Eliseo notes that the marginalization of undocumented youth may be exacerbated if they acquire post-high school employment that does not pay well because it seems to be the only plausible option. However, Eliseo also suggests that limited post-secondary options may create a greater sense of determination among those who decide that they will find a way to attend college, despite the barriers (Gonzales, 2016; Hinga & Conchas, 2015).

Indeed, several participants have been able to find ways to pursue higher education opportunities despite encountering the aforementioned challenges. Upon finding out that their immigration status posed numerous obstacles to obtaining higher education, several of the students in this study ended up finding and joining groups led by undocumented youth. Through groups like TYIJ, most participants stated that they were able to meet undocumented youth who had been able to attend college and access a variety of resources about applying to college as an undocumented student. Although initially dispirited, Alessandra was reignited with a sense of hope and motivation upon learning that there ways to she could go to college as a result of becoming a member of TYIJ:

> After finding out that I just couldn't really get into [the University of Tennessee], and all of that. Like, that's what motivated me to get into TYIJ…What helped me a lot was being in TYIJ and knowing that there was a possibility, and then meeting other people that I know came before me and were able to get in college.

Silvia explains that looking for answers about how to navigate her immigration status led her to find TYIJ:

> I first started being involved with TYIJ because it was my junior year of high school, and it was the year after I found out I was undocumented, and I kinda wanted an answer about what I could do, you know, what were my options because I didn't want to give up.

Negrón-Gonzales (2013) suggests that as youth learn about their immigration status and the associated consequences, they look for support and information from others in similar situations. This scholar contends that by seeking out and finding such support, undocumented youth often become more politically engaged and are thus more likely to become participants in collective pursuits for immigrant justice. Indeed, all of the participants in this study have been involved in collective action for immigrant justice via their involvement in TYIJ.

Upon finding resources and support regarding college access provided by undocumented youth-led groups such as TYIJ, several students in this study pursued a strategy of applying to several colleges in and beyond their home state, focusing on institutions that expressed an open commitment to supporting undocumented students both financially and socially. Isabela explains that she was able to get significant funding from a small private college by openly explaining to university administrators the barriers she faces to accessing financial aid as an undocumented student. As a result, she states that: “Applying to college has even been a blessing because now I’m at [a small private university], and I mean, they’ve given [undocumented students] so much help. I mean, it really does feel good.” This particular college has admitted several undocumented students in the past few years (six of whom are participants in this study) and high-level administrators have openly declared their interest in and commitment to helping this demographic group access post-secondary education.

Not only has this particular college provided substantial financial aid to these students, but several of the study participants who attend this institution suggest that it has also provided additional support by trying to create an inclusive and welcoming space for undocumented immigrants. Alejandro attends this institution and suggests that because it is a historically Black college, he has found a safe space in which to reveal his immigration status:

> [My university] is awesome because I feel like they don't exactly know my type of struggle, but they know what it is to have someone be prejudiced against you…And the fact that the history of [the university] is all about struggles, it kind of has helped me out a lot, just being here. It makes me feel like [I’m] in a more safe environment.

Here, Alejandro translates his experience of disenfranchisement as an undocumented immigrant to the oppression of African Americans, which Collins (2000) suggests can be an important element of movement building. Moreover, welcoming institutional spaces and policies can play a crucial role in the retention and success of undocumented students in post-secondary institutions (Gildersleeve & Vigil, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Muñoz, 2015)

Some of the participants in this study suggested that upon realizing that they could not access the same financial aid to attend college as their documented peers, they employed a strategy to “work harder” in high school so they could acquire the most funding possible to facilitate their pursuit of a college degree. Ana discusses how she has not let hurdles, such as trying to access college, stop her from trying to achieve her goals:

> I’ve tried so hard to create opportunities for myself. Like I’ve told myself, I’m not going to let this stop me; I’m going to work harder because I want to prove people wrong. So, I applied for going to college, for example…I applied to so many places and I didn't let all those noes and shut doors stop me.

According to Solorzano and Delgado Bernal’s (2001) framework, attempting to overcome educational barriers by “working harder” may reflect a form of internal transformative resistance. In this instance, Ana resists the notion that restrictive policies will prevent her from gaining access to post-secondary education, and instead engages in tactics that she expects will help her overcome some of the challenges associated with pursuing a college education as an undocumented immigrant.

Ana, in addition to other youth in this study, also suggested that she had to find creative ways to work around bureaucratic barriers while enrolled in college:

> I'm always, like, "Oh, well, I need extra help with this," or "Oh, I can't pay for this," or "Oh, I don't qualify for this," you know? And I'm constantly, constantly trying to find help, constantly trying to find other ways around things, because that's what we're forced to do, we're forced to search other ways, alternate ways for everything.

Despite encountering numerous obstacles throughout her college career, Ana suggests that she often finds ways to overcome these challenges, illustrating her perseverance and creativity in the face of adversity. In an informal conversation with another participant in this study, they explained that they do not reveal their immigration status to institutional authorities unless explicitly asked to do so, thus hoping that they will avoid the tuition rates applied to undocumented students. At the time of this conversation, this strategy had been working for this particular student and they were able to pay in-state tuition rates at the community college they attended. Several studies similarly show that many undocumented youth demonstrate considerable resilience and determination in the face of adversity, finding creative ways to overcome social and institutional barriers (Hinga & Conchas, 2015; Gonzales, 2016; Terriquez & Patler, 2012). Although many of the undocumented youth profiled in the aforementioned studies were able to realize their educational attainment goals through hard work and the creative navigation of institutional barriers, attaining a post-secondary education among undocumented students is significantly lower than that of their documented peers (Chavez, 2015; Flores, 2010). In this study, at least three participants have not been able to enroll in college and another three participants have been unable to complete their degrees due to prohibitive tuition fees.

As illustrated above, it is evident that youth individually challenge the educational inequities arising from their immigration status on a regular basis. These forms of resistance illustrate the emergence of an oppositional consciousness and are employed as a means of challenging unequal social configurations (Collins, 2000; Mansbridge, 2001; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). When youth engage in such forms of resistance, they disrupt the status quo by challenging the policies and practices that disadvantage undocumented students. When these individual acts of resistance are combined with collective action, as will be illustrated in the next section, the opportunity for catalyzing social change is augmented (Collins, 2000).

"We are the Future of Tennessee": The TYIJ Tuition Equality Campaign

In addition to several undocumented youth in Tennessee individually pursuing creative ways to overcome educational barriers, all study participants have been involved, in some form, in the collective pursuits of TYIJ. The history of TYIJ is rooted in a two-week program in 2009 that was intended to provide a space for immigrant youth in Tennessee to learn about their rights, key policies that would affect them, and the principles of community organizing. One of the program outcomes was the emergence of TYIJ, in which members initially focused their energy on advocating for the passage of the DREAM Act. However, when the DREAM Act failed to pass in 2010, group members re-evaluated their organizational mission and goals. TYIJ decided that educational equity was a key priority for its members, and thus pursued various campaigns to pursue this goal. The statewide tuition equality campaign has been TYIJ's largest sustained campaign for educational equity in recent years.

In 2012, TYIJ officially launched their campaign for tuition equality. Although the state legislative session had already come to an end, the campaign was designed to bring about greater public awareness of the obstacles undocumented youth face in trying to access post-secondary education. The tuition equality campaign was officially launched on May 19, 2012, the same day that many high school graduation ceremonies were held. That day, undocumented youth held a rally dressed in their graduation caps and gowns, as described in the opening vignette of this article. In addition to organizing this rally, members of TYIJ distributed hundreds of blue ribbons at high school graduation ceremonies across high schools in Tennessee to garner support for the tuition equality campaign.

However, tuition equality did not gain much traction among state legislators in 2012. Several legislators justified their opposition to the bill by suggesting that legal status determines who is and is not worthy of receiving state benefits. For example, State Representative, Jim Gotto (R), suggested that “to be fair to those families who legally came to this nation, it is likely that the [out-of-state tuition] law is going to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future” (Garrison, 2012). In portraying undocumented immigrants as law-breakers, Gotto, among other legislators, justified his opposition to tuition equality by suggesting that undocumented youth are undeserving subjects of the education benefits awarded to documented state residents.

Although the tuition equality campaign of 2012 did not garner the support of many state legislators, TYIJ members suggested it created a platform for beginning to educate the public about the challenges undocumented youth face in trying to gain college admission. It is also important to note the political climate regarding immigration-related issues in early 2012. One of Tennessee’s border states, Alabama, had just passed the harshest anti-immigration bill in the country. Moreover, in 2011, the Tennessee State Legislature saw the introduction of a statewide anti-immigrant bill—the *Lawful Immigration Enforcement Act* (HB 1380/SB 780). Factors such as these may have created a more challenging context in which to push for immigrant-friendly legislation at that particular time.

Considering the resistance to tuition equality in 2012, TYIJ members evaluated their activist efforts and decided to focus on stopping deportations and advocating for comprehensive immigration reform in 2013. However, affordable access to higher education remained a priority for TYIJ members, and thus in 2014 the group reignited the tuition equality campaign they had initiated in 2012. Members hypothesized that they might be able to garner more support for this bill in Tennessee now that federal immigration reform had become a common topic of discussion in American politics. TYIJ members were energized by the perception of political opportunity (Giugni, 2011; Snow & Soule, 2010). Despite the perception that the political climate might be more open to a tuition equality bill, some TYIJ members reminded the group that it took ten years for Colorado to pass in-state tuition and that a campaign capable of being sustained over a period of years would likely be necessary. With this in mind, TYIJ began planning its 2014 tuition equality campaign.

Based on advice from the Interim President of the University of Memphis, a supporter of tuition equality, the TYIJ drafted a “pilot bill” whereby in-state tuition would be provided to undocumented youth who attend public colleges in Shelby County. Undocumented youth would be eligible for in-state tuition at these colleges if they had spent two years in a Tennessee high school and graduated with a high school diploma or a GED. With this pilot bill, TYIJ members hoped to get a sense of state legislators’ openness to tuition equality before introducing a statewide tuition equality bill.

Much to the surprise of TYIJ members, shortly after the introduction of their pilot bill, Republican Senator Todd Gardenhire introduced a statewide tuition equality bill (SB 1951/HB 1992) that he had crafted without involvement from TYIJ or other immigrant rights organizations. However, the criteria for receiving in-state tuition was stricter than TYIJ’s pilot bill, requiring undocumented students to spend five years in a Tennessee high school and meet stringent academic requirements. Despite stricter eligibility criteria than many TYIJ members would have liked, TYIJ decided to support Senator Gardenhire's bill.

Upon deciding to support the statewide bill, TYIJ crafted a comprehensive lobbying strategy for each of the legislators sitting on the Senate and House of Representatives Education Committees, where the bill would first be debated. At their weekly meetings, TYIJ members reviewed a list of individuals sitting on these committees and discussed the expected or stated perspectives of each legislator on the tuition equality bill. TYIJ collectively determined which legislators' opinions they believed could shift, and thus focused their energy on lobbying those individuals.

To sway legislators' opinions, TYIJ members first launched a social media campaign to encourage friends and family to call members of the education subcommittees and request that they vote in favor of the tuition equality bill. Each week before the subcommittees were to discuss the bill, TYIJ would post a flyer with the phone numbers of each Senate or House Education Committee member and a sample phone script for individuals to use when calling them. Youth also created memes of key legislators. For example, they created a meme of Senator Dolores Gresham, the Chair of the Senate Education Subcommittee, to pressure her to support the tuition equality bill. Methods such as these were used to encourage individuals who were part of TYIJ members' social networks to participate in the tuition equality campaign by calling Tennessee legislators and asking them to vote in favor of the bill. As noted by other scholars, undocumented youth activists throughout the U.S. frequently use social media to mobilize support for their campaigns (Nicholls, 2013; Zimmerman, 2010).

TYIJ members also visited the offices of specific legislators each week to share their personal stories and encourage legislators to support the tuition equality bill. These stories intended to demonstrate the personal impact that tuition equality would have on individual undocumented youth, such as the following story:

> [Carmen] wants to open a small business one day, but for now that hope is on hold…Last year, she graduated from [local] High School in Nashville with the goal of enrolling at Austin Peay State University. Instead, the 19-year-old South Nashville resident helps her family make ends meet by baby-sitting family friends. "I want to help people in my community by offering jobs," she said. "Then I realized I would have to pay three times more than my friends for access to higher education."

Storytelling is a common tactic of the U.S. immigrant youth movement (Anguiano, 2011; Nicholls, 2013; Patel & Sánchez Ares, 2014). TYIJ's rationale behind sharing personal stories is to humanize the political discourse surrounding tuition equality for undocumented students. For example, Rosa suggests that by meeting undocumented youth and hearing their stories, legislators are better able to

> understand that their decisions are affecting real people and real youth and real families and that it's not about politics, but it's really about people…many times they don't see that until we go [to] their office and kind of show our faces and are like, you know, here we are, and we're real. We're not just something in writing.

Isabela agrees, expressing her hope that through collective efforts to share the stories of undocumented youth, legislators will "realize that the laws that they're making, they're actually affecting real people and that we're not, like, I guess, sort of made of paper, or something, you know? We have feelings and we have families." Similarly, Patel and Sánchez Ares (2014) suggest that storytelling illustrates the common humanity between undocumented persons and their documented counterparts, which can mobilize individuals, including policymakers, to become allies.

Creative collective actions were also employed by undocumented youth during the tuition equality campaign. For example, TYIJ members compiled a stack of mock applications for admission to the University of Tennessee from dozens of undocumented youth; each application included the youth's expected year of graduation from high school, the major they planned to pursue, their future plans after college, and their thoughts about why they should have access to in-state tuition. Copies of these mock applications were administered to members of the Senate and House Education Committees. Symbolic actions are a cornerstone of the immigrant youth movement throughout the U.S. (Anguiano, 2011; Nicholls, 2013).

The aforementioned tactics employed by TYIJ members seemed to influence the opinions of some Tennessee legislators. For example, Representative Richard Floyd, the House Republican co-sponsor of the bill, was deeply moved by youths' stories. For example, when he introduced the bill to the House Education Subcommittee in 2014, he gave an impassioned speech about why committee members should vote in favor of tuition equality. Although he was receiving pushback from his constituents, he believed that passing the bill was "the right thing to do." While making this argument, Representative Floyd was moved to tears. Several members of TYIJ described Representative Floyd's tearful speech as particularly a poignant and powerful moment in their campaign, and many were surprised to see a staunch Republican from rural Tennessee so moved by the plight of undocumented youth. Some youth suggested that this could mean there was greater openness to the bill than they originally anticipated (Giugni, 2011; Snow & Soule, 2010).

Building on the momentum created by Representative Floyd's impassioned introduction of the bill, TYIJ members continued lobbying legislators and planned more actions and events to highlight the stories of undocumented youth. Despite the numerous organizing tactics employed by TYIJ members, by mid-March the youth leading the campaign were becoming concerned that the tuition equality bill would not make it out of either of the education subcommittees before their scheduled end-dates. In an effort to push for a vote on the bill so that it could move to the next level of debate in the Legislature, TYIJ staged an action that they hoped would generate enough attention to pressure committee members to vote on the bill. Several TYIJ members went to the Legislature dressed in their graduation caps and gowns. They entered carrying large checks with the cost of out-of-state tuition for various public universities in Tennessee or signs that read "Tuition Equality Now" and "We are the Future of TN." Despite the creative nature of their action, the subcommittees did not bring the bill up for a vote that week. However, reflecting upon this action at a meeting, youth were energized by the fact that they were the center of attention and, as one TYIJ member articulated, "everyone was talking about us that day."

Notwithstanding the collective efforts of TYIJ, Senator Gardenhire withdrew his bill on March 24, 2014 because he lacked enough votes for it to pass. Despite this setback, on TYIJ member suggested that the collective efforts of undocumented youth in Tennessee would not cease: "Immigrant youth have advocated for this bill for two years and we won't quit until every student can pay a fair price for college. Our dreams are what's at stake, and we will never give up." Shortly after the bill had been pulled by Senator Gardenhire, Carolina reflected:

> I knew it wasn't gonna pass, for the reason that we didn't have all the votes from the people that we needed, but I still had hope. But hopefully, we can try it again, and try, and try it, and try it, and hopefully one day, we can at least have that right to have equality of tuition.

Here, Carolina suggests that there may have been less political opportunity than perceived (Giugni, 2011), but that through the continued collective efforts of TYIJ, there may be a chance that the bill will pass in future legislative sessions.

Although several TYIJ members were disappointed that the bill was not voted on in either of the education subcommittees, many believed that misinformation among legislators about the bill (e.g., that in-state tuition would be a financial loss for the state rather than a gain) hindered its success. Despite the challenges they encountered during the 2014 campaign, TYIJ members highlighted many successes of the campaign. For example, members suggested that tapping into their in-person and online social networks was an important component of building a growing base of support for the bill. Also, they were proud of the numerous actions, events, and meetings that they led over the campaign period. In particular, they considered going to the Legislature in their caps and gowns a particularly powerful action, as it brought much attention to their cause. Furthermore, TYIJ members considered the regular media attention throughout the 2014 campaign as essential in bringing the issue of tuition equality to light. Finally, TYIJ members believed that one of the major successes of their tuition equality campaign was that it contributed to a discursive shift, as illustrated by the remarks of one member:

> We changed the conversation. One of our goals this year was to shift the narrative about tuition equality, helping people to understand the issue and recognize the real impact of tuition policies on Tennessee students. And we succeeded. We were in the media several times every week during the legislative session, bringing [undocumented youths'] stories into living rooms across Tennessee. Journalists noted the changing tone and softening stance of legislators on this issue.

Their ability to change the conversation and garner the support of several legislators was a source of pride for many TYIJ members. TYIJ members stressed that during their tuition equality campaign in 2012, there were no similar victories.

In an attempt to build on the momentum generated in 2014, TYIJ launched the 2015 tuition equality campaign and youth members worked with Senator Gardenhire to reintroduce the tuition equality bill he brought forth in 2014. Undocumented youth employed similar tactics to the 2014 campaign by reigniting their social media campaign, continuing to share their personal stories and aspirations with legislators on a regular basis, and engaging in creative actions (e.g., dressing in graduation caps and gowns and greeting legislators as they entered the Legislative chambers). To the surprise of several TYIJ members, many more legislators voiced their support for the tuition equality bill in 2015. TYIJ members continued to exert pressure on members of the Legislature using the aforementioned tactics throughout the 2015 legislative session, thus ensuring that the issue of tuition equality remained a central topic of discussion among policymakers. The bill passed through all committees and in April the Tennessee State Senate voted in favor of the tuition equality bill,[5] which was considered a significant success by TYIJ members. However, and the bill failed to pass the House floor by only *one vote*.[6] As a result, another year passed in which undocumented youth could not access in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities.

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[5] 21 legislators voted "yes" and 12 legislators voted "no" in the Tennessee Senate

Despite the devastating reality of the tuition equality bill being one vote short of passing in 2015, members of TYIJ expressed hope and optimism that the bill would pass in 2016. Rather than reintroduce the bill in 2016, the bill could go straight to the House floor for a second vote on the same tuition equality bill that had been introduced in 2015. However, before the bill could go back to the House floor for another vote, it was necessary for 18 members of the Calendar and Rules Committee to vote in favor of doing so. TYIJ members again engaged in sustained collective action during the 2016 legislative session, however the 18 votes needed from members of this committee did not materialize. In informal conversations with members of TYIJ following the 2016 legislative session, several believed that the anti-immigrant rhetoric pervading much of the 2016 Presidential campaign influenced state legislators to withdraw their support for the bill or at least not publicly admit their support for it. One study participant remarked that several legislators with whom she talked during the 2016 session told her that it was too risky for them to vote for a bill that supported undocumented youth during an election year and that undocumented youth would find more support among legislators once the election had passed.

Unfortunately, this hope has not become a reality as of yet. During the 2017 state legislative session, the tuition equality bill was introduced again but did not pass through the House Education Administration and Planning Committee. One of the committee members who voted against the bill, Eddie Smith (R-Knoxville), attributed this to a shift in political discourse around immigration:

> [with] the election of President Donald Trump I decided to vote against [the tuition equality bill]…I think we should give the new administration and Congress (time) to fix our broken immigration system before we act as a state on issues related to immigration" (Tamburin, 2017).

Despite such resistance from some state legislators, TYIJ members remain determined to fight for equal access to public institutions of higher learning in the coming years.

As illustrated above, TYIJ members have employed conventional forms of organizing, such as lobbying, to make their desire for tuition equality known to those in power. They then escalate to creative actions when political representatives seem to resist their demands or fail to act in favor of tuition equality. The actions undertaken by TYIJ have caused several legislators to change or become more committed to their stance on supporting tuition equality. However, these shifts, while impressive, have not resulted in the passage of a tuition equality bill as of yet. Moreover, several TYIJ members believe that the 2016 presidential campaign and the current presidential administration hampered some of the support they garnered from state legislators in previous years. Some TYIJ members also attribute the political resistance they have encountered to the conservative nature of Tennessee. Carolina contends:

> As we know, Tennessee [has] more Republicans, so it's more strict. And it's really hard to at least convince them [to] at least to think about how immigrants have to deal with all of this. And it takes a lot of time to do it.

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[6] 49 legislators voted "yes" and 47 legislators voted "no" in the Tennessee House of Representatives; 50 "yes" votes were needed for the bill to pass in the House.

Similarly, Linda suggests that because of Tennessee's conservatism, statewide immigration policies are less likely to be influenced by the immigrant justice movement than federal policies: "Locally, it's pretty hard [to influence policy], I think, because it's a Republican state and they listen to Tea Partiers, and just the really radical right wing part of the party."

Continued efforts by TYIJ reflect Price and Diehl's (2004) assertion that despite "the South's long and difficult history, as well as the political ascent of the Right throughout the region," youth continue to organize in the South because although "change may be difficult … it is possible" (p. 12). Although the tuition equality bill has not been passed yet, TYIJ has been successful in building substantial momentum around this issue over the years despite the setbacks they have faced. Moreover, their efforts over the past few years to promote tuition equality seem to have created a base of powerful supporters and generated public conversation about educational equity for undocumented students. As such, it remains the hope of several TYIJ members that despite the current presidential administration, state legislators can still be moved to support tuition equality. However, what remains to be seen is exactly how Donald Trump's presidency will influence the nature of statewide policies that affect the lives and well-being of immigrant populations. Notwithstanding the concerns among TYIJ members about the influence President Trump will have on immigration policy, undocumented youth in Tennessee are resolute in their commitment to continue fighting for educational equity.

Conclusion

Overall, many youth remarked that the emotional toll of navigating their immigration status in relation to future educational opportunities was particularly challenging, a finding that is reflected in other studies conducted in other states across the U.S. (Gildersleeve, 2010; Gonzales, 2016; Muñoz 2015; Rincón, 2005; Terriquez & Patler, 2012). Several youth suggested that the barriers to accessing post-secondary education caused them to become angry, distraught, or depressed. Although initially dispirited, many participants resisted the notion that the high cost of tuition would prevent them from gaining access to post-secondary education. Youth thus employed a variety of creative strategies to acquire post-secondary education considering these constraints, such as seeking out supportive institutions of higher learning, negotiating with university administrators, or finding ways to sidestep bureaucratic barriers. Such tactics illustrate the "critical hope" and determination of these students to find ways to secure access to a college education (Gonzales, 2016; Hinga & Conchas, 2015).

In addition to the individual level tactics employed by undocumented students to access post-secondary education, the youth in this study have also engaged in collective action to advocate for the right of all undocumented persons residing in Tennessee to receive in-state tuition. Via TYIJ, undocumented students across the state launched a tuition equality campaign in 2012 that has built momentum and garnered significant support among state legislators over the last few years. During this campaign, undocumented youth in Tennessee have engaged in a variety of creative collective tactics, such as sharing their personal stories with legislators and the media, delivering stacks of mock university applications to state legislators, or going to the State Legislature dressed in their graduation caps and gowns. Such actions represent an oppositional consciousness among undocumented youth in Tennessee that has ignited a powerful social movement (Mansbridge, 2001). However, with the recent wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy priorities of the Trump administration, the ability to pass a tuition equality bill in Tennessee may become harder to do in coming years. Despite these challenges, members of TYIJ have made it clear that they will not back down from the fight for educational equity any time soon.

Overall, we suggest that the individual and collective efforts of youth in Tennessee to increase undocumented immigrants' access to post-secondary education provide an informative example of how youth are engaging in a comprehensive form of boundary politics and acting as agents of change within the educational landscape of Tennessee. It is hoped that this analysis can be extended to inform scholarly discussion of how the *combination* of everyday acts of resistance and the social movement participation of undocumented youth are influencing educational policy and practice in contemporary American society. Future studies could similarly examine the multiplicity of tactics used by undocumented youth to gain access to post-secondary education and how these tactics are shaped by local social and political contexts. Additionally, participatory action research could be employed more often in future studies to ensure that undocumented students are able to guide the analysis and dissemination of findings, as in the case of this study.

