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"EVEN THOUGH WE WERE KIDS, IT FELT LIKE WE DID HAVE A VOICE": CHILDHOOD COUNTERNARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE INTO EMERGING ADULTHOOD

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Abstract

"Even though we were kids, it felt like we did have a voice": Childhood counternarrative development and maintenance into emerging adulthood

David L. Gordon, Jr., MSSA

We are socialized into a world in which multifarious forms of oppression are so typical that to contest them requires a departure from the accepted logics of social domination (King, 1968/2010). As long as the stories we subscribe to support the maintenance of a coercive hierarchy, it remains difficult to establish equitable social structures (Baszile, 2015; Hasford, 2016). By eliciting and centering marginalized stories, we are better equipped to challenge the rules, roles, and expectations based primarily on dominant groups' stories (Delgado, 1989). Developing counterstories or counternarratives is a necessary link between critical dialogue and critical action (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Rapa et al., 2018). Beginning with adultism as a common experience, the current study explores how children construct liberatory counternarratives through critical dialogue during a youth participatory action research (yPAR) program and how they apply those counternarratives to critical action as adults. I address four research questions in this dissertation: 1) How do youth participating in an afterschool participatory action research program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives in relation to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces? 2) To what extent are those counternarratives replicated or expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups? 3) To what degree are those counternarratives maintained into

emerging adulthood? and 4) To what extent do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action? To address these questions, I analyzed data from multiple years of ethnographic fieldnotes and childhood exit interviews collected during a long-running yPAR program with 9 to 11-year-olds. Emerging adult data was obtained through individual semi-structured interviews with young adult former yPAR participants, as well as one group interview. Childhood exit interviews and emerging adult interviews were analyzed using the Listening Guide (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Woodcock, 2016). The discerned results suggest that children in the yPAR program utilized dialogue in collaboration with adults, who leveraged love, hope, faith, humility, and critical thinking to support children. Through this critical dialogue, children could name power disparities, forms of oppression, or assumptions about them as children, as well as reframe aspects of their relationships with adults, providing alternative perspectives/interpretations of their capacity to engage in social spaces and challenging existing assumptions about children. Upon naming and reframing these dominant narratives, children could leverage the critical dialogue utilized in the yPAR program to articulate their own counternarratives that directly contradict certain dominant narratives about the role and capabilities of children. We observed that children broadened some of these specific counternarratives into generalizable life precepts that could be applied to other forms of oppression. Further, we also observed that emerging young adults continued to reiterate childhood counternarratives about who can contribute to social change efforts, whose perspective has value, and the importance of elevating

marginalized voices. Finally, we observed that emerging young adults incorporated their childhood counternarratives into their own current involvement in social action by highlighting the importance of listening, collaboration, advocacy, and understanding why they believe the rationales they support.

Dedication

For the wisdom and inspiration of the past (in memoriam):

David Sr. & Lisa Gordon

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For my hope for the future (in praeparatione):

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Introduction

This study explores how children collaboratively develop alternative understandings of social realities, also known as counternarratives, which they can subsequently leverage to support their engagement in critical action, both during childhood and later during adulthood. The insights from this study will inform practices for collaborating with youth in social change efforts and the creation of social spaces for children that facilitate their continued development of liberatory counternarratives and critical consciousness. Further, it will provide insight into the capacity of 9 to 12-year-old children to engage in critical dialogue, leading to the formation of counternarratives that can subsequently be leveraged into critical action, both during childhood and later during emerging adulthood. The study entailed an in-depth review of archival ethnographic fieldnotes from a youth participatory action research (yPAR) program and childhood exit interviews, as well as emerging adult follow-up interviews. At the time of the follow-up interview, all participants were adults over 18 years of age who had previously participated in the yPAR program as children.

To provide a brief roadmap, I will begin this chapter with an overview of the background and context of the study. I will then introduce the problem statement, statement of purpose, and research questions the study will address. Following this, I will briefly discuss the research approach, my positionality, and the assumptions underlying the study. Finally, I will conclude by discussing the rationale and significance of the research and defining key terms.

Background and Context

Even with increased media coverage of some social justice issues in recent years, systemic inequity remains a pressing social issue. For example, the overturn of Roe v. Wade has presented a significant setback in reproductive rights. This Supreme Court decision will reverberate differentially across dimensions of gender, race, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and able-bodiedness. It occurs in a context in which Black maternal deaths occur at a rate more than double that of non-Hispanic white women or Hispanic women (Bond et al., 2021). Simultaneously, the criminal justice system incarcerates Black men at a rate more than five times that of white men (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Moreover, over 18,000 adults are held in federal prisons for immigration-related reasons. At the same time, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement civilly detains another 23,300 more, and yet another 7,900 unaccompanied minors are under the custody of the Office for Refugee Resettlement (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Furthermore, as part of a recent surge in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, more than 30% of transgender youth live in states that have passed bans on gender-affirming care, while an additional 13% live in states that are considering similar legislation (Redfield et al., 2024). Such forms of oppression are not only prevalent, but they also reflect a consistent pattern in the strategic marginalization and exploitation of social groups.

Paradoxically, the repetitive nature of oppressive strategies is part of what renders them so durable. We are socialized into a world in which such forms of oppression are so typical that contesting them requires a departure from the accepted

logic of social domination. This process begins from infancy when we each enter the world as members of at least one dominated group, marginalized by structurally embedded adultism. Adultism is a system of subordination on the basis of age predicated upon the assumption that adults are superior and of greater worth than children and youth (Bertrand et al., 2020; DeJong & Love, 2015; Hall, 2021). As seen with other forms of oppression (such as classism, heterosexism, racism, and sexism, for example), youth-adult power disparities are demonstrated at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level of analysis and this dynamic is similarly maintained by a variety of structural and systemic mechanisms (Hasford, 2016).

For example, regarding exploitation, in a United States context, youth are often not able to financially benefit from their own labor to a degree equal to adults, instead being expected to pursue internships and volunteer opportunities (DeJong & Love, 2015). Most children and youth under age 14 are unable to obtain legal employment, resulting in economic dependence on adults and, in some cases, vulnerability to sexual exploitation (DeJong & Love, 2015; Moane, 2011). Children under 14 who can legally work in agriculture are provided with few labor and wage protections (Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938). In terms of powerlessness, youth are not provided with a voice or representation within the political system, and this absence of youth in decision-making is mirrored at other levels of analysis (DeJong & Love, 2015; Moane, 2011). Adults shape dominant cultural narratives, which include narratives around the role and characteristics of youth (DeJong & Love, 2015; Hasford, 2016; Moane, 2011). As mentioned previously, youth dependence on adults

renders them vulnerable to multiple forms of violence (DeJong & Love, 2015; Moane, 2011). This vulnerability also makes them susceptible to increased systemic control through removal from their home environment and entry into the child welfare system, which, in turn, can potentially result in increased contact with the criminal justice system (DeJong & Love, 2015; Goodkind et al., 2020). Finally, regarding fragmentation, the temporary nature of childhood and youth creates a barrier to unified youth action, as, even while children and youth are being socialized regarding the role of young people, they are simultaneously growing into a more dominant status (DeJong & Love, 2015). We see in all of these examples a parallel with similar mechanisms enacted on the basis of other identities to maintain coercive hierarchies and power structures. Having established the repetitiveness of these oppressive strategies, we must consider what renders them so obdurate in the face of resistance and what spurs individuals to engage in social action that transforms social systems to reflect the basic dignity and humanity of marginalized communities.

Engagement in efforts to promote social equity and transform social systems is not a given and must be preceded by several conditions. There must be an awareness that inequity exists, an understanding that this inequity is not natural, but structural, motivation and capacity to pursue transformation, resources to undergird the effort, and an opportunity to act. Such conditions are consistent with aspects of intrapersonal, interactional, relational, and behavioral empowerment (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 1995). Dominant stories or narratives, whether present at the individual, interpersonal, or social level, form a barrier to the development of these

forms of empowerment and, subsequently, are an essential site of intervention for the promotion of transformative change (Rappaport, 1995).

Stories, in general, have historically played a pivotal role in developing a collective understanding of social structures, traditions, and norms for people of many cultural backgrounds (Baszile, 2015). They are how we see reality, our idea of how the world works, and the rules by which we are governed. If we think of a famous fictional story, we are immediately reminded of a distinct reality with distinct characters. The participants have specific characteristics, roles, and abilities. Some are considered good, and some are considered evil. Everyone in the story is governed by rules the author has put into place. Harry Potter does not climb into a rocketship because that is not part of the story. That does not fit within the narrative that the author has created.

Similarly, we socially construct stories that tell us how our world works, determine who plays what role, and reify the rules by which our world is governed, not unlike the fictional world of the Harry Potter universe. We are immersed in those stories from birth and are introduced to a world where specific rules and expectations are already in place. A problem is that the stories that shape our systems and structures have not historically been co-authored. Dominant narratives created by dominant social groups are implicitly normalized and shape our expectations of reality. As long as that story normalizes the maintenance of a coercive hierarchy, it remains challenging to transform structures into something more equitable. By eliciting and centering marginalized stories, we are better equipped to challenge the

rules, roles, and expectations that have been based primarily on the stories of dominant groups.

