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"It's Everybody's Job": Youth and Adult Constructions of Responsibility to Take Action for School Change through PAR

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Abstract
Participatory action research (PAR) with youth holds potential to spur social justice-oriented change due to its explicit orientation to transform systemic inequity. Whereas youth in PAR projects embody agency in their actions, they hold less institutional power than adults in positions of authority. In addition, youth who have been marginalized along lines of race, dis/ability, language, and/or other forms of socially constructed difference may be positioned in ways that further undermine their power. How PAR with youth can lead to changes in policies and practices in the face of these power dynamics is not yet fully understood. One mechanism that may heighten the potential of PAR with youth to promote change is a shared sense of responsibility and agency between the youth involved in PAR and those adults they may be trying to influence. This article explores this area, investigating a PAR project involving junior high youth at a K-8 school in an urban area. We examine the youth and school adults' constructions of responsibility and how these shaped possibilities for collective transformative agency. Ultimately, our article elucidates how PAR can more effectively be used as a lever to propel social justice in education.

Keywords PAR with youth · Shared responsibility · Collective transformative agency

Introduction

Participatory action research (PAR) with youth holds potential to spur social justice-oriented change in education and beyond, challenging white supremacy and intersecting oppressions based on race, sexuality, gender, gender identity, dis/ability, language,

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immigration status, and more. This potential is due to its explicit framing as action-oriented, aiming to transform policies and practices (Cammarota and Fine 2008a; Fine 2009; Rodríguez and Brown 2009). PAR with youth is a collective, multigenerational approach to research in which youth, with guidance from adult facilitators, determine the topics to research based on their own experiences with injustice, and then take action to make change (Rodríguez and Brown 2009). PAR is often conducted with youth of color or other youth who face systemic injustice, and is grounded in Critical Race Theory or other critical theories to advance research about a range of social justice issues (Cammarota et al. 2016; Caraballo et al. 2017). While an important body of literature about PAR with youth has documented the benefits that accrue to the youth involved as related to sociopolitical and civic development (Anyon et al. 2018; Kirshner et al. 2015), there is more to be learned about the "action" aspect of PAR. Many PAR projects involve youth engaging in activism and/or presenting their research and concrete recommendations for change to educators, school leaders, and elected officials (Cammarota 2014; Welton et al. 2015). These actions stemming from PAR projects with youth are the source of the potential for social justice-oriented change, beyond the possible benefits to individual participants. However, the field of PAR with youth has yet to fully flesh out the mechanisms that may influence how these actions may promote social justice-oriented changes in policies and practices.

One such mechanism may be the cultivation of a shared sense of responsibility and agency between the youth involved in PAR and those adults they may be trying to influence, specifically the educators, school leaders, elected officials, and others who are not directly involved in a PAR project but have been privy to the youth's recommendations. Youth can and do embody agency in their actions to further social justice aims, but hold less institutional power as students than adults in positions of authority. In addition, youth who have been marginalized along lines of race, dis/ability, language, and/or other forms of socially constructed difference may be positioned in ways that further undermine their power. Hence, youth involved in PAR, especially youth of color and those who have been otherwise marginalized, do not often hold institutionally sanctioned positions of power from which they can enact social justice-oriented changes in policy and practice. Instead, they must often rely on convincing or compelling adults in positions of authority to make changes to policies. For this reason, it is important to consider youth and adult conceptions of who holds responsibility for taking action in response to issues raised through PAR.

This article explores this area, investigating a PAR project involving junior high youth at a K-8 school. Through PAR, and in collaboration with adults outside the school, the youth researched and made recommendations related to racism and bullying. We examine the youth and school adults' constructions of responsibility and how these constructions shaped possibilities for a shared sense of agency between the youth and school adults—collective transformative agency. Our research questions are: (a) How did youth and school adults construct responsibility for acting upon the youth's PAR findings? and (b) How did constructions of responsibility shape possibilities for transformative agency? In the sections that follow, we discuss our theoretical framework before turning to the review of literature. We then discuss our methods and findings. Ultimately, our article addresses a central component of PAR with youth—the action piece and its potential—which has received less scholarly attention

than the possible benefits of PAR to individual youth members. A focus on this area is important in order to understand how PAR can be used as a lever to propel social justice in education and intervene in white supremacy and other forms of injustice.

Transformative Agency, Shared Responsibility, and Intersectionality

In order to consider how youth and adults construct notions of responsibility and the implications of these constructions, we draw upon the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) concept of collective transformative agency (Bang and Vossoughi 2016; Haapasaari et al. 2016), adding to it an understanding of shared responsibility (Diamond et al. 2004). In addition, we view the concepts of transformative agency and shared responsibility through the lens of intersectionality (Artiles et al. 2016; Cooper 2016; Crenshaw 1989; González and Artiles 2015; Hernández-Saca et al. 2018).

A synthesis of CHAT scholarship suggests that contradictions within an activity system (such as a school) create possibilities for transformative agency, entailing joint efforts to change an activity system. Contradictions, which can be catalysts for action, are not individual-level problems but are, instead, systemic tensions that require collective action and the creation of new solutions or tools (Pacheco 2012). These contradictions can be the rallying point of cooperative work and engagement in which new, hybrid knowledge is co-created and beliefs begin to shift (Bang and Vossoughi 2016; Gutiérrez 2008). This collective learning, prompted by contradictions in an activity system, can open possibilities for collective transformative agency, which involves individuals or a collective re-imagining and transforming an activity system (Haapasaari et al. 2016). The concept of collective transformative agency can be applied to a PAR group itself, which includes youth and adult facilitators. However, in this study we shift the focus and instead apply this theory to understand the possibilities specifically for youth in PAR and school adults to come together within the school activity system in order to enact change. This approach adds depth to the field's understanding of the relations between youth PAR participants and authority figures within the activity system they inhabit.