This article also hopes to inform the work of those engaging in movement-building work to address serious injustices. The tactics and strategies employed by TYIJ members to influence state policy are noteworthy, particularly as TYIJ has garnered impressive levels of support from legislators who were initially reluctant to vote in favor of tuition equality. Although tuition equality is not yet a reality in Tennessee, undocumented youth have "changed the conversation" by engaging in these collective efforts. Thus, an examination of the tactics used by TYIJ could be helpful to other social movements and collectives, particularly those operating in conservative social and political contexts. A final consideration for those engaging in movement-building work is the role that participatory action research could play in bolstering this work. As noted by members of the TYIJ Research Collective earlier, PAR democratizes the research process and generates important information that can be used to influence the decisions made by those in positions of power.

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Krista Craven is an assistant professor of Justice and Policy Studies at Guilford College. She earned her Ph.D. in Community Research and Action from Vanderbilt University in 2014.

Diana Montero is a youth organizer in the immigrant justice movement. She earned her undergraduate degree in Political Science from Fisk University in 2017.

Jazmin Ramirez is a youth organizer in the immigrant justice movement. She is currently pursuing her undergraduate degree in Social Justice at Trevecca Nazarene University.

Maria Robles is a youth organizer in the immigrant justice movement. She is currently pursuing her undergraduate degree in Social Justice and pre-Engineering at Trevecca Nazarene University.

Rodrigo Robles is a youth organizer in the immigrant justice movement. He earned his undergraduate degree in Psychology from Fisk University in 2017.

Examining How Youth Take on Critical Civic Identities Across Classroom and Youth Organizing Spaces

Jesse Moya, Siena College

Abstract

This paper documents the ways that two learning spaces—a community-based youth organizing group and a high school social studies classroom—provided different opportunities for Latinx youth to take on critical civic identities characterized by a critical consciousness, a motivation for social justice, and feelings of civic agency. By examining two structurally unique learning sites from a situated perspective, this paper highlights how youth critical civic identity processes are negotiated within figured worlds over time. In particular, the goals and membership expectations of the two sites positioned the study participants on different identity trajectories, with classroom students more likely to adopt an aspirational critical civic identity, while youth participating in community-based organizing took on more practice-linked identities as critical civic activists. In particular, positioning youth as valuable contributors to critical civic action was a key resource for youth to take on these practice-linked identities as individuals with agency to address social injustices.

Keywords: *youth; identity; organizing; civic development; critical consciousness; learning environments; urban*

Introduction

Latinx in the United States continue to be marginalized in civic life and schools. The urban communities where many Latinx live are more likely to have fewer opportunities for youth civic engagement (Hart & Atkins, 2002) and the schools that most Latinx attend are less likely to provide them with quality civic learning opportunities (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Torney-Purta, Barber & Wilkenfeld, 2007). For instance, high stakes standardized testing policies have detrimentally impacted low-income schools through an overemphasis on tested subject areas and test-taking skills, at the expense of other important subjects, like civic development (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Structurally, schools serving Latinx are far more likely to be over crowded, under resourced, and racially segregated (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Consequently, Latinx are much less likely to experience the quality learning opportunities that promote academic and civic engagement to foster critical civic identity development (Conchas, 2006; Kahne & Sporte, 2008). These academic and civic opportunity gaps lead to lower Latinx educational attainment rates and civic participation when compared to Whites and African Americans (Telles & Ortiz, 2008), which perpetuate an oppressive cycle for Latinx. Without college opportunities, many Latinx youth will struggle economically and continue to be marginalized civically. In an era of neoliberal educational policies focused on raising test scores and perpetuating the status quo (Sondel, 2015), the dearth of critical civic opportunities fails to prepare youth for the political struggle necessary to ensure quality educational and civic opportunities for marginalized communities (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

While schools and civic organizations have the power to position individuals as marginalized, they can also provide opportunities for liberation, where Latinx youth can take on identities with the dispositions to critique and act against these injustices (Freire, 2000). While limited in number, the studies on empirical efforts to engage students with social critique and civic action through the classroom have shown increases in students' critical literacy, civic commitments, and civic agency (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Rubin, 2007; Westheimer, 2015). Similarly, out-of-school spaces, such as youth organizing groups, have been sites where youth have developed critical social analysis skills, commitment to community and political engagement, and a sense of empowerment to contribute to change efforts (Gambone, Yu, Lewis-Charp, Sipe & Lacoe, 2004; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Kirshner, 2015; Larson & Hansen, 2005). While there is evidence that both classroom and youth organizing groups have been associated with positive developmental outcomes, findings are based on a small number of studies. In particular, the *processes* that influence critical civic identity development in each of these spaces need further elucidation (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). In addition, there is theorizing on how situated learning contexts impact civic identity development (Flanagan et al., 2011; Nasir & Hand, 2008) but very few qualitative studies that explore these processes across classrooms and youth organizing groups, particularly amongst Latinx populations.

In this study, I examined two learning spaces—a community-based youth organizing group and a high school social studies classroom—where Latinx youth had access to quality critical civic learning opportunities to understand how participation in these spaces influenced their critical civic identity trajectories. By examining two structurally unique learning sites from a sociocultural perspective, I highlight how youth critical civic identity processes are negotiated within situated contexts over time (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998). I argue that the goals and membership expectations of the two sites positioned the study participants on different identity trajectories (Wenger, 1998), with classroom students more likely to adopt a future oriented or *aspirational* critical civic identity, while the youth in community-based organizing took on more present or *practice-linked* identities as critical civic activists. In particular, positioning youth as valuable contributors to critical civic action was a key resource for youth to take on these practice-linked identities as individuals with agency to address social injustices.

Theory and Background

An Initial Definition of Critical Civic Identity

The construct of critical civic identity draws from research literatures around youth civic development and critical pedagogy. A civic identity refers to an individual's sense of attachment to her community, the extent to which she is (or plans to be) civically engaged, and her sense of agency in affecting the social well-being of the community (Flanagan & Faison, 2001, Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997). A *critical* civic identity involves developing an awareness of structural injustices and a motivation to address them (Freire, 2000). This identity differs from a civic identity in that the attachments are not necessarily to one's proximal community but there exists solidarity with those who are oppressed by injustice, regardless of the location (Rogers, Mediratta & Shah, 2012). Moreover, critical agency not only involves feeling effective in one's community, it entails feeling capable of addressing local and structural injustices.

A Situated Perspective on Critical Civic Identity

Drawing upon the concepts of positional identities within figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) and identity trajectories (Wenger, 1998), I use a sociocultural lens to provide insights into the processes by which youth take on various kinds of critical civic identity trajectories through participation. My conception of identity development is grounded in the sociocultural theoretical framework, which argues that identity processes are socially negotiated during co-participation in cultural practices within a situated context (Holland et al., 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003). Cultural practices have been conceptualized as "figured worlds" with their own set of norms, expectations and ideas that offer individuals different resources and constraints for taking on certain kinds of identities (Holland et al.,1998; Nasir & Kirshner, 2003). I focus on the ways youth negotiated identities in relation to how they were positioned by the historical norms of each institution and the goals of the educators in each site.

In addition, I use Wenger's (1998) concept of identity trajectories that theorizes identity as a multi-layered process of becoming that is negotiated across time and space. Individuals make sense of who they are within the context of their histories, the dynamics of the practices they engage in and the futures that they imagine for themselves (Wenger, 1998). As such, identities include both a procedural component and a cognitive or self-making element (Holland et al., 1998; Urietta, 2007). I draw upon Nasir & Hand's (2008) articulation of this procedural component of identity as a "practice-linked" identity, or "the sense that there is a connection between self and the activity" (Nasir & Hand, 2008 p. 147). These practice-linked identities are the "identities that people come to take on, construct, and embrace that are linked to participation in particular social and cultural practices" (p. 147). The cognitive element of identity speaks to the process of individuals wrestling with who they are and who they want to become, which I refer to as aspirational identities in this paper.

Theories of Critical Civic Development

Existing theories of the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 2000) and sociopolitical development offer insights into the relationships between a social critique, motivation for justice, civic action, and agency. Freire (2000) argues that critical consciousness develops through praxis, or a cycle of critical reflection and civic action. He proposes that consciousness mediates action and critical consciousness will promote transformative civic action. He articulates three stages of consciousness (magical, naïve, and critical), each marked by a particular lens for understanding inequality, and the presence of action or no action to address it. Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) build on Freire's work to broaden and describe the range of stages for the development of critical consciousness, or what they call sociopolitical development. Their work accounts for more gradations, particularly between Freire's Naïve and Critical stages, to better capture the process of consciousness development. In addition, Watts et al. (2003) point out that consciousness may drive a motivation to act on injustice but a sense of agency or empowerment is necessary for sustained action. While these theorists provide important understandings into the relationships between consciousness, action and empowerment, research from a situated perspective offers more nuanced insights into how individuals take on identity trajectories within various settings. As my data suggest, identity processes are not as linear over time as the stage models suggest, nor are these processes global across contexts.

Research on Critical Civic Identities in Schools & Community-organizing

Few in-school or out-of-school learning spaces offer youth opportunities to take on critical civic identities because they rarely engage with issues of injustice (Levine & Lopez, 2004; Sherrod, 2006) or position youth as valuable contributors to important civic action (Kirshner, 2015). In particular, schools for low-income students of color too often resemble factories and operate with a hidden curriculum of preparing working class youth to be compliant workers in low-skilled jobs (Spring, 2001).

However, educational spaces that engage youth with critical content and civic action have reported shifts in student critical civic identities. For instance, teaching civics from a social justice perspective is most effective at fostering dispositions to seek out the root causes of social injustices and a motivation to address them (Westheimer, 2015). Employing critical pedagogy and sociocultural learning theory, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) implemented several successful school and community-based projects with urban students that underscored the importance of providing youth with opportunities to co-participate in critical civic practices with more experienced adult educators. Morrell's research (2004) highlights how long-term participation in a critical classroom and summer critical research program led youth to take on critical civic identities as creators of knowledge and individuals with agency.

In out-of-school spaces, youth organizing groups are potentially powerful spaces for cultivating critical civic identities because they tend to position youth as authentic collaborators in critical civic actions (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Kirshner, 2007). The characteristics of youth organizing groups are by no means uniform. However, they are often typified by the collaborative efforts of youth and adults who are actively engaged in projects whose aim is to understand and address issues of concern in their communities (Kirshner, 2008). These organizing groups can provide youth with access to figured worlds where they engage with critical content, expert adult organizers, and socially relevant activities in their communities (Kirshner, 2008). Moreover, youth organizing groups have been more effective at engaging low-income youth of color and promoting critical civic identity development than traditional civic engagement opportunities (Gambone et al., 2004). Strobel, Osberg and McLaughlin (2006) argue that youth identities shifted from "at-risk youth" to "valuable civic actors" through their participation in a youth activism organization. The authors assert the importance of developmental spaces "dedicated to repositioning youth as active agents in their own lives and in their surrounding contexts" (p. 211). They propose that the developmental shifts occurred "when social criticism was connected to active and constructive problem solving" (p. 212).

While there is limited research documenting practice-based examples of critical pedagogical approaches in action, the studies that exist have documented positive outcomes for youth across classroom and youth organizing spaces (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kirshner, 2015; Morrell, 2004). As argued by Freire (2000), when opportunities for social criticism are coupled with efforts to imagine and enact solutions, youth tend to experience an expanded consciousness of social injustices and an increased commitment and agency to address them (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Strobel et al., 2006). Others have also suggested that agency must be coupled with guided opportunities to impact change for young people to develop a sense of power and influence (Evans, 2007) and that youth can develop a sense of collective agency when contributing to the larger efforts of youth organizing groups (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Gambone et al., 2006; Kirshner, 2009). However, limited attention has been given to how institutional characteristics of both schools and youth organizing sites influence the nature of youth participation in civic action and how that positions them to take on critical civic identities.

The work of those applying situated frameworks to understand various learning contexts offers a vital lens for examining identity development across classroom and community-based youth organizing learning spaces. Studies in schools and civic organizations have highlighted how novices are positioned in relationship to the central practices of a community can impact their engagement and identity development within a given domain. The institutional context of a learning space, such as its values, belief systems and the expectations of membership, play a key role in shaping civic identity processes (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003). Flanagan et al., (2011) argue that spaces like schools and community-based organizations serve as "mediating institutions" where youth civic identities are shaped. Moreover, these institutions shape the kinds of civic involvement that youth engage in and the range of identities and actions they consider possible through the practices modeled by those within the institutions they participate in. For instance, Flanagan et al. (2011), argue "meaningful identity options are constrained by what members of a group consider possible for people 'like them'" (p. 98). By influencing values and actions, these mediating institutions shape civic identities and the possible identities that can be adopted. Nasir and Hand's (2008) study of identity development within a high school basketball team and a Mathematics classroom highlights how being positioned to take on integral roles within the basketball team made it more likely for the students to adopt 'practice-linked identities' as basketball players. Similarly, Kirshner (2008), showed that different ways of prioritizing youth development and campaign goals led to unique ways of positioning youth participation in the practices in three youth activist organizations. In turn, youth positioning with respect to the "experts" in the organizations afforded distinct youth developmental outcomes.

While we have important initial insights into identity development within school-based spaces (Nasir & Hand, 2008), international civic institutions (Flanagan et al., 2011), and across youth community-organizing sites (Kirshner, 2008), these studies do not specifically examine critical civic identity development across classroom and youth community-organizing spaces. This paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of the conditions that support youth in taking on critical civic identities within and across school and community-based learning sites.

Methods

Through two case studies, employing qualitative methods, this study documented and analyzed the structural characteristics, cultural practices and identity processes within two learning sites. Specifically, I look at how the positioning of youth within these "figured worlds" shapes their identity trajectories, which consist of identity processes connected with cultural practices (practice-linked identity) and their cognitive self-making of their identities and who they want to become (aspirational identity). Given my interest in *how* structural and interpersonal characteristics of learning sites interact with identity development, a qualitative methodology was best suited for this study (Merriam, 1998). I chose a case study approach because it is well suited to examine in-depth, a case within its "real-life" context" (Yin, 2006, p. 111). As is customary to qualitative research, the limited number of sites and participants will prevent any broad generalizations to larger contexts (Merriam, 1998). However, this approach is ideal for providing insights into processes within particular contexts that cannot be obtained through quantitative approaches. By using a situated lens to examine a community-based youth organizing group and a high school social studies classroom, two structurally diverse locations, this research highlights how different learning settings influence identity processes (Yin, 2006). In particular, it provided a way to explore identity processes across contexts and highlight how characteristics in institutional structures position young people to take on different identity trajectories.

As the main instrument in a qualitative and critical study, the researcher's paradigm or epistemology influences the way that social and cultural life is documented and interpreted (Carspecken, 1996). As a researcher and educator, I bring a critical perspective that situates human cultural practices within a structure that has historically marginalized individuals based on race, class, gender and sexuality. While I situate knowledge and experience within this power structure, I also recognize that postmodern insights, which question the existence of a standard "truth" are important (Carspecken, 1996).

As both a participant and a researcher in each site, I had to manage the demands of contributing to the spaces while also collecting data. Over the course of fifteen months, I interviewed youth and educators in each site while also participating in the practices of the organizing group and the two social studies classrooms of the focal teacher. As a participant, I served as a resource to each site, making myself available to meet the needs of the organization and classroom, rather than operating as a driver of the culture and practices of the space. Nevertheless, my participation, presence and relationships with students undoubtedly had an impact on each environment (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999), particularly in the youth organizing space where I was a more active participant. While traditional research perspectives might argue this undermines "objectivity," critical research places a premium on the researcher's proximity and trustworthiness to the participants in evaluating the merits of a study (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Morrell, 2006). For instance, this closeness led to the establishment of trust that made it more likely for youth participants to share their experiences and perspectives with me. Conversely, the structure of the school space allowed for fewer interactions with the student participants, which positioned me more as an "objective" observer, but with a different level of access and trust with students.

The data presented in this paper come largely from the seventy-one interviews I conducted, as well as the observational and artifact data that I collected and analyzed. Collectively, these data informed my conclusions around the local site characteristics and global structural features that influenced critical civic identity development for the youth in the study.

Selection of Participants

Youth

The participants in both sites were primarily low-income Latinx youth (ages 14-18) from the same urban community in southern California. I identified a focal group of students in an attempt to document patterns of engagement and change over time amongst particular youth. However, I also collected snapshot and focus group interviews with other participants in the site to provide additional information on each space. In the youth organizing group, I selected six youth who were just beginning to participate in the leadership component of the group (less than three months) and six youth who had been in the leadership of the organization for a year or more. In the classroom site, I selected six students from the social studies teacher's 10th grade World History class and six students from his 12th grade Government & Economics class. The youth organizing focal group consisted of nine females and three males, while the classroom group had six males and six females. I did not provide students with any monetary incentives to participate.

The Youth Organizing Group

Two main factors influenced the purposeful selection of United For Justice (UFJ)[1] as the youth activism site for this study: 1) the organization's reputation as an effective youth organizing group and 2) my previous experience volunteering with them as part of an initial pilot study. UFJ worked with youth and families from an urban community in southern California to fight for educational justice. The organization had successfully tackled many issues, including campaigning to build new schools in the community, championing equitable funding, and fighting to establish graduation requirements that would ensure all students eligibility to California's four-year colleges. The staff and organization were committed to addressing community issues and fostering youth and adult capacity to address these issues. UFJ sponsored youth clubs at four of the local high schools, as well as junior high school clubs and a parent organization.

Social Studies Classroom

Several factors went into the purposeful selection of the classroom under study. The choice of social studies was appropriate because it is a subject that typically includes a civics component and provides opportunities for students to examine and critique social conditions and their origins. It was also essential that the teacher express a commitment to promoting critical and civic engagement for all students because of the desire to compare sites where educators had similar youth development goals. A teacher with a prior relationship to UFJ was ideal because that allowed for exploring possible connections between the two sites (i.e. mutual students and campaigns). The selected teacher, Saul Sanchez, was recommended by two adult organizers within UFJ as an ideal candidate for the study because of his reputation as a critical educator and his collaboration with UFJ as a teacher sponsor of one of the four high school clubs.

Interviews & Field Notes

Through the two case studies, I conducted seventy-one interviews with forty-four students and eight educators. I used semi-structured interviews with the 24 focal youth to obtain their perspectives on their participation in each learning site and the site's impact on their attitudes towards schooling, civic participation, and motivation for social justice. I interviewed the focal participants at least twice, once in the middle of the study and once at the end. The interviews with UFJ youth (on average sixty-five minutes) were longer than those with classroom students (initial interviews averaged forty-two minutes and follow up interviews averaged eighteen minutes). I used interviews with adult educators (one to two hours long) to obtain their perspectives on their practice and the educational site's impact on youth academic, critical, and civic development. In order to provide a deeper understanding of each site, I conducted additional snapshot and focus group interviews with students outside of the focal group: three with ten sophomores and three with twelve seniors.

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1. All names of organizations and individuals are pseudonyms.

Participant observations took place one to two times weekly at each learning site over the course of fifteen months. Traditional observation took place when the adult organizers and classroom teachers were facilitating meetings and lessons for the youth participants. However, when engaging in a meeting or working with students in a classroom, the activity took precedence over notes until a moment arrived when note taking did not disrupt the activity.

Data Analysis

As appropriate for qualitative case study research, data analysis occurred during and after the completion of this study (Yin, 2006). Following each visit to the learning site, I typed up field notes and documented my own observer commentaries. When I conducted audiotaped interviews, I catalogued, transcribed, and made notes. Periodically, I wrote analytic memos to summarize and inform the direction of my observations to answer my study questions and begin identifying codes and analyzing the data. Once I collected the data in full, I began using a text-based data management system to organize and code the qualitative data to facilitate the comparison and the development of associations in the data at the factor and sub-factor level (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). After reading through my data, I developed grounded codes and used them to identify patterns and associations between characteristics of each learning site, student engagement, and critical civic development. The generation of codes emerged from the data and was informed by my theoretical framework.

Findings

Participants took on aspects of critical civic identities across both sites, such as the cultivation of a critical consciousness and motivation for social justice. In the classroom and organizing sites, exposure to critical content and dialogue fostered students' development of a critical consciousness and a motivation to address social injustices. However, participation in the community-organizing group (UFJ) was also marked by more robust shifts in feelings of civic agency and the inclination to take action to address injustices. I argue that the goals and member expectations of each space positioned youth to take on these possible identity trajectories. In the figured world of the classroom, the goals and modeling of the teacher positioned students as critical thinkers in development and future civic participants in preparation. This afforded the development of practice-linked identities as critical thinkers and aspirational identities as critical civic activists. In the figured world of community-organizing, goals and practices positioned students to adopt practice-linked identities as critical civic activists and aspirational identities as critical civic leaders. In particular, positioning youth as valuable contributors to important critical civic action provided opportunities for developing a sense of agency and a practice-linked identity as a critical civic activist.

Classroom Practice-Linked Critical Thinkers: "We Become Little Hims"

In challenging schooling's historical goal of promoting the status quo and perpetuating hegemonic ideals of meritocracy, the teacher positioned students to take on practice-linked identities as individuals who critiqued injustice. In particular, Mr. Sanchez made these practice-linked identities available in the classroom by engaging with youth in critical content and dialogues from a social justice perspective. As institutions, schools have long functioned as a means to promote patriotism and maintain the status quo by privileging content that perpetuates hegemonic ideals (Spring, 2001, Westheimer, 2015). Mr. Sanchez shared that he experienced push back from colleagues for his social justice approach to teaching, but persisted because he saw it as crucial to progress: "I say, 'this is my bias, here it is,' and I'm gonna try to push it with my students because I think that our community's improvement depends on being able to see the world from this point of view." In addition to providing students with access to content that addressed injustices, Mr. Sanchez modeled ways of engaging with it. One of his primary goals as an educator was developing students' capacities to be "critical consumers of information." By helping students "develop critical filters", he hoped to promote the tendency to look for root causes and explanations of social injustices. For instance, he was intentional about providing information and questions that encouraged his students to develop an inclination to question, a key component of critical dialogues.

The following excerpt highlights how engaging students in critical dialogues positioned them to take on practice-linked identities as critical thinkers. In a focus group interview, five seniors were discussing an assignment around the documentary *Food Inc.*, which takes a critical look at the ways corporations exploit workers, deplete the environment, and put consumers at risk in order to make profits. One of the film's segments presented the story of a young child, Kevin, who died from eating a hamburger contaminated with E. Coli. The students were asked to write a page-long response to explain who was responsible for Kevin's death. The students talked about how they were adopting the kind of critical analysis that Mr. Sanchez modeled in his teaching. The excerpt begins with Sabrina asserting that they were becoming "little hims," indicating that they were assuming the identity of a critical thinker, like Mr. Sanchez. Then the students discussed how they would answer the question, exploring multiple perspectives. First they stated the immediate cause of the child's death and then sought out root causes, like Mr. Sanchez encouraged them to do.

> Rafael: It's like, "he died because he ate the hamburger."
> Sabrina: and "that hamburger was eaten by the boy and it's the farmer's fault."
> Rafael: But then, "it's not the farmer's fault because they are sort of forced to raise the animal in that way."
> Sabrina: It's a chain reaction.
> Ernie: Because there's laws, and you blame the government.
> Rafael: Not really the government, it's the companies.

Then multiple students reiterate that they feel like they are becoming more like their teacher, indicating an identity trajectory as a critical thinker and problem poser. Sabrina: "Yeah, we're little Sanchezes." Yolanda: "Little Sanchezes." Ernie: "Sanchezes." Finally, Rafael concluded the discussion by connecting corporate greed to the exploitation of farmers and nature. This discussion provides an example of how the classroom space, through the teacher's modeling of critique, provided a model for interrogating injustice. As the students participated in the practices of the site, they took on the identity of someone who examines social issues with a critical lens. In addition, several students reported that they applied this critical lens outside of the classroom by sharing critical perspectives with friends and family or through the way they now interpreted information in the media. The practice of critique was becoming part of who they were and what they did, or a practice-linked identity (Nasir & Hand, 2008).

Positioning Youth for Aspirational Identities in the Classroom

In multiple ways, the classroom world challenged the development of practice-linked civic identities and positioned students as citizens-in-the-making. Mr. Sanchez’s goals and discourse made aspirational critical civic identities available, but the institutional expectation of schooling as a place for acquiring knowledge and preparing youth for the future challenged these identities from forming in practice.

Teacher Goals Position Youth for Future Civic Participation

The discourse of Mr. Sanchez’s goals around civic engagement positioned youth as aspiring critical civic participants. For instance, he encouraged youth to have a commitment to improving conditions in their communities by telling students they “have to pay it forward.” Many of his seniors indicated being aware of Mr. Sanchez’s goal. Marc said, “He wants us to be those students that are out there, the leaders of *tomorrow*.” And Diana shared, “he’s one of the teachers that gets you thinking, ‘what can you do to change the *future*’” [emphases added]. Sabrina added, “He tells us that we’re the ones, that *we’re the ones* that have to solve the problems.” Rafael recounted how learning about social injustices “outraged” him and drove him to ask Mr. Sanchez for his opinion on addressing these issues. Mr. Sanchez’s answer underscores his belief that education and consciousness are keys to social justice. Rafael shared:

> We’ll be outraged by things we learn and we’ll be like, “what can we do?” And he’ll just tell us, “like education, keep going in school, and you’ll learn so much more and then you’ll know what to do.” So basically, just go to college and that’s all, “well, you’ll figure out what you need to do to improve society or this country.”