These marginalized stories have been discussed in the critical race theory (CRT) literature, and related areas of literature, as counternarratives. Counternarratives present a collective, strengths-based, critical interpretation of everyday realities from the perspective of non-dominant groups. Where dominant narratives validate and prop up existing power relationships, counternarratives mobilize the shared experiences of oppressed peoples to ask questions and challenge assumptions of what is and what could be. Dominant narratives place blame at the individual level, whereas counternarratives explore contributing factors at multiple levels of analysis, particularly at the structural or macro level. Counternarratives complicate and nuance where dominant narratives oversimplify, allowing for broader and more creative intervention strategies. The intentional development of counternarratives can motivate, drive, and sustain efforts for transformative social change. One aspect that makes such counternarratives so engrossing and effective is that they do not depend on isolated reflections but are developed in collaboration with others, such that the resulting narratives reflect a shared experience from multiple perspectives. Individual reflections and experiences are interwoven through critical dialogue to forge an understanding of social realities that can compel critical action.

This process of reflection, dialogue, and action is what Paolo Freire (1970/2000) described as critical consciousness. Within critical consciousness, dialogue is a crucial component that humanizes participants and creates a space in

which new possibilities might be realized. It is the bridge between individual observation and collective action that can alter deeply entrenched social structures. Friere (1970/2000) refers to it as "an encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed" (p. 88), meaning it's more than just an exchange or depositing of information. Rather, it is an intentional act of collaborative co-creation between participants to unite their stories in pursuit of a common purpose. It is naming the world in order to transform the world. Collective problematization through critical dialogue produces a strengths-based, historicized counternarrative from which marginalized groups can organize collective action focused on transformational change.

In the present study, I will explore further this process of collective problematization and the creation of change-inspiring counternarratives by children. Beginning with adultism as a common experience, this study seeks to understand how children begin to disrupt logics of oppression in the creation of new motivational counternarratives.

Problem Statement

Children are socialized into the normalization of identity-based hierarchy in the context of structurally-embedded adultism. This socialization is enacted through the inscription of dominant narratives regarding the characteristics, capacity, and normative social positioning of social groups. Such dominant narratives reify and support tools of oppression that are leveraged in similar ways across dimensions of identity. The narratives we are socialized into early in life influence the narratives that

guide our decision-making as we continue to develop, from childhood into emerging adulthood, and beyond.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to identify processes by which children begin to critique dominant narratives that support identity-based hierarchies and subsequently form liberatory counternarratives that can be leveraged in transformative social action. Furthermore, this study explores children's maintenance of these counternarratives into emerging adulthood and application in social action across dimensions of oppression. As such, this study will seek to address the following research questions:

1. How do children participating in an afterschool PAR program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces?
2. To what extent are those narratives replicated or expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups?
3. To what degree are those counternarratives maintained into emerging adulthood?
4. To what extent do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action?

Research Approach

This study is comprised of an analysis of both archival and newly collected data. The archival data includes ethnographic fieldnotes and exit interviews from a

long-running youth participatory action research (yPAR) project. This project consisted of an afterschool program conducted at an elementary school on the California Central Coast. Starting in 2007, 4th and 5th-grade students were recruited to participate in a praxis cycle of problem definition, intervention design, collective action, and evaluation of intervention outcomes. During the time being reviewed in this study (2007-2012), two cycles of participating youth identified a problem, designed and implemented an intervention, and evaluated intervention outcomes. Approximately twenty children (ten from each grade) participated in any program year, except for the first year, which comprised twenty 5th graders.

Newly collected data was obtained through individual semi-structured interviews with young adult former yPAR participants, as well as one group interview. Participants were eligible to enroll in the study if they were over the age of 18 and had previously been members of the yPAR program during the years under consideration. For both the group and individual interviews, questions were focused on the young adults' reflections on the yPAR program, perspectives on the capacity of children, and current engagement in social action. Group and individual interviews were conducted via the Zoom teleconferencing service, recorded, and transcribed using an online transcription service.

For analysis, both archival ethnographic fieldnotes were coded by a team comprised of the doctoral candidate and three undergraduate research assistants using consensus coding. The team coded for aspects of critical dialogue, reflections on various forms of oppression, and reflections on relative child-youth capacity. I coded

childhood exit interviews and emerging adult semi-structured interviews using the Listening Guide to discern developing counternarratives. The Listening Guide is a voice-centered, feminist coding method that allows analysis to be grounded in and connected to the perspectives, ideas, and words of the participants rather than interpreting their perspectives through the lens of primarily external sources (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Woodcock, 2016).

Assumptions

This study is underlaid by certain assumptions regarding the experiences of children and youth. First, this study assumes that children participate in adultist structures and, although they might not explicitly identify institutional adultism, they are aware that their full participation in social structures is constrained by virtue of their age. Children and, later, emerging adults might not explicitly name children's experiences as oppressive. Yet, according to this assumption, they are aware that the experiences of children and adults are systemically disparate. Second, this study assumes that children are generally aware of the existence of forms of oppression that they experience intersectionally, as well as forms of oppression outside of their direct experience. Although children might not be fully aware of the mechanisms of oppression, this study assumes that they are aware that injustice exists conceptually. Third, this study assumes that individuals are unlikely to engage in transformative social action without a rationale for doing so. In other words, individuals are unlikely to try to change social structures that influence lived conditions without first identifying the necessity of that change or problematizing those lived conditions.

Finally, this study assumes that individuals engage in the world in accordance with socially constructed scripts or narratives. Whether based on dominant or subaltern perspectives, this assumption holds that people generally move through the world in a manner consistent with some mutually held belief system or understanding of normative social relations. Together, these assumptions inform the rationale for this study and its intended contributions to the psychological literature.

Rationale & Significance

The impetus for this study stems from two primary observations. First, awareness of oppression and its root causes is not a given. On the contrary, there are countless reasons provided by individuals, groups, and institutions that benefit from the existence of oppression and power inequities as to why such inequities either constitute the natural and ideal order of society or are actually the fault of marginalized persons. Opportunities must be created to question and problematize these explanations. Otherwise, an oppressive status quo is likely to persist. Second, awareness of oppression, in and of itself, is not sufficient to promote social action. Freire (1970/2000) acknowledged this reality when he noted that reflection without action is not true reflection. The bridge between reflection and action, however, is dialogue, through which oppressed persons are able to collaboratively imagine a world in which liberation is made real. The product of this collective imagining is a counternarrative, which can then be mobilized into transformative action. As such, and given the immediate exposure of children to dominant narratives, it seems important to explore how children engage in this process of collective questioning

and imagining, as well as how they leverage that collective imagining into social action, even as they themselves grow out of one marginalized identity and into members of a group that benefits from that very system of marginalization.

Understanding such a process provides multiple opportunities for advocates for social equity. Although some studies have explored the development of counternarratives by children and youth (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Garcia et al., 2020; Kinloch et al., 2020), little research has explored how young people maintain those narratives into adulthood or utilize them to inform adult critical action. Similarly, little research has addressed how counternarratives born of critical dialogue regarding adultism, in which membership in the marginalized group is transient, is applied to domains of oppression in which membership is persistent over time. Given this, the current study seeks to inform theory about the role of counternarratives in mediating the application of critical dialogue to engagement in critical action, specifically for children. Further, this study seeks to inform theory about how emerging young adults sustain and apply critical counternarratives that may or may not directly benefit them due to their shifting positionality. In practice, strengthening these theoretical areas will better equip practitioners in shaping spaces that prepare children to engage in life-long liberatory practice, beginning with engagement in critical reflection and dialogue.

The Researcher

I am a doctoral candidate in Social Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). I identify as a red-letter Christian[1], middle-class-raised, early middle-aged, Black, American-born, heterosexual, cisgender man. I am also a father to two young biracial children, both identified as male at birth. Before attending graduate school at UCSC, I worked for several years as a social worker and counselor, having previously obtained my master's degree in social administration (social work) at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OH. Much of my work has been focused on the needs and experiences of system-involved children, youth, and their families. Specifically, most of the youth I have served have been involved in the child welfare system. Due to this experience and the significant overrepresentation of youth of color in the child welfare system, I have developed an interest in how children and youth of color can gain increased control over the conditions that impact their everyday lives. In that vein, I have previously studied, presented, and/or published on topics related to implicit communication in elementary school settings, critical consciousness development, service learning, and academic success for under and misrepresented college students (Do et al., 2023; Langhout et al., 2022; Langhout & Gordon, 2021; Vaccarino et al., 2022). I believe that these aspects of my identities and experiences inextricably influence my values, worldview,

[1] Red-letter Christianity is a branch of Christianity which places emphasis on the words and teachings of Jesus found in the New Testament. Specifically, I ascribe to liberation theology in the tradition of Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973/1988), James H. Cone (1970/2010), Naim Stifan Ateek (2017), and Grace Ji-Sun Kim (2021). As such, I engage in this work with the praxis perspective that spirituality and social justice activism are mutually constitutive.

and, commensurately, my approach to the empirical study of psychological issues. As such, I seek to consistently engage in critical reflexivity to examine how my complex forms of privilege and marginalization inform my work.

Definitions of Key Terms

Oppression - Systematic subordination on the basis of membership in socially constructed groups, maintained through institutional structures, policies, ideologies, and interpersonal practices, that deprives members of a given group of equitable access to material and psychological resources (Young, 1990).

Liberation - Radical change reflecting "insight, restoration, and an opening for greater humanity for victims as well as perpetrators, bystanders, and witnesses" (Watkins & Shulman, 2010, p.47) of oppression, which occurs through economic, political, sociocultural, spiritual, and psychological transformation, thereby disrupting the systems of oppression described above (Gutiérrez, 1973/1988; Watkins & Shulman, 2010).