We add to the concept of collective transformative agency an understanding of shared responsibility, as expressed by Diamond and colleagues (Diamond et al. 2004). Through findings from a study of elementary schools with varying student racial demographics, these scholars showed the connection between teachers' beliefs about students' capabilities and their sense of responsibility for student learning. Teachers of low-income and African American students voiced deficit thinking and felt less responsibility, as compared to teachers of middle-class, white and/or Asian American students.[1] Diamond and colleagues proposed that the schools' micropolitical contexts shaped teachers' beliefs and sense of responsibility as connected to the schools' organizational habitus. Though we use CHAT rather than the concept of

[1] Asian Americans are often stereotyped as a "model minority," which obscures the structural racism and white supremacy that they face.

habitus, we draw upon the concept of shared responsibility (Diamond et al. 2004) to add depth to our understanding of transformative agency. These scholars illustrated the potency of teacher biases in shaping a sense of responsibility, while situating these teachers within the context of on-going interactions and shared beliefs in a school. This understanding suggests that school adult beliefs, as situated within the activity system of a school, could also shape their sense of responsibility about taking action in solidarity with youth about social justice issues raised through PAR. A sense of responsibility for taking joint action—on the part of both youth and school adults—may be a key aspect of the development of collective transformative agency.

The development of shared responsibility and collective transformative agency may rest upon the capacity of participants to disrupt existing power relations (Bang and Vossoughi 2016), which fall along intersectional lines (Artiles et al. 2016; Cooper 2016; Crenshaw 1989; González and Artiles 2015; Hernández-Saca et al. 2018). Crenshaw (1989) illustrated how these power dynamics intersect along various axes through the concept of intersectionality, which builds upon the insights of Black women scholars such as Anna Julia Cooper, in the late 1800s (Cooper 2016), and other women of color scholars. The potency of the concept of intersectionality, as Cooper notes (2016), is not in accounting for personal identity but, rather, for clarifying how power relations operate along intersecting axes. Whereas the concept was often originally employed to explicate the experiences of Black women with racism and sexism, other scholars have shown how a range of other forms of oppression may intersect, such as related to language and dis/ability (González and Artiles 2015); dis/ability and race (Artiles et al. 2016; Hernández-Saca et al. 2018); and sexuality, gender identity, and racial identity (Blackburn and McCready 2014). Also, injustice related to age (youth-adult dynamics) can co-occur with these other forms of oppression, as shown in scholarship on adultism (Conner 2015; Conner et al. 2016). The lens of intersectionality reveals the often-obscured interests of those with less power in interlocking systems of power and oppression.[2] Likewise, for our study, this lens can illustrate possible hindrances to PAR youth and school adults from developing shared responsibility and transformative agency to address the social justice issues raised in PAR projects.

Participatory Action Research with Youth and the Potential for Change

We situate our study in literature that sheds light on the potential of PAR with youth to advance social justice-oriented change, exploring instances of concrete changes in policy and practice stemming from PAR, the factors that may hinder potential changes, and the mechanisms by which such change may be promoted. We pay close attention to intergenerational power dynamics between adults and youth, especially as related to identities along lines of race, dis/ability, language, and other socially constructed forms of difference.

[2] Thank you to the anonymous reviewer for making this point.

Change Stemming from PAR with Youth

Important research on PAR with youth has demonstrated that this approach can contribute to youth's agency and sociopolitical development (Anyon et al. 2018; Hipolito-Delgado 2010; Kirshner et al. 2015). In addition, scholarship has shown that PAR with youth, though a messy process rife with complexity related to internal and external power dynamics (Guerrero et al. 2013; Guishard 2009; Lac and Fine 2018), represents a re-imagining of epistemology, research methodology, and pedagogy when approached with a critical, Critical Race Theory, and/or Indigenous/decolonial lens (Cammarota et al. 2016; Cammarota and Fine 2008b; Caraballo et al. 2017; Caraballo and Lyiscott 2018; Fine 2008; Kornbluh et al. 2015; Lac 2019; Mirra et al. 2015; Scorza et al. 2013; Torre 2009; Tuck 2009; Tuck and Guishard 2013). However, the purpose of promoting youth sociopolitical development exists in tension with another purpose: to transform systems (Brion-Meisels and Alter 2018; Rubin et al. 2017). Foundational scholarship on PAR with youth conceptualized this approach as oriented toward action and change (Cammarota and Fine 2008a; Fine 2009; Rodríguez and Brown 2009). Rodríguez and Brown (2009), in their much-cited article on the principles of PAR with youth, explain, "The third principle is a commitment to research and learning that aims to actively intervene into and transform knowledge and practices in ways that improve the lives of marginalized youth" (p. 30). In addition, the first chapter of Cammarota and Fine's book (2008), which heightened the prominence of PAR with youth, states that "[r]esearch findings become launching pads for ideas, actions, plans, and strategies to initiate social change" (p. 6).