Fostering this motivation to seek knowledge through education and to be change agents illustrates how the classroom goals and discourse around it positioned youth to take on aspirational identities as critical civic activists. For instance, Rafael noted that watching the documentary, “Capitalism: A love story” and talking about it in Mr. Sanchez’s class made him aspire to start up a cooperative business one day to address the exploitation of workers. The combination of exposure to critical content and Mr. Sanchez explicitly making future identities available to students through his discourse influenced who they wanted to become in the future (aspirational identity) but not their present practice-linked identity.

Civic Action as a Means for Individual Preparation for the Future

The expectations of the figured world of school influenced how students approached civic action through their classroom and presented challenges to using it as a means to promote practice-linked identities as critical civic activists. The complimentary goals of schooling as a site for future preparation and for sorting students through evaluation served as barriers to framing the classroom as a space where individuals participate in civic action and ultimately see this as part of their identity. For instance, the outcomes of the senior year Civic Action Project (CAP) highlighted how the purpose of schooling was seen as a means to develop the student for the future rather than a space for addressing present social injustices in communities. The CAP encouraged students to address a community issue actively by devising a policy reform and then seeking to implement it. When asked about the project, Mercedes indicated that the CAP helped her build civic knowledge: "Just like going out and doing research and being more independent, like looking for laws and things that affect the way the community looks like." Ernie said the project "made us aware of the issues in our community and we came up with solutions, well *possible* solutions." Ernie's distinction that they came up with "possible" solutions highlights that the projects were more theoretical than action oriented. In fact, Mercedes pointed out, "I think we did more learning than action." While this project did help to build students' knowledge of community concerns, it did not lead them to take action to address these issues. Moreover, the interviewed seniors admitted to discontinuing their Civic Action Projects once they received grades even though the projects had not yet been implemented. This suggests that they did not see the project and the classroom as spaces where action and community change were central expectations of membership. Instead, the grade and the evaluative purpose of schooling was their central motivator for participation in the project.

Classroom Consciousness, Action and Civic Agency

In the classroom, exposure to critical content was associated with students' increased awareness of current injustice, but few opportunities to engage in important civic action limited students' opportunities to adopt identities as individuals with the agency to address these social injustices. Within the context of a discussion on unions and capitalist worker exploitation, Filiberto admitted "I was so ignorant, in the work area, like about how much power you can have." He further confessed, "and it makes me think what else I am ignorant about? Like the school system, I don't know my rights. I would want to know." His quote suggests that participation in Mr. Sanchez's class fostered his awareness of injustice and it drove him to "want" to know more, but not necessarily to participate in civic action. Similarly, Sabrina shared, "when we talked about the exploitation [of domestic and international workers]. It gets me mad." She asserted, "I want to do something about it" but she exasperatedly stated, "[we are not] able to do nothing." Sabrina's motivation for justice was not tied to action through school, so it remained more theoretical than applied. The absence of opportunities to address issues of injustice through this classroom limited possibilities for supporting student agency to believe that they could do something about oppression.

The lack of experience in critical civic action coupled with the lack of support for those endeavors was associated with lower feelings of civic agency amongst the students in the classroom (as compared to students in the community-organizing group). The following quotes are responses to the question: "Do you feel you can make a change in your community?" The classroom students' answers were characterized by feelings of fear ("why are we so afraid of saying, 'oh, let's do something about it,'" Filiberto), powerlessness ("I don't think they would listen to me, a teenager telling them what to do," Valerie) and being unprepared ("I wouldn't know how to deal with it," Luci). In addition, the classroom students' motivation for civic action tended to be more theoretical, and not coupled with concrete critical civic action or feelings of civic agency. For instance, Luci said she "would want to" make a change in her community and Filiberto admitted, "[we] are inspired," but "we never do anything."

Exposure to critical content and observing critical dialogues can influence a young person to take on a practice-linked identity as a critical thinker and motivate them to want to become someone who acts against injustice, but access to a fuller range of practices may be needed for students to adopt critical civic activist identities. The classroom offered few opportunities for students to take on practice-linked identities as critical civic participants, but it did position some to take on aspirational critical civic identities. While lacking an active engagement with addressing social injustices, students articulated an aspiration to do so in the future. Having a future expectation for agency should be considered a nascent stage of becoming a critical civic activist that would likely be activated if afforded opportunities to participate in civic action and positioned as critical civic activists in the present. This highlights a nuance under theorized in previous explanations of critical civic development that tend to focus on binary categories of critique and social action that imply little middle ground and overlooking incremental markers of development such as aspirations to address injustice (Freire, 2000, Watts et al., 2003).

UFJ: Youth as Agents of Change Today and Tomorrow

In contrast to the figured world of the classroom, UFJ goals and member expectations positioned youth to take on practice-linked identities as agents of change in the present and aspirational identities as critical civic leaders as part of a cycle of leadership. Ruben, an adult organizer, wanted youth to address injustice proactively whenever they saw it, work for the collective good, and begin to see themselves as leaders in the community: "I want people to be well organized and take initiative on their own when they see injustice and not wait for someone else to tell them to do something…for students to become, feel like they're leaders and organizers and influential." By using words like "become" and "feel like," Ruben conveyed his desire for students to take on particular identities as part of their participation in UFJ. In the organization, the purpose of civic action was to address injustice and not necessarily to promote learning or serve as a tool for evaluation, as in the classroom. In regards to critical civic action, addressing injustice was merely what people in this figured world were expected to do. When I asked Elvira what was expected of students like her in UFJ, her response echoed Ruben's goals for students.

> I think their expectations are for us to turn us into leaders and then be able to turn others into leaders. I think our job is definitely to come back. Maybe not the same community, but go back to a community that is struggling like ours is.

Elvira's comments indicate that she internalized UFJ's emphasis on a cycle of leadership wherein youth become agents of change and help others become leaders for the improvement of marginalized communities everywhere (Moya, 2012). From these comments, we see that UFJ goals positioned youth to take on practice-linked identities as proactive leaders in their communities in the present *and* in the future. In UFJ, membership was expected to evolve into leadership.

The organizational structure of UFJ offered identity-shaping opportunities for youth to take on roles voluntarily within the group and the values associated with it. First of all, youth *chose* to be in UFJ, whereas school is compulsory. Moreover, the material reality of low-income Latinx youth too often means that they are compelled to go to under resourced schools that are inclined to see them from deficit perspectives (Valenzuela, 1999). As Mr. Sanchez noted, attending a school like this can lead students to resist identifying with the figured world of schooling. Alternatively, choosing membership in a group can be an important identity shaping opportunity for adolescents, setting them up to take on the values and practices within the space (Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997). The initial choice to join UFJ often was not because of a strong sense of purpose and agreement in the mission, but youth were continuously making the choice to remain in the group. For instance, Cristina initially attended her first UFJ meeting because she wanted to add an extracurricular activity to her college applications. After joining the leadership group, she asserted that she took on the shared purpose of the organization and would continue coming even if it did not improve her resume for college. She said, "If they were to tell me, 'you're not getting college credit.' Or not credit, just it won't look good, I'll be, 'okay, that's fine, I'll still be here. I'll still come.'" For Cristina, the purpose of contributing to social change became more important to her than an external future reward; it was now a part of who she was becoming and a part of her practice-linked identity. When I asked her what her role in UFJ was, she said, "like any other student. Come, learn, and then make change." As an organization, UFJ positioned individuals as powerful change agents. The fact that Christina chose to stay in that space made it an even more meaningful identity shaping experience for her.

UFJ Trajectories of Civic Leadership: "I Want to be a Leader Like Her"

Through integral participation in a community of critical civic leaders the focal youth in UFJ were motivated to take on the identity of the experts in the learning space. As Wenger (1998) argues, the expert participants within a learning space provide models for possible identity trajectories within the practice. For instance, the UFJ educators modeled civic leadership, which encouraged youth to take on identities as civic leaders. Maria (student) talked about a time when she was listening in on a conference call with a national organizing group that Elvira (student) participated in with Ruben (adult organizer). Maria shared how Ruben's behavior in the conference call modeled exceptional leadership by taking on the responsibility to inform the public about an initiative.

> Ruben was saying things and they were asking him if he could spread the word around California and he said, "of course, that's what I'm here for." And that's part of being a leader. What kind of leader would he be if he said, "oh, I'm sorry, I can't." That's not part of being a leader.

Several students talked about being inspired by the example that the adult organizers set. For Arlene, she was awed by the important contribution of the organizers but she also felt that she could do the same. She said, "They inspire me. Sometimes, I see them doing all this stuff. 'Whoa, if they're doing it, why can't I?'" Cristina envisioned the role of organizers as consciousness raisers in the community to make the world a better place. She said, "They just shake it up, be like 'hey, you know, come to your senses. This is happening, you can't just sit there.' They just want a better community, a better world, where everybody has a good education." Cristina pinpointed one of the organizers, Sara, as a leader whom she wanted to emulate, "you see her and you're like, 'I want to be like her. I want to be a leader like her.'"

In addition to being models of civic leadership, UFJ educators also provided youth with opportunities to engage in civic action that positioned students as leaders-in-the-making. A considerable amount of the action in organizing was around consciousness-raising. In UFJ, educators both modeled the practice of informing others and provided opportunities for youth to do the same, reflecting the youths' positioning as valued contributors to that figured world. David felt that the role of the adult organizers was to provide the students with information about community issues and campaigns so that they could pass on the information to their peers at school: "The role of the organizers would be, in my opinion, to teach us, to help us understand what they are talking about. And then to allow us to try and do our best to pass that on as well." While this could be considered a hierarchical relationship, the students did not perceive themselves as having a less important role in the group. Vero felt that everyone in UFJ was a leader, contributing his or her part in the organization:

> I think all of us [are leaders]. They [the organizers] had to get it from somewhere too; they had to get the information from someone. So, we're like them. Because they got it from someone, we got it from them, and then we all become leaders.

From the quote, one can see that Vero feels like she is becoming a leader, like the adult organizers in UFJ. By participating in the cycle of leadership, learning from organizers, and then passing the knowledge on to others, Vero and other UFJ focal youth were provided opportunities to take on practice-linked identities as aspiring community leaders through their participation in the organization.

UFJ Consciousness, Action and Civic Agency

Youth in UFJ articulated how the critical content they learned in that space prepared and motivated them to participate in civic action and begin to see the world and themselves from a critical perspective. For instance, Maria and Vero shared how learning about unjust social conditions made them want to do something about them. When learning about budget cuts to education and UFJ's efforts to stop them, Maria remembered thinking, "if this is going on, then we have to fight for it." Then she immediately reflected, "it's just really powerful how we could do all that stuff," demonstrating how Maria saw herself as someone who acted on injustice and had the power and agency to contribute to important civic actions. Reflecting on a discussion around the unjust treatment of undocumented students in the U.S., Vero shared that participation in UFJ changed the way she thought about the world. She said, "Like that's what UFJ does, to my brain (laughs). Not go with the norm, cause if you go with the norm, you're not going to make a change." This willingness to go against the norm to make a change highlights her critical consciousness, motivation for social justice and inclination to take action. It also points to her shift in identity within the figured world of youth organizing. As people produce identities in figured worlds, they reorganize their subjectivities and begin to see themselves and the world in new ways (Holland et al; 1998; Urrieta, 2007)

In contrast to students from the classroom space, youth in the community organization felt a stronger sense of civic agency, which was associated with direct participation in critical civic action within the figured world of community organizing. When asked if she could make a change in her community, Vero's response indicated that her strong sense of civic agency was tied to collective efforts to address injustice: "Yes, but everything has to be done with the whole entire community, 'cause everybody has to come together [to] organize and prepare and all that stuff." Other youth also talked about the importance of opportunities to participate in relevant civic action as vital to their feelings of civic agency. Maria and Elvira, both very shy students upon entering UFJ, talked about how authentic participation in important campaigns helped them develop a sense of power and agency. Like Valerie (the classroom sophomore quoted above with a low sense of agency), Maria initially felt intimidated and powerless as a young person trying to address issues in her community. The first time she presented to the school board she "had never talked to people with that type of power." She shared her thoughts before the presentation, "it's going to be so intimidating, a tenth grader going up there and telling them, this is how I feel." However, after speaking to the board, she realized "it's not that bad. Once you actually do it, it's like, 'okay, well you can do it again,'" and she was no longer afraid to engage in these high-profile civic tasks, suggesting a shift in civic identity. Elvira also reflected on how contributing to important campaigns gave her a sense of agency: "So, it's like, being involved and being able to just influence decisions at the school board level made me realize, 'yeah, I could go to [college] and make a difference in the national level.'" Her experiences through UFJ made her realize she had the agency to contribute to campaigns addressing larger national issues. These quotes suggest that support from a community of activists and the opportunity to take on practice-linked identities as contributors in important civic campaigns were key components of developing a critical civic identity marked by a critical consciousness, motivation for social justice, and feelings of agency to impact one's community.

Conclusion

Comparing these two cases highlights how, and under what conditions, individuals take up the identities available to them within figured worlds. The goals and expectations of a figured world shape the range of identities available within it. Positioning youth as integral participants in the key practices of a site mediates whether individuals assume those identities. These findings build on the civic identity theorizing of Flanagan et al. (2011) by showing how the goals and membership expectations of schools and youth organizing groups influence the types of identities available to young people within each space. For instance, UFJ youth were positioned as emerging critical civic leaders, which led youth to take on practice-linked identities as critical civic activists in the present. In the classroom, the goals of the space positioned youth to adopt practice-linked identities as critical thinkers and aspirational identities as future agents of change.

While this study confirms previous research underscoring the importance of coupling opportunities for critique and civic action to foster critical civic identities marked by a robust sense of agency (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Evans, 2007), I also argue that the goals of figured worlds mediate how opportunities for civic action influence these identity processes. I found that amongst two similar groups of low-income Latinx students, exposure to critical content and dialogue fostered a critical consciousness and generated a motivation for action across the sites. Moreover, my investigation of the two sites from a situated perspective allowed me to document how institutional level factors influenced access and engagement with civic action across contexts. For instance, the traditional goal of schooling as a place for preparing future adults rather than a place for youth to contribute to their communities limited identity-shaping opportunities for civic action. Even when class assignments directed students to take action in their communities, students experienced schoolwork as preparation for future roles rather than an opportunity to impact their communities in the present. This positioning made it much less likely for students to develop a practice-linked identity as a critical civic activist and the sense of civic agency that was associated with it. Similarly, UFJ practices also suggest that fostering a critical civic identity requires more than just offering opportunities for civic action. Namely, youth were more likely to participate in those opportunities because UFJ organizers expected them to *be* leaders. Thus, the expectation that participation would evolve into leadership in UFJ likely mediated students' adoption of practice-linked identities as critical civic activists.

Through my use of a situated lens, I highlight some important insights into processes of critical civic identity development across learning contexts and over time. First, it suggests that critical civic identity processes are more complex than most stage-focused models have documented, with present procedural aspects as well as cognitive or aspirational elements. For instance, it is important to consider both how students see themselves in the present and their aspirations for the future when studying how learning spaces influence critical civic identities processes. Spaces like Mr. Sanchez's classes, which lead youth to aspire to critical civic identities are likely crucial catalysts for adopting these subjectivities in the future when provided with opportunities for critical civic action. Follow-up studies with students who have articulated these aspirational identities can explore how and if these identities ever develop into practice-based identities. Additional comparative studies across school and organizing spaces with the same students could yield important insights into how youth take on or perform different identities across spaces. In addition, comparing critical classrooms with different goals for civic action could provide greater clarity into the role of the educators' goals versus schooling expectations in mediating the influences of civic action through the classroom.

This study highlights some important implications for educators across spaces. While classroom levels of civic agency were lower, this study shows that despite all of the challenges to critical civic identity development within marginalized schooling spaces, a teacher committed to engaging youth around problem posing and critical content *can* promote critical awareness and foster aspirations to participate in future critical civic actions. In fact, many of the students who participated in UFJ had experienced at least one teacher who exposed them to critical content and encouraged them to be civically involved. Given that nearly all youth participate in schooling, it is also necessary to understand how educators, administrators, and policy makers can support critical civic development in classrooms. These experiences have been offered through schools before and have been essential to critical civic development in schools (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Westheimer, 2015). Moreover, this study shows how educator goals position youth to develop particular relationships to civic action. To be most effective, educators will need to consider ways to integrate civic action into their learning spaces in ways that position youth as important contributors to their community and not just citizens-in-waiting or students to be evaluated. For educators in youth organizing, they should consider adopting discourse and practices that promote the idea of a cycle of leadership amongst their members.

Learning spaces that promote critical civic identity development have been found to foster greater civic engagement, future commitment to activism, as well as academic engagement amongst youth (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister, 2008) and particularly youth of color (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). For Latinx youth, who are more likely to experience inferior civic and academic opportunities, learning sites dedicated to fostering critical civic identities can help to empower them to disrupt these oppressive inequalities.

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Jesse Moya is an Assistant Professor in the Education Department at Siena College. He received his Ph.D. in Urban Schooling at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research focuses on learning environments that promote critical and civic identity development across educational contexts.

Listening and Learning from Rangatahi Māori: the Voices of Māori Youth

Mere Berryman, Elizabeth Eley & David Copeland, University of Waikato

Abstract

This paper presents three stories-over-time of the secondary schooling experiences of New Zealand's rangatahi Māori–or Māori youth. The stories span fifteen years of New Zealand schooling and are told from three perspectives: the experiences of the students as told in their own words; the voices of youth within the prevailing political contexts of government policy; and, the reframing and repositioning of researchers listening to the experiences of rangatahi Māori who believe they have succeeded as Māori. In reality, the stories are interwoven, however, in an effort to make sense of the various methodological dilemmas, risks, and entanglements across the three points of learning, we have endeavored to disentangle these different threads from the whole and follow these independent of each other. We then weave these threads together again, as we sense-make across this complexity to identify implications for other educators, policy makers and researchers.

Keywords: *student self-determination; equity excellence and belonging; relationships; culturally responsive pedagogy; policy*

Introduction

New Zealand's indigenous Māori people comprise 15 percent of the population—with 26 percent under the age of 15. Although this represents a significant decrease from a 100 percent of the population only 200 years ago, this proportion is significant enough to remain constantly at the forefront of New Zealand's national consciousness. Sadly, this is more often for negative reasons or connotations because, as Western dominance has taken hold, the over-representation of Māori in almost all of our nation's negative statistics has come to define one of our major national challenges (see the Department of Statistics NZ website, 2017). For example, Māori comprise 51 percent of New Zealand's male prison population and 58 percent of the female prison population. The unemployment rate for Māori is 15 percent compared to 4 percent for European New Zealand. In 2015, 10.6 percent of Māori students left school with 'little or no formal qualifications' compared to 3.7 percent of European New Zealand students (Ministry of Education, 2016).

This has resulted in many measures, some well-intentioned and others not, to "fix the Māori problem." The resulting deficit theorizing and pathologizing practices, especially through the education system, has had a disastrous impact on New Zealand's rangatahi Māori. As New Zealand schools attempt to "fix" the problem of Māori under-achievement, Māori cultural identity and selfefficacy have been eroded. For many rangatahi Māori, the vision of equitable and excellent outcomes for all within our education system turns out to be a hollow promise. The gap in achievement results between Māori and non-Māori students has persisted across generations of learners. At the same time, there is a strong voice from Māori communities calling for *rangatiratanga*—Māori self-determination and self-leadership (see, for example, Durie, 1998). The prevalence of this discourse also holds out the expectation that these threads of change in our society will also be woven within our schools. However, as in many other countries where a majority culture wields the political power, the voices of our Māori students tell us that many experience an institutional resistance from within and across their schools, through the reproduction of racist values and paradigms within the school curriculum and the political and social life of the school (see hooks, 1994).

This paper asks what the voices of Māori youth can teach us about responding more effectively to the challenges of disparity in education, and the place of policy and research in contributing to this reform. This paper draws from fifteen years of research, involving the participation and achievement of Māori youth in response to their educators reforming classrooms and schools in more relational and culturally responsive ways (Berryman & Eley, 2017; Bishop, Berryman & Wearmouth, 2014). Over this time, extended in-depth interviews, using kaupapa Māori and culturally responsive research methodologies (Berryman, SooHoo & Nevin, 2013), were undertaken with these young people. A reanalysis of these interviews and the contexts in which they were gathered, identified three parallel contexts for change.

We present the information as three individual stories-over-time: the students' views on education as told in their own words; young people contributing to the changing education policy contexts; and our experiences and repositioning as researchers attempting to create more culturally responsive contexts for students theorizing. We conclude by weaving these threads together again to present the current status—including the celebration of progress made, the simultaneous frustration with progress not made and the hope that springs from trusting the future to the inspiring and determined rangatahi who have not given up on us.

The New Zealand Context

As a country, the prevailing rhetoric across New Zealand is that of equity, equality and equal opportunities. As a nation, our commitment to social justice is held in high regard. Unfortunately, for many people, particularly Māori, the reality falls far short of the rhetoric. Māori civilization and culture were well established when the land was "discovered" by the British in the late 1700s. A deliberate colonization of the country occurred and, although this was largely peaceful (in comparison to the British colonization of other nations within the 17th and 18th centuries), there were disastrous consequences for Māori (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). A key event in the colonizing of New Zealand was the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi by Māori tribal leaders and British Government representatives, in 1840. This Treaty mandated a partnership relationship and established British governance in return for Māori (tribal) ownership and protection of their land interests and *taonga* (cultural treasures). However, the sovereignty guaranteed to Māori was increasingly ignored, resulting in dire consequences for Māori cultural, social and economic wellbeing, well into the 20th century. As Crown policy, this Treaty continues to shape the bi-cultural relationship between Māori and Pākehā (descendants of the colonists) and influence government policy in contemporary New Zealand society (Tawhai & Gray-Sharp, 2011).

Impacts on the New Zealand Education System

In general, Māori students do not do as well in our education system as other students - they do not remain in schooling as long as other students nor are they achieving as highly (Office of the Auditor-General, 2012; 2013; 2015; 2016a; 2016b). Despite many initiatives to raise Māori student achievement, English-medium schooling continues to return lower achievement rates for Māori than for non-Māori students (Udahemuka, 2016). In 2015, 62% of Māori students left school with NCEA[1] Level 2 or above compared to 83% of European students (Ministry of Education, 2016). A significant contributing factor to this is the "culturally subtractive approach" to education policy that lasted into the 1980s (May, Hill, & Tiakiwai, 2004). The purpose of schooling was seen as assimilating Māori students into Western ways of thinking and succeeding; the retention of the Māori language, culture and values was regarded as a threat inhibiting the process of civilizing or influencing over Māori (Barrington, 2008).

A movement of resistance to colonization by Māori in the 1970s, and at the same time towards revitalizing and reclaiming things Māori through self-determination, has become known as Kaupapa Māori. Smith (1999) contends Kaupapa Māori approaches involve retrieving the space to undertake research that Māori believe will be of value to them and where the traditional (powerful) research communities are open to "the need for greater Māori involvement in research" (p.183). In doing so, Kaupapa Māori research must attend to the legacies of past researcher imposition on Māori by ensuring issues of power are addressed (Bishop, 2011). Therefore, while attention must be paid to the ways in which the colonial education system has continued to underserve Māori youth, this paper begins from a position of decolonization and Māori self-determination by listening to the voices and metaphors of these young people as guides into future policy and research.

The Use of Māori Metaphor

In our paper, we make deliberate use of Māori metaphor and terms. One Māori term for youth or young people, and the term we use, is *rangatahi* Māori. The word *rangatahi* has its roots in the verb *raranga*—the Māori word for weaving. We posit this term as a metaphoric indicator that our young people stand as both the result of the influences, including the impact of significant people in their lives, and their own position and actions of agency and self-determination. We propose that our weaving brings together three key components. As we have constructed this metaphor we have thought of these rangatahi Māori as *ngā whenu* (warp threads), weaving through their engagement with others. Adults (such as educators and researchers) who, through their various spheres have influenced rangatahi Māori in their education journey, we have thought of as *ngā aho* (the weft threads). We use this raranga (weaving) metaphor within an image of the political environment that continues to be dominated from a Western worldview—the policies and practices that are the (often unseen) structures that underpin and interplay in the weaving together (or not) of the contributions from rangatahi Māori and their educators. It is only when these threads can be effectively woven together that a new, unique creation can emerge.

Our research began in 2001, when we (a researcher, a civil servant and a videographer) were working to understand education as a context for equity and excellence. As Māori and non-

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[1] National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the official secondary school qualification in New Zealand.

Māori professionals, we were deeply involved in education, and as parents we believed the education system should be providing the best foundation for our youth and, through them, our country.

Method: Weaving Together Three Stories of Experience

We present three stories that move iteratively from classrooms and schools, to the education system itself and finally to research methodologies. We express this story by building from an Indigenous, decolonizing, kaupapa Māori theoretical framework to kaupapa Māori and critical theoretical perspectives brought together in a new framework, culturally responsive methodologies (Berryman et al. 2013). We use an iterative process of building on learning from one study to the next. Authors have been part of all studies.