Children and youth - Socially constructed statuses assigned on the basis of being under the age of majority or enfranchisement (Tuck & Yang, 2014; United Nations, 1989). Although there are distinctions in developmental psychology based on age, adultism is leveraged against all individuals under the age of majority, although the specific experience of adultism may vary based on where an individual falls on the age spectrum (DeJong & Love, 2015). The participants in this study were school-age children during the original yPAR study.

Emerging Adult - A socially constructed status denoting that an individual has passed the age of majority or enfranchisement, although they may not be endowed with the same degree of positive regard as an older adult (Reifman et al., 2007).

Literature Review

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how children develop counternarratives through critical dialogue, maintain those counternarratives into emerging adulthood, and leverage those counternarratives in the pursuit of transformative and liberatory social change. Specifically, this study asks the following questions: 1) How do children participating in an afterschool yPAR program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces, 2) To what extent are those narratives replicated or expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups?, 3) To what degree are childhood counternarratives maintained into emerging adulthood, and 4) To what extent do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action? To ground this exploration, in this chapter, I will review relevant literature on age-based oppression, critical consciousness, counternarratives, and empowerment for social action.

Rationale for Topics

Engagement in critical action efforts to effect liberatory change requires a reference point for what changes are necessary and how those changes might be brought about most effectively. This study posits that counternarratives that challenge dominant rationales provide just such a blueprint for how members of marginalized communities can collaboratively engage in transformative action. To understand the role of counternarratives in problem identification and intervention, we must first

establish what dominant norms and patterns of oppression are being contradicted. Although the children whose experiences are centered in this study encounter many intersectional forms of oppression, they all commonly share the experience of age-based oppression, specifically adultism. Due to this common experience, I will begin by detailing the literature on adultism. I believe that this will be particularly helpful in understanding how adultism provides an early life model of subordination and domination that subsequently normalizes oppression in other domains of identity.

As adultism normalizes patterns of domination and subordination, members of marginalized communities can collaboratively evaluate and challenge systems and structures that are upheld by those patterns. This collective engagement in reflection, dialogue, and subsequent critical action comprises the process of conscientization (Freire, 1970/2000). In this study, I will be particularly focused on how yPAR participants engage in critical dialogue to create liberatory counternarratives, which subsequently enable critical action. To provide the groundwork for these connections, after providing an overview of adultism, I will discuss the current literature on conscientization and its role in producing counternarratives.

Having established the patterns of oppression exemplified in adultism and the process by which members of marginalized groups begin to challenge those patterns, I will then explore the ways in which children and emerging adults are able to leverage counternarratives to gain greater control over the systems and structures that impact their lives. To ground this discussion, it's necessary to review the literature on empowerment, from which we can gain a better understanding of how

counternarratives can contribute to multiple forms of empowerment, which can subsequently be embodied in collective social action. After all, this is the central characteristic of praxis, in which theories born of critical reflection are mobilized into action, which subsequently informs future ongoing theorization (Freire, 1970/2000; Montero, 2009). Without action, reflection is inauthentic and ineffective, as conceptualized in this description by Freire (1970/2000):

> An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating "blah." It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. (p. 87)

Given the critical role of action in mobilizing a commitment to transformation that emerges from critical dialogue and accompanying counternarratives, a discussion of empowerment necessary for action is appropriate. I begin, however, by reviewing relevant literature on adultism.

Adultism

Oppression on the basis of age occurs in two distinct dimensions. Subordination experienced as one reaches late adulthood is defined as ageism, whereas that experienced prior to reaching the age of majority or enfranchisement encapsulates adultism. More precisely, adultism is a system of subordination on the

basis of age predicated upon the assumption that adults are superior and of greater worth than children and youth (Bertrand et al., 2020; DeJong & Love, 2015; Hall, 2021). As a result, children and youth have restricted opportunities to enact social power, limited access to goods, services, and social privileges, and an inability to participate fully in economic and political spheres (Corney et al., 2022; Oto, 2023). The lived experience of this form of oppression is complicated by the many intersecting identities held by children and youth, resulting in differing experiences of adultism, although there are common themes (Collins, 1990/2022; Hall, 2021). Mirroring colonial logics of colonizer/colonized duality, children and youth are assumed to be less mature, moral, and capable of self-determination than their adult "opposites", thereby validating the prioritization of adult decision-making and social control (Corney et al., 2022; DeJong & Love, 2015). The deprecation of one socially constructed group to reinforce domination and a hegemonic status quo is a pervasive method of oppression, which is first experienced and normalized during childhood (Bell, 2007; Bettencourt, 2020; DeJong & Love, 2015).

Such normalization is significant, as adultism simultaneously intersects with and models other forms of oppression (Bertrand et al., 2020). Multiple theoretical frameworks of oppression highlight key commonalities across systems of oppression. For example, Lee Ann Bell (2007) describes oppression as pervasive, cumulative, durable, grounded in group-based categories, hierarchical, hegemonic, internalized, intersecting, and restrictive. These features could be equally attributed to racism, sexism, cisheterosexism, classism, and, critically, adultism. For the purpose of this

literature review, I will discuss how adultism is reflected in Iris Marion Young's (1990) Five Faces of Oppression. Consisting of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, this framework provides a convenient structure for drawing comparisons across domains of oppression. Further, it has frequently been used as a tool for understanding and teaching about various forms of intersectional oppression (Allan et al., 2023; DeJong & Love, 2015; Shlasko, 2015). Unsurprisingly, the appearance of these mechanisms varies depending on the context under consideration. In order to provide focused, concrete examples, I will discuss all five mechanisms in the context of the United States education system.

Exploitation

Exploitation is the systematic extraction of resources from one group for the benefit of another (Shlasko, 2015; Young, 1990). These resources can take any number of forms, though they are often different for children and youth in comparison to adults due to the typical exclusion of children from the labor market (DeJong & Love, 2015). Children and youth are uniquely vulnerable to exploitation within public education due to the testing industrial complex that has accompanied increasingly neoliberal approaches to education and high-stakes testing (Brathwaite, 2017). With increasing privatization, many school districts had already established highly profitable contracts for food vendors and curriculum, but this profit generation only escalated following the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2002 (Au, 2022; Brathwaite, 2017). As a result, private companies are now positioned to make billions of dollars in profit off of assessment facilitation, school-based test preparation, and

independent test preparation for individual students (Au, 2016, 2022; Del Carmen Unda & Lizárraga-Dueñas, 2021). One of the foremost of these companies, Pearson, reported sales of over £3.6 billion ($4.5 billion) in 2023 alone for assessment and qualifications, virtual learning, higher education, English language learning, workforce skills, and strategic review services (Pearson, 2024). According to a Politico report, in 2012, Pearson generated $258 million from its United States assessments alone (Simon, 2015). Interestingly, despite having certain outcome goals in their contracts with various school districts, Pearson is paid whether those outcomes are achieved or not (Del Carmen Unda & Lizárraga-Dueñas, 2021; Simon, 2015).

Simultaneously, youth of Color and low-income youth are impacted disproportionately, as standardized tests are inherently constructed in ways that are culturally and socioeconomically biased (Au, 2016). As a result, these youth are more likely to feel pushed out of school, face harsher discipline for active or passive resistance to negative school experiences, and experience higher visibility and exposure to the criminal justice system, potentially leading to entry into juvenile detention or prison where they will continue to be exploited for corporate profit (Del Carmen Unda & Lizárraga-Dueñas, 2021). Systems of exploitation, such as these are closely linked to and supported by the marginalization of children.

Marginalization

Marginalization, as used here, consists of restriction on the degree to which a social group is able to access, participate in, and benefit from systems of labor

(Young, 1990). As a result, marginalized groups face disproportionate material deprivation and are at greater risk of dependency on others for access to necessary resources (DeJong & Love, 2015). Children are excluded from legal work in most industries and, due to compulsory education, are expected to be in school preparing for entry into the workplace and channeling funds to corporate beneficiaries, as previously discussed (DeJong & Love, 2015; Moane, 2011). Due to this exclusion and the lack of a basic minimum income, they are economically dependent on adults and, as a result, at greater risk of exploitation and violence.

These risks of exploitation and violence are perhaps best illustrated by a rare exception to child employment standards. Children as young as 10 can legally work on farms outside of school hours, provided they are hand-harvesting, their employer obtains a federal waiver, and, if they are under 12, they are working on a farm on which employees are exempt from the federal minimum wage (Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938). With parental permission, there is no limit on how many hours outside of school children can engage in agricultural work, potentially impacting their ability to rest sufficiently to fully engage in school (National Center for Farmworker Health, 2018; Wurth, 2023). Further, as chronicled in a recent New York Times story (Dreier, 2023), children might also be employed illegally in any number of occupations outside of agriculture. In both of these scenarios, legal and illegal, self-advocacy for worker's rights carries great risk, as the child and, often, the child's family are economically dependent on their employer and have few or no alternative employment options (Choi, 2021; Dreier 2023). Low-income and undocumented

children of Color are at the highest risk of these forms of marginalization and exploitation (Choi, 2021; Wurth, 2023). Changing systems that promote such forms of marginalization and exploitation is hindered by the absence of children and youth from sanctioned decision-making structures. This systemic absence of decision-making power constitutes what Young (1990) termed powerlessness.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness denotes a structurally constrained ability to contribute to or control decisions that impact one's own social participation or ability to access material resources (DeJong & Love, 2015; Young, 1990). As a concept, powerlessness does not suggest that children and youth do not have agency. On the contrary, children and youth exercise individual and collective agency within the education system in a variety of ways, including through covert and overt forms of resistance (Cruz, 2013; Langhout, 2005; Rosales & Langhout, 2020). Further, many schools have created systems for increased student input (Silva & Langhout, 2016). Yet, as children and youth are considered less mature and, therefore, less able to adequately assess their own needs or conditions, they are frequently excluded from decision-making processes or constrained to tokenized contributions within school systems (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jackson, 1966; Langhout, 2005; Payne 2023). Adults determine priorities for curriculum content, set the schedule, monitor time, restrict and direct physical movement, and create standards for assessment (Jackson, 1966). The experiences and perspectives of children and youth rarely, if ever, are engaged in the co-construction of knowledge. Rather, in many schools, adults,

specifically teachers and those responsible for curriculum design, are tasked with determining what knowledge is essential, disseminating information consistent with those forms of knowledge, and assessing the ability of children and youth to retrieve and apply that information (Apple, 1971; Jay 2003; Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). This adult control over the distribution and valuation of information aligns closely with the next mechanism of oppression, cultural imperialism.

Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism consists of the imposition of a dominant culture's perspectives, narratives, and values as normative standards for marginalized communities (Young, 1990). These spoken and unspoken expectations are subject to rigid and punitive enforcement, resulting in potentially dire consequences for those who do not adequately assimilate to or, at least, effectively navigate dominant norms (DeJong & Love, 2015). Within the context of adultism, adult perspectives, narratives, and values are the standard by which children and youth are assessed and, consequently, rewarded or punished. In school spaces, this often can take the form of hidden curricula.

The hidden curriculum consists of the everyday patterns of behavior that shape and prescribe the desired behaviors of participants in the setting. Philip Jackson (1966) talked about the hidden curriculum as "learning to live in a crowd" and noted that students are trained on how they specifically should live in a crowd through the rules, routines, and regulations of the classroom. These rules, routines, and regulations are part of the everyday process of making sure what "needs" to happen in

the classroom happens, but generally, “what needs to happen” is based on the general purpose of schooling within our social context, which is ultimately determined by adults. Schools are designed to prepare students to participate in the world after graduation, but the definition of “appropriate participation” is not universally agreed upon (Fernández & Langhout, 2018; West, 2007; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). On the contrary, “appropriate participation” is based on dominant cultural norms, which entails prescribed roles for certain groups of people. The implication of prescribed group roles could mean teaching students about the value of their cultural background in comparison to the value of dominant cultural backgrounds, the capabilities of their social identity groups, the resources that those in their group should expect to receive or have access to, or the general powerlessness to which they should become accustomed (Giroux & Penna, 1979).

Much as seen in other mechanisms of oppression, this feature of adultism is not experienced equitably across intersecting identities. Typically, not all students receive the same treatment, as some teachers find it necessary to address “troublemakers” or “less capable” students before they disrupt or slow down the rest of the class (Jay, 2003). Not surprisingly, these subjectively determined “troublemakers” and “less capable” students are disproportionately comprised of members of marginalized groups, particularly students of color and working-class students. Often, this evaluation is based on the students' ability to successfully enact dominant cultural expectations, rather than their ability to engage with class material. Such denigration of lived experiences and resulting repercussions from failure to

successfully adapt to dominant forms of knowledge and engagement are one form of violence experienced by children, which I will now discuss in greater detail.

Violence

Violence, as used in this text, is not constrained to acts of physical violence, but also includes psychological, ontological, and epistemic violence (Coşkan & Şen, 2023; Pillay, 2022). In addition to physical violence, children and youth are often not seen as valid contributors to the construction of knowledge (epistemic violence) and the reality of their lived experiences is dismissed in favor of adult experiences (ontological violence) (Brunner, 2021; Fuentes et al., 2024). Although violence can be enacted by and toward anyone, marginalized groups endure systemically initiated, maintained, and sanctioned forms of violence (Young, 1990). Given their economic dependence on adults, children and youth are particularly susceptible to exploitation and violence. Within school systems, specifically, this violence can take the form of any of the previously described forms. Consistent with the United States' failure to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, school corporal punishment is still considered legal practice in 19 different states (Dhaliwal et al., 2024; Green et al., 2024). When implemented, it is disproportionately applied to Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children and youth, particularly in the South (Dhaliwal et al., 2024; Green et al., 2024).

Together, these mechanisms of oppression serve to other children and youth, invalidate their lived experiences, and maintain a system based on the implied superiority of the dominant group, in this case adults. This is system maintenance

accomplished in a manner very similar to other systems of oppression, thereby serving as an early life model of subordinate and dominant relationships. Liberation requires an ability to critique and problematize such a model. Upon developing a critique of "what is", members of marginalized groups can collaboratively imagine a self-determined definition of "what should be," which can subsequently be leveraged into transformative critical action. This praxis model of reflection contributing to collective problematization and dreaming, which can then be mobilized in collective action, has been discussed in the literature as conscientization, which I describe in the following section.

Conscientization and Counternarratives

As individuals gain an understanding of their role within social structures, they must reflect on their own experiences in the world (Freire, 2000). They are able to incorporate their interactions with social structures and institutions over the course of time into their understanding of the way the world works (Deimer & Li, 2011). In isolation, however, individuals are unable to build on the experiences of others to complicate their understanding of the world in a manner that can provide a foundation for collective action (Rapa et al., 2018). As such, they are susceptible to gaslighting by dominant groups and may not have sufficient information to challenge deficit narratives regarding their ability to thrive. By engaging in dialogue with other members of marginalized groups, individuals can begin to discern an understanding of reality that speaks to the perspectives of the subaltern (Montero, 2009). With their personal story now joined to the stories and experiences of others similarly positioned

in social systems, the individual is better situated to problematize dominant narratives about their role within those social systems (Freire, 1970/2000; Montero, 2009). These dominant narratives often limit analysis of social inequities to the individual, micro-, or meso-level and, therefore, limit the identification of potential solutions to ameliorative or deficit-based changes at these levels (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Collective problematization through critical dialogue produces a strengths-based, historicized counternarrative from which marginalized groups can organize collective action focused on transformational change to structures and ideology at the macro-level of analysis (Diemer & Li, 2011; Rapa et al., 2018; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). To further explore this connection between problematization and counternarratives, I will discuss critical reflection and dialogue processes in greater detail. This description will lead to a discussion of counternarratives that might emerge from critical reflection and dialogue.

Critical Reflection and Dialogue

Frequently, construction of reality is centered in dominant ideology (Osorio, 2009). Oppressed groups, perpetrators of oppression, and bystanders alike are socialized into the normalization of an oppressive status quo. Before a collective opposition to this status quo can be put forth, there must be a re-centering, a theoretical shift in considering the mechanisms that maintain power inequities. This re-centering requires a contextualized critical analysis of the subjective experience by individuals (Varas-Diaz & Serrano-Garcia, 2003). Critical reflection entails individuals questioning the reality that is systemically portrayed through dominant

ideology and narratives and, alternatively, developing a consciousness of their social positioning as exhibited by their lived experiences (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Without such reflection, one is unable to engage in critical, transformative action (Freire, 2000).

By engaging in critical reflection, individuals can gain a greater understanding of injustice and the mechanisms that maintain it. Individual reflection, although important, does not translate directly to transformative structural change. On the contrary, liberation psychology suggests that the bridge to social action is the collective sharing of narratives and the dialogical construction of social realities with others (Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 2009). By deeply reflecting on their own experiences of the world, social actors are able to draw upon those reflections to share with others and to mobilize based on shared narratives that run counter to dominant ideologies.

Through engagement in dialogue with one another, members of subordinated groups can move from "personal" problems to community or collective problems by incorporating a broader range of experiences and collaboratively constructing understandings of social reality. When rooted in historical context, dialogue can not only provide greater clarity on the collective problems of the present, but can draw upon collective memory to identify and contest the historical foundations of oppression that continue into the present. In discussing empowerment techniques in connection to PAR, Fals-Borda (1988) highlighted the utility of a critical recovery of history. Specifically, he stated, "This is an effort to discover selectively, through

collective memory, those elements of the past which have proved useful in the defense of the interests of exploited classes and which may be applied to the present struggles to increase conscientisation" (p. 103).

This drawing upon collective memory takes on a particular connotation when considering the positionality of youth. Given that they are immersed in concentrated socialization through formal schooling, critical dialogue (or more specifically a dialogue that challenges proscribed norms and the status quo) involves drawing upon collective narratives that expressly capture an understanding of the world outside of the purview of popular culture. This development of collective meaning by youth can be facilitated by an organized process of questioning everyday occurrences and drawing upon each other's lived experiences to engage in democratic knowledge production regarding those experiences (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012).