Youth in PAR have shined a spotlight on a range of social justice issues, including racism in the enforcement of dress codes (Welton et al. 2015), racist microaggressions (Cammarota 2014), the rights of undocumented students (Quijada Cerecer et al. 2011), inequity in school discipline (Lac and Fine 2018), school turnarounds and closures (Kirshner 2015; Kirshner and Jefferson 2015), the exclusionary experiences of LGBTQ youth of color (Owens and Jones 2004), school push-out practices (Torre 2009), health care and policing (Fox and Fine 2015), and more. Though limited, some research has linked PAR with youth to some concrete changes in policy and practice, such as the expansion of a program for high school women of color (Welton et al. 2014), classroom-level pedagogical and curricular changes (Bertrand and Ford 2015), a reconsideration of inconsistent grading practices (Yonezawa and Jones 2009), physical improvements to a high school and expanded multicultural course offerings (Romero et al. 2008), and changes in public health decision-making (Wanis 2010). Other research has shown how PAR with youth can change relationships between youth and school adults, sometimes in a direction that positions youth more as colleagues than subordinates (Ozer and Wright 2012; York and Kirshner 2015). In addition to research illustrating how PAR with youth can lead to changes in policies and practices, other research has shown that youth in PAR have faced

pushback from the adults in positions of power whom they are trying to influence (Lac and Fine 2018). Youth of color in particular may face resistance in response to research related to racism and other forms of oppression (Cammarota and Romero 2011) or may be perceived as lacking credibility (Bertrand 2014). These studies illustrate instances in which PAR with youth did or did not result in changes to policies and practices, and the messiness of the change process. However, there is more to be learned about the mechanisms by which PAR with youth can lead to change and the possible obstacles to this.

Obstacles to Change Stemming from PAR with Youth

Obstacles to changes in policies and practices engendered by PAR with youth include youth-adult power dynamics and broader structures of intersectional inequities. To illustrate this, we draw on not only literature about PAR but also that on youth activism, a related field. Relationships between youth and adults can be characterized by adultism, "attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and ideas that are based upon" the idea that adults are superior to youth (Conner et al. 2016, p. 4), which negatively affects processes and outcomes of PAR with youth. For instance, in a study of Ballou City Youth Commission (BCYC), the researchers found approaches to communication between youth and adults that either supported collaborative work or stifled youth voice (Conner et al. 2016). The researchers observed institutional-level bias in favor of adults via time management and organization strategies, and individual bias in adult dialogue about youth's credibility, knowledge, experiences, and agency. In a conceptual piece drawing upon theory and empirical research, Kirshner and Jefferson (2015) framed the problem as an "exclusion of young people from [forms of] public participation" (p. 6). They argued that adults undermine youth's potential for agency by engaging in dialogue rooted in a rhetoric of paternalism, salvation, and "rescue" (Kirshner and Jefferson 2015, p. 7). In addition, youth-adult dynamics as related to PAR often unfold within school settings, which provide an additional layer of constraints to youth agency (Brion-Meisels and Alter 2018; Rubin et al. 2017).

However, a simplistic consideration of youth-adult power dynamics does not tell the full story about the barriers that youth may face when seeking to speak up and make change through PAR. Youth embody a range of identities related to race, sexuality, gender, gender identity, dis/ability, language, immigration status, and more. For this reason, adults' responses to youth may hinge upon more than age differences and adultism. Indeed, the racism that researchers of teacher expectations have documented (Jussim and Harber 2005) suggests that youth of color engaging in activism or PAR may face more pushback or less recognition of their efforts than would white students. Some commentary on the recent youth activism related to the Parkland shooting, for instance, has indicated that Black youth have been overlooked by adults and the media while white youth are positioned with more visibility and influence (Glanton 2018). This suggests that a similar phenomenon may be at play in PAR with youth.

In addition, youth with disability labels or in the special education system may face barriers to adults recognizing youth agency in PAR. Oftentimes students with

disabilities[3] or those labeled in this way encounter bias from school personnel and are viewed through the lens of the medical model of disability (Cook et al. 2000; Skrtic et al. 1996). In one study of a PAR program involving students of color with disability labels, the researcher found that pre-service teachers responded with defensiveness to the students' suggestions for change and placed responsibility on the students for taking action (Brown 2010). In another study, students with dis/abilities in a leadership group sometimes struggled to have their views on school turnaround heard (Pazey and DeMatthews 2019). Youth with other marginalized identities may also face obstacles related to their identities when engaging in PAR or activism, as suggested by research on bias that emergent bilingual and LGBTQ students face in school (Blackburn and McCready 2014; Pettit 2011).

Mechanisms to Move from PAR to Change

In considering the scholarship described above, we wonder about the mechanisms by which PAR with youth can lead to change in policies and practices in the face of power inequities based on age, race, dis/ability, sexuality, and more. Instructive here is scholarship that argues that youth presenting their research findings and making recommendations is not always enough to catalyze concrete change (Burke et al. 2017; Dolan et al. 2015; Mirra and Rogers 2016). Fox and Fine (2013), for example, suggest explicitly focusing on power dynamics, using consciousness-raising practices centered on student experiences in order to prevent the facilitating adults from mimicking oppressive power dynamics. In a different vein, Dolan et al. (2015) illustrate that PAR with youth can become more powerful as a component of youth organizing, while Mirra and Rogers (2016) demonstrate the utility of university partners in advancing the research recommendations generated through PAR with youth. Also, the research on student voice suggests that PAR with youth can become a catalyst for change when combined with formalizing youth leadership into school structures (Lac and Mansfield 2018). Our theoretical framework suggests that another key to youth influencing policies and practices through PAR may lie in the cultivation of a collective sense of responsibility and agency between youth and the adults they are trying to influence. This article uses this framework to add to the existing research by investigating youth and adults' constructions of responsibility.

[3] Critics of person-first language (Cohen-Rottenberg 2015; Collier 2012) have argued that placing the disability label after the person serves to stigmatize the disability. We resonate with this perspective of the person-first language while also resonating with those who argue that such language shows respect for the personhood of people with disabilities (Clarke et al. 2017). In this paper, we choose to use person-first language to refer to students with disabilities, following the practice of a range of scholars who approach disability from a sociocultural perspective (Artiles et al. 2016; González and Artiles 2015; Hernández-Saca et al. 2018). This choice seemed the best fit for this paper, which touches upon a range of power dynamics and identities but is not positioned within disabilities studies.