Story 1 draws from the schooling experiences of rangatahi Māori. These stories were gathered at three different times: 2001; 2005-2009; and in 2015. The three research events were all undertaken within appropriate ethical procedures. In 2001 and then again from 2005-2009, the perceptions of rangatahi Māori were gathered using Kaupapa Māori methodologies undertaken by experienced and respectful interviewers. All interviews were transcribed and a thematic analysis of the transcripts was undertaken employing a grounded theory approach. While prioritizing confidentiality, there were opportunities for rangatahi and schools to review the analyses and they confirmed that the resulting themes and collaborative stories captured the intent of their messaging. The group-focused, interviews-as-conversations were held on the school grounds, and were to become instrumental in bringing deficit theorizing and discursive repositioning into the education landscape in New Zealand (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). However, while Māori researchers were involved each time, adults with perceived authority led the questions and despite benign intentions, may well have replicated the same power dynamics of the students' schooling experiences.

Story 2, locates students' experiences within a movement towards greater social justice in education, portraying the political climates impacting on minoritised students and families. From an analysis of relevant educational policy and literature, we discuss the macro-climate of government policy changes and how these were derived and have been implemented for Māori. The 'default positions' of schools to align with and to reproduce middle-class, Western values across the schooling system continues to be the challenge. In response, the themes from rangatahi Māori voices reveal their priorities.

Story 3, gathered in 2015, learned from our earlier interview experiences. This research utilized a relational and culturally responsive framework, a merging of both kaupapa Māori and critical methodologies (Berryman et al. 2013). The students, as participants, knew they were the knowledge holders and would be sharing their messages under the mantel of their tribal leaders and *whānau* (families and extended families). Story 3 constitutes the changing researcher positioning that led us to pay careful attention to the cultural contexts in which rangatahi Māori shared their theorizing.

Our conclusion attempts to triangulate our iterative learnings from the three stories. We look at what these young people taught us about the cultural resilience and self-determination they drew on in order to survive and, sometimes, to flourish within the school system. The two-fold role of adults, both Māori and non-Māori, is explored—both in supporting, encouraging and freeing rangatahi Māori within the system; and, in working with leaders and teachers to resist negative practices within schools. We conclude by looking at the possibilities and promise for these young people and for our society as a whole when our youth can lose labels that "minoritize" or "marginalize"; and can stand proud, having succeeded *as Māori*—the vision of the New Zealand Government's Māori Education strategy (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Story 1: The Experiences of Rangatahi Māori within New Zealand Schools

In 2001, principals, teachers, whānau members and Year 9 and 10 Māori students (12 to 15 years) from five secondary school communities were asked what, in their experience, would engage Māori students in learning. Teachers were asked to identify two groups of students; those engaged and those who non-engaged with learning. Both groups spoke in depth about the deficit positioning they endured merely for being Māori. The quotes below are from students interviewed in 2001, and reported in Bishop and Berryman (2006).

> Being Māori. Some teachers are racist. They say bad things about us. We're thick. We smell. Our uniforms are paru [dirty]. They shame us in class. Put us down. Don't even try to say our names properly. Say things about our whānau. They blame us for stealing when things go missing. Just 'cause we are Māori. (p.11)

The major difference between the two groups came in how they determined to respond to the overpowering and deficit discourses being perpetuated by their teachers and non-Māori peers. Engaged Māori students talked about leaving their culture at home in order to succeed at school and this discourse remained in 2005-2009 when cohorts of other students in the same reform initiative were also interviewed:

> Being at a school that has a lot of Pākehā (non-Māori mainly of European descent) teachers, I'm not really putting them down, but it's something that you have to do, you kind of have to leave your Māoritanga (all aspects of being Māori) at the door, because you can't really...they don't understand you as much…it's hard to carry on with your Māoritanga in class.

Non-engaged students in 2001 talked about actively resisting when they felt they had been wrongly treated but being powerless to do anything other than be removed from learning or remove themselves from learning:

> Our art teacher is…like dumb, and she doesn't teach us anything, so the whole class talks, but it is only the Māori that get kicked out. Well she will come over to us and tell us to stop talking, and then we will go, "But the whole class was talking." And she will say, "No, you stop talking." Mr. H kicked us out [the Head of Department], and we tell him that she doesn't teach us and that is the whole class, but he just kicks the Māori out. Yeah, we have been kicked out for the rest of the year. We just sit in these other senior art classes, and we do nothing. (Bishop & Berryman 2006, pp. 18-19)

And also in 2005-2009: "if we don't get along with a teacher our whole class shows it." The analysis from 2001 showed that for both engaged and non-engaged students, school was a negative experience that the researchers described as "overwhelmingly awful, year after year" (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p.255). While giving up their cultural identity resulted in marginalization, many engaged Māori students accepted this as the price to pay for remaining at school and achieving academic qualifications. Those not prepared to compromise their cultural identity went in search of less hostile communities within which they felt they could belong.

Similarly, from 2005-2009, groups of students from 12 different schools reported another poignant message about the moments within their schooling that held promise, albeit set against a background of micro-aggressions (both overt and covert) that challenged their language, identity and culture. They, too, talked of the likelihood of experiencing pedagogy of variable quality across their school: “She rocks, she’s a mean [great] teacher. Need some more like her. Yeah true, it’s dumb just passing in one class and failing in all the others” (2005-2009). When rangatahi Māori believed that teachers were not fulfilling their professional responsibilities, they were likely to reciprocate similarly. Sometimes, they did not attend the classes of these teachers on a regular basis and, when they did, they lacked any real effort. Despite this, a picture of what would engage Māori students with learning was emerging and, over the years, these discourses have been reinforced and strengthened.

Self-determining pedagogy of relations

To engage in learning, groups of students from over the years have told us that educators need to provide a pedagogy that is relational (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Sidorkin, 2002) but from which they could also be self-determining (Young, 2004):

> …you get to know her and she gets to know you and stuff like that and she’ll talk to you and stuff and you feel comfortable around her…she’s not making you feel kind of awkward. Like if there was something wrong she would like warn us and tell us that we’re doing it wrong, but like our other teachers don’t know our class as well and that’s why, I don’t think they tolerate our class much because they don’t know us like how she knows us, but she’s got to know everyone, like she knows everybody in our class, she knows everything. (2005-2009)

Students described positive relationships with teachers as those where they were not talked down to, where power was shared and where teachers were committed to their students’ success.

> You can tell he respects us, because when it comes to learning big time he’s always there, if we don’t understand something he doesn’t talk to us like little babies, he talks to us like young adults. Mrs. D talks to us like we are the same level. And everyone really respects her because of it and like everyone knows she’s the teacher and the boss but she also most of the time she doesn’t make herself feel dominant over the rest of the class but at the same time she is still the teacher. But other teacher’s talk like I am the teacher and you are the student. And they think they are better than us. “You [have to] listen to me, I don’t [have to] listen to you.” (2005-2009)

Relational pedagogy is reinforced when teachers actively reject negative stereotyping and raise students’ own expectations of their abilities to realize their own power in the learning space:

> At the start of the year we were like “we’re dumb, we’re the dumb class, the dumb lot.” She goes “no, no you’re not dumb.” She said from now on we’re not allowed to say that word. We’re bright, she reckons. Yeah, she wants us to strive, to go to the next level. (2005-2009)

In the same way as the 2001 students, the 2005-2009 students were clear about the teachers they could work with and those they chose not to work with. Often this was because they had failed to find a way to get along.

> We need a teacher that we get along with, we don’t learn anything if we don’t get along with the teacher. None of us get along with [Teacher 1] and she just sends us [out of class] and like lots of people go [out of class] every day and don’t learn.
> She makes things so it’s better for us more than for her.
>
> They don't have to do any of this stuff but, yeah, they just do it and I think it’s awesome that they do it, especially towards the Māori students in this school. Yea, it’s really gives us like a sense of whānau in this school.
>
> She wants to be like a good teacher. She doesn’t want to be your friend or that sort of thing. She’s like a friend, but not a friend. He’s firm and lenient and very, very positive, positive thinking, like if you do something wrong he’s always there to back us up. (2005-2009)

Students talked about the teacher’s response to absenteeism as being an indication of an improved relationship.

> Yeah, I have wagged [absented themselves] math. He went to my class and called me over, “why weren’t you at math? Wagging?” You got to tell the truth eh! He cares that we’re in class. That means you’ve got to be straight up with him. (2005-2009)

Students consistently argued relationships as being essential and foundational to their engagement. Bishop, Ladwig and Berryman (2014) were later able to statistically verify their argument.

Culturally responsive pedagogy

Once a relational pedagogy has been established, students wanted a pedagogy within which they can construct new learning from their own prior knowledge and cultural experiences. Rather than marginalize their prior knowledge and experiences, or try to impose a transmission model of learning, rangatahi wanted to bring their own funds of knowledge to their learning (Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2011). In 2001, this was seldom their experience:

> We do a unit on respecting others’ cultures. Some teachers who aren’t Māori try to tell us what Māori do about things like a tangi (cultural rituals of mourning). It’s crap! I’m a Māori. They should ask me about Māori things. I could tell them about why we do things in a certain way. I’ve got the goods on this, but they never ask me. I’m a dumb Māori I suppose. Yet they asked the Asian girl about her culture. They never ask us about ours. (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p.76)

Through all the interviews between 2001 and 2009, rangatahi Māori articulated a collective call for successful engagement in education for them and their peers: “As Māori, you want everyone to be there with you to help you along the way, and to help them along the way. You don’t just want to succeed for yourself, but you’re taking everyone with you” (2005-2009).

By altering the power relationships and pedagogies within classrooms, teachers found that the students' cultural values could enhance cognitive engagement and subsequent achievement.

Reciprocal dialogic pedagogy

Bringing their own experiences to the learning, through active social engagement with others, requires determined opportunities for dialogue to occur throughout the learning. Contexts such as these allowed learners the opportunity to both seek advice and ask questions of other students without fear of embarrassment or reprimand. Thus, all of the expertise in the class was activated instead of relying solely upon the expertise of the teacher.

> Mrs. R changed like everything she could. We're all used to teachers teaching us all together. But what she does is she teaches us to teach other people. She puts us in groups and then we learn this and that and we go on to our group and teach them that and then that group will teach the rest of the group. (2005-2009)

Students increasingly spoke of the power of this more dialogic way of working. In schools this brought about dramatic shifts in both the quality of the education experience for rangatahi and their achievement.

> Last year I was in like the naughty class and yeah, our class was just like naughty, our class didn't do work, we didn't get anywhere, but this year this class is like pretty safe, we do our work, pass our grades, we come together. At the start of the year we were separated but we all came together as a team.
>
> There is like a family bond in here but it's like we're accountable to each other so if we see someone who's not actually being responsible it's like we have the responsibility on ourselves to make them accountable for what they are doing. (2005-2009)

Story 2: Reforming New Zealand's Education System

The experiences of the students recounted above, occurred against a backdrop of historical and political injustices that impacted on the lived experiences of all parties, and underwrote the prevailing discourses across New Zealand society. Most of the learning of our nation's history has come through the curriculum taught within the schools—the same agency and institutions that perpetuated the misinformation and misconceptions about differences between cultures. The positioning of Western (White) culture and values as superior to the 'native' (Brown) culture continued for many decades. This had dire consequences for Māori youth in schools. By the beginning of 1960, publicity about social maladjustment in the cities had focused the government's attention on Maori issues, particularly the "disproportionate numbers in the Court records" and evidenced by "their educational achievements (but not their capacity) [being] below par" (Hunn, 1961, p. 98).

The response of the state to this problem of 'social maladjustment' was to look for solutions that the New Zealand Ministry of Education came to acknowledge as "well-intentioned but disadvantageous actions" (Ministry of Education, 2015). Many of these actions were pathologizing, seeking to address and compensate for perceived deficits within the students and their home life. For example, the Chapple Report (Chapple, Jeffries, & Walker, 1997) concluded that the differences in achievement resulted from Māori socio-economic status rather than ethnicity and "there was therefore nothing significant about 'being Māori' that affected education success." These findings significantly affected the way teachers thought about the educational achievement of Māori and contributed to many of us adopting a "blaming" attitude and an abdication of responsibility—providing tacit approval for the poor teaching, put-downs and derogatory comments experienced by the students as 2001 and 2005-2009. Ten years later, a re-analysis of the Chapple Report data demonstrated that ethnicity is a significant factor in achievement over and above socio-economic status (Harker, 2007).

Māori were not passive bystanders during this upheaval but were active determinants of the pathway education should take for rangatahi Māori. Māori kaumātua (elders) became increasingly strident in voicing their discontent with an education system where rangatahi Māori consistently neither enjoyed nor achieved education success. A series of four Hui Taumata Mātauranga (Education Summits) were hosted by Ngāti Tūwharetoa, a central North island *iwi* (tribal group). Education officials and politicians attended the hui and listened to kaumātua (tribal elders), Māori parents and grandparents spoke of their aspirations and hopes for their children though our education system. A second Hui Taumata was held in November 2001, focusing on leadership in education and the place of Māori in education authority. A third, held in March 2003, looked at the quality of teacher education and Māori experiences in the tertiary sector.

The fourth and final Hui Taumata Mātauranga was held in September 2004 and centered on the views of rangatahi Māori themselves. From the voices of these young people, the following determinants of success were derived:

- relationships for learning;
- enthusiasm for learning;
- balanced outcomes for learning;
- preparing for the future;
- being Māori.

Their experiences and the themes that ensued paralleled the challenges raised by the young people whose voices comprise our 2001 and 2005-2009 stories. The collective voices of rangatahi Māori were also very much in line with Māori politicians and scholars who increasingly advocated that all state-funded schools needed to ensure Māori students' language and culture were present in their schooling experiences. All advocated that rangatahi Māori must not have to leave their language and culture at home in order to succeed at school, and they have continued to advocate that strong cultural identity is a prerequisite for education success (Barrington, 2008; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Durie, 2001).

In response to the growing understandings, including at these Hui Taumata, that a system-level response to Māori underachievement was required, the Ministry of Education embarked on a series of policy initiatives. The first strategy, launched in 1999, recognized that Māori educational success was a Ministry-wide responsibility. The term Ka Hikitia translates as "to step up"—the name of the policy being a call for the system to "step- up" to meet the needs of Māori. The first document (in 2006) *Ka Hikitia: Setting Priorities for Māori Education* was published as an internal document within the Ministry, setting out the proposed Māori education priorities for the next five years. In 2008, *Ka Hikitia—Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012* was released, a four-year strategy document for the public and mandated policy for schools. A subsequent four-year strategy *Ka Hikitia—Accelerating Success 2013-2017* was released. The vision statement for Ka Hikitia is: Māori students enjoying and achieving education success as

Māori—a vision statement that grew out of the voices of Māori through the Hui Taumata Mātauranga and continued to be reinforced through the voices of rangatahi Māori.

The above recitation outlines the political desire, voiced by rangatahi Māori and supported by Māori leaders, to both own the issue of intergenerational underachievement by Māori students and to mandate the need for schools and the education system to 'step-up' to address the issue. However, despite over 20 years of policies and strategies entitled "The Māori Education Strategy," there is little evidence of changes inside educational settings, including schools. The effectiveness of Ka Hikitia has been evaluated by the Office of the Auditor General (see Office of the Auditor-General, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016a, 2016b). The Auditor General was reasonably positive regarding the *potential* of the policy: "overall, I found reason to be optimistic that Ka Hikitia will increasingly enable Māori students to succeed." However, the report also states:

> The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) introduced Ka Hikitia slowly and unsteadily. Confused communication about who was intended to deliver Ka Hikitia, unclear roles and responsibilities in the Ministry, poor planning, poor programme and project management, and ineffective communication with schools have meant that action to put Ka Hikitia into effect was not given the intended priority. As a result, the Ministry's introduction of Ka Hikitia has not been as effective as it could have been. (2013, p.7)

Story 3: The Researchers' Journey

In Story 3, culturally responsive research methodologies allowed the researchers to gather the stories of rangatahi Māori from across the nation (who had succeeded as Māori at school) to add to the weaving without compromising their cultural identity. This story alludes to changes over time in the researchers' positioning and ways of working. While we have always understood the moral imperative to make a difference for students underserved by the education system, many of whom are rangatahi Māori, we have not always understood the ways that this might be best achieved.

When the rangatahi Māori voices from 2001 were first shared with educators in New Zealand and then later published (Bishop & Berryman, 2006), they were considered ground-breaking. For the first time, educators and policy makers could see and read about the impact of their practices on rangatahi Māori. Thus, began a drive by many educators to seek solutions by "gathering student voice." Immense care had been undertaken in the 2001 research to develop non-dominating power relations with the research participants. Yet, an unanticipated consequence has been a number of educators gathering students' views, using traditional western research frameworks and without following ethical requirements—potentially, opening up acts of societal oppression. Until educators understand how power plays out in these conversations, they will continue to be problematic.

Acts of research such as these give "little regard to participants' rights to initiate, contribute, critique, or evaluate research" (Berryman et al. 2013, p.1). Berryman et al. go on to say that "traditionally, the ''right to-be-studied (or not)'' and decisions about how the study would be carried out have not been maintained by the researched community, rather they have been sustained by groups of outsiders who have retained the power to research and to define." The wide acclaim given to the inclusion of "student voice" in the early research had opened up the need to better understand how to create contexts for students (and others) to be heard through research methodologies in ways that were participatory and empowering for the students and did not inadvertently perpetuate oppression.

This dilemma is a familiar one for those who seek to understand the experiences of young people, especially those of non-Western cultures, in our education system. For example, Tillman (2002) refers to research that allows "opportunities for collaboration, insider perspectives, reciprocity, and voice" (p. 3). However, despite this positioning, it is still possible for a caring researcher/educator to sit outside of the experiences of the students, to question or to comment on their experiences and not truly and respectfully hear them or even draw on the knowledge, experience and full contribution of the participants.

By 2015 we understood that the relationship and positioning of the researcher and the students were pivotal, consequently we deliberately created a "research stance where establishing respectful relationships with participants was central to both human dignity and the research" (Berryman et al. p.1). And, out of respect that all participants identifed as Māori, there was an explicit attendance to the notion of "situated cultural practice" (see, for example, Goodnow, 2002; Lee, 2007; Rogoff, 2003; Rosaldo, 1993). The notion of research as situated cultural practice proposes that "what drives research, its purposes and uses, how meaning is made during the implementation of research practices, and the knowledge and representations that are produced are culturally and socially mediated and negotiated processes" (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008, p.310).

The students interviewed came from schools that were participating in a school reform program called Kia Eke Panuku: Building on Success.[2] In the context of an educational policy (Ka Hikitia) that requires schools to ensure that Māori students enjoy and achieve educational success as Māori, Kia Eke Panuku found a great deal of confusion and uncertainty in schools about how to interpret, let alone implement, the mandated policy. To gain understandings and provide some guidance for school communities, Kia Eke Panuku sought input from two groups. The first group comprised eight experienced educational experts (both Māori and non-Māori). The second group comprised over 150 senior rangatahi from 58 secondary schools who were part of the Kia Eke Panuku initiative—that is, these rangatahi were attending schools that had demonstrated a commitment to making a difference for Māori students as evidenced by their willingness to participate in Kia Eke Panuku: Building on Success.

Neither group worked towards a definitive definition or application of the phrase: Māori students enjoying and achieving education success as Māori, but rather worked to produce a set of ideas as starting points for on-going reflection and sense-making by school communities[3]. This was an important construct within the research methodology. Culturally responsive methodology was selected as the means for engaging with rangatahi Māori and, although culturally responsive methodology shares the same goal of involving all stakeholders in the research as in participatory research and public sociology, it differs in intention. Culturally responsive methodology is not always about transformation: "one does not enter the relationship with the explicit intention of changing the other but rather to honor and support the other" (Berryman et al. 2013, p.107).

To ensure a respectful, agency-enhancing research stance, set in a cultural context that privileged Māori ways of working over more traditional Western ways of information gathering, the researchers hosted students in a series of nine hui (meeting/s run following Māori cultural procedures), on marae (iwi cultural spaces) across New Zealand. The researchers did not directly select the student participants, but schools were asked to invite up to three senior Māori students to participate. In most cases, the schools talked with their senior students about the request and the questions under discussion. This resulted in 158 rangatahi attending the hui, accompanied by at least one adult, most frequently the adults involved a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team but also included teachers, whānau and iwi members.

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[2] Kia Eke Panuku: Building on Success is a New Zealand secondary school reform initiative, funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, however, this paper represents the view of the authors and is not necessarily the view of the Ministry. The initiative was implemented in 93 secondary schools (approximately one third of all New Zealand secondary schools.

[3] Fuller details of the process followed and discussions undertaken, can be found on the Kia Eke Panuku website: http://kep.org.nz/student-voice/about-the-themes.

Prior to the hui, rangatahi received three questions and had opportunity to think and talk about the questions with their peers, their whānau or other people. The questions were:

- What have been your successes in this school?
- Who has helped you with this success?
- In your experience, what does Māori students enjoying and achieving education success as Māori mean?

Rangatahi from each school were interviewed by their accompanying adult (from their school) who posed the questions. The responses were often in the form of conversations between the students as they interacted with each other and built on previous responses. Rangatahi frequently referred to speaking on behalf of others who were not present but speaking with their permission and their blessing. Their accompanying adults did not join in these conversations but listened respectfully. We observed many school leaders being emotionally moved by the powerful stories told by their rangatahi, who fearlessly took us all to task for injustices and inequities perceived within education and, in equal measure, praised and endorsed the steps taken to redress those injustices.

By 2015, rangatahi Māori reported that across schools there had been a re-positioning of how their own culture could be more equitably recognized and developed by some of their teachers. Students saw in the actions of these teachers something more than cultural appropriation of knowledge and skills, but rather a response to them as individuals, as culturally located learners.

> We have teachers who have come from England and from other countries who have no te reo Māori (Māori language). They learn te reo Māori and try to understand it. I can help them. That's important for me because it shows that they have motivation, they have a passion to understand students at a deeper level. It shows me that they take into consideration my culture and who I am as a person, as a Māori person. It shows that they appreciate that as well.
>
> There's a huge drive on excellence, but there's also a huge drive on keeping your culture, keeping your culture alive...making it known to you and to everybody else that you are Māori and you're proud to be Māori. And yeah, I think that's an important thing you need to have whilst going through education, you need to have that bit of culture just to bring it all back home. (2015)

For some the school environment had become an opportunity to recover what had been taken through generations of colonization and separation from tribal homelands and whānau connections. For others there were receptive, non–Māori taking steps to acquire the knowledge, skills and experiences they needed to understand the circumstances and world-view of their students:

> I was fortunate enough to be able to share my culture with the teachers and teach them a little bit of te reo Māori, and it was really cool to see how they were responsive to what I was trying to teach them.
>
> This year has been really good, with teachers stepping up and including Māori culture in what we learn in class. It's been really good. And so, for me, that's what I think is Māori success, being able to have that connection in your subjects to really get the proper understanding that you need. (2015)

Students were moved to take direct and collective action where they saw Māori students being under-served:

> My culture's very important to me, so if they're not offering it at our school, if they're not giving students the opportunity then I'm going to fight for that, and I'm not going to let that go away. So, I talked to the principal, talked to teachers and nothing was happening with te reo. I wanted to know why, so I ended up going on to the wider community...and I ended up going on to TV cause the community actually were concerned that there wasn't any reo in our school, and so I pushed for that…and now Māori will be offered next year at school, because it's something they deserve to learn, and if it's not being offered, and it's not fair. (2015)

In one school community, rangatahi Māori initiated a national petition to require schools to include within their curriculum matters pertaining to the "Land Wars." This period of New Zealand's colonial history was marked by armed invasion, by British militia and subsequent widespread confiscation of Māori land. While the government declined to prescribe the curriculum in the way requested it subsequently lent support to a call for the reinstatement of a commemorative day. Encouragingly, others, celebrated their new-found agency and defined this in terms of Māori values and practices.

> From a Māori perspective, it's about manaakitanga (building the respect of others), whakawhanaungatanga (making connections as family), tautetanga (supporting others who rely on you), all those things, and āwhina (care). At my school now the teachers tell us, mahi ngā tahi—work as one. And definitely I do....working in pairs, or in groups. So, the teachers aided me with not working alone...to put myself out there towards others. And, you know, kaua kei whakamaa: do not be shy. Just work together. (2015)

Success as Māori' as Described by Māori Students

Despite each hui being totally independent of the others, there was remarkably high consistency of experiences across the nine hui. Across all rangatahi and across all groups, common experiences and understandings were shared. The following ten themes emerged:

- Being able to resist the negative stereotypes about being Māori
- Having Māori culture and values celebrated at school
- Being strong in your Māori cultural identity
- Understanding that success is part of who we are
- Developing and maintaining emotional and spiritual strength

- Being able to contribute to the success of others
- Experiencing the power of whanaungatanga (family like relationships)
- Knowing, accepting and acknowledging the strength of working together
- Knowing that you can access explicit and timely direction
- Being able to build on your own experiences and the experiences of others

These themes were understood as strongly inter-related. For example, the strongest message from rangatahi was that to be successful as Māori within the school system, they had to be able to resist and overcome other people's low expectations and *negative stereotypes about them being Māori*. Many articulated this as an area where adults and non-Māori could and should be supporting them. Māori students clearly understood that their success required more than their own personal strengths, achievements, values and connections. Some rangatahi directly attributed their success to the support they had received from a school environment where their own culture and values were explicitly celebrated, modeled and thus valued by others. This was essential to being able to be *strong as Māori*, rather than believing they had to compromise their own cultural identity by trying *to pass* as someone else. Understanding that success was a part of who they were and what other Māori were, or could be, required their being emotionally and spiritually strong. These rangatahi understood that at times this had not been the case for them, nor was it the case for many of their peers, friends or whānau, some who had resorted to suicide.