Critical dialogue is an integral part of developing a social construction of reality. According to social practice theory, this understanding of reality is, simultaneously, what we conceive of as learning and identity development (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). Dialogue represents one of the multiple forms of participation within social contexts through which our understanding of that context is expanded and through which we shape our negotiation of meaning and construction of our life stories (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). Individuals simultaneously shape, are shaped by, and can mobilize this collaboration to transform social settings (Stetsenko, 2013). This process and its relevance to the experiences of youth is exemplified in a case study of a 16-year-old group home resident participating in a collaborative project

(Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). Labeled as "emotionally disturbed" by group home staff and social services professionals, the young person, Jay, maintained an ambivalent relationship with peers, staff, the author, and academics. The author observed, however, that Jay's participation in the collaborative project encouraged him to think about his place in the world, which progressed into thinking more critically about the nature of social institutions broadly and the group home in particular. Jay's dialogical participation with peers, the author, and staff provided a foundation for a shift to an action-oriented stance toward his social settings. Subsequently, Jay's generalized resistance to the group home and its staff became focused on the transformation of the structural oppression present within the group home. In time, this transformative stance was directed not just toward the group home, but expanded to encompass the systemic oppression of the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

We see in this study that once multiple perspectives have been engaged in developing a democratized understanding of social reality, youth (or other marginalized groups) are able not only to recognize the nature of social structures, but also develop a shared understanding of what a desirable world might look like. With this shared understanding, collective critical action for social transformation can occur (Gordon & Taft, 2011). In fact, not only does critical dialogue facilitate critical action, transformative action cannot take place in the absence of dialogue (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Without dialogue, we run the risk of silencing the "other", including those with intersecting social identities that we might not share. Upon establishing a counternarrative, however, we can move toward re-shaping

problematic social structures according to our collective utopic imagining (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

Also evident in the above study was the role of group home adults in supporting transformative dialogue (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). Indeed, collaborative dialogue, whether between peers or between youth and adults, requires intentional attention to certain pre-conditions. Friere (1970/2000) suggests that liberatory dialogue requires five key components: love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. For the purpose of operationalization, love can be thought of as reinforcing the humanity of others and the validity of their perspectives. Humility requires refraining from projecting ignorance onto others, as well as acknowledging our own gaps in understanding. Faith involves believing that others are actually capable of collaboration. Hope requires a belief that change or progress is actually possible. And, critical thinking suggests that we are willing to think about the constituent parts of the systems in which we participate and the mutability of those parts. To support critical dialogue, adults needed to model all of these traits in some capacity. This is true for both liberatory pedagogy and methodology.

Participatory action research (PAR) can present one such organized process for youth to engage in critical dialogue and begin moving toward the creation of transformative change (Ozer, 2017). In this approach to research, participants, in this case youth, collaborate to set the research agenda, implement the research methods, analyze the results, and design a course of action based on those results. Working with youth to identify problem definitions can challenge dominant conceptions of

their own needs and strengths. For example, in one study conducted across two high schools, youth participatory action research (yPAR) student researchers were recruited to engage in problem definition, intervention design, and evaluation (Ozer & Wright, 2012). The authors addressed two primary questions. First, how do yPAR interventions create or strengthen opportunities for youth to impact school policies and practices, and, second, how are yPAR participant interactions with students and adults distinct from typical interactions in the school setting? Both schools had existing student advisory councils, but these groups largely served to provide consultation on efforts to increase "school spirit" or other student social opportunities. By participating in the yPAR project, student researchers had the opportunity to engage in rich critical dialogue with peers and school staff regarding issues that impacted their everyday participation in the school setting. In both cases, youth and staff were able to conceive of youth participation differently. For both, their narratives around roles for students and student expertise shifted from dominant narratives in which youth, particularly youth of color, have little or no control or input in school settings.

Dialogue provides an opportunity for the intentional development of a narrative based on shared experiences, or a counternarrative or counterstory to popular thought regarding social realities (Hook & Howarth, 2005). These counternarratives are able to facilitate certain key processes for subordinated groups. In naming the lived experiences that run counter to dominant narratives, they provide the opportunity for subordinated groups to build community through consensus

around encounters with oppression and engagement in resistance (Delgado, 1989). They can highlight possibilities for action and articulate a desire-based framework (Tuck, 2009). Through the centering of lived experiences, members of subordinated groups are able to contest their exclusion within contexts shaped by dominant groups and name misallocations of resources and power (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

In the previous study (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011), the authors discerned that opportunities to engage in dialogue provided a basis for a new, shared understanding of systems, structures, and institutions. For the students participating in this study and the adults they interacted with, recognizing the capacity of youth and youth being taken seriously created a supportive environment for systemic change within the school setting. In these conclusions, we see that critical dialogue among members of marginalized groups can support the development of counternarratives, which, in turn, can be mobilized into transformative collective action (Diemer & Li, 2011; Taft, 2015; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). It is this utility of dialogue in supporting the creation of liberatory counternarratives that contributes to my first two research questions: how do children participating in an afterschool yPAR program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to youth capacity to participate in social spaces, and to what extent are those narratives replicated or expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups? Counternarratives present a conceptualization of a potential reality that represents the hopes and dreams of marginalized communities, as opposed to being based on the norms and practices of dominant groups. Before discussing the potential collective

action that might emerge from this contradictory conceptualization, let us explore the nature of counternarratives in more detail.

Counternarratives

The stories that society tells about us are not always consistent with our own understanding of ourselves or the worlds we inhabit. Often, these narratives serve to reinforce existing power structures and normalize social hierarchies. Dominant symbols and activities elevate the perspectives of dominant groups while simultaneously marginalizing or rendering invisible the perspectives of subordinated groups (Moane, 2011; Young, 2011). When deficit narratives are normalized as an explanation for social inequities, there is little incentive for systemic change on the part of oppressors or those experiencing oppression (Delgado, 1989).

In contrast, studies have shown that the development of counternarratives can be useful in establishing and evaluating the link between the individual and social structures (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Grabe & Dutt, 2015). One such study found this to be the case in examining the narratives of women engaged in social action in Nicaragua (Grabe & Dutt, 2015). The goal of the study was to explore how members of the Movimíento Autónomo de Mujeres (Autonomous Women's Movement) developed counternarratives around women's rights, thereby expanding notions of human rights. Looking more closely at these narratives allowed the authors to observe the interplay between individual understanding of daily life experiences and how they engaged in actions to address those experiences. Specifically, the authors asked how these understandings and attitudes led to the women's role in creating this movement

and how they saw this process as applying to the Nicaraguan political agenda. Following interviews with 13 women identified as leaders within the movement, the authors discerned three key themes. First, they observed that problematizing oppressive practices and dominant political narratives had resulted in a firmer commitment to resistance and a sense of duty regarding the women's role within the movement. Second, the narratives of the participants highlighted that formation of the movement was the manifestation of the realization that the human rights agenda of existing social justice movements was too narrow, excluding issues that disproportionately or exclusively impacted women. Consistent with the earlier point of the issues presented by a failure to consider intersectionality, the goals of the Sandanista movement following the revolution were not inclusive of the rights of women. Third, the authors found that the interviewees were able to use this elucidation of women's rights as a human rights issue to push forward a liberatory political agenda. We can see from this project that the counternarratives these women constructed through reflection and dialogue not only helped them evaluate their understanding of the world, but also allowed them to mobilize that understanding to create transformative change.

Although this study demonstrates the role of counternarratives for adult women, similar utility has also been observed for youth. Specifically, a study by Cervantes-Soon (2012) looked at the narratives of high school girls from Juarez, Mexico. The author centers her theory and method on testimonios. She explains that her use of testimonio is grounded in the work of Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1981)

"theory in the flesh", which privileges the experiences, voices, and knowledge of subaltern women of color (Cervantes-Soon, 2012). Through the example of testimonios from two girls, the author outlines three applications of testimonios as counternarratives, confessionals, and consejos (advice). The author notes that women at the border are often depicted as naive victims as opposed to agents of their own destiny. One of the students interviewed uses a testimonio to describe how she is able to self-author an activist identity out of her own experiences with violence. Reflecting on her own traumatic assault, the student states, "Although sometimes I get attacks of rage, not fear, but rage, I hope to transform this rage into boldness." (Cervantes-Soon, 2012, p. 380). In addition to creating a counternarrative, the students interviewed were able to use testimonios as a confessional to critically reflect on their own experience and actions, sharing and learning lessons from the truth of their own experience. Finally, the students interviewed used testimonios to encourage and give advice to others. Through dialogue, the students were able to share and grow from each other's experiential knowledge.

Counternarratives provide an opportunity for participants in dialogue to center subaltern experiences and interpret social realities from the perspective of marginalized groups. This recentering can provide a foundation for problem identification and transformative action. For example, the discussion of disparities in academic outcomes as an "achievement gap" reinforces the underlying assumption that the problem is the failure of students of color to meet academic standards, reifying the dominant narrative of white intellectual superiority (Love, 2004).

Alternatively, discussion of these disparities as an "opportunity gap" highlights the systemic inequities impacting students of color and supports efforts for transformative systemic change (Carter & Welner, 2013; Love 2004).

This shift in framing as a motivator for potential change was a central aspect of one study that sought to explore how high school youth developed counternarratives as part of a participatory action photovoice project (Goessling, 2018). Youth were recruited from a school in a Portland neighborhood with the highest concentration of residents of color in the city. Consistent with dominant narratives, media and local conversations constructed this area as a "bad" neighborhood. The author observed how these descriptions supported the narrative that "good" neighborhoods and schools are those that are predominantly white and economically privileged. Through their discussions of their photographs, participant youth were able to name and challenge these stories about their community. Specifically, they observed that because of assumptions about their community, school, and the youth that attended, youth were actively segregated into smaller sub-schools under the premise that selecting a specific area of focus would improve their standardized performance scores. Instead, for the three sub-schools, one was predominantly Latinx, another predominantly Black, and another predominantly white. Participants identified that they found themselves forced to choose between the sub-school aligned with their potential career interests or one aligned with their ethnic or racial identity. In particular, youth expressed frustration over an inability to access courses across sub-schools, rendering exploration of new topics impossible. This

division impacted teacher resources and student ability to engage in the classroom. Rather than the problem definition focusing on youth motivation or persistence, the participants were able to highlight the role of the program design in enforcing inequities. The youth contradicted the deficit-based discourse regarding their school and instead were able to collaboratively construct a counternarrative that named that they and their peers cared about the quality of their education and problematized the neoliberal education reform strategy in place at their school.