Methods

Background

This study focuses on an after-school PAR project at a K-8 school, which we call Mountain Gate Elementary, in an urban area in the Southwestern United States. In the focal school year, 2015–2016, the school served about 500 students, including about 85% Latinx students and smaller percentages of Native American, Black, and White students.[4] Just over 10% of the students were emergent bilinguals (labeled as "English Language Learners")[5] and under 10% of the students were classified as having disabilities. As for the school adults, the principal was Mr. Ramirez,[6] who identifies as Chicano. The principal identified about half of the teachers as teachers of color and half as white.

E. Sybil Durand, Taucia Gonzalez, and Melanie Bertrand—all university researchers—founded, designed, and implemented the program in January 2015. The program, which continues to the time of this writing and is now facilitated by teachers, was implemented in the 2015–2016 school year by Sybil, who identifies as a Black Haitian woman, and Melanie, who identifies as a white woman. During that year, youth membership ranged between 9 and 15 members, most of whom were girls and/or identified as Latinx. The 9 youth who attended the majority of meetings were students in either 7th or 8th grades, some of whom were identified for special education or emergent bilingual services. Though the group was open to any junior high student, we purposively recruited students identified for these services with the aim of creating an inclusive space in which participation was equitable and radically different than in the school day. The PAR group meetings were held weekly and were led bilingually in Spanish and English.

In the group, youth read multicultural young adult fiction, which, along with non-fiction and theoretical texts, served as jumping-off points for conversations about issues unfolding in the school and community. From there, the youth identified issues they wanted to research and/or take action on during the school year. There was no explicit pedagogy from the adults as related to responsibility to take action. Some youth decided to follow up on research from the previous year on bullying, creating anti-bullying posters and a movie, with adult guidance. Both bullying and racism can be considered contradictions within the activity system of the school in that they are systemic tensions. Other youth in the group decided to pursue a new research project related to self-esteem and racism. The youth, in collaboration with the two adults, conducted surveys of students in grades 6, 7, and 8, and interviewed students, school adults, and community members. One of the survey findings was

[4] We report approximations of these figures to maintain confidentiality.

[5] We follow García (2009) in using the term "emergent bilingual," except when referring to official school designations of PAR members. This usage shifts the focus from perceived deficits to the assets of bilingualism.

[6] All proper names are pseudonyms. To accurately portray the institutional practice at the school, we refer to students by first names and to school adults by Ms. or Mr., followed by the last name.

that 47% of surveyed students agreed with the item "I know about the history of my own culture or race," and only about a quarter agreed that they learned about their culture at school. (See Bertrand and Demps 2018.) At the end of March 2016, the youth presented their findings to the school faculty at a staff meeting. In this meeting, the youth presented concrete recommendations for change, specifically calling for curriculum reflecting students' racial/ethnic identities. The youth also presented a video and poster they produced, with adult support, about the previous year's topic of bullying. The video was geared toward fellow students, but had implications for adults, such as related to reporting bullying incidents. The youth also presented their research, video, and poster to sixth graders at the school.

Data Collection

Data were collected throughout the course of the program in the 2015–2016 school year. Videos were recorded of every PAR meeting, and each was transcribed by a bilingual transcriber. Also, the two implementers wrote field reflections and collected artifacts. Interviews were conducted once with nine of the PAR youth members, those who stayed in the program through the end of the school year. The youth interview protocol included questions specifically about responsibility, including: "Whose job do you think it is to try to figure out solutions to the issue of [the topic of the research]?" and "What do you think your role is in [the topic of the research]?" In addition, interviews were conducted once with 14 school adults (12 teachers, Mr. Ramirez, and the assistant principal). School adults were identified for requests for interviews if they: (a) had attended the youth's presentation at the end of the school year and/or (b) were teachers of the youth involved. Seven of the adult interviewees identified as Latinx or a person of color, and the other seven identified as white. The school adult interview protocol did not have an explicit question about responsibility, but many questions engendered these responses, including: "What would be the benefits and drawbacks of student research playing a role in school decision making?" All of the interviews were conducted in English, except one conducted in Spanish with a youth member. The interviews, which lasted approximately 20–30 min, were conducted individually, at the school site, by one of the university researchers, at the end of the school year, following the presentations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis unfolded in two phases. In the first phase, all interviews and video transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo 11. The research team developed a coding scheme that incorporated inductive and deductive codes aligned to several areas of interest, including the focus of the present article. Of note, the coding scheme included the following codes: "academic and community agency," "civic activity," "student voice," "adults' talk about youth's research," and "action should be taken." The code "action should be taken" was applied in every instance in which someone (youth or adult) said that action should be taken at the school to address the problems raised by the youth's research. Each document was coded by two different

researchers. Field reflections were also coded, but were used to provide context to the overall study rather than to find instances in which someone said action should be taken.

During the first phase of the analysis, the research team noticed diverging notions of responsibility. With that in mind, in the second phase, one researcher created an Excel matrix documenting every instance of the code "action should be taken." To be clear, these instances were drawn from interviews and the videos of PAR meetings. The columns in the file provided the excerpt, information about the speaker (such as institutional role), who the speaker said should take action, whether an individual or group was named, whether a concrete action was mentioned, and, if mentioned, whether the action was vague or specific. After the creation of the matrix, a different researcher combed through the instances, deciding whether she agreed or disagreed with whether a given instance was an example of the original definition of the "action should be taken" code. Also, she recreated the column information, such as whether an individual or group was named, in addition to writing extensive analytic notes. The two Excel files were then compared, resulting in a list of 66 instances. In judgements related to the columns of the Excel file, such as whether an action was vague or specific, the interrater reliability ranged between 77 and 87% agreement. This list of 66 instances was analyzed by sorting the final Excel file by the various columns, which showed us patterns about youth's conceptions of who holds responsibility to take action as compared to adults' conceptions of responsibility.