Many rangatahi talked about being the first of their family to attain success, whether it was cultural success, in the arts, languages, academic and/or sporting success and whether it was at a school, regional, national or international setting. Many rangatahi talked about their success across a number of these indicators and across the range of these settings.

Some talked about not having seen themselves as successful until fairly recently. Across all of the groups, students clearly articulated that their personal success was fully intertwined with their *contribution to the success of others*. Being able to relate to others in a *whanaungatanga* or familial way meant that they understood and took *strength from working together*. Rangatahi understood that by working together, they would be more able to do things on their own in the future. They all talked about benefitting from being provided with *timely and explicit guidance and direction,* which had helped them to *build upon their own experiences* but also the experiences of others.

Weaving the Stories

Our weaving now brings the voices of different groups of rangatahi Māori together, through their engagement with others. In story 1, youth engage with and speak to educators; in story 2, with Māori elders and policy makers; and in story 3, with educators and researchers. In order to ensure our weaving does not privilege our own voices, as policy makers, videographers and researchers, over those of rangatahi Māori, we have attempted to undertake this work by adhering to culturally responsive methodologies. We have worked to enhance our understandings of the contexts in which these voices were first heard and understand them in culturally respectful ways. This has enabled us to re-listen to the voices of rangatahi Māori within dialogic and culturally responsive spaces.

Back in 2001, the researchers concluded that: "despite reporting that their experiences in education were overwhelmingly awful, year after year, these students understood and were still optimistic about the possibilities that education offered them" (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p.255). There are hints here that, in line with the prevailing political climate, students believed that the education system and what it offered them was okay—the problems with lack of achievement were down to personal responsibility or personal failure. While they could point to individual teachers who did not meet their expectations of good teaching practice, they did not look for whole-scale system change.

Previously the opinions of rangatahi Māori were neither sought nor valued in education, nor were they clearly heard in the prevailing policy space until 2004 at the Hui Taumata. Since then we have learned that rangatahi Māori have many solutions but first those who maintain the power must create contexts where it is safe for them to speak, then we must be prepared to listen and act accordingly (Berryman et al., 2013). If rangatahi Māori are to be truly self-determining then those who hold the power to reform the contexts of education, must be prepared to listen and learn. Within these contexts a new, ongoing and consistent story of rangatahi Māori self-determination has emerged which needs to influence not only teachers and leaders in schools but also the political contexts in which education still continues to marginalize rangatahi Māori and many other diverse groups of youth across the world.

Conclusion

In 2015, a pattern of change was beginning to emerge from our collective weaving. However, as the Auditor General concluded about the Ka Hikitia policy itself, the potential for transformative change for our students has not been realized. The voices of these rangatahi Māori agreed, they shared their ongoing need to overcome negative stereotyping around their potential; to be strong in their own cultural identity and to be able to access support from the adults in the school who are culturally aware and responsive to their needs. They also identified the need for personal strength and resilience—the need to develop strong conceptions of themselves as successful, to have the emotional and spiritual strength to see them through adverse contexts, and to know and understand the extent of whanaungatanga (strong and supportive ties to other Māori in their schools and communities). Our successful Māori students felt that luck had played a part in their success; there were times when they could have fallen away and abandoned their education due to the weight of the pressures and the negative factors impacting on them. They knew that this had been the case for many of their peers and, in many cases, their family members. While they could celebrate personal successes, they still longed for transformative change within their schools to make a difference for all Māori.

Overall, it appears that school is a more positive place for our 2015 rangatahi Māori. And, while the gap between rangatahi and non-Māori student achievement remains, there are some indications that this gap is beginning to reduce. However, our students still face the challenges in that the prevailing rhetoric (now supported with over a decade of “Māori Education Strategies”) suggests that the problem is ‘in hand’, implying perhaps that students who are not doing well in the system are still, somehow, personally to blame. And, with the Ka Hikitia strategy due to finish in 2017, who can say what will happen to this prevailing discourse.

Undoubtedly, much of the social change that has taken place over the past 15 or so years in New Zealand’s education is due to the bright threads within our weaving, our rangatahi. We have learnt of their courage and determination to change the schooling experience, knowing that they may not experience this change themselves but that they could make it better for those who follow them. In 2001, rangatahi voices told of the deficit positioning, underlying the fabric of schooling, of which, many educators, researchers and policy-makers were ignorant. Many rangatahi were not only marginalized within their classrooms but often were undermined, put-down and had their potential ignored. Then at the Hui Taumata in 2004, rangatahi Māori took their messages to the educational decision-makers and policy-setters. Finally, in 2015, we hear how their voices and their stories have begun to bring about important changes. Our rangatahi became the agents of change, despite all the factors that worked against them, including their youth, their race, and the conditions of oppression under which they operated.

Part of our narrative as researchers has been how we, with the best of intentions, perpetuate the status quo when we sit as the lone authority on what is best for students. However, when we draw on the knowledge and experiences of our young people, and honor the self-determination and activism that they bring, the very change we are seeking begins to emerge. The narratives of the students' and the researchers' experiences are set within the less-visible framework of government policy—a pattern with many twists and turns; a story of good intentions, lofty rhetoric and major initiatives. Sadly, it also tells a story of promise and potential that has languished and continues to fall short.

All is not lost. The young people tell us of their own responsibility to support the students following them so that they will feel a sense of belonging in education. Students have told us that when education builds from a foundation of relationships that respect them and who they are; when their own cultural experiences, in dialogue with others, are able to contribute to the construction of new knowledge; then we can determine our future together and we will be in good hands.

We conclude our paper with another translation of the term rangatahi, that of a new fishing net, traditionally woven from flax. A common whakataukī (proverb) is Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi, translated, the worn net is cast aside, while the new net goes catching. This whakataukī signals the important responsibility of preparing rangatahi for their significant future roles. In the words of Barack Obama (2208):

> One voice can change a room, and if one voice can change a room, then it can change a city, and if it can change a city, it can change a state, and if it can change a state, it can change a nation, and if it can change a nation, it can change the world. Your voice can change the world. (Speech, November 3; Manassas, Virginia)

By sharing power with students, by listening to them and seeking to follow their advice, we have learned that educators, researchers and policy makers are more likely to promote contexts through which the voiceless have voice, the powerless have power and from such spaces hope can emerge (Freire, 1994). Only then might their voices change the world.

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Mere Berryman, ONZM, PhD, Med, is an Associate Professor at the University of Waikato. Her early research involved collaborative work with schools, Māori students, their families and communities through the formation of culturally responsive relationships. This work merged with the inception of Te Kotahitanga, and was further built upon in 2014 with Kia Eke Panuku. This iterative professional development initiative aimed to promote Māori students' educational success as Māori by combining understandings from kaupapa Māori and critical theories with policy. Ongoing evidence of educational disparities for Māori continues to make this work a priority. Mere publishes in this field.

Elizabeth Eley, MEd, BEd, DipTchg, comes with wide experiences from across the education sector. She is currently Associate Director of Poutama Pounamu: Equity, Excellence and Belonging within the University of Waikato. Poutama Pounamu focuses on making a difference for Māori students so they can truly enjoy and achieve education success as Māori. Her Master's thesis and subsequent research investigated the impact of assessment practices on student achievement. Her PhD research explores how to enhance the teacher's role as the 'More Knowledgeable Other' within a student's 'Zone of Proximal Development' in order to enhance student classroom learning and experiences.

David Copeland, LLB, documents significant educational reforms in New Zealand schools, employing a range of media. He has contributed as a researcher and as a communicator for the WISE Award winning Te Kotahitanga program and the more recent Kia Eke Panuku initiative. His insider's perspective and commitment to co-constructed outcomes ensures both veracity and participant safety. His portfolio of collaborations with academic and government agencies includes contributions to New Zealand's Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis programme (BES). In recognition of his work in education David was elected a fellow of the World Technology Network in 2003.

Willfulness and Aspirations for Young Women in Australian High Stakes Curriculum

Shane B. Duggan, RMIT University

Abstract

This paper follows recent scholarship in youth studies in suggesting that young people's aspirations for the future are deeply enmeshed within a social, cultural, and economic articulation of what constitutes a "good" life that an individual ought to orient toward. It uses Ahmed's (2014) notion of "wilfulness" to consider how young people anticipate, plan for, and orient toward the future as a real and imagined space that is embedded within their relationship to everyday social, cultural, and economic practices. To do this, I draw upon digital blog and interview narratives collected across a seventeen-month period from three young women in their final year of secondary school in Victoria, Australia. These narratives take up the notion of "willed" space(s) to consider the capacities, energies, and projects that these young women tell about the future over time. Throughout, this paper argues that a willful lens is particularly productive for its capacity to move beyond an understanding of educational participation as a fixed site for realising aspirations to one that highlights multiple processes of becoming within novel spaces of identification and belonging.

Keywords: *gender; aspirations; senior secondary; narrative; affect*

Introduction

> *Y'know me, itching for something more as always. I'm itching to be somewhere doing something deliciously exciting. Something I would never in a million years consider doing. Something terrifying. I want a permanent adrenalin rush. I'm tired and wild and wanting something more. But I'm not quite ready yet.* -Laura, Park High, Blog Post: 8 July

The most common word in Laura's blog throughout the year is "more." For Laura, "more" is articulated both in terms of processes, emotions, and very commonly, in relation to her body. In the opening narrative, she communicates a key quality of her final year of schooling—events unfold less by design than by chance, connected through their sense of "itching," of being "itchy" for the future. As it is for many young women in their final year of secondary schooling in Australia, Laura's narrative is a story of what Ahmed (2014) calls willing or willfulness.

This paper draws out the interplay between the willing and the willed. It follows recent scholarship concerned with questions of aspiration and gender in the sociology of education and critical youth studies (McLeod, 2015; Woodman & Wyn, 2015) to suggest that young women's aspirations for the future are deeply enmeshed within an articulation of what constitutes a "good" life that an individual ought to orient toward. Ahmed's (2014) "willful subject" is deployed here to extend the conversation around aspirations and gender in educational scholarship. It draws upon the digital blog and interview narratives collected across a seventeen-month period from three young women in their final year of secondary school in Victoria, Australia. These narratives take up the notion of "willed" space from three directions: from with-in, with-out, and against notions of gender, participation, and aspiration. Throughout, this paper argues that a willful lens is particularly productive for considering questions of how young people take up multiple processes of identification and belonging within the context of massively increased participation in senior secondary education.

I begin with a sketch of the rapid increase in senior secondary and higher education participation in Australia over the last two decades. I then elaborate Ahmed's (2014) notion of willfulness and explore its potential in considering questions of aspirations and gender in the sociology of education. Data gathering techniques used to collect and analyse the narratives of the young people in this study are outlined. Here, I also provide a snapshot of each of the young women and their participation in the research. The second half of the paper explores the contributions of the three young women, Laura, Candice, and Angela in turn, before considering questions of educational participation, aspiration, and gender within a willful frame.

Aspirations in High Stakes Curriculum

Each of the three young women in this paper emigrated to Australia with their families in the early years of their participation in formal education. Their narratives bring together three important discourses in the sociology of education, where this study is framed: the social, structural, and economic dimensions of young people's aspirations for post-school study and work; second, the paradoxical effects of the rise in educational participation, yet continued stagnation of labour market outcomes for young women in the global north; and finally, the marked increase in hybrid identities and the racialisation of young people from Asian backgrounds in particular in Australian educational discourse. These categories frame the discussion of aspirations and gender that follows.

In Australia, much research into senior secondary education has examined the structural, cultural and political conditions that combine to influence young people's participation in formal educational settings and their transition to post-school work pathways (Morrison, 2010; Sellar, Gale, & Parker, 2011; Walkerdine, 2011). As Keating et al. (2013) show, large-scale shifts in labour market opportunities and credentialism in senior school curriculum means that more young people are orienting toward university pathways without a clear path to articulate into the labour market. In Australia, these experiences are themselves differentiated by factors of class, gender, and ethnicity. For those "in the middle," a complex network of resources, expectations, and familial support helps young people to successfully negotiate senior secondary and further education (Snee & Devine, 2014, p. 3). Whilst these circumstances might help to enable relatively low-risk transitions for many, for those in minoritised positions, these supports also potentially encourage certain kinds of "reasonable and acceptable" aspirations for "people like us" (Snee & Devine 2014, p. 4). As James et al. (2010) note, the aspirations of middle-class young people are often tied to notions of what is an acceptable minimum achievement—especially regarding pursuing further education and engaging in skilled, usually professional labour. Zipin et al. (2015, p. 228) argue however, that discursive incitements to overcome obstacles through "raising aspirations" actually increase rather than attenuate obstacles by operating ideologically to simplify the complexities' through which young people imagine and produce themselves and their future lives.

In Australia, McLeod and Yates' (2006, p. 164) longitudinal study found significant class and gender distinctions both in relation to the "current situation and their prospective future(s)" of young people in metropolitan and regional settings. They note that within "changing meanings of what is powerful and less powerful," there remains a persistent pattern in the outcomes that young women face, particularly with relation educational experiences and aspirations (2006, p. 225). In response to questions of class and school selection in the UK, Ball (2003) highlights the anxieties, strategies, and techniques employed by both the "middle-class" and those who aspire to it in maintaining social class position in and through formal educational participation. Similarly, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) argue that traditional notions of what it means to be a working or middle-class are still very much lived and desired by young women amidst changing economic and political conditions.

It is the case in Australia that young women on average outperform young men in senior secondary education, have higher participation rates, and go on to University in greater numbers (Stanwick, Lu, Rittie, & Circelli, 2014). Yet by age twenty-four, only two-thirds of young women are in full-time work or study, compared to eighty percent of young men (Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, & Huo, 2015). In many ways, Year 12 represents a moment of heightened optimism for young women that is simply not maintained once the persistent inequities of the labour market are encountered in the years that follow (Collins, Kenway, & Mcleod, 2000; Connell, 2013). One key suggestion in this literature is that the neoliberal shifts that have accompanied the first decades of the new millennium mean that for young women, going on to tertiary education and to meaningful, full time employment is an expectation rather than a fantasy (McLeod, 2015). Questions of marriage and childbearing for many young women are deferred to the more distant future, "after" establishing a career (Wyn, Cuervo, Crofts, & Woodman, 2017). Within this economic, cultural, and social environment, it is not that "traditions" are dismantled, or no longer desired, it is that fitting them within the conditions of the present and anticipated future requires that they are realised differently. Thomson (2011, p. 177) captures this well in her suggestion that "tradition is a situated concept, implicated in classed, sexualized and racialised cultures." As I have considered elsewhere, there is evidence to suggest that young women are reflexively "doing" gender in strategic, novel, and traditional ways (Duggan, 2016). These identities are "improvised," to use Thomson's (2011, p. 176) term, and they draw upon middle-class resources in the present to make and remake imaginings of the future in productive, and novel ways.

Finally, there is a burgeoning literature about mixed and hybrid racial identities within an Australian context in recent times (Bolatagici, 2004; Matthews, 2007). Bolatagici (2004, p. 78) for example, argues for the creation of a "third space" as a way of opening up the analytical possibility of a "positive transgression that questions and challenges rigid racial categories." For Neely and Samura (2011, p. 1941), migrant young people's experiences of education involve "on-going historical, political and dialectical processes between materiality and culture." This is particularly illustrated in the sustained prevalence of stereotyping around pro-educational orientation of young people of Asian descent, and young Asian women in particular. As Bablak, Raby, and Pomerantz (2016, p. 56) show in a North American context, "minority characterisation" conflates "assumed cultural personality traits, homogenises and excludes, and carries negative repercussions."

Matthews (2002b, p. 204) extends this, arguing that the “social and spatial separations that emerge from processes of racialisation and sexualisation sustain the formation of Asian…pro-educational orientations that rely on maintaining Asian/Anglo distinctions.” Matthews’ assertion is instructive for this paper, and I return to this in my discussion of Candice—a young woman who migrated from China—and her articulation of aspirations for the future.

The embedding of economic values as a kind of “politics of expectation” has forged a powerful platform of aspiration-focused policy initiatives in secondary and higher education, contributing to what some have termed a “neoliberal imaginary” of social mobility for both young people and their families (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2011; Sellar, 2013). Within this paradigm, discussions of stress, aspiration, and young people interacting diligently with the “systems” of high stakes curriculum—such as the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which is the focus of this paper—have increasingly come to be positioned alongside examinations of social and political agendas within senior secondary policy. These issues have been studied at length with an emphasis on multiculturalism (Keddie, 2014; Machart, 2016), educational outcomes (Schnepf, 2007; Sellar et al., 2011), mobility (Rizvi, 2013; Waters & Brooks, 2011), and learner identities (Matthews, 2002b; Modood, 2004). A common concern across these varied approaches and perspectives are the ways in which young people’s movement across national boundaries and time are articulated within and around issues of ethnicity, gender, and class. For example, Machart (2016, p. 60) powerfully reflects on the transcultural experiences of Asian migrants by interrogating the “intercultural… identifying processes whereby individuals adopt strategies in order to negotiate the self in relation to the other.” For Machart (2016), the emphasis on cultural stereotypes privileges particular forms of identification and socialisation, yet operates to close down others. In the narratives of these three young women, these stereotypes serve as powerful identifications to operate within, or resist against in their experience of the VCE.

Two final points regarding the current trend in thinking about young people’s aspirations are worth elaborating here. First, embedded in narratives surrounding the importance of participation in higher education, there exists a set of normative assumptions that assume a particular kind of “youth” subject who must “arrive” successfully at adulthood on the one hand (Kelly, 2006), and define that arrival in terms of an economic “value” on the other (Côté, 2014; Miller & Rose, 2008). The implication of this for market ideology is not only in positioning university entrance as the preferred post-school destination par excellence, but also in privileging a subject who orients toward high-status pathways and universities as key indicators of successful participation in senior secondary and post-school education. Second, an economic focus on aspirations has been shown to refigure inequalities in access to, and support for engaging with post-school education as being a lack of individual capacity, rather than that of the differing resources that are available to young people (for example, Kelly, 2015b; Reay, 2013). As Reay et al. (2001, p. 872) argue, “[b]ehind the very simple idea of a mass system of higher education we have to recognise a very complex institutional hierarchy and the continued reproduction of racialised and classed inequalities.” Similarly, in Australia, te Riele (2012, p. 249) has shown that recent efforts to set targets for increased school completion are superfluous unless efforts are also made to address not only the economic benefits, but also the social and personal ones through an emphasis on the quality of the education that [leads] to achieving the Year 12 or equivalent qualification.

Thus, whilst educational participation is taken as a “rational behavior” in popular discourses, the reality is that for many young people, significant structural and social barriers make participation more, or less valuable. This is particularly important for the young women in this paper, as notions of aspiration “toward what?” form a significant part of the temporal context of their final year. How particular images of success stick, and become entangled with narratives of possible and probable futures is fundamental to interrogating how discourses of aspiration and optimism circulate in contemporary times. Returning to Zipin et al. (2015), this understanding of aspirations is crucial for rationalizing continued educational participation as a manifest practice for young people. In the next section, I introduce Ahmed's notion of "wilfulness" as a means of accounting for how value sediments and accumulates in, for, and with young people in orienting toward, and planning for the future.

A Willing Life

In tracing the notion of "willful subject," Ahmed (2014, pp. 94–5) writes "[t]he distinction between good will and ill will, between strong willed and weak willed becomes in very stark terms a social distinction." Throughout the text, she uses the notion of "wilfulness" as a way of accounting for, in her words, "what a subject develops, or must develop, to a greater or lesser extent, over time" (2014, p. 61). Reflecting upon the Grimm fairy-tale of the "willful child" who meets her end for her recalcitrance, Ahmed's analysis draws a portrait of how willfulness is deposited through the many articulations of social, cultural, and civic life; an affective force which conditions and is conditioned by the anticipations and anxieties of being, and becoming a viable subject.

Willfulness has two distinctive qualities that are useful for my analysis in this paper. First, a willful subject, for Ahmed (2014), is one who is framed in terms of a moral character—that of the "strong" vs the "weak" will. As she writes, a strong will "describes the acquisition of form…in pursuit of an end" whereas, a "weak will is one where the nature of the will gets in the way of the achievement of form; a lack of purpose leads to disunity and disintegration" (2014, p. 81). The partitioning of these two forms works on individuals to encourage and code certain 'moral' practices, and to disavow others. It is through this double movement that some individuals can come to be seen as tenacious, ambitious, and gregarious, yet the same actions for others are considered stubborn, aggressive, or brash. For Ahmed (2014, p. 17), the "depositing [of] will is unevenly distributed in the social field," and consequently, "the uneven distribution of the will is how a figure can appear as willful."

The second use of willfulness for this paper concerns what Ahmed terms an "ill-will." That is, the activities of an individual that through their emergence and identification as "ill," become marked for correction. For Ahmed, the marking out of good and ill will is at the heart of the educational project. Following the birth of modern education and its problematic relationship with "straightening out" the will of the child through corporeal punishment, Ahmed finds in the "positive pedagogy" of John Locke an educational project of straightening out; a bringing of certain practices, orientations, and tendencies into the world, and a levelling of others. She notes, "[i]f education is to be woven by one's own influences, then it is also the chance to influence what a child becomes" (2014, p. 69). For this paper, I argue that considering the educational project as a straightening of what is bent is fundamental for thinking the emergence of forms of aspiration, and their embedding in the logic of senior secondary participation. I elaborate further on the gendered dimensions of this 'project' in the substantive sections of this paper.

In an earlier text, Ahmed (2010, p. 129) draws on the colonial writings of James Mill to suggest that education is the necessary production of an "impression" upon the child because they are "impressionable and must learn to receive the right impressions" (my emphasis, 2010, p. 129). In Ahmed's view, "(e)ducation is an arrangement of circumstances in such a way that happiness is the result" (2010, p. 129). Mill's link between "natives" and children is no accident, but reflects a promotion of Colonial education as the utilitarian promotion of what it means to be “civilised.” This is most recognisable in the context of the “crisis of multiculturalism” where, as Ahmed shows through an analysis of the film Bend it Like Beckham, freedom is premised as an act of happiness, to be free “from family or tradition but also freedom to identify with the nation as the bearer of the promise of happiness.” Attaining a sense of freedom means acquiring ‘capacities, energies, and projects’ (2010, p. 137). These categories are instructive, as I will discuss in the narratives that follow.

Within the willful lens employed in this paper, this analysis is informed by an understanding of identities as a “sense of self” within which, multiple subjectivities can be read as constituted and constitutive, temporally located, and constantly emerging. This provides a powerful analytic for considering how young people “go with” or resist against dominant frames of reference for who they ought to “be” or become. Importantly, it also encourages consideration of how those qualities are applied projectively or retroactively in the stories that people tell. In the next section, I briefly outline the data gathering and analytic techniques for this study before moving into a substantive consideration of the narratives of these three young women.

Data Gathering Techniques

This paper draws on narratives from a qualitative longitudinal narrative study of thirteen young people engaged in their senior year at three government secondary schools in Melbourne, Australia. The research archive constituted blog posts, two individual interviews of one hour each, and two focus group sessions at each of the three research sites conducted between February 2012 and July 2013. The semi-structured interview questions sought to elicit descriptive accounts (What does a typical day where you attend school look like?), invited the young people to reflect on their educational participation (Are there any things you think make it easier or harder to stay involved in your studies this year?), and asked participants to consider the future beyond school (When you think about next year, what does your life look like? What sorts of activities would you like to be doing?). In each interaction, I was careful not to position university as a “rational behaviour” or to implicitly suggest a hierarchy of post-school outcomes.