As seen in this study, opportunities to participate in meaningful dialogue allow participants to co-construct new understandings of their social realities (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Goessling, 2018). This co-construction can affirm the strengths of the participants and their communities, while simultaneously highlighting focus areas for social action. Once counternarratives highlight potential focus areas for social action, however, the involved participants must have access to the means to engage in that action. Based on our social positioning, individuals and groups might have less access to certain options for enacting social change than those granted more privilege by social structures. As adults are in a position of greater privilege and power than children, we ask our third research question: to what degree are childhood counternarratives maintained into emerging adulthood? To counter systemic lack of change-making options, it is necessary to create empowering spaces that encourage increased access to decision-making, relational networks, action opportunities, and institutional knowledge. The absence of such forms of empowerment precludes the

application of reflection and dialogue to engagement in transformative collective action.

Empowerment

This intentional promotion of collective agency and the creation of opportunities to enact that agency are fundamental aspects of empowerment. Empowerment, at least as discussed here, is not limited to an internal feeling, but rather is indicative of an increased capacity for the creation of change, as exhibited by the application of that capacity. Elsewhere, empowerment has been defined as an "intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over their resources" (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989, as cited in Rappaport, 1995 p. 802). This intentional, ongoing process is inherently connected to the contesting of dominant narratives and the creation of counternarratives, as dominant narratives often work to constrain access to and control over resources for marginalized groups (Rappaport, 1995). For youth, due to their particular social position, this process looks different than it might for adults.

Empowerment is a process that entails multiple components, each requiring attention to obtain the goal of gaining greater access to, control over, and mobilization of resources (Rappaport, 1981; Rappaport, 1987). Four primary components have been previously discussed in the literature. First, empowerment has an intrapersonal dimension, consisting of one's belief in one's capacity to create

change and influence social dynamics (Zimmerman, 1995). Second, the interactional dimension consists of one's ability to cognitively engage with the world around them, taking in information, evaluating it, and making decisions based on that information (Zimmerman, 1995; Peterson, Hamme & Speer, 2002). It is this form of empowerment that is possibly most explicitly linked to the development of counternarratives. Through collective dialogue, participants gain a nuanced understanding of the spaces they inhabit and are able to develop shared strategies based on that understanding. Those shared strategies are subsequently mobilized in the third form of empowerment, behavioral empowerment. Behavioral empowerment is embodied in taking action toward effecting change based on self-efficacy and cognitive evaluation (Zimmerman, 1995). This form of empowerment might include technical skills or opportunities to engage in social change actions. The fourth component of empowerment is a more recent addition, but one that should come as no surprise given the collective nature of the definition of empowerment. As individuals do not exist nor effect change in isolation, empowerment also has a relational component (Christens, 2012). Broadly, this component consists of an ability to proactively incorporate the experiences of others and to collaborate toward collectively defined transformative change (Christens, 2012). For each of these components, it is important to note that the empowerment process is not universal, but, rather, can take different forms for different people in different contexts (Kohfeldt et al, 2010; Langhout, Collins, & Ellison, 2013; Zimmerman, 1995).

Although growth into adulthood is no guarantee that an individual will have an increased belief in their ability to affect change, there is a strong likelihood that young adults will be more willingly supplied with information regarding social systems by other adults than children might be (interactional empowerment). Further, it is more likely that this information will be presented in an accessible manner consistent with their level of experience. Once provided with information regarding social systems, adults have greater access to opportunities to act on that information (behavioral empowerment). Lastly, due to existing narratives regarding relationships between children and adults and the prohibition of children from certain social systems, adults are likely to have greater access to relational networks that can facilitate change (relational empowerment).

Given these realities, I expect that children who develop counternarratives during childhood, although absolutely capable of transformative action as children, would find that their options for collective action increase as they move from childhood into adulthood. So, if children who are provided the opportunity to engage in critical dialogue utilize that opportunity to formulate counternarratives regarding their status as children and those counternarratives are maintained into adulthood, we might expect to see these young adults acting upon those counternarratives, provided that they have access to the described domains of empowerment. As these adults are no longer children, I am also interested in the degree to which they apply these counternarratives and their accompanying logic to social action regarding other forms

of oppression. This results in my final research question, to what extent do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action?

Chapter Summary

This chapter's purpose was to ground the current study in the existing literature regarding youth resistance to structural adultism and the dominant narratives that maintain it. Prior to discussing the structure of the current study on childhood counternarratives, it was necessary to explain what narratives and structures children and emerging adults might collectively construct narratives to contradict. To accomplish this, I began by explaining the nature of adultism and some of the ways in which it prepares children to participate in systems of subordination and domination, such as those exemplified by other domains of oppression. Having established the prototypical nature of adultism, I then explored current literature on childhood critical consciousness. Critical reflection and dialogue are necessary steps that must be undertaken in the co-construction of liberatory counternarratives. Counternarratives that emerge from this process can then be collaboratively leveraged in critical action with the goal of effecting transformative change. The collective understanding of the commensurate parts of social systems embodied within counternarratives serves as a form of interactional empowerment, which, in turn, enables the community engaged in the creation of those counternarratives to more effectively “gain greater access to and control over their resources”(Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989, as cited in Rappaport, 1995 p. 802). This study will explore how children participating in yPAR program engage in critical dialogue to

co-construct counternarratives. Further, it will also explore the ways in which emerging young adults maintain and apply these childhood counterarratives in their current social actions. The next chapter will explain how I designed the study to answer these questions effectively.

Methodology

Introduction

As introduced in the previous chapters, the purpose of this study is to explore how children develop counternarratives through critical dialogue, maintain those counternarratives into emerging adulthood, and leverage those counternarratives in the pursuit of transformative, liberatory social change. The selection of methods for the investigation of liberatory processes should also seek to embody the ethics and ideologies of liberation. Further, the concept of counternarratives, as utilized in this study, originates from critical race theory. Indeed, as indicated in the third research question, this study seeks to explore how children and emerging adults apply counternarratives across domains of oppression, including but not limited to racism. As such, the logics and key tenets of critical race theory are relevant in considering appropriate methods. In this chapter, I elaborate on the methodological approach for this study and describe the implementation of specific research methods. As the primary subject under investigation is the development of childhood counternarratives and the framework of counternarratives is derived from critical race theory, I will provide a rationale for the study design by describing the epistemological and methodological implications of critical race theory and liberation psychology, as well as the suitability of critical participatory action research in view of these implications. With this background established, I will describe the specific methods utilized in this study.

Study Design Rationale

Critical race (CRT) and Latina/o critical (LatCrit) theory describe racism as a ubiquitous factor in the daily experiences of people of color, which includes children and youth of color. These racist structures intersect with other domains of oppression to shape the subjectivities of youth. In particular, their comparative status as children presents a form of intersectionality that warrants careful consideration, especially as we begin to consider how children engage in critical dialogue and, subsequently, social action. Our study of childhood resistance to oppressive systems should reflect the complexity of their experiences of oppression. By acknowledging that complexity, we can better support youth in movements for liberation. As such, CRT presents a valuable framework for developing research investigating the impact of racist and adultist structures on youth critical consciousness.

A CRT approach requires that we attend to the contributions of racism to social realities. Indeed, a colorblind or, perhaps more accurately, color-evasive (Annamma et al., 2017) epistemology, such as that prevalent in mainstream psychological research, fails to recognize that race plays a role in individual and group social, political, and economic experiences (Adams & Salter, 2011). Proponents of colorblindness suggest that racism is solely an individual-level process and that by consciously electing to ignore someone's race, race is removed as a factor in interactions (Gallagher, 2008). Contrary to this, the systemic nature of racism discussed within CRT suggests that individual-level processes such as overt prejudice comprise only a small component of a framework underlying dominant ideology and power distribution (Gallagher, 2008). Individuals must navigate systems and

structures created in the context of and for their exclusion. The pervading idea that research is being conducted in a post-racial world fails to consider the importance of historical context, the researchers' role in social structures, and the participants' experience of those same social structures (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). The relative subtlety of this post-racial perspective belies its pernicious nature and facilitates its durability.

With this in mind, two key facts undergird the potential utility of CRT as a framework for psychological research of childhood counternarrative development. First, race continues to be a defining factor in our participation in social systems (Bender, 2016; Salter & Haugen, 2017; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Indeed, human behavior does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it occurs within specific historical, social, and cultural contexts (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). The ideology and rationalization leading to and resulting from racial categorization are a part of that context. Further, the disparate collective and generational impact of racism and constructions of whiteness are ever present in human behavior (Adams & Salter, 2011; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Not only do individuals continue to operate under historically constructed racial ideologies, but, as mentioned previously, they are operating within systems designed in the context of those same ideologies (Pickren, 2009). Given the predominant voices in psychology, to ignore the importance of race to the human experience is to designate the experiences of dominant groups as normative (Goar, 2008; Pickren, 2009).