There are limitations to our methodology. We did not set out to create a study measuring youth and adults' conceptions of responsibility and, therefore, we did not include explicit questions on this topic in the school adult interview protocol. Also, our analysis of youth's construction of responsibility comes from both interview and video data, while our analysis of adults' construction of responsibility comes from interview data alone. To contend with this issue, we draw on interview data alone when reporting on numbers of people who made certain responsibility statements, rather than reporting numbers of instances. We draw upon the full data set, though, to flesh out qualitative claims. Nevertheless, the data illustrate patterns about constructions of responsibility that can inform future research.

Findings

We found that youth and adults sometimes agreed on who has responsibility for taking action on the activity system-level contradictions exposed through the PAR research—bullying and self-esteem as related to racism—however, there was also divergence, with teachers often emphasizing that the youth should be the ones to take further action. Overall, in interviews, 7 out of 9 youth and 11 out of 14 school adults mentioned that action should be taken. Of those who said action should be taken, all 7 youth (100%) commented that school adults held some responsibility for taking action, whereas 5 of the 11 school adults (45%) said they should be responsible, while 6 of them (55%) cited the youth in PAR as the ones responsible for taking action. While these numbers illustrate the mismatch in youth and adults'

constructions of responsibility, they do not show the level of emphasis when someone made a statement about responsibility. Below we delve into the nuances of constructions of responsibility as related to possibilities for collective transformative agency, drawing upon the interviews and video data.

Youth

Youth presented instances of shared responsibility and an understanding of the power dynamics at play throughout their engagement in PAR. Interviews and analyses of dialogue during program activities displayed how the youth imagined the roles and responsibilities of the school adults in concert with themselves, envisioning what could be considered collective transformative agency to address the contradictions of bullying and racism.

Shared Responsibility and Possibilities for Collective Transformative Agency

Youth PAR participants projected a new reality for their school utilizing the knowledge obtained through their research. Often, they invoked a shared responsibility for how the issues of bullying and racism could be addressed where teachers, administrators, the wider community, and themselves could implement changes. In this way, the youth created possibilities for transformative agency in which a range of individuals could collectively engage in re-imagining the activity system of the school. Alondra, a Latinx student in eighth grade who was labeled an English language learner, said the following as related to self-esteem and racism:

> I think it's everybody's job. Especially students at our age because we're starting to grow up and people who might feel not good about themselves or something, we could still have time to change their minds… I have to talk to more people to know how they feel and how they are and then try to make them feel better.

Here Alondra invited everyone to be part of the solution, including her fellow students. Not allowing her age to stand in the way of a shared sense of responsibility, she assigned herself the duty of speaking to additional individuals to improve their disposition towards their racial identity.

Brenda, a Latinx eighth grader labeled as an English language learner, also noted the role of students as being responsible for decreasing instances of bullying, inclusive of herself. She mentioned teachers, but almost as a secondary player. She was very specific as to what her role should be, illustrating her part in transforming the space. In response to a question about whose job it should be find solutions to the problems investigated in PAR, she replied, "Us and probably teachers…. [My role is] to help the community or my peers…. To tell them not to do that or what's right and what's wrong."

Julia, a Latinx eighth grader labeled as an English language learner, reiterated the necessity of multiple stakeholders, inclusive of students and the broader community even beyond the school, in creating spaces where racism is eliminated.

When asked who should take action about racism, she responded, "Nosotros mismo como personas…. Todas las personas." [We ourselves as people…. All the people.] This comment suggests that she saw the need for a collective approach to transformative agency.

Power and Position

The power and position of young people relative to adults in society was not lost on the youth in their considerations of responsibility and agency. Matters of voice and the ability to impact change were reflected in the students' statements. While they exhibited cognizance of their relatively low position as impacted by systemic adultism and perceptions of valid knowledge and the various marginalized positions the youth inhabit, they did not eschew their part in creating a new reality. When asked who is responsible for addressing bullying and racism in school, Leon, an eighth grader labeled as an English language learner, noted:

> I think it's mostly adults since they're the ones that have mostly a word than students. I think instead of avoiding it they should teach something about it or make a difference in the community or the school…. Because since they're adults they can teach the students about what's right and what's wrong and students may learn and they could agree. Those students could tell other students.

Leon acknowledged the power that adults hold by virtue of their knowledge, positioning, and recognized voice, yet he proposed their ability to impart that knowledge to the youth was a jumping off point for the students' own empowerment by sharing information with their peers. In this way, the adults could become allies and partners of the youth.

Julia expanded the notion of the adults being allies with youth by utilizing hierarchical position and power to support youth participation in the transformative process. She recognized how students are dependent upon teachers for the receipt of instruction and knowledge, "Pienso que también les deberían de enseñar, porque los estudiantes vienen a aprender cosas nuevas o cosas que no saben aquí en la escuela." [I think they (teachers) should also teach them, because students come to learn new things or things they do not know, here at school.]

Julia went on to state:

> Yo quiero que ellos piensen y que hagan, que colaboren con nosotros…. Yo digo que los maestros también deben ellos deben de dar primero el ejemplo porque son personas mayores y es obvio que los adultos saben más que como nosotros sabemos menos que ustedes los adultos porque ustedes tienen más años viviendo en esta vida.
> [I want them to think and do, to collaborate with us…. I say that the teachers, too, should give the first example because they are older people and it is obvious that adults know more and that we know less than you, the adults, because you all have lived longer in this life.]