The unique blend of data gathering techniques employed in this study gleaned an average of 40 researcher-participant interactions for each individual across the seventeen-month period. In this paper, I focus on the narratives of three of the young women in the study attending Park High, a small co-educational government school in the inner urban areas of Melbourne. The table below provides a snapshot of each participant (next page):

Name	Gender identity	Migrated to Australia	Place of birth	Language spoken at home	Year 12 Subject selection	Post-school aspiration (from Interview 1)	2013 activity
Candice	Female	13	China	Mandarin	English Literature English Legal Studies History: Revolutions Political Studies Psychology (2011)	High-status University: Law or Arts	High-status University in Melbourne: Arts
Angela	Female	2	Korea	English	English Psychology Studio Art History: Revolutions Drama	University: Identified high-status & local	High-status University: Arts offer - Deferred
Laura	Female	10	New Zealand	English	English Studio Art Legal Studies Drama VET: Media	“Lay Low”	Travel/work (No university application made)

The study sought to examine young people’s experience of their final year of schooling and movement to their immediate post-school life. Given the nature of the proceeding analysis, it is worth elaborating on the project in some detail here. The study was designed to capture a diverse array of stories, and as such, participants were included regardless of their intended post-school destination. For this reason, the study focused on the experiences of young people engaged in their final year of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), the dominant post-compulsory pathway for young people in Victoria. In line with many recent studies of young people in Australia and indeed further abroad, participants overwhelmingly identified university as their preferred post-school destination. The VCE is a two-year programme (Years 11 and 12—typically 16-18 year olds). In calculating a final ranking for a student, scores from up to seven subjects are scaled each year to account for their relative difficulty. At the end of their final year, students receive an Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking (ATAR), which is used as the primary means by which universities offer federally subsidised places to their courses. Students enter preferences for up to twelve different courses across multiple institutions, with applications handled centrally in each state and territory by a Tertiary Admissions Centre.

The structure of the VCE means that subject selection, assessment, and ordering “preferences” for tertiary study are strategic tasks for young people in their final years of secondary school (Duggan 2016). In this, schools have been shown to play an important and active role in directing students toward particular kinds of pathways (Teese & Polesel, 2003). As Teese and Polesel (2003) show in their extensive study of VCE subject selection, access to high-status subjects and tertiary preparatory programmes are not equally available to all young people. For Teese and Polesel, socioeconomic advantage plays a large role in mediating the quality, and the quantity of young people's experience of the senior years.

One of the methodological goals of this project was to show the utility of a-synchronous online blogs maintained by participants over an extended period—in this case, the final year of schooling—as a means of “capturing” the self-in-process. This strategy has the potential to contribute to the growing scholarly interest in autobiographical narratives and prolonged engagement with research participants. Whilst these interests have been pursued through different traditions elsewhere, they reflect broad recognition of how narratives offer 'rich insights into how lives, images, and stories are intertwined in multifarious and complex ways' (Tamboukou, 2015, p. 62).

An emphasis on “making” narratives as a form of telling, interpreting, and producing stories highlights the communicative practices through which function and purpose are made intelligible. The power of this is two-fold. Firstly, it gives a basis for examining what Clough (2002, p. 14) defines as “the need [for a story] to be told,” and secondly, it allows for recognition of how this “need” might change over time, both for individuals, and across groups or generations. For an exploration of the will, and how it is ‘done’ in young people’s engagement with education and notions of the future, the notion of “need—the story that itches—is a powerful analytic.

Willing the Future to Come

Unlike many other young people in the study, Laura's narratives rarely mentioned, or showed much concern for successfully completing her VCE studies. A young Maori woman who emigrated from New Zealand at age 10, she regularly pit the value of schooling against social activities and desiring significant change in her life. Late in the year she disengaged from her blog with the declaration: “I’m sick of over analysing my life on this thing” and a few days later, began deleting several earlier contributions. To return to the narrative that opened this paper, the internal battle between her contested “characters” and the promise of finding and being “found” dominate Laura’s narrative. Her desire to engage in activities she “would never in a million years consider doing” is suggestive of unfolding and restlessness—a subjectivity in which there is no essential “I,” but rather contested selves which surface, unfurl, and are played off against other possibilities. Butler’s suggestion that individuals perform their subjectivity into being actively is useful here, highlighting the importance of choosing which categories to reify and which to resist. Laura’s narrative suggests a complex contingent arrangement of multiple subject positions and resources, for example in her displacement of the VCE from its normative cultural position. Speaking of her day-to-day life, she suggests:

> I still do a lot of things, just not things that my teachers would necessarily approve of I guess. I’m a promoter on Thursday nights which pays pretty well. It’s at this, uhh, I guess you’d say fetish club in the city…so I get to do some pretty awesome dressing up. Crystal, my friend, works there too. Good fun stuff. (Laura, Park High, Interview: 14 August)

Engaging in activities that her teachers might not ‘approve’ of seems to crystalise the dichotomy of life versus school for Laura. It is significant that she mentions her teachers here, rather than her mother, who the school has ‘given up’ calling regarding her absence. In one interview Laura explained that her mother takes the side of ‘life’ and school is an unsympathetic, and relatively cold apparatus. ‘Life’ takes the form of a willful articulation of desire that exceeds the boundaries, real and imagined, of the school hall. I asked Laura what drew her to the role as a promoter:

> [laughs]…I don’t want to tell you some of it, but it’s mostly dressing up and wandering around. It doesn’t embarrass me to say that. I think a lot of people like that I look a bit Maori, too, so I get a lot of tips. Just having a good time, and making sure everyone else does too. (Laura, Park High, Interview: 14 August)

As Ahmed (2014, pp.80-81) writes, “the will becomes what is required to resist the things that are around us, which seduce us in their proximity, so that we aim for something that is not yet." Promoting at the fetish club, seen as an act of will, captures an energy that exceeds the normative relation of a young women to her final years of school—it carries a cost that is both symbolic and embodied. Ahmed (2010, p. 137) notes, "(t)o become an individual is to assume an image: becoming free to be happy turns the body in a certain direction." In Laura's narrative, her body, and specifically her Maori body, produce her success in the spaces of the fetish club. The "dressing up" implies a difference in how bodies are regarded—and how Laura is required to act.

In our final interview, which she attended "because Vicki (Pastoral Coordinator) was insistent that [she] come," Laura flicked through vocational college brochures before casting them aside, suggesting "I'm sure I'll do something once I figure it out." Figuring out, though, is a continuously project, made and remade in each of Laura's narratives. What emerges is an image of the future that does not rely on participation in formal schooling as a central indicator of success. Reengaging one last time with the blog some months after the end of her studies, Laura reflects:

> I'll be fine. I'll figure it out my way. I'm not disappointed…Year 12 is a fucking shitfight. It is stupid: the year I want to discover what all this is for and instead here I am belting my head against a wall...I'm pretty happy. I partied hard and did it my own way. I never went home because I had a SAC. I turned up to my Drama exam hung-over. (Laura, Park High, Exit Questions: 15 January, 2013)

On one level, we might read Laura's detachment from school as a form of what are commonly characterized as risk-taking behaviours (consuming alcohol, drug taking, body modification, and the implication of sexual activity). Indeed, as Youdell (2006) writes, the rise in neoliberal reforms in educational policy inscribe some young people as "in" and others as "out," based upon social, and cultural, as well as gender and class inequalities. Exclusion from educational institutions is written on bodies unevenly, and many of the practices Laura describes above "mark" her as a problematic student. A willful reading, however, allows us to see Laura's progressive uncoupling from the institutional narrative of success and engagement in her final year studies as "bound up with a project [that] reaches for an end" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 61). This operates in two directions at once: First, Laura's disengagement can be seen as a failure of the will—a reflection that "the will can be stronger and weaker…such that the state of the will becomes the truest measure of the state of the person" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 61). Yet, Laura's willing disengagement is what Ahmed (2014, p. 134) terms a "charge against": one that Laura, "charged with willfulness…[can]…accept and mobilize." Returning to the Grimm narrative that opens her text, Ahmed (2014, p. 136) suggests that the charge of willfulness—to mobilize it in her own orientation—is "the judgement of the rod as an illegitimate ruler" (emphasis in original). For Laura, the VCE and its implication of orienting toward tertiary study are illegitimate; they do not define what it is for her to be in and for the future.

Laura continues to complete the minimum number of tasks, receiving her certificate:

> …It [having completed the VCE] feels liberating. It feels like people might stop asking about it one day. It feels like I might be able to just work and be myself…Most important to me is to trust myself to know what's best. It's to surround myself with people who get ME rather

> than try to fit me into a box and a course description. (Laura, Park High, Exit Questions: 15 January, 2013)

Key to Laura's narratives across the second half of 2012 is the suggestion that she will one day be able to define herself outside of the terms of university enrolment. She will figure "it" out wherever "it" may reveal itself—a meaningful pathway that allows her to be a willful agent of her own "making." Unlike the other participants in the study, Laura actively rejected the idea of "the university student" as synonymous with "the VCE student" and decouples notions of "aspiration" as "success;" With this in mind, I now turn to consider how for Candice, a young woman born in China before emigrating to Australia at the age of seven. In this section, I focus on how Candice embeds her aspirations for a high-status career with the United Nations in her experience of the present, and how these aspirations accumulate in gendered and racialised ways.

The Willing Present

Candice moved to Park High after transferring from a select entry Government Girls' College at the beginning of her VCE studies. At many points in her interviews she described herself as a "nerd" as well as "so Asian":

> I'm Asian here. Because everyone's white and I just bring fried rice every day. But at my old school I was considered "white"…[pause] because, I could not deal with Maths, I just, I hated Maths. I just could not deal with any Asian pop. I hated Asian pop so much! (Candice, Park High, Interview: 23 May)

For Candice, certain practices mark her as "Asian." Conformity to those practices, through bringing certain foods for lunch, enjoying "Asian" music, hardens the categories associated with being of a culture, such that resistance to them is "strange." As Matthews (2002a) argues, "traditional" and "Asian" identifiers are often used as problematic, yet also productive markers by young people, that both elides and reinforces their pejorative uses. They also produce 'sticky' expectations around many everyday practices, such as educational participation, as Candice explains in the same interview: "Yeah, I have that stereotype of that really hard working Asian person, but I'm not doing any of the Asian Five[1], which is really strange" (Candice, Park High, Interview: 23 May). Matthews (2002b) notes that the use of the term "Asian" in Australia is a homogenous category used to refer to those people from Southeast (primarily Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia), and Northeast Asia (particularly China, Japan, and Korea). Unlike in the United States or Britain, it does not usually refer to those of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Sri Lankan background. For Matthews (2002b, p. 217), racialising discourses "are articulated in various ways by different people—those who reap the privileges of the centre and those who are marginalized by it." For Candice as a young Chinese woman attending first a predominately "Asian" and then later a "white" school, being "white'"or "Asian" depends on the practices that she takes up relative to her peers rather than essential qualities of non/whiteness.

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1. I quizzed Candice on the meaning of the term 'Asian Five': to which she responded "*There's Chemistry, Math Methods, another Maths, Physics, then Bio or, no, English. It's English because you're forced to do English.*" Anecdotally, Asian learners primarily take up these subjects since they have less analytical, interpretive, or language-based tasks, paired with favourable scaling in the calculation of a student's final ATAR.

Recognition of the difference in the identity markers that migrant young people perform in different contexts is well rehearsed in the literature (Francis & Archer, 2005; Matthews, 2007; Phoenix, 2009). The bracketing of this "difference" has both moral and affective dimensions. For the former, Candice's "being Asian" is something she simultaneously takes up and disavows depending on her circumstances. "Being Asian" is a moral justification for engaging in certain practices such as "bringing fried rice everyday" yet it also requires resistance of other supposed identifiers, such as in not enjoying mathematics and science. Rattansi and Phoenix (2005, p. 105) suggest that recent emphasis on "the possibility of multiple positionings allows scope for understanding the creative 'hybridisation' of identities whereby young people in particular are able to borrow…elements from a range of ethnic and gender identities." This is particularly true, for Rattansi and Phoenix (2005, p. 105), in the articulation of "the tensions, anxieties and crises generated when attempts are made to cross cultural and identificatory boundaries." In this sense, Candice's bracketing of "Asian" habits, practices, and dispositions in her narratives from "White" ones serves an important purpose in traversing the perceived divide between dominant imaginings of those cultures. Here, Ahmed (2010, p. 141) is instructive in her suggestion that "(m)embership in an affective community can require not only that you share an orientation toward certain objects as being good…but also that you recognize the same objects as being lost.'"

Candice's work ethic and active study practices speak powerfully to what Thomson (2011, p. 48) describes in her longitudinal study of young people as an "educational identity that is self-consciously informed by being a 'determined"' young woman. Candice's aspirations are regulated by familial expectation and motivated by her recognition of gender inequality. Early in the year, she highlights the role of gender in her aspirations when speaking of her eventual goal to work for the United Nations:

> I don't really want to go into politics whilst there's still so much change. I feel bad for Julia Gillard, there's always hate, there's always hate about what she wears. No one did that to John Howard or Kevin Rudd,[2] it's just really cruel. But I also know how important it is to have that political background for the UN. All of the women who work there are so powerful…I wanna be one of them.
>
> (Researcher): That sounds like a rewarding goal. What attracts you to it?
>
> Ummm well it's, half the time, I see ads for them and I just go "wow, I'm never gonna get there." Someday. Someday I'm gonna get there. They say that "woman applicants" you know, "are generally put forward." (Candice, Park High, Interview: 23 May)

For Candice, politics is a space where femininity is a risk, where a "charge against" may be made. The UN on the other hand is not a political space, but is one in which females take up the willful charge and are powerful. For Candice however, the risks of politics are a requirement for access to the benefits that the UN provides. As Nayak and Kehily (2006, p. 78) highlight, for many young women, “the emphasis upon educational success and a professional career” involves a denial of traditional markers of femininity in an “attempt to clamber up the career ladder and feel justified” in their post-school choices. Candice’s desire to “be one of them” and to “get there” means successfully negotiating both the dominant discourses of neo-liberal individuation, but also the added risks associated with her own femininity. As Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2003) suggest, social mobility and career attainment are an “escape” from the perils of femininity and being “powerless.”

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[2] In June 2010, Julia Gillard became Australia's first female Prime Minister replacing Kevin Rudd through a Labor caucus vote. In her time as leader, she faced staunch criticism from the media as well as opposition politicians that on several occasions involved the use of derogatory language attacking her gender and sexuality. This culminated in an address to the Parliament on October 10, 2012 often referred to as "'he Misogyny Speech" where Gillard moved to oppose a motion by the then Opposition Leader Tony Abbott. A transcript of that speech can be found here: http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/transcript-of-julia-gillards-speech-20121009-27c36.html. The speech was reported on widely by media outlets both within Australia and abroad.

Changing the Will

Whilst Year 12 students do not tend to finish their regular classes until the first weeks of October each year, it is quite common at many secondary schools in Victoria for all the major coursework to be completed by early September. Thus, for the young people in this study, discussions of “the end” of Year 12 were increasingly prevalent from late August onward, as they transitioned from coursework to revision for end-of-year examinations, and even more so once exams began in the last weeks of October. In a series of blog posts between September and November, Angela, a young woman born in Korea who emigrated to Australia as an infant, captures this moment:

> It seems that a lot of aspects of my life are a fantasy, something that I want to keep and build upon even though it isn’t real yet. Is that wrong? Though study is my main priority, whether I obey that or not is another thing. But what if on the other side, everything is still the same? (Angela, Park High, Blog Post: September 24)

In the weeks preceding her exams, she describes the “strangeness’ of the shift away from feeling institutionally “held”: “It is not just knowing that I have a place to go 5 days a week. I want more in life, not necessarily more but change, which is already upon me. I want to experience in the world” (Angela, Park High, Blog Post: October 22). Later, she elaborates on this whilst waiting for one of her exams to begin:

> How can we be expected to focus on exams when we know that at the end of them all of this is over? I’m not worried about them, I’m no A student anyway, but I have this feeling that soon now that I have the taste for change and freedom that what I have now with (sic) no longer be satisfactory. It is a slight unnerving feeling yet at the same I can’t wait to see the result of it. All of this and I’m supposed to sit and wait for this exam? Two more weeks of waiting in line before the bus arrives. (Angela, Park High, Blog Post: November 2)

For Angela, the future happens “out there” as a fiction that can only be engaged with once she has finished “waiting in line before the bus arrives.” Her excitement for the “taste for change and freedom” evokes an image of the future as comprised of both the possibility to “make” herself successfully, whilst also laying out that image as uneven, yet productive. As it is for many young people, on the other side of successful completion of the VCE, the future remains “out there.” A willful reading of how futures are made differentially, particularly for young women acknowledges that “decision[s] made in the present about the future (under the promissory sign ‘we will’) can be overridden by the momentum of the past" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 145). Here, "momentum" operates powerfully in the present. Ahmed (2014, p. 108) notes,

> [i]f it is assumed before our arrival, that we have a certain future in front of us, we might be pushed toward that future…What you are assumed to be for can then become what you are good for, even all that you are good for.

For Angela, the expectations of the schooling system, and their relation to the "future" operate, in the final days of the VCE, as a restraint. She continues:

> Only 170 hours and 15 mins until I see my friends again
> Only 10,080 mins before I have a life again
> Only 604,800 seconds and I will be free from all that restrains me now
> I have spent the last 14 years of my life in the school system and now within a week it shall end and be no more. (Angela, Park High, Blog Post: November 16)

Where researchers such as Furlong and Cartmel (2007) suggest that individuals face "fateful moments," consequential challenges, and take "risks," others argue that young people are already and always "living through the consequences of decisions, or lack of decisions" (for example Thomson et al., 2002, p. 338). Angela rarely mentioned her Korean heritage, even though she predominately speaks Korean with her parents at home. She recognises her parent's desire for her to pursue University after school, yet throughout our interviews, she highlighted keeping "options" open and working hard as important orientations to have. In contrast, Candice cites "being Asian" as the reason she must apply for "Law or something like that" at one of a very short list of prestigious Universities. This is not to suggest that Angela's migrant status has no effect on her day-to-day life, or indeed her orientation toward school, but rather to highlight how these effects, even within the same school and cohort, are articulated differently, or not at all. Indeed, each of these three young women attended focus group sessions where ethnicity and migration were discussed, yet, as Angela and Candice's narratives show differently, decision-making, change, and consequence are bound within active practices and an identity performance that is always in-between, and exceeding any particular point (Tamboukou, 2011). The stories that Angela, Candice, and Laura tell play an important part in establishing and retaining the meaning of the events and practices that they face in their negotiation of the VCE. As Livholts and Tamboukou (2015, pp. 110–111) usefully suggest, meaning making is produced through "telling a story in the present" that "allows looking at what makes it possible." In their terms, "the becoming of a subject is thus saturated by paradoxes and anxieties, and displays ethical dilemmas that are embodied and genealogical" (2015, p. 111). Thus, as Thomson et al. (2002, p. 338) argue, "turbulence" and "disorientation" are productive and dynamic in that although they may produce "highly structured and highly predictable" life choices for some young people, the processes by which they arrive at those choices may still be unpredictable and vibrant. These processes are not reducible to grant narratives of gender, racialisation, or class, even though they may be deeply affected by them. Angela perhaps sums this up best when she suggests:

> As my schooling life of order, structure and purpose comes to an end, I find myself wanting more to fill the gap…The unknown, the future and the present all have their place in this feeling, yet I have not found my place. (Angela, Park High, Blog Post: October 22)

A Willful Life

What emerges through the analysis of these narratives is the need to account for the micro-movements and tensions that emerge both in the lives of those whose trajectories that do not fit within the "norm"–broadly defined—as well as in those that reflect more traditional pathways in terms of class, ethnicity, and gender. Woodman and Wyn (2013, p. 264) note that understanding young people's transitions "simply in terms of successful and deviant individual trajectories through study and into the workforce" tends to impoverish discussions around those individual's lives. Personal and social responsibility is an active endeavour which is at least in part facilitated or constrained by this sense of "bound" agency, where the conditions that young people face play a significant role in the non/linearity of their transitions (Roberts, 2013; te Riele, 2006). For Candice and Angela for example, the reification of traditional gendered and cultured ideals within their narratives suggests what I argue is a reproduction of middle-class norms that acknowledge the ways in which they are problematic and contested in their articulation. Candice is acutely aware of how her future aspirations are gendered and racialised, and draws upon the motif of the powerful "do it yourself" woman to actively orient toward them. This echoes McLeod and Yates' (2006, p. 118) analysis of the female participants in their longitudinal study that their "dreams are a conjunction of desires, dynamics, and social and emotional processes that, in contemporary circumstances, may produce new identity outcomes and shifts in gender relations and positioning." For Candice, the desire to be a powerful subject is, as Thomson (2011, p. 173) puts it, "both consistent and inconsistent with her social location."

Where traditional approaches to subjectivity might emphasise the cultural and institutional processes through which young people are regarded as "not yet" adult, a focus on willfulness allows us to see how subjectivities themselves are contested spaces that are actively inhabited, and involve a continual becoming. Angela and Laura's stories are performable because of the contested spaces of the "fetish club" or "waiting" in which they are told. Angela's disavowal of "I" in favor of the all-inclusive "you," as well as Laura's reflected "we" can be understood as dynamic movements between established and novel subject-positions that are actively negotiated in their telling. For Ahmed, willfulness does work on the individual, and is also a "doing" of the subject. This doubling is intentional, and vital for understanding how particular activities, identities, and aspirations come to be considered as "willful," and others do not. As she notes, it is "the depositing of willfulness in certain places that allows the willful subject to appear as a figure, as someone we recognize, in an instant" (2014, p. 17). In this sense, the willful figure is "sticky," and returning to the beginning of this paper, Laura's "itching" can be read as a response to what "sticks" and what slides; the moment of friction between what sorts of identities and orientations ought to sit easily, and those which rub, tingle, and affix. Desire, aspirations, and notions of the self do not necessarily produce easy or complete identities, rather, seeking out and maintaining the will is an ongoing practice which involves rehearsal, renegotiation, and continual maintenance in the day-to-day.

There is a substantial body of literature which emphasizes the non-linearity of young people's trajectories from "youth" to adulthood in modern times, particularly challenging the assumptions around independence as an unproblematic and linear process for most young people (for example in a UK context: Brooks 2009; Ball & Olmedo 2013; and in Australia: Woodman & Wyn

2013; Kelly 2015; Wyn et al. 2012). For example, for Candice, the "career" before the "career" creates a space which, rather than recreating the linear transitions model regarding thinking one's future, instead creates intermediary zones in which aspirations might be generated and realised before "moving on." The "career" before is not merely qualification for, but rather allows for the possibility to be. Put simply, "career before the career" is a future-making move. Responsibility is doing something meaningful that opens up the prerequisite requirements of "the UN" and allows for the possibility of transcending the gendering impulse of "politics." On one level, this move is suggestive of what Singh and Doherty (2008, p. 118) argue is the global orientation of "transnational identities," where many young Asian migrants strategically engage "both within and beyond various capitalist, family and national regimes to pursue 'transnational imaginaries.'" Thinking more broadly though, rather than considering subjectivities in terms of "compliance" or "resistance" to participation in the VCE, these young women produce an iterative and continuously unfolding response to the question of "who am I" when constructing grand narratives about who they might be permitted to "be," or how they might "be different." In short, these are willful narratives that make, and accept a charge of willfulness.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has sought to take up young people's identity making practices in their own terms, and resist the tendency in youth and policy scholarship to render those spaces as either "normal" or "other." It has suggested that the embedding of neoliberal discourses of attainment and responsibility within the architecture of school completion policy targets is more than simply an imperative of successive government bodies: it is a lived accumulation of strategies and aspiration that is written upon the desires and bodies of young people as they move within and through it. These spaces, physical, imagined, and projected are thus key sites in which identity making and aspiration is "done," alongside rather than in place of linear narratives of success, completion, and transition.

The neoliberal shifts that have accompanied the first decades of the new millennium mean that for these young women, going on to tertiary education and to meaningful, full time employment is an expectation rather than a fantasy. Within this economic, cultural, and social moment, it is not that "traditions" are dismantled, or no longer desired, it is that fitting them within the conditions of the present and anticipated future requires that they are realised differently. Throughout this paper, there is evidence to suggest that young women are reflexively "doing" gender and ethnicity in strategic, novel, and traditional ways. For Laura, this means deeply embodied participation in the economy of the fetish club, for Angela, maintaining an "openness" in her future planning, and for Candice, being a powerful woman who "makes it" at the UN. These identities are "improvised," to use Thomson's (2011, p. 176) term, and they draw upon multiple articulations of the will to make and remake imaginings of the future in productive, and novel ways.

The affective lens afforded by Ahmed (2014) is useful for examining the practices that young people engage with as they move through an educational landscape that increasingly privileges neo-liberal governance and measurement by foregrounding how self-making practices allow for, or inhibit expressions of aspiration and identity. Incorporating this rich theoretical landscape into the sociology of education has a generative capacity for capturing how young people's understanding, planning, and articulation of the future "moves." This "moving" affects both broader imperatives of "becoming someone," as well as how those movements itch, rub, and shift alongside the more quotidian practices of doing gender and aspiration in the everyday. As I have attempted to highlight in this paper, this lens has salience for understanding young people's planning for the future that may incorporate, but are not reducible to university entrance, and for those alternative aspirations which emphasise global mobility and non-traditional pathways.

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Shane B. Duggan is a researcher and lecturer investigating how young people interpret, negotiate and prepare themselves for entry into higher education and work. His work is concerned with questions of access and equity and has an increasingly global and digital focus. Shane's recent research focuses on how young people understand, plan for, and engage in higher education and work in the context of shifting local and global social, cultural, and economic conditions. His research has contributed to recent reforms to higher education admissions policy in Australia.