Second, we cannot attempt to understand the behavior of the human subject, including but not limited to behaviors of resistance, without first understanding the process of their subjectification (Howarth & Hook, 2005). Before we have the opportunity to act in the world, we receive messages from those around us regarding the way we are seen by the world. The perception and positionality of the body shape how we experience the world and, subsequently, how we develop our self-concept (Mama, 1995; Cruz, 2001). The inner machinations of identity and personality are dialectally connected to our social interactions. Contrary to trends of individualism in mainstream psychology, we must acknowledge intersecting social positionalities and how they are experienced in order to begin to understand how an individual engages as a social actor (Cole, 2009).

Like CRT, liberation psychology not only acknowledges the ongoing presence of oppression but advocates for an understanding of reality from the perspective of the oppressed (Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003). Further, liberation psychology provides a basis for the mobilization of that consideration toward the transformation of the contexts people of color inhabit. Although liberation psychology acknowledges the importance of understanding what is, it also seeks to understand what the status quo is currently not and what the conditions of society should be in comparison to the status quo (Martín-Baró, 1994; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). With this understanding, liberation psychology suggests a focus on transformation from what the world is to what the world should be. This enterprise is, by its very nature, a political one, recognizing the role of power in everyday interactions and pushing for a more

equitable distribution of that power. As individuals engage in collective dialogue around their reflections on these systems of power, they are able to engage in critical action based on that dialogue, leading to further reflection in an ongoing cycle of praxis (Freire, 2000). Enacting these alternatives in liberation-focused work with youth can deepen our understanding of youth experiences with oppressive structures and their subsequent resistance to those structures.

Taken together, we are given some key indicators of an appropriate epistemological perspective, which could inform an appropriate methodological framework. First, an epistemology consistent with the described tenets of CRT and liberation psychology must prioritize critical reflexivity on the part of researchers who are engaging in empirical work in the context of systemic racism and structural oppression. This requires an awareness of the ways in which mainstream psychology has reified these forms of oppression and commitment to the intentional transformation of oppressive structures. As such, an appropriate epistemological paradigm must maintain a critical stance in the framing of knowledge production and support transformative change.

Second, an appropriate epistemological paradigm must decenter whiteness and dominant perspectives. Instead, it must acknowledge the expertise of marginalized voices and prioritize a focus on subaltern perspectives. In the case of this study, such an epistemological perspective gives appropriate weight to the subjective experiences of children and emerging adults. Liberation psychology would suggest, however, that it is insufficient to explore these subjective experiences in

isolation, but, on the contrary, it is also necessary to consider how subjective experiences are collaboratively leveraged to create a shared understanding of social systems that can subsequently be acted upon.

Accordingly, a third key factor of an appropriate epistemological framework is the centering of dialogue and collaboration between participants to co-construct an understanding of the social context. Knowledge is not seen as something that is transferred from one person to another but, rather, is seen as co-created in discourse between participants and researchers. Consistent with this, research is not conducted "on" participants but, rather, with and alongside participants (Fine, 2018). The current study is not PAR, but will analyze data derived from a previous PAR study, and draws on critical participatory action research as an epistemological paradigm and prioritization of values.

Within a youth participatory action research (yPAR) methodological framework, youth reflections and dialogue are centered and drive the chosen intervention. As previously stated, the current study did not involve a new yPAR study. It did, however, utilize archival data collected in the course of a yPAR project, as well as transcripts from follow-up interviews conducted with youth at the conclusion of their participation in the project. This archival data, shaped by and with child program participants, has subsequently been added to through the collection of contemporary data from emerging adult former yPAR participants, specifically group and individual semi-structured virtual interviews. Our adult interview process was intended to continue to center the voices of program participants in the democratic

production of knowledge. Unfortunately, due to the nature and timeline of this study, we were unable to fully engage adult former yPAR participants in the analysis process. Yet, we attempted to honor their perspective by presenting some of our discerned observations from coding archival data and discussing their reflections or reactions to those observations as part of the interview process.

The original project provided an ideal source of data due to the liberatory and dialogical nature of participatory action research (Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; Silva & Langhout, 2016). As Ben W. M. Boog (2003) states, "Action research is designed to improve the researched subjects' capacities to solve problems, develop skills (including professional skills), increase their chances of self-determination, and to have more influence on the functioning and decision-making process of organizations and institutions from the context in which they act" (p. 426). The benefits of yPAR are that action research is typically cyclical, initiates social change, allows for a thorough consideration of intersectionality, and equips stakeholders with skills to continue social action (Grace & Langhout, 2014). Participating children are able to leverage opportunities for critical reflection, space for critical dialogue, and, hopefully, new strategies for critical action, thereby promoting the development of critical consciousness (Langhout, Collins & Ellison, 2013). PAR can be used in a way that encourages youth to reflect on their life experiences and context, co-construct an understanding of reality with other youth, identify a problem, design an intervention, engage in action to implement that design, and evaluate the outcomes of their action (Ponciano, 2013). Throughout its history, PAR has been leveraged by members of

marginalized communities to speak back against oppressive policies and practices, and, further, to reshape the systems that sustain such policies and practices (Fine, 2018). As discussed, collectively constructed counternarratives are a vital component of this process.

Research Sample

The archival data reviewed in this study was collected as part of a long-standing afterschool yPAR program conducted at Maplewood Elementary School[2] (MES), an elementary school in an unincorporated area in the Central Coast area of California (Langhout, Collins & Ellison, 2013). Starting in 2007, 4th-grade students were recruited to participate in a praxis cycle of problem definition, intervention design, collective action, and evaluation of intervention outcomes. Every year, rising 5th graders would recruit a new cohort of 4th-grade students. Because of this, youth participants were able to share institutional knowledge with their peers in each successive year.

A school setting is particularly appropriate for this study as schools are often a site in which restriction of child and youth participation in decision-making is normalized (Langhout, 2005; West, 2007). Further, in schools, youth are expected to comply with both explicit and implicit rules that reify adult-child power disparities (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). These same rules also reify dominant narratives regarding social positioning as a result of intersectional membership in multiple marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1991; Marchbanks et al, 2018). As such, this yPAR

[2] All proper names have been changed.

project allowed the youth to engage in critical dialogue in a context in which dominant narratives regarding their social roles were particularly salient, thus providing a rich source of qualitative data for analysis.

During the yPAR program, each cohort of youth participants consisted of approximately 10 children. The approximately 10 rising 5th graders enrolled in the program each year would recruit 10 new 4th graders, for a total of approximately 20 program participants over the course of each academic year. As the yPAR program began in 2008, student demographics have fluctuated to some degree over the years. Over the course of the program during the years reviewed in the current study, the student body was 51-62% Latinx, 29-38% white, 3-6% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2-3% Black (California Department of Education, 2023a; Kohfeldt et al, 2010). The Maplewood Latinx percentage of the population was increasing in the area at the onset of the program due to white flight and is now decreasing due to neighborhood gentrification. Historically, the majority of program participants have identified as Latinx. For the years reviewed in this study, 68-83% of Maplewood Elementary School students were eligible for free or reduced lunch (California Department of Education, 2023b). During the 2012-13 school year, the final year under review, 67% of students were designated as English learners (California Department of Education, 2023c).

Based on the program years on which this study will focus, emerging adult former yPAR participants are between 19 and 25 years of age. Three men and two women, identifying as Latinx (3), biracial (1), and white (1) were recruited for

individual and group interviews from former childhood yPAR program participants, all of whom had participated in the afterschool program between Spring 2008 and Spring 2013.

Overview of Information Needed

This study focused on the experiences of children participating in an afterschool yPAR program. Four research questions were proposed in order to better understand how these children developed, applied, and maintained transformative counternarratives based on those experiences. The information required to answer those questions was determined to be contextual and perceptual. This information included:

- Descriptions of critical dialogue between children and adults regarding participants' understanding of the capacity of children within the context of the yPAR program.
- Content of counternarratives expressed by children at the conclusion of their time in the program, which could also be framed as their perceptions of the relative capacity of children and ideal adult-child power-sharing relationships.
- Connections between adultism-related counternarratives and counternarratives related to alternative forms of oppression.
- Connections between counternarratives prevalent in the yPAR program and adult counternarratives.

- Descriptions of linkages between adult counternarratives, perceived best practices for social action, and active engagement in social action

Table 3.1

Overview of Information Needed

Research Question	Information Needed	Method
How do children participating in an afterschool yPAR program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces?	Descriptions of critical dialogue between children and adults regarding participants' understanding of the capacity of children within the context of the yPAR program Counternarratives expressed by children at the conclusion of their time in the program	Childhood Fieldnotes Childhood Program Exit Interviews
To what extent are those narratives replicated or expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups?	Connections between adultism-related counternarratives and counternarratives related to alternative forms of oppression	Childhood Program Exit Interviews Adult Interviews
To what degree are childhood counternarratives maintained into emerging adulthood?	Connections between childhood counternarratives prevalent in the program and adult counternarratives	Childhood Program Exit Interviews Adult Interviews
To what extent do emerging young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action?	Descriptions of linkages between adult counternarratives, perceived best practices for social action, and active engagement in social action	Adult Interviews

Research Design Overview

The following steps were taken to carry out the current study. In the following sections, I will provide additional information regarding the details of each successive step in the research process.