The inherent hierarchy of the teacher/student relationship is clearly identified in Julia's statements. Yet, as with Leon, her comments show how the role of the teacher is to provide the necessary information and tools so that students can participate as partners in school change efforts.

Jacqueline, a Latinx seventh grader whom others construed as Black and who received special education services, illustrated how the cemented power dynamic morphed during the PAR youth's presentation to school faculty. During this occasion, the youth exhibited the contradictions present in the school system to the teachers and administrators. In an interview following the presentation, she commented:

> We're also talking about how we should teach our children about racism. Everybody, parents, schools, teachers, it's important to learn about your race…We [the youth] taught them [school adults] about it, as kids, we taught them. They [school adults] could at least say, "We should at least teach our kids about racism like they told us to." They should get ideas from our experiments. Like our presentation, at least teach kids about the racism.

By presenting the adults with information, the youth in PAR flipped the normal position of the deliverer and receiver of information. While Jacqueline relied on the adults to make the change due to their power to alter the rules and practices in the school, she recognized the PAR youth as the instigators of the transformation. Jaqueline's comments, then, along with those of Julia and Leon, illustrate how the youth envisioning possibilities for collective youth-adult action to transform the activity system of the school even while acknowledging and navigating the power dynamics. In this way, the youth created possibilities for collective transformative agency to address the contradictions of racism and bullying.

Adults

Some adults' comments showed that they agreed with the PAR youth about bullying and racism and took responsibility for addressing these contradictions in the activity system of the school. Many adults, however, agreed with the youth but did not claim responsibility, instead indicating specific actions the youth should take. In this section we discuss the possibilities for shared responsibility and collective transformative agency that opened with some adults' commentary, in addition to the points of divergence in which collective change was thwarted.

Shared Responsibility, Intergenerational Collaboration and Transformative Agency

Though several teachers suggested that they or teachers in general had responsibility for taking action related to the youth's research and recommendations on bullying and racism, two teachers especially stood out. Ms. Zena, who identified as multicultural, and Latinx educator Ms. Núñez were both teachers in the school. In interviews, they reflected on the types of actions that they or other members of the school activity system should take to improve conditions of racism and

bullying. In this way, they opened possibilities for intergenerational collaboration and collective transformative agency.

Ms. Zena showed she was in favor of faculty supporting student-led initiatives, such as positioning students as decision makers about the content of social studies classes. She not only aligned herself with the youth's presentation, but also envisioned teachers taking collective action. She commented:

> The research and the findings are a big invitation for the teachers and the parents to really reflect on how are we talking about our histories? How are we passing on our knowledge, how can we tap into the funds of knowledge that exist among us in the community, in the classroom, but also in our homes?

Moments later, she noted, "I would think the professional thing would be for teachers to respect that, to work with them [students]." In this way, she indicated that the role of teachers should be to take responsibility and work alongside students, suggesting a vision of collective transformative agency within the school. Ms. Zena also provided details on what "professional [behavior]" might entail: respecting the recommendations of the youth in PAR. Thus, she implied that school adults did not fully align with or respect the youth's evidence of schoolwide racism and systematic bullying at Mountain Gate Elementary. Ms. Zena thought that youth-driven research could radically shift practices at the school. She stated:

> If we could have more students do research, and that research helps them come up with very specific topics, or very specific areas of study, then we could, I think, I have no doubt about it. We could transform the way education would look at this particular site.

This excerpt suggests that Ms. Zena embraced the concepts of shared responsibility and collective transformative agency. She commented that, powered by student research, "we" could promote change in the activity system of the school.

Similarly, Ms. Núñez aligned with the youth's presentation to the faculty. Though she envisioned less of a collective approach to transformative agency, she nonetheless embraced responsibility for taking action. She commented that the information the youth shared was "an eye-opener" that made her think about ways to discuss racism in the classroom.

Avoidance of Responsibility

While Ms. Zena, Ms. Núñez, and some other adults embraced responsibility, many adults did not. Instead, these adults often appeared to align with the youth, but emphasized the youth's actions rather than their own. There was nuance among adults' responses of avoidance, with some hinting that school adults may play a supporting role in taking action whereas others placed full responsibility on youth. In addition, the adults sometimes discounted the youth's research,

belying an intergenerational (and along other lines of difference) disconnect in how issues of bullying and racism were viewed. By eschewing meaningful shared responsibility, these adults created barriers to the formation of collective transformative agency to intervene in the contradictions of racism and bullying within the activity system.

Broadly speaking, many (though not all) school adults avoided claiming responsibility, instead indicating specific actions that youth should take. For instance, a statement from Ms. Finch, a teacher of color, illustrated the ambivalence of teachers about shared responsibility. In discussing possible action resulting from the youth's research, she stated:

> It should be their [PAR youth's] step. They should be doing it. You know? It's not on your part. They should be more accounted; they should be more responsible. Then also on our work part. I don't know. Everyone is so busy. It's like never-ending work.

She began this quote by insisting that the youth in PAR should take responsibility for action ("It should be their step"), not the two PAR adult facilitators ("It's not on your part"). Though she emphasized the youth's responsibility, she also considered school faculty ("Then also on our work part"). However, she cited the burdensome faculty workload as a possible obstacle to teachers taking action. By focusing on the youth's role rather than that of the teachers, Ms. Finch detracted from possibilities for collective transformative agency.