"But I Said Something Now": Using Border Pedagogies to Sow Seeds of Activism in Youth Empowerment Programs

Candace Thompson, University of North Carolina Wilmington
Sheri C. Hardee, University of North Georgia

Abstract

In this article, two teacher educator researchers engage in a duologue to explore the pedagogical and poetic openings experienced during two individual youth empowerment school-based research projects—one a middle school poetry project, the other a high-school mentoring project. The projects engage minoritized youth with undergraduate students in colleges of education utilizing a methodology grounded in a theory of physical and metaphorical borderlands and border pedagogy for agentive participation. We assert that intentional formation of border spaces of participation and care within the silencing spaces of school serves as a foundation from which youth may build capacity for future actions for social activism and change.

Keywords: *critical youth empowerment; qualitative methodology; duologue; borderland theory; postcolonial theories*

Force our poor sense into your logics, lend
superlatives and prudence: to extend
our judgment—through the terse and diesel day;
to singe, smite, beguile our own bewilderments away.
Teach barterers the money of your star,
In the time of detachment, in the time of cold, in this time
tutor our difficult sunlight.
Rouse our rhyme.
-Gwendolyn Brooks, 2000, from *The Good Man*

Research in youth studies, specifically youth activism, illustrates the benefits of youth empowerment in developing leadership capacity, voice, and engagement (Kirshner, 2007; Mitra, 2006) and helping young people articulate their hopes as a form of critical literacy, in which they are emboldened to forge better alternatives for themselves (Watts & Guessous, 2006). The literature on youth empowerment and activism is replete with methodological pathways offering insight into the supports needed to build youth's capacity to instigate, organize, and affect school and community change (Bishop, 2015; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Ginwright, 2003; Ginwright & James, 2002; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006; Zimmerman, Stewart, Morrel-Samuels, Franzen, & Reischi, 2011). As teacher educators working from a social justice framework in two youth empowerment programs—one a middle school poetry project, the other a high-school mentoring project—that engage minoritized[1] youth with undergraduate preservice education students from two different colleges of education, we marvel at the myriad ways these young folks engage in the complex processes of becoming activists (Bishop, 2015).

Through relationships with us and our preservice education students; through writing, speaking, and performance; through question-posing; through the declaration of border spaces of free expression and uncomfortable/disruptive dialogue; through opportunities to share, affirm, and enact identities and ideas; and through the hopeful act of being heard, we bear witness to these young people as they push open new spaces. While we view these as spaces in which youth become agentive "subjects in the construction of their identities and the wider society" (Giroux, 1991, p. 135), we argue there is critical work needed before youth may view themselves as activists, and this impacts the methodological and conceptual construction of youth programming. When students have been told they are "less than" and are deprived of spaces for critical dialogue, then the creation of physical, pedagogical, and dialogical borderlands becomes an essential methodological step in supporting youth to develop critical consciousness and explore their roles as activists. Likewise, our mostly white, middle-class preservice educators need these borderlands to self-reflect, deconstruct biases, and build their identities as socially conscious educators through dialogic dives into the experiences of power and privilege with their youth partners. In such spaces, adults are not the arbiters of power, and students are not *given* voice, but these places privilege collaborative learning centered on youths' lived experiences (Tsekoura, 2016). This requires that we, as teachers, scholars, and activists, "rouse our rhyme" in the service of raising up agentive youth and working with youth and burgeoning teachers to nurture seeds of active citizenship growing in a difficult sunlight.

That said, this is not a traditional research article. Rather, we illustrate the development of these border spaces of budding youth activism through a dialogic interplay between the authors that highlights the voices of our youth participants and the university students with whom they worked. As dialogical interplay is such a vital part of the methodology behind borderland development, we use this approach to examine the processes of how youth engage to create spaces of care, creativity, living stories, and resistance through a conversation focused around the following points of inquiry:

1. How might the intentional development of border spaces impact youth participation and empowerment in issues relevant to their lives?
2. What critical literacies do students from marginalized Communities of Color use, claim, or seek as they voice their understanding and experiences of inequality?
3. How might youth programs focused on social justice issues develop an evolving border pedagogy shaping the critical consciousness of youth and their university mentors?
4. What theoretical/conceptual and methodological pathways have we cultivated through participatory processes that underscore prospects for youth studies?

We also examine the conceptual framing of the borderlands as a methodological construct for developing youth programs, and we explore how to move the consciousness of Giroux's (1991) border pedagogy beyond these spaces to catalyze youth-directed social change. We assert that the intentional formation of border spaces of participation and care within the silencing spaces of school serves as a foundation from which youth may learn through collaborative/collective action that speaks to their experiences and informs future actions for social change. In this, a methodology grounded in a theory of physical and metaphorical borderlands and border pedagogy for agentive participation provides valuable insight into understanding how the openings provided by and within these agentive spaces may serve as a birthplace for activism. We address the processes in developing youth agency among our middle and high school youth and the challenges of facilitating such programs with mostly white, preservice educators who must learn to engage in and value such spaces (Beilke, 2005; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). We end with a call for further exploration of borderland research methodologies to assist researchers further in understanding their roles working with underrepresented youth and encouraging youth not only to “believe in themselves” but to “say something now”—to catalyze change through the power of words.

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[1] We use the term minoritized to include students who are marginalized by race, ethnicity, language, sexual identity, and socioeconomic status.

Colorful Spaces in Difficult Sunlight: Program Descriptions and Processes

I am the future of the world
I wonder how my life will turn out
I hear my devils calling
I see what I could be
I am the future.

-Niles, 2015 youth poet

Both of our youth programs stemmed from colleges of education in the Southeastern United States and were established in 2010, in the early pre-tenure years when our hunger to find spaces of belonging as teachers and researchers was raw and pressing. As first-generation college graduates from tightknit working-class backgrounds we—an African American woman and a White woman—drew our strength and sense of belonging from research and teaching grounded in the lived experiences of everyday women, men, and youth, and particularly those whose voices were marginalized. Our work as teacher educators in predominantly white spaces also compelled us to move our education students outside of the comfortably benign spaces of the university classroom and into local, underserved schools and communities to interact and engage in relationships with youth from diverse communities and experiences. Thus, our programs wrapped undergraduate Social Foundations courses around social justice readings and discussions and incorporated field experiences in each of the youth programs.

Both programs occurred within the regular school day on school property, and we were full participants in our respective programs, allowing us to be on site to teach and model while developing strong and caring relationships with our youth participants. The middle- and high-school youth and preservice students’ voices (and our own) shared in this manuscript represent voices and dialogue spanning the 6-year arc of our respective projects. While we have written about these projects in traditional research formats, we see this article as a nontraditional dialogue centered on how our current methodologies developed over time, through mistakes, new discoveries, and critical reflection. We see our work together and within our individual projects as an evolving dialogue between us and with our students—this is our methodological approach. In what follows, we present a brief overview of each program, including participants, traditional methodological approaches, and program descriptions prior to moving into our duologue.

Study Focus and Setting	Methodological Tools
Study 1. Middle School Youth Poetry Project • Led by African American education faculty at predominantly white university in Southeastern, coastal U.S. city • Established 2010 as a 6th grade literacy program focus on poetry and 7th graders established 2011 **Participants:** *Youth* • Served 450 students [African American, Latino/a, SE Asian*, White, African*]; Majority low-income *Preservice Teachers* • 170 students; Approx. 90% white, female, middle class 5% male; 10% students of color *Others* • 6th/7th- grade language arts/social studies teacher; ESL teacher *students with refugee status	**Framework:** Critical Youth Empowerment (Jennings et al. 2006); Critical Arts-based inquiry with a focus on poetry (Finley, 2011) **Data Collection:** Preservice teacher journals and final presentation projects, poet interviews (individual and focus group), youth poems and artwork, participant-observation fieldnotes **Data Analysis:** Coding and thematic analysis of student poems, visual analysis of student artwork associated with poems, youth interviews, preservice teacher journals, and written reflections research memos

Study Focus and Setting	Methodological Tools
Study 2. Near Peer High School Program • Led by White, female education faculty at a predominantly white mid-sized institution in the south; Established 2010 as part of a College Access Challenge Grant (federal) **Participants:** *Youth* • Served 400 youth; Majority students of color; Majority non-native English speakers; 100% low-income & first-generation *Preservice Teachers* • 390 participants, 79% white; 83% female	**Framework:** Borderland Theory/Border Pedagogy (Anzaldúa , 1999; Bhabha, 2005); Critical Youth Empowerment (Jennings et al. 2006); Intersectionality Studies (Crenshaw, 1989; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013); Mentoring Studies (Garza & Ovando, 2012; Holloway & Salinitri, 2010; Lee, Germain, Lawrence, & Marshall, 2010; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008) **Data Collection:** Preservice teacher journals, reading reflections, final research papers, mentoring evaluations; Youth participant journals, evaluations, poems/art; Counselors bi-annual reports; Fo-

Others - 9th-grade guidance counselors; teachers	cus groups and interviews with mentors (preservice students) and mentees (high-school youth) **Data Analysis:** Solo and team coding using In Vivo, emotion, and versus coding; analytic memos (Saldana, 2013), poetic coding (Cahnmann, 2003)

Study One: The Poetry of Voice: Mighty Youth Poets Project (Candace)

The Mighty Youth Poets Project is a poetry-based mentoring program for 7th graders at an urban middle school in southeastern North Carolina. The school population is approximately 47% African American, 27% White, 22% Hispanic, and nearly 2% Asian with a growing population of students with refugee status from Africa and Southeast Asia. The project is part of a school-based field experience for beginning education students enrolled in an introductory social foundations course. My students are predominantly white, middle class and female. Working closely with a generous and culturally conscious Language Arts teacher, we offer an open invitation to all interested 7th graders and have been able to create a diverse group of youth poets—a delicious mix of gifted and struggling readers who are African American, Latino, African, Southeast Asian, Bi- and Multiracial, and White—who work in small groups to read, write, and perform poetry and build relationships with my education students. Youth poets and mentors combine interviews, journal writing, music, movement, technology, art, and spoken word performance to learn about each other and create original poems based on themes ranging from: *My Legacy,* and *This I Believe, to Poetry About Who I Want to Be in the World, to Poems of Protest and Resistance*. Community poets are invited to perform and discuss their favorite poems, and youth poets also act as visiting poets at a local elementary school where they perform poetry for K-3 grade students and engage them in discussions about poetry.

Informed by a critical youth empowerment (CYE) framework (Jennings et al., 2006), and a critical arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2011), the program integrates a stance of productive resistance grounded in the artfulness found in the everyday language and experiences of youth in order to critique the social structures in which they lived. The primary goal to inspire and challenge youth poets to use their voices to talk about issues that impact their lives and communities (such as bullying, violence, loss, love and life dreams), and see their voices as valuable and necessary to a sense of agency. A secondary goal was for preservice students to see the child before them; to trouble the notion of equity, what makes a “good” school or a smart student, and to wrestle with the dilemma of navigating (and inhabiting) unfamiliar borderlands to incite learning through authentic relationship. If, as my students claimed, they love children, I endeavored to test and complicate this love. They find that this is difficult, messy, and deeply personal work, as one of my preservice students noted, “*My perspectives of teachers as a whole was impacted. Who knew it could be so hard to reach children!”*

Study Two: Weaving Nets for Tightrope Walkers: A Near Peer Mentoring Project (Sheri)

The second project stemmed from a Near Peer Service Learning grant in the southern United States, which was part of the College Access Challenge Grants (CACG) meant (1) to increase the number of underrepresented students graduating from secondary schools and (2) to increase the number of underrepresented students successfully enrolling in and completing postsecondary education ("Educational Access and Success" 2014). This particular program sought to address these goals by pairing postsecondary mentors in an entry-level teacher education course with 9th-grade secondary students who had been labeled by their school as "at-risk" based on test scores, perceived ability, and/or behavior.

The mentors were enrolled in a course entitled "Exploring Socio-Cultural Diversity," a requirement for all education majors, which included a 20-hour field experience component in a diverse setting. The challenge was to bring the class and the field experience component together in a way that did not reify postsecondary students' preconceived notions and preexisting stereotypes. The student body at the university and the demographics its education majors, which are majority white and female, are not representative of the community or the participating secondary school, which, according to the state's Department of Education, was 54.08% Latino, 20.56% Black, 20.23% White, 3.49% Asian, and 1.46% multiracial ("Enrollment by Ethnicity," 2015). In addition, 69% of the students' guardians/families at the secondary school indicated eligibility for free and/or reduced lunch, although 100% of students received free lunch as part of Title I programming ("Free and Reduced Price," 2014). Mentees and mentors met weekly, and both reflected on their journeys together through journals, poetry, narratives, and art. While the program had the federal goal of increasing academic success, what stemmed from the project was a need for a galvanizing space for disempowered youth who felt (and were) ignored in a traditional school setting—a place where youth could talk about their experiences and be heard.

The common goal of our programs is to demonstrate the importance of a living borderland as a methodological approach for youth empowerment programs–a figurative and literal space where minoritized students can be their authentic selves, as they analyze and deconstruct oppressive structures through poetry and other critical literacies in relationship with, and sometimes in opposition to, their white mentors. We focus on how the borderland came to represent the core of the methodology that now defines our qualitative work. In demonstrating this living borderland, we employ a duologic approach weaving border pedagogy into the fabric of our own research conversations and the voices of our students; this entwining is a more authentic representation of the way border spaces of human interaction emerge, coalesce, erupt, and become new. It is also how, in our experiences, such borders are imperfectly navigated through relationship and in conversations across locations and positionalities.

Borderland and Border Pedagogy: Cultivating Youth Activism

I stand up for the people who get hurt
I stand for the people who respect me
I stand for the people who protect each other
I will protect my loved ones beside me

-L.R., 2016 Youth Poet

Our methodological approaches go hand in hand with the actualization of the borderland. As described by Anzaldúa (1999), "Borders are setup to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*…It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants" (p. 25). In each program, the prohibited and the forbidden were the minoritized youth oppressed by traditional schooling structures and stereotyped by their teachers, sometimes their communities, and even their mentors (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Marsh & Croom, 2016). The need for spaces for self- and communal-discovery emerged as necessary not only for growth but for survival (hooks, 1990). We saw these spaces as borderlands—liminal places where we grapple with tensions, move in and out as needed, and become border crossers—taking the knowledge gained within to reshape spaces policed by dominant society.

What happens in the borderland is what Giroux called border pedagogy (1991) and what Sepúlveda (2011) re-envisioned as a pedagogy of acompañamiento. In describing the borderland, Diaz Soto, Cervantes-Soon, and Villareal (2009) noted that the sacred space is "a method for reflexivity that relies on critical discourses and material practices aimed at nurturing, cultivating, and questioning espistemologies" (para. 4). They continued, "true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved" (para. 10). We see this pedagogy of acompañamiento as a means for developing the critical literacies necessary to question and deconstruct dominant culture. In each of our studies, this approach is embodied in the raw and authentic declarations of selfhood by Sheri's wounded teens wanting to be recognized as valuable, and in the artistic expressions of identity, resistance, and hope expressed by Candace's youth poets. Within each expression, a sacred space is birthed, and the ruptures lead to new depths of dialogue, new revelations of selfhood, new ways of speaking up, talking back, listening fully, and taking actions that may change the way one moves through the world.

All of Us Talking: A Duologic Journey

Over six years, we have shared and presented together on our challenges, one of which was the struggle in (re)presenting these students' powerful experiences as "research" and failing to do justice to these students' voices. We conceive of these conversations as a duologue—a written dialogue between two persons. Duologue is a term most often used as a textual strategy, but we use it as methodological approach to articulate our process of sharing frustrations and awakenings. We see our duologue as a "a co-authored form of research" (Diamond & Mullen, 1996, p. 3) in which the internal and external dialogues about events and insights into/about one's life and work shared with a research partner serve to develop new understandings of experiences as we navigate frustration and hope within larger contexts. Interspersed throughout, and in conversation with us, are the voices of our youth participants and preservice students.

Duologue makes real our relational existence as teacher educators, researchers, and sister-scholars committed to education that is justice-oriented and youth-centered. We are deeply tied to the youth with whom we work and our communities. As we write, talk, and journal, our duologue allows us to move from inside our own heads and hearts—the I of research—into a space of turn-taking allowing for fresh perspectives, critical reflection, and question-posing that connects and reaffirms our work, drawing us into the we—a collective of voice from diverse experiences. It is a fusion, a borderland of our experiences as seed planters, teacher educators, and researchers. An evolving duologue allows us the freedom to "explore conversation as a reciprocal process of learning about liberating forms of knowledge," and as "a form of reflective inquiry in which we each legitimate the others' writing...and also reflect on the methods and results of the work" (Gergen & Gergen, 2012, p. 258). It is from these duologues that we are emboldened to seek out and attend to the conditions necessary for marginalized youth to engage their whole selves and unique voices in empowered ways. We view our duologue as a critical step in our research process, as sustenance and affirmation, as methodological inquiry and risk, as opportunities for wonder, and as a safe and empowered space in which we may vent frustrations even as we seek new avenues for creative thinking and action.

Poking the Tiger: Engaging in Border Spaces

Sheri

When I was first asked to coordinate this mentoring program, I knew that I wanted the borderland to be the foundational re-framing for the program simply based upon the language of the supporting grant. As a federally-funded program, the mentoring program was meant to serve "at-risk" populations, and I have a visceral reaction anytime this word is used because it is too often used to couch oppression or act as a patch covering the larger issues caused by oppressive systems and structures so tightly interwoven into the fabric of our schools. While the grant providers wanted us to focus on academic improvement through mentoring, I knew that this might not be where the program took us. This became clearer as I went through the first semester and quickly realized that many of these children faced oppression from teachers, administrators, and counselors. Almost all of the mentors, who worked with both the students and their teachers, noted shock at the realization that the majority of the teachers demonstrated a lack of care toward students in the program and an unawareness of students' individual situations and backgrounds, and in many cases, the teachers' and administrators' comments and actions illustrated their stereotypes in relation to race, ethnicity, language, ability, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexuality. As one mentor wrote, the high-school students in this program were "fish swimming against the current," and another encapsulated the need for the borderland when shew rote, "there are youth whose lives are hanging in the balance. They are grasping for something to hold onto, someone to lead them, and somewhere to belong." The idea of a life hanging in the balance, hanging by a thread between two or more unwelcoming worlds, is impossible—the tightrope walker cannot maintain a balance forever, and at some point these children are going to fall.

Candace

In my 6 years at the school, I have watched some children fall away. They will be poets one semester, and I later find out they've been suspended, referred to the alternative school, or moved unexpectedly. And yet, I have witnessed nearly every child I have worked with stand on this proverbial precipice daily with a hopeful vision of their possible lives, as noted by Z, an African American boy who wrote his vision of himself as resilient and capable in 2014,

> I have a dream, but I am not Martin Luther King. I have faith in myself...Life is a challenge but I'm prepared for the test. In school I work hard in what I do. Can't should not be a word because you can do anything you want to do.

Despite the precarity of the circumstances my youth poets may inhabit, they come to value the spaces co-created with their preservice mentees as one where encouragement is the norm, and patience a vital element of relationship. In this empowered, care-filled space, poets flourished in what they saw as recognition of their personhood and trusting affirmations of their work. During an interview, one poet stated, "I kind of like love my mentor 'cause I can talk, we can talk about anything." The freedom to share without fear of being silenced is essential to dialogue, and although some of my preservice teachers were unable to fully understand the complexity of our poets' experiences, they learned to at least listen and support—itself an important manifestation of empowerment illustrated in this comment by a youth poet,

> The thing I like about Miss K is that she was very nice. Every time you accidentally mess up she didn't scream and yell, she just helped us. She is funny and she gives you advice in how to be confident in yourself. She cares about you.

Sheri

I, too, watched too many students fall off of the tightrope in the first few years, being pushed out to the alternative school, moving schools, or being suspended. The shocking aspect to me, was how we (me and the mentors) would find out by happenstance—only when a mentor would approach the guidance office because their mentee had not shown up for several sessions. It didn't take us long to recognize that the youth lacked support. The high-school students, themselves, realized the need for a space of their own—to talk, listen, learn about oneself and others, and build both individual and communal strength. One of the questions we asked mentees from the beginning was "what do you wish your teachers or your school knew about you?" And their answers were poignant, amazing, and heartbreaking. To provide one example, one student responded, "That I'm transgender. I wish there was a place for me." As another question, we asked, "if there was one thing you could change about your school, what would this be?" One student answered, "the way that there is bullying. This is not a safe space." And another responded, "everything. I'm falling through the cracks." I mention these to illustrate the emphasis on space, place, and the tightrope walker's dilemma. The students are falling through the cracks because of the lack of a supportive, caring environment where they have the freedom for identity- and social-exploration and where they have the chance to both find and express their voices—the opportunity to hear and be heard. This strengthened my resolve to develop a program that truly encapsulated the idea behind the borderland and border pedagogy. The wrench, however, was how to do this while maintaining a professional relationship with the school (i.e., not getting myself kicked out) and while dragging my resistant white, middle-class, female students with me on this journey. While I know Candace had this same issue with her undergraduates, her program was a bit more intentional in the development of an empowering space with its focus on poetry and social justice from its inception.

Candace

The image of the tightrope walker is a powerful and poignant one. There is the thin line we walk as representatives of "the Academy" in struggling schools that may feel less than magnanimous towards the university. I entered into the relationship with my school site with the mindset of a servant. I was there to serve children, to engage them in a poetry project if they wanted to participate. I did not ask teachers for their time, I didn't ask for any resources beyond a space to gather and a time during the school day that would not interfere with core courses. But the lives of my students and the stories revealed in poetry and conversation embody the meaning of tightrope walking. They balance their raced, classed, and gendered bodies against a backdrop of deficit assumptions of teachers and the community (the narrative of bad schools and bad home lives) and the daily challenges of adolescence. One of my young African American poets was particularly attuned to the damaging labels assigned to young people who don't quite fit the norm, as noted in this excerpt of her poem:

> David comes to school with ripped clothes
> Little do his peers know his soul is hurting
> When David looks in the mirror he sees labels that
> His peers given him

Another poet noted, "Sometimes people feel like they have to hide because of their sexuality and their race. People feel like they have to leave the place they call home." This leaving of self to fit in, this tightrope walk for survival, was new for many of my preservice teachers. In a mini-qualitative research activity I do with my preservice teachers prior to working with youth poets, we begin by unpacking the deficit narratives that students have heard from friends and other education students, as well those they share in an anonymous class survey. Statements like "it's a ghetto school," "it's in a rundown part of town," "the kids are bad at that school," and "we were told not to go through there at night; there's a lot of crime" were frequent comments. We discuss these images of the community drawing on the poetry of Nikki Giovanni, Ted Joans, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Finney, and Sonya Sanchez, as well as readings that encompass the historical and contemporary scholarship on school funding, employment, transportation, and policing policies. We review the school's report card, the annual teacher's working conditions survey, and then, we walk the community using Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth model as our guide. The aim is for students to deconstruct their deficit views and "tour" the community through a strengths-based lens. Inviting everyday voices from the community, they hear that the shabby building on the corner houses a comfortable and stylish salon, the house in need of repair has a thriving garden, the folks—young and old on their porches who appear to just be hanging out are an example of community poetry; one in which neighbors know and look out for each other.

Poetry is the artistic vehicle by which we begin to engage in dialogue around issues that my students may have limited knowledge. Poetry becomes the bridge by which my youth poets share the stories of their lives with me and my mostly white preservice students. As this Caribbean American girl wrote to her mentor as a poem of introduction,

> I want to be a surgeon when I grow up. was adopted at age 11 years old. I was in foster care for six years. I was in Florida, I have 6 sisters and 3 brothers. I want to be known as a nice and smart person.

In the presence of a brilliant young person in a school labeled as being "bad" or "ghetto," her mentor is confronted with the reality that their view of the school, and by association the student, is incorrect and unfair. That is the learning edge; a tightrope of cognitive dissonance and possibility. For the youth poet, it is a courageous act, speaking into a space in which she is not only heard but affirmed in her experience.

We

In talking over the course of our projects, we realized that both sets of our students were walking the tightrope—unsure of how to voice their concerns and fearful, in some cases, of whether they should. As one of our students wrote, "Sometimes I lose myself while being a follower. I lose my voice while hearing others. I feel lost." We felt the pain of their loss, their being lost, and their lack of a space to be themselves. We commiserated over walking a tightrope ourselves, and we wondered how, as individuals intimately involved in youth empowerment programs and professors held to the task of educating our mostly white students, we could meet the expectations of our institutions while providing a space for the youth with whom we worked to be heard. We saw our partnerships with these schools, our communities, and our institutions as fragile because we saw oppression occurring and we felt the push to do research in these settings, educate our college students, and maintain our partnerships in direct opposition, at times, to what we wanted for these youths. We shared the pain of hearing our students' stories and feeling at a loss for where we wanted to take these projects that was sustainable and meaningful.

What grew from our conversations, however, was the realization that youth programs and empowerment were essential to development of a borderland space for students' voices to emerge in full force. As one undergraduate student noted of working with her mentee, "As a mentor, you also develop a level of trust with your mentee that may not develop when the role of teacher is assumed. We become a bridge, then, with teachers as well for things they might not be aware of." We, too, had to take caution in viewing our positions as a tightrope walker and accept the role as bridge builders for youth. If not us, then who?