Mr. Ramirez, the principal, placed the responsibility for taking action on the teachers, but pointed to their low capacity as a hindrance, thereby suggesting that teachers were the roadblock to the development of shared responsibility and collective transformative agency. He commented:

> They [students] don't have a lot of voice because we don't have a lot of teacher leaders to give students voice. For instance, we don't have a student council because no one is willing to do and I can't do it.

Later he added, talking about obstacles to student voice, "The only way I can change that is if I have staff that is willing to do that and I don't have the staff right now." In addition, Mr. Ramirez commented that his own time limitations affected the possibility for action related to the PAR findings. Thus Mr. Ramirez did not envision a possibility for collective transformative agency because of his perceptions about the teachers' capacity.

Mismatched Expectations About Responsibility as Related to Positionality

The positionalities of the youth and adults—and the related power hierarchies—may have contributed to the often mismatched expectations about responsibility between youth and adults. Youth-adult power dynamics were complicated by individuals' institutional roles as students, teachers, or administrators. These dynamics

were further complexified by other positionalities. Students were not only students, but also youth who were racialized as students of color (except one white student), and, in some cases, categorized by the school as requiring special education and/or services for emergent bilingual students. Teachers were also adults, identifying as a range of ethnic and racial identities, in addition to other identities. Hence conceptions of responsibility may have aligned with positionalities, which created challenges for the creation of collective transformative agency.

There were sharp divisions between the expectations of the different institutional roles, which may have played a role in creating barriers to shared responsibility. Teachers and administrators contended with constant pressure to raise standardized test scores and faced daunting workloads. The school psychologist, for example, explicitly pointed to time limitations as barring her from taking action. Ms. Burns, a white teacher, also referenced faculty workload, explaining, "It's not that people don't care or don't want to help. They're just really overburdened." Continuing, she added that perhaps a volunteer could take on the project, mentioning parents and community support. Also, these comments echoed those of Ms. Finch, who commented, "Everyone is so busy. It's like never-ending work."

Whereas teachers and administrators commented about the workload associated with their institutional roles as a hindrance to shared responsibility and collective transformative agency, the youth in PAR did not mention school adult workload and, instead, clearly viewed teachers as responsible for taking action, as described above. Recall Leon when he commented that adults are "the ones that have mostly a word than students" and Julia when she asserted that teachers have the main responsibility to take action because of their position as older people who know more than youth. Both Leon and Julia, however, viewed teachers as instrumental to youth's involvement in participating in change as well.

Positionalities related to racial identity, in light of systemic racism and white supremacy, may have further complicated possibilities for shared responsibility and transformative agency. In Mr. Ramirez's view, white teachers' viewpoints as related to race and racism were an obstacle to action. After the youth's faculty presentation, he commented that, for "lots of white…teachers," race is a "really hard thing to talk about." He viewed teachers' reluctance to discuss race as a hindrance: "This year's research about…race and self-identification and the term racism…. I think for teachers who are conscious can use that. For this school, we're not ready to use those ideas." Unlike Diamond and colleagues (2004), we are unable to directly tie adults' sense of responsibility for acting on the PAR findings to the youth's racial identities because we have only one research site and comparison is not possible. Also, Diamond and colleagues examined adults' sense of responsibility for student learning, which is different from responsibility for taking action. However, considering that teachers in general, especially white teachers, often have lower academic expectations for certain groups of students of color in comparison to white students (Jussim and Harber 2005; Oates 2003), it seems possible that some adults' deficit perspectives of students of color within the activity system of the school could have influenced whether they found the research findings to be credible. Indeed, several adults questioned the credibility of the findings, often wondering whether the issues the youth raised were as severe as reported. For example, Mr. Barnsdale, a white

teacher, made the following comment, comparing the Spring 2016 research findings to those of the previous spring: "My question last year about the bullying was, 'Do they really know what bullying is?' That's the same thing here. Do we really know what racism is?" With this statement, he implied that the youth in PAR and/or the youth who were surveyed or interviewed for the research were not credible. Some school adults, however, fully believed the youth, and commented that they would like to take action (as discussed in the previous section). Adult views about the credibility of the research could have influenced whether they felt responsible for taking action or viewed themselves as actors in potential collective transformative agency.

Also, the youth's (school-imposed) identities related to special education and emergent bilingual services may have influenced school adults' views of the youth, their findings, and possibilities for adults to develop a sense of responsibility. For instance, several school adults made comments about Jacqueline, a student designated for special education services, who was mentioned above. School adults construed her as a bully and trouble-maker, an image that did not match with the leadership and keen analytic eye that she contributed to the PAR space. For instance, Mr. Barnsdale cast her as needy, commenting, "Jacqueline, wow, what a family life she has." The principal also mentioned Jacqueline, implying that it was incongruous to see her presenting about bullying when she was perceived as a bully herself. In regards to an anti-bullying poster that the PAR group created, he said, "I think that poster, I think, is about Jacqueline. Jacqueline did fine with that being the biggest bully on campus." Ms. Fiori, a white teacher, commented that Jacqueline "is very defiant," going on to describe an episode. This teacher seemed surprised at Jacqueline's presentation skills, saying:

> When she was presenting she seemed almost not as, it's almost like, she's usually cocky and here she wasn't cocky. She was almost, I don't want to say timid, but what's the word? She was more humbled when she was presenting, but also spoke intelligently and stayed on the topic, and there was no sort of, she tends to talk with this very defiant tone, but she wasn't like that at all.

This quote illustrates Ms. Fiori's low expectations of Jacqueline as a presenter of original research, belying assumptions about Jacqueline's intelligence and character. The quote does not provide direct evidence that Jacqueline's designation for special education influenced Ms. Fiori's sense of responsibility. However, it does suggest that the teacher's perception of Jacqueline as defiant in general could have influenced her perception of the research and/or her willingness to cultivate shared responsibility and collective transformative agency with Jacqueline.

Other teachers made comments about Julia, the only student who spoke her presentation parts in Spanish. Much of what she said was not directly translated, and some of the teachers found this frustrating. Ms. Fairburn, a white teacher, commented, "I'm like, 'What are they translating? I'm not sure,' because I can catch like every third word, and I was just like, 'That was a little bit strange.'" Mr. Barnsdale commented that he was surprised to hear Julia speak, because, he said, she spoke only a little in his class. However, several teachers, especially those who spoke Spanish, mentioned that they enjoyed the bilingual aspect of the presentation and/or her approach specifically. Ms. Núñez said:

> I kind of make a connection with her [Julia] because when I came to the US for the first time I was…in 7th grade and I didn't speak English at all and I was always very shy, always kept to myself. … And just to see that she was there, talking to us in Spanish and she was proud of it, it was just a very positive impact.

As suggested by the comments of Ms. Núñez and other teachers, positionalities along lines of power could be connected to the divergences and convergences in constructions of responsibility. Ms. Fairburn thought it was "strange" that Julia was presenting in Spanish, whereas Ms. Núñez saw herself in Julia. As with Ms. Fiori's comments about Jacqueline, the comments of Ms. Fairburn and Ms. Núñez do not provide direct evidence of identities influencing shared responsibility and collective transformative agency, but suggest that this could be the case.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we have shown that the youth in the PAR program advanced a social justice agenda at Mountain Gate School, envisioning that school adults—in conjunction with youth—were responsible for taking action. Some adults embraced and acted upon the youth's research, whereas others emphasized that the responsibility for taking action lay with the students. By underscoring the youth's role and diminishing their own role, the majority of school adults overlooked the stark institutional power differences between students and school adults within the activity system of the school, which would inhibit students from making policy on their own. In this way, some school adults constrained possibilities to develop shared responsibility across youth and school adults, thereby hindering the development of collective transformative agency. However, in many ways the issues uncovered in this research also point to much broader, more complex dynamics. One question that emerged is why some adults wholeheartedly expressed a shared responsibility with the youth to tackle the contradictions of racism and bullying, while others completely evaded responsibility, and still others expressed more nuanced responses. Youth-adult power dynamics appear to have played a role. Moreover, power relations related to racial identity, special education designation, and English language learner designation may have shaped the conditions for shared responsibility. We wonder whether adults' constructions of responsibility would have been different if the youth were white and did not have English language learner or special education labels. Current events in the United States suggest that this could have been the case. For instance, youth involved in activism related to Black Lives Matter had been speaking up and protesting police gun violence for years prior to the Parkland shooting, but have received much less (positive) attention from the media and adults in positions of power (such as legislators) than the Parkland youth activists (Glanton 2018; Klas and Gurney 2018; Stewart 2018). These media accounts provide insights into the power dynamics at play within the activity system of Mountain Gate Elementary. Intersecting axes of power originating beyond the activity system may have acted as road blocks for PAR youth and school adults within the activity system, hindering

the development of collective transformative agency to address the contradictions of bullying and racism.

Also, we consider the potential role of institutional dynamics. Beyond the context of intersectionality of adultism, racism, ability labels, and language ideologies, recent education current events such as teacher walkouts point to the presence of organizational tensions related to teachers' own institutional positionalities. These may or may not be connected to some adults' reluctance in response to students' presentations of findings related to racism and bullying on campus. For example, while many students and the school administrator spoke to the role of teachers to take responsibility to address racism and bullying, few appeared to take on this mantle. Thus, there may have been mutual influence between intersectional power dynamics related to age, race, ability labels, and language, on one hand, and institutional dynamics, on the other, as related to possibilities for the creation of collective transformative agency.

With these complexities in mind, we provide directions for future research. Although our study did not consider youth-adult dialogue, our research indicates that mutual understanding about the purposes of PAR and the responsibility to take action would be beneficial. Hence, we recommend future research that intentionally centers on dialogue by all school members, which may lead to more insight on how youth and adults of varying identities perceive and decide to engage with PAR findings and work toward collective transformative agency, even in cases where youths' research topic and findings constitute a challenge to adults' work. This is especially true when teachers are asked to consider pedagogical and institutional issues that they may view as beyond their purview.

The differences in how youth and adults in our study came to construct responsibility also signal the need for future research on how teachers can learn from youth, specifically in ways that go beyond teachers' "learning" about students through analysis of diagnostic or curricular assessments of students' academic performance in school. This was alluded to by adults who constructed shared responsibility along with students. Ms. Zena, in particular, noted the value of youth-driven research, viewing the youth's presentation as a "big invitation for the teachers and the parents" to re-envision curriculum and pedagogy to reflect the community. Thus Ms. Zena considered the youth's research an opportunity for teachers to enact agency in the school. This suggests that youth-driven research is instructive for initiating collective transformative agency when adults are positioned as learners within a school activity system.

Part of the process of PAR should involve deliberately addressing power relations (Fox and Fine 2013). In this study, school adults were not involved in the research the youth conducted. However, the findings suggest that school adults can become fellow researchers in PAR projects with youth, as long as attention is paid to intersectional power dynamics, including youth and adult positions related to age, but also race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, language, and immigration status. A PAR project that brings youth and school adults together to examine systemic and institutional contradictions and co-create hybrid knowledge (Bang and Vossoughi 2016; Gutiérrez 2008) could effectively disrupt existing power relations and pave the way for enacting collective transformative agency through shared responsibility.

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