This realization changed our programs for the better. It's not that we stopped worrying about our partnerships, our undergraduates, and our institutions' influence on the communities, but we realized that a methodological change for community research was necessary. We came to the understanding that when working with minoritized youth, it was vital that we help create spaces for students to be themselves and to learn from one another. Our methodological approach to each semester now is to ensure that we provide a platform for the development of such spaces and that we communicate to our undergraduates and school partners about the importance of borderlands. We are aware, however, that the danger in this configuration may be that the labor within these spaces is on the backs of our youth. As the image of youth as scholars of their own experiences emerges, they become teachers of preservice students who have little or no experience in the conditions of their mentees' lives, the wealth of their communities, or the depth of their knowing. We are concerned that their labor as youth scholars is extracted for the benefit of our preservice students. It is undeniable that our youth, by virtue of their own coming to voice as co-creators of these border spaces, are in some ways positioned as the bridges by which we walk our preservice teachers to consciousness. We are acutely aware that as faculty, we must do the lion's share of inspiring, pushing, and pulling our preservice students into these spaces to prevent the burden from falling on the shoulders of youth participants. Some of our preservice students enter willingly and others are momentarily stunned by the risk of not knowing, of not being the expert in the room, of being scared when presented with mirrors in which they must confront their biases. However they enter, they are undoubtedly changed in the act, as this preservice teacher noted, "You have to have a heart to teach. To be a great teacher you have to truly care for your students and everything about them. You have to take the time to get to know them and help them." In this uncertain space, no one is unchanged. In the shifting power of border spaces where youth voices predominate, everyone is gorgeously undone.

Critical Youth Literacies: Naming, Claiming and Seeking As Creative Youth Work

Sheri

When we first began the mentoring program, I did a great deal of reading on mentoring programs and their aims, most of which agreed that the goals of mentoring were academic, individual, and social (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Here I was, though, trying to train students on how to become mentors when I wasn't entirely sure how to do this myself. And no situation is more awkward than two unwilling, unsure participants trying to have a conversation. I knew that I wanted my undergraduates—the mentors—to develop critical literacies through our class activities, readings, and discussions, so I suggested that my students investigate similar activities for their mentees. As we did in class, mentors engaged the mentees in autobiographical poetry, narratives, journals and dialogue journals (written conversations between mentee and mentor), and the arts, and as in our university class, they based these activities around identity exploration related to privilege, power, and oppression; the self in relation to the world; and socialization and individual and institutional oppression. What the majority of mentors learned in working with their mentees was that this oppression about which they were learning was factual. Unfortunately, they discovered that the high-school teachers held fast to ingrained stereotypes and deficit perspectives that inhibited students' chances for success. As one mentor journaled,

> Some of them [the teachers], they don't really show a lot of interest to everyone. It's just certain people, but it's the people who have problems that they disregard. They don't pay no attention to. So, if they support everybody and stop looking past everybody, then it will be better…This makes me want to be a critical multicultural educator. This is why it is important to take input, conduct interviews with students, because sometimes students see things adults do not, they see it for what it is.

At the essence of this mentor's statement was dialogue—he found it vital to talk with his students and understand from where they were coming. The "problems" faced by mentees, however, were not the fault of the students. As another mentor so aptly wrote, "The biggest obstacle I think [my mentee] faced…came from the way in which he is being educated."

Candace

I completely understand about starting a program with a format in which you have little experience! Let me be clear, I am NOT a poet, but poetry saved my life when my oldest sister was killed when I was a teen. It gave me a language and the ability to express feelings that were too deep and complex for my 13-year-old self to articulate on my own. Later, it helped me articulate resistance and taught me how to sing my Self into reality, when my teachers and parents (and sometimes peers) tried to render me invisible or less than. Poetry, I knew from experience and research, could be the vehicle by which youth could find and develop their own voice. Poetry was also the stuff of my teaching, a way of engaging my preservice students in creative thinking, a way they could begin to see teaching as a creative and deeply intellectual act requiring emotional intelligence and a critical eye. Like Sheri, our classroom explorations included examinations of privilege, power, and oppression. We used scholarly literature, film, performance, and first-person narratives to develop the critical literacies necessary to working with our youth poets. All were tied to some creative expression like free writing as a way to explore difficult topics and ideas, qualitative interviewing to learn about their poets and teach their students how to interview them, journaling, and various poetic devices and performative strategies to share with their youth poets. There were/are students who resist having to work with spirited, willful middle schoolers rather than more pliable elementary school children. They resisted the focus of the content on issues of race, class, language, power and privilege, their discomfort sometimes impeding their ability to engage in classroom discussions and with the poets. I am used to this resistance and their weaponized silences (Ladson-Billings, 1996), but they cannot remain so in the face of youth who challenge their commitments to and images of themselves as a loving teacher. I perceive my classroom as a negotiated border space, fraught and wired for uncertainty, where students develop a language and a poetic platform from which to express their anxiety and perhaps, the tools to confront it. What we initiate in the classroom is exploded in the poetry project; as youth poets come to speak their minds, my preservice students cannot remain silent. One example is the following poem excerpt written by three African American girls. Their words present a powerful counternarrative to preservice students' deficit views and challenged misperceptions of their school and its youth.

> I see a student body full of life, excitement, and kindness
> You see a rough school consumed by fights, disrespect, & bullying
> I see a fierce tiger, blue & yellow, and plenty of technology for all
> You see a poor city school, outdated, and unclean
> I see creative, encouraging teachers that care for each student
> You see overcrowded, overrun classrooms led by defeated teachers
> I see a school with successful, smart students willing to learn
> You see a low achieving school filled with bad grades, distractions, & un-teachable students
> But at the end of the day although we have our weaknesses
> Together we are strong.

Sheri

And this idea of "Together we are strong," in the words of Candace's poets, is what my mentees and mentors began to realize. It was using these borderland strategies that the mentees slowly began to talk and write about themselves in a manner that they hadn't felt free enough to do before. Ninety percent of the mentees over the four years of the program indicated that the best part of mentoring was "just having someone listen" and "just talking and hangin." Many of these students had long since stopped trying to communicate with their teachers, who failed to really listen and labeled students according to preconceived notions. As one mentee clarified regarding her teachers' views of her, "No one will believe me because I have a probation officer. That automatically makes me a delinquent and a liar in their eyes I guess." Along these same lines, a mentor related of her mentee,

> [he] specifically told me more than a few times of how he enjoyed math over all other academic subjects, but he hated his math class because the teacher was mean to him. When I could ask him why he would say, "Because I'm a dumb black kid"…The odds were set against [him] from the beginning.

These youth recognized how their teachers viewed them, and with their mentors, they were able to open up about these topics that many of the other adults in their lives ignored or brushed aside. One mentee confirmed, "I told my mentor the teachers was racist and didn't think she'd listen but she did and she believed me." Although the process was slow and it took time to build trust, the mentoring relationship afforded a space for critical discussions about oppression to emerge. As one mentor wrote, her mentee

> hinted at racism that went on in her school but at first was nervous to talk about it with me. Once I told her to say whatever she believed she told me that there was always this unequal treatment of the white students in her classes by their white teachers. I told her that I believed her and I did.

I do not doubt that this trust in one another stemmed from the activities in which they engaged, activities that required deep self-reflection and sharing, and our accompanying critical course readings and activities. Additionally, some mentors were able to catalyze this process by sharing their own experiences. As one mentor noted of her high school days, "Just like [my mentee], my school was mostly white. I had an animosity towards school. We connected on this." And in a true example of dialectical connection, another mentor wrote that her mentee thought "it is wrong to speak Spanish outside of her home…Ana and other students are losing a part of their identities, and they will never truly know their potential if they are denied their native languages." As a result, they began conducting their mentoring sessions in Spanish, and, as the mentor said,

> I saw who she really was when she started speaking in Spanish to me…If Ana speaks up, she could be speaking up for herself and other kids like her. If she opens up and talks about her experience to people, she could be an inspiration. She showed me true courage.

Much like Candace's poets, this mentor and mentee were using language as an act of resistance, as a declaration of self.

And an act seemingly so simple had an impact on this mentee's sense of self. When asked what she wanted her teachers to understand about her, this same mentee said, "My teachers think that I'm not intelligent because I don't speak English, but it's not true. Really I am intelligent because now I can speak two languages. Some people can't, you know, but I am good. I can do anything." It is heartbreaking to hear this student state "I am good," because the indication is that her teachers don't see her goodness, her individual beauty—her teachers have failed to truly *see* her at all. The critical literacies these high-school students need to gain in these spaces involve the ability to use their voices and their creative outlets to be heard and seen for who they are. Rather than forcing "our poor sense into your logics," as Brooks wrote—rather than attempting to fit into dominant culture, a culture to which they will simultaneously never be accepted—it is time to rupture these dominant spaces. As one of the mentees wrote, "Let us be free. Let me be free. Really I am me, and I am what I want to be. See me. Hear me."

Candace

The demand for freedom to be oneself and speak one's truth resonated with my poets too. The freedom of an open dialogic space was vital to my poets, especially this year. The 2016 presidential election created a palpable tension amongst my poets, as they struggled to make sense of and voice their experiences of inequality in a highly charged political landscape. The critical literacies gained and enacted in this space were vital not only to students engaging in dialogue about injustices they see happening in the world, but also in raising their awareness of the implications for their communities and lives. The racial and ethnic diversity of my youth poets cultivated a space where discussions of racism and the damaging rhetoric about immigrants permeating the national conversation came to the fore in several poems written before the election. In one, two African American males wrote a drop-the-mic poem that dismissed the prevailing stereotype of Black folks as poor and incapable of success. They wrote,

> We on the rise coming out of the hood
> Owing a new business, you thought we were no good
> Don't under-estimate me because you don't know me
> I could be better, but I'm still a somebody

At first shy and uncertain, feigning a coolness that belied their deep intelligence and vulnerability, these two youths and their equally shy mentor struggled to connect. In another, a male Mexican American student wrote:

> With all the craziness in the world, it makes me feel blue and angry.
> One thing that makes me angry is Donald Trump building his wall between the US and Mexican border, but there is something that helps me calm down.
> Origami helps me do much more stuff and helps me get away from the craziness.

This student would bring origami to every session. His mentor at first found it to be "distracting," but learned this was the poet's way to navigate complex emotions he felt around talk of a border wall. His friend and poetry partner, also from Mexico, used poetry to reject negative stereotypes of Hispanics and assert his family's pride in their heritage. He wrote:

> My parents are alive they have lungs and a heart.
> They act like most parents but they are both very smart.
> But most people believe that Hispanics live in the ghettos and poor parts of the city.
> Many Americans believe Hispanics are stupid and petty.
> But my parent and many other Hispanics are successful in life.
> This goes to show that Donald Trump is wrong and should not want to take out Hispanics.
> But I'm proud to be a Hispanic who lives in America and who goes to school and speaks English.

Both sets of poets worked with white males from politically and socially conservative backgrounds. For the African American poets, the preservice student with whom they worked was uncertain of how to relate to these seemingly obstinate young men. Both mentors admitted they were at a loss on how to get their poets focused. When I pushed them to consider what they imagined focused students would look like, they admitted that they had not truly been listening to what their poets were telling them about what mattered to them, in part because they did not know how to respond to their vulnerable positions as Black and Latino youth whose very existence made them targets of loathing and suspicion. In modeling relationship and dialogue with the youth poets and how to work within the border spaces these young men had created, the mentors began to listen and facilitate the youth poets' writing. In particular, as their level of comfort grew, they began to ask the youth poets questions in ways that challenged poets to more clearly articulate their meaning through their poems. It was a powerful reminder that youth empowerment within creative border spaces empowers teachers too.

We

In answering the question of how our marginalized students use, claim, or seek critical literacies, we have come to understand that they already have critical literacies. We see this as evident through their poetry, their art, and their narrative writing. The problem is that their critical literacies—their voices and views of the world—are not recognized by those outside of the borderland as critical or even sometimes as literacy/literate. Again, in the words of the students, when asked how their teachers saw them, one mentee said, "My teachers think I am dumb, Hispanic, undereducated parents, poor." Another related, "My teachers think I am a wetback, illegal immigrant," and yet another specified, "My teachers think I am a bitch, but really I am everything I need to be and a good person. I am Black and proud." Mentees repeatedly stated that their teachers thought they were "bad, ghetto, noisy with a bad attitude, lazy and stupid"—all stereotypes that their teachers had about them. Yet they were none of these, and their critical literacies, in some cases, surpassed those of their teachers with their limited and limiting views. As one mentee asserted, "Don't treat me like crap just because of my color."

As one undergraduate noted, in the traditional school setting, students "who are creatively limited and confined only to the answers in the back of their books or the opinions of their teachers are being robbed of the opportunity to attain true knowledge, to create their own opinions, and to think critically." The borderlands forged in our programs provided spaces where the critical literacies of our poets and mentees were valued. We cannot underestimate the power of creative expression as a tool for critical literacy. As stated previously, mentoring programs too often focus on academics over any other activity (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008); however, programming for underrepresented youth needs more of an emphasis on social justice and how socialization occurs. We should be preparing our students to speak up for themselves in settings where their voices are not valued. Although several of the youth in our projects were reluctant to share their thoughts via writing or art, in part because they didn't think they were good enough and most were fearful of being laughed at by peers, they came to see, as one youth poet said so eloquently, "Poetry can change you. I used to be so quiet and shy. Like, I wouldn't even speak because I was afraid to say the wrong thing, so I just said nothing. And then when I did the poetry slam I spoke. Sometimes when I get mad or upset I just walk off, but I said something now. It made me believe in myself." The very phrase is a beautiful example of action poetry carrying the seeds of a burgeoning activism.

Evolving Borders and Shaping Youth Critical Consciousness

Candace

For youth programs that occur during the school day, there is some level of subversive teaching—itself a border pedagogy—that happens. Border pedagogy requires and inspires our creativity to engage youth. Sometimes the subversive approach is the most creative in navigating restrictive school spaces and university student reluctance. I am honest with my preservice teachers and school administrators about the fact that students will be learning about, reading, and writing poems exploring issues of cultural identity and justice, but we enter these precarious and fraught spaces through the delicious subversiveness of relationship first—the process and act of learning to see one another as wholly complex beings in a web of family, community, and possibility. We instigate the border through relationship so our preservice teachers cannot ignore or remain silent when their young poets offer the troubling and hopeful contours of their lives. In this way, evolving borders and the co-construction of knowledge are instigated by our youth simply being their authentic selves in an empowering space where they are expert and learner.

Our youth and preservice teachers come to experience our programs as navigational spaces in which their individual histories, communities, discourses, and ways of knowing are negotiated and shared (Moje et al., 2004). These can be difficult spaces because our youth share personal experiences and express their reading of the world from their locations within margins with which our mostly white and middle class preservice teachers have little experience. Preservice students may attempt to silence the truths presented by youth out of fear, lack of experience, and general discomfort with youth's ability to clearly and authentically express their experience. One preservice student when questioned about her experience with youth poets, responded that she didn't like *"How children are already talking about serious subjects at a young age, and acting like it's no big deal."*

Sheri

These are, indeed, navigational spaces, and at times, the journey is long and difficult. As Giroux (1991) wrote of the border pedagogy, "This type of pedagogical cartography can illuminate and make problematic the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of those places and borders we inherit and which frame our discourses and social relationships as intellectuals, students and citizens" (p. 510). These are, he said, sites of critical discovery and creativity—both parts of the great adventure of remapping and rediscovering (p. 515). Creativity and possibility are the exciting parts of this journey, but dealing with student resistance, as Candace mentioned, is one of the biggest struggles along the way. The journey is often uncomfortable for all participants. We are reminded that duologues are not always harmonious, but they may allow those involved to be "a knowing participant in the other's development" (Mullen & Diamond, 1999, p. 318).

Candace

When confronted with these conversations in an intimate space and in the context of relationship, youth and preservice students are engaged in an excavation of critical consciousness—of learning to grasp the world as it is read through another's experience, to bear witness to one's own discomfort, to admit what one does not know about the "other." Through these ruptures, learning and relationship evolve; imperfectly, haltingly, hopefully. The real growth in critical consciousness occurs when our youth understand they have a voice, and others want/need to hear it. In this, they are learning how to use their voices, how to express what is real and lived.

Sheri

I like the term "excavation" Candace utilizes to describe what happens in the borderland and through a border pedagogy, or pedagogy of acompañamiento. We are traveling on this journey together—me, my undergraduates, and the youth with whom we are working—we're learning together and we are never quite sure what we are going to uncover from one day to the next. As one of my undergraduates aptly noted, "This is one of the hardest things I've ever done, but it's the most rewarding experience I have had in college to date."

As Candace also indicated above, one of the hardest, yet most exciting parts, of this excavation or mapping is that undergraduates are learning from their mentees in the process. As one poetry mentor came to realize in her work with youth,

> I never have personally believed in these race-learning stereotypes, but this experience allowed me to truly view the impacts that these stereotypes have on students. The idea that schools are always working for the better good—This experience allowed me to see the negative sides of schooling, such as tracking, that I had never noticed before.

It is hard because we worry sometimes that our undergraduates will do more damage to their mentees than good (Holloway & Salinitri, 2010). We want them to grow beyond their stereotypes and biases, but not at the expense of the youth with whom we work. As Candace said, sometimes they are afraid of talking about critical issues or they claim that it's not appropriate for school, but this may be because they do not know how to engage in difficult conversations. When it works, though, it is worth it. As one student noted of his first few weeks with his mentee,

> So here we were, a young African American high-schooler and a white college student suddenly relating to each other on an intimate topic, meeting each other from all sides of an issue. All of my students have a story and a voice and those need to always matter to me.

Not every undergraduate in the program is going to change their views, but we have to try. These undergraduates, all future educators, need to learn to listen to their students and truly hear what they are saying. They should learn how to navigate border pedagogies in their own classrooms. One mentor explained this process of expanding border pedagogies as follows:

> After mentoring, I learned that [this high school] needs to invest more time teaching students about social justice, socialization, oppression, and power. The issue that [this high school] presents to my point of view is that students need to learn more about critical social justice. This is fundamental to teach students how to be conscious of injustices. The school has to be more aware of their diversities, needs to be able to understand critical social justice and how to practice it.

And yet another mentor described the need for such border pedagogies in the following manner:

> …the teachers here believe that as long as they do not say anything offensive about someone's race then they are respecting that person's race, but they are actually just ignoring it. Pretending someone is just like everyone else strips the children from their individualism and they begin to believe that they are just a number or a test score to the faculty of the school.

If these future educators can begin to realize the importance of truly listening to their students, bringing students' interests into their classrooms, and addressing issues of injustice with all of their students, then perhaps American education can change. If these future educators are willing to invite their students to participate in an excavation with them, then who knows what they will discover together. To me, the heart of the border pedagogy is learning together—through sharing difficult, heartbreaking, beautiful, and life-changing experiences.

We

And, indeed, perhaps one of the most important elements that we have learned through these experiences is that the border pedagogy is both heart-wrenching and hopeful. As Sepúlveda (2011) indicated, this type of pedagogy is a call to action, and it is communal at its heart, which is why Sepúlveda described this as a pedagogy of acompañamiento. Those who are marginalized are

> attuned to those spaces in between and to the very human feelings of being cast as outsiders. These are paradoxical spaces that exist within educational institutions yet beyond their authority and understanding, to be understood only by those whose lives are also in between, such as border-crossing subjects who carry "the burden of the meaning of culture." (Sepúlveda , 2011, par. 61)

The question then centers on whether our mostly white undergraduates can provide their students with such spaces—we believe so. They may not fully understand these spaces, but they can understand the need for them and they can implement a pedagogy in their classrooms that values language, dialogue, self-discovery, and community. Even if they step out of this space to ensure it is safe, the point is to "provide the conditions for students to engage in cultural remapping as a form of resistance" (Giroux, 1991, p. 514).

We: Cultivating Theoretical, Conceptual, and Methodological Pathways for Youth Studies

Our work highlights spaces of productive tension, messy and fraught with disruptive knowledges that challenge and illuminate the voices of young people for whom silencing and the rhetoric of failure is common (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morell, 2001). Such programs can provide youth with the opportunity to engage "dialogically through a configuration of many voices, some of which offer up resistance, some of which provide support" (Giroux, 1991, p. 359). We want our students to be activists, but we argue that before we can get to this point, engagement in the practices of the borderland can help these young activists develop stronger voices, those with the power to incite change. Students need to delve into self-exploration, communal discovery, and critical thought through writing, dialogue, and the arts before or as they move into empowerment and empowered action. Discovering one's critical voice can help students be more successful on their journey toward action. As one student poet wrote,

> The world needs to take a risk and do what's right, you have a chance to be that bright light. It starts with you…be brave, love each other and the outcome will be great.

When our colleagues ask us about creating youth programming or writing grants to develop such programs, we stress that an excavation of the project's setting and goals is vital from the beginning of the potential relationship with a school partner. Just as we argue that we should incorporate a border pedagogy with our students, we would note that developing university/community partnerships should also be part of our methodological approach from the start. Rather than walking that tightrope, we need to be able to have honest dialogues with potential partners about our goals with such programming.

In particular, a duologic strategy has allowed us to consider how colleges of education can tie these experiences together in ways that build upon the knowledge of collaborative learning within these bordered spaces. This project has inspired us to engage in duologues with our undergraduate students, and it has illustrated that we should encourage our students to duologue with their mentees. This can result in stronger bonds between all of us as we move in and out of these borderlands together. Additionally, utilizing such practices with our colleagues as we research on similar topics can help us think through the difficulties we face in our work. In relationship with colleagues, our students, and especially our youth, we "explore conversation as a reciprocal process of learning about liberating forms of knowledge and duography as a means of representing them" (Diamond & Mullen, 1996, p. 258). As a "co-authored form of research" (Diamond & Mullen, 1996, p. 3), duologues open important spaces to work through dilemmas and stuck places, and exchange critical insights and support.

Our discussions about our youth programs guided us in making programmatic improvements and in helping our students gain strength and power through collaborative work. These conversations also aided us in constructing liberating spaces for working through ethical dilemmas with research, such as how to truly provide a space for students' voices to be at the forefront and when to take off the researcher hat and just be advocates for the youth with whom we work. Thus, we see the duologue as vital to qualitative studies to help us think through the difficulties that we can face in such work. Regarding border pedagogies, Dunlop (1999) argued, "As we seek bridging territories for understanding through cross-cultural narratives, we seek to deconstruct frozen, false boundaries of gender, ethnicity, culture, geography, and temporality. In the classroom, our responsibility becomes 'a responsibility to trace the other in self'" (p. 68). We believe the same is true of our research—we have this responsibility to "trace the other in self" before and throughout the entirety of the research process and to ensure that understanding, acceptance, and affirmation are present and respected (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

We have a responsibility, too, to ensure that the language of the borderland does not "other" or distance those who are participating by maintaining hierarchies, as hooks (1990) warned many years ago. As previously noted, for our preservice teachers and school partners, this work can reify stereotypes if not carefully constructed, which is why methodology in regard to such studies is so important (Applebaum, 2003; Ellsworth, 1989; Garza & Ovando, 2012; Holloway & Salinitri, 2011). When developing and navigating youth programs, we need to be able to talk with participants about the borderland approach and why it is significant. Such theoretical framings for our classrooms and our research can help us move toward change—our youth already understand this, but we have to learn to listen to them. As Brooks noted in the introductory poem, we live "In the time of detachment, in the time of cold" and she requests, "in this time / tutor our difficult sunlight." We believe that our approach to youth empowerment is a way of "tutor[ing] our difficult sunlight." To end with the combined words of two youth poets—one Black and one white, we are called to initiate new ruptures of the borders that surround or ensnare us, for it is through these ruptures that youth voices are heard and activism is forged:

> Changing the world requires leaders
> With a bright light. It is us that has to fight the good fight.

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Candace Thompson is an associate professor in the department of Instructional Technology, Foundations, and Secondary Education at the University of North Carolina in Wilmington, North Carolina. She received her Ph.D. in Social Foundations of Education from the University of South Carolina in 2008. Her research interests include critical multicultural education in teacher education and developing cultural competency and critical consciousness in pre-service teachers through school and community-based service learning. She lives this work by immersing her beginning education students (and herself) in local urban elementary and middle schools and the communities they serve. Students link course content to their developing practice and engage in critical examinations of diversity, the role of the teacher, and equity and access in schools and communities. Dr. Thompson teaches social foundations of education and multicultural education courses for undergraduate and graduate teacher education students. She recently published a co-authored book on urban children's literature and has published articles in the *Journal for Diversity in Higher Education*, *Teaching Education*, and *The High School Journal* and several book chapters.

Sheri C. Hardee is an associate professor and associate dean for the College of Education at the University of North Georgia. She has a Ph.D. in Social Foundations in Education from the University of South Carolina. She utilizes postcolonial and feminist intersectionality frameworks to examine equity and equality in regard to access to and support in institutions of higher education, starting with support provided within middle and high school environments. She has taught both undergraduate and graduate courses in the Social Foundations of Education and has published articles in *Journal for Diversity in Higher Education*, *Teaching Education*, *The Journal of Educational Foundations*, and *Thresholds in Education*, and several book chapters.