1. Prior to obtaining IRB approval for this study, I completed an immersive literature review and submitted a proposal to my dissertation committee. The details of my literature review and proposed research methods were refined with the assistance of my committee in preparation for submitting a research protocol to the IRB for approval.
2. Upon completion of the dissertation proposal meeting and approval from my dissertation committee, I submitted a protocol to IRB detailing research procedures and practices to ensure adherence to ethical standards for studies conducted with human subjects.
3. Childhood ethnographic fieldnotes were analyzed utilizing consensus coding with a team of undergraduate research assistants.
4. Childhood exit interviews were independently analyzed utilizing the Listening Guide.
5. Attempts were made to recruit adult former yPAR participants for focus groups, with the goal of conducting follow-up individual interviews following the facilitation of focus groups.

6. After several unsuccessful attempts to conduct focus groups and consultation with my dissertation committee, adult former yPAR participants were recruited for individual semi-structured interviews only.
7. Adult semi-structured interviews were collaboratively analyzed by an undergraduate RA and myself utilizing the Listening Guide

Data-Collection Methods

Childhood Data

During the course of the yPAR program, the primary investigator, graduate student coordinators, and undergraduate research assistants collected detailed ethnographic fieldnotes consistent with the protocols described by Emerson et al. (1995/2011). The goal of these notes was to capture in as much detail as possible the interactions and dialogue between participants. At the time of collection, research assistants were provided with in-depth training on the collection of fieldnotes and provided with feedback on how to increase the detail of their observations. All fieldnotes were collected within 72 hours of contact.

At the conclusion of their participation in the program, youth were also asked to complete a semi-structured exit interview. This interview explored their experiences with the program content and reflections on their interactions with others, personal capacities, community impact, and the future of the program. An inventory of included items in this initial follow up interview can be found in Appendix A. Three group interviews with two participants each and one individual interview were conducted in 2008, for a total of seven participants (five girls and two boys).

Seventeen individual interviews were conducted in 2010, and six were conducted in 2012. In total, 30 different participants participated in the childhood exit interviews being analyzed.

Emerging Adult Data

Adult participants were initially invited to a 2-hour focus group reflecting on their experiences and critical dialogue during the yPAR program. The goal for this focus group was to provide an opportunity for adult participants to collaboratively reflect on the occurrences of the yPAR program, thereby collectively building on counternarratives developed during the program and providing reminders to those participants with less recollection of the program activities. Focus group participants with the strongest memories of their participation were to be invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Unfortunately, after many attempts to arrange these focus groups over the course of several months, we were unable to coordinate a sufficient number of interested participants to conduct a group of the desired size of 3-5 participants each. Following the unsuccessful attempt to conduct focus groups and the completion of one group interview comprised of two participants, we made the decision to move forward focusing solely on conducting semi-structured interviews with participants.

Accordingly, interested young adults were invited to participate in a 60-minute semi-structured interview focused on their experience of counternarratives during their participation in the yPAR program, their existing narratives regarding racial, gender, and socioeconomic inequities, and their strategies for social change based on their definition of social problems. Interviews were conducted via Zoom in

order to make participation more accessible for participants who might no longer reside locally or who might have concerns regarding transportation or childcare. An inventory of included items can be found in Appendix B. As part of the recruitment process, participants were also asked if they were able to refer any other members of their yPAR cohort for participant recruitment. All five participants completed an individual interview and two of those five participants also took part in a group interview.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Childhood Data

Prior to the coding process, a codebook was written by the primary investigator outlining definitions, operationalization, and examples for critical dialogue, commentary on relative adult-youth capacity, and reflection on forms of oppression. In consultation with undergraduate research assistants and following practicing consensus coding together, this codebook was revised to reflect a shared understanding of all included codes. Based on this shared understanding, the primary investigator and three undergraduate research assistants engaged in consensus coding of all fieldnotes from the Spring quarter of program years 2007-2012. Each note was coded by two coders, who would review what they had coded with the full research team during our biweekly coding meetings. Any assigned code that was not approved with full-team consensus within 5 minutes was discarded.

Childhood exit interviews, conducted in 2008, 2010, and 2012, were solo-coded by the primary investigator using the Listening Guide. As part of the Listening

Guide process, each childhood exit interview transcript was reviewed at least four times. During the first listening, I listened to the overall "plot" of the participants' stories and experiences. I also noted areas of silence or pauses so that I could attend to potential explanations for those pauses as I reviewed the data. To track my subjectivity, I took time during this first listening to note my own responses or questions that arose as I reviewed the transcripts or fieldnotes.

In the second listening, I focused on identifying "I"-poems, wherein the participant identifies their relationship to the context or others in the first-person. This allowed me to explore how the participant was situating themselves in relation to the world around them and how they were expressing their own thoughts, needs, desires, or conflicts. I also identified their use of other pronouns, such as "you" or " they", to identify dissonance or internal dialogues.

During the third and fourth listenings, I explored the contrapuntal voices expressed by participants in their "I"-poems. This allowed me to attend to the relationship between the voices that the participants expressed and how those voices shaped into a more cohesive narrative. By exploring how the various "I"-poems build upon, nuance, or contradict one another, we can gain a deeper understanding of the participants' reification of dominant narratives and development of counternarratives in relation to ongoing critical dialogue.

Analysis of yPAR ethnographic fieldnotes and childhood exit interviews provide a foundation for responding to the first two proposed research questions for

this study. Specifically, the results will address: 1) How do children participating in an afterschool yPAR program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces, and 2) To what extent are those narratives replicated or expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups?

Emerging Adult Data

Adult interviews were also coded using the Listening Guide, consistent with the process described above. In addition to the areas of focus described in the four listening iterations, I also listened for overlap, contradictions, or extensions to the childhood counternarratives discerned from coding childhood exit interviews, as well as how those counternarratives were applied by participants. This analysis of contemporary interviews sought to respond to the second two research questions for this study. Specifically, the results address: 1) To what degree are childhood counternarratives maintained into emerging adulthood, and 2) To what extent do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action?

Results: Childhood Data

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how children develop transformative counternarratives during an afterschool program, apply counternarratives across domains of oppression, maintain those counternarratives into emerging adulthood, and mobilize counternarratives into adult social action. Specifically, the research questions of focus in analyzing the archival data are: 1) How do children participating in an afterschool yPAR program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces, and 2) To what extent are those narratives replicated or expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups? This chapter presents results obtained from analysis of ethnographic fieldnotes from the yPAR program across spring quarters from 2007-2011, as well as childhood exit interviews conducted in 2008, 2010, and 2012.

In our analysis of ethnographic fieldnotes, we made the following observations in connection to the stated research questions:

1. Children in the yPAR program utilized dialogue in collaboration with and with the support of adults. These adults utilized certain explicit strategies consistent with Freire's recommendations for environmental characteristics supportive of critical dialogue.

2. Children in the yPAR program under study utilized critical dialogue to name key characteristics or aspects of their relationships with adults that reflected power disparities, forms of oppression, or assumptions about them as children.
3. Children in the yPAR program utilized critical dialogue to reframe aspects of their relationships with adults, providing alternative perspectives of their capacity to engage in social spaces and challenging existing assumptions about children.

Further, in our analysis of childhood exit interview transcripts, we made the following additional observations:

4. Children were able to leverage the critical dialogue utilized in the yPAR program to articulate their own counternarratives that directly contradicted certain dominant narratives about the role and capabilities of children.

5. Children broadened some of these specific counternarratives into generalizable life precepts and demonstrated awareness of other forms of oppression but did not frequently make explicit connections between their experiences with adultism and other forms of oppression.

Following is a discussion of each result in turn with necessary details to explain and support the respective observation. I will begin by providing an overview of the results related to critical dialogue that were observed in the ethnographic fieldnotes, after which I will detail the counternarratives that were identified in the childhood exit interviews.

Result 1: Children in the yPAR program utilized dialogue in collaboration with supportive adults. These adults utilized certain explicit strategies consistent with Freire's recommendations for environmental characteristics supportive of critical dialogue.

In observing children collaboratively shifting their shared understanding of their positionality relative to adults through critical dialogue, it was notable that adults were not absent in these interactions and, in fact, had an essential role in facilitating critical dialogue between and with the young people in the setting. As discussed in Chapter 2, Friere (1970/2000) suggests that liberatory dialogue requires five key components: love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. For the purpose of operationalization, Love can be thought of as reinforcing the humanity of others and the validity of their perspectives. Humility requires refraining from projecting ignorance onto others, as well as acknowledging our own gaps in understanding. Faith involves believing others to be capable of collaboration. Hope requires a belief that change or progress is actually possible. And, critical thinking suggests that we are willing to think about the constituent parts of the systems in which we participate and the mutability of those parts. To support critical dialogue, adults needed to model all of these traits in some capacity. We observed that adults leveraged these components to support critical dialogue throughout the yPAR program.

For example, in the following conversation, university research assistants and yPAR participants discussed potential actions that could be engaged in to address the

identified problem of, “Kids need a break to get away from class work and to have personal space.” The graduate student coordinator proactively encouraged one of the children to participate in the dialogue. She did so by validating the value of the child’s perspective, both in her initial solicitation of the child’s contribution and again when the child offered her input.

> Aidole had been very quiet throughout the group discussion, so I asked her if she had any ideas. She shook her head no. Itzel said that Aidole doesn’t talk. I disagreed and said that I had heard her talk lots of times and that she has really good ideas, which is why I wanted her to participate. Itzel changed the subject and pointed to Aidole’s earrings, stating that she had given them to her for her birthday. I commented that I liked them, and then Aidole suddenly raised her hand. She said that she did have an idea, and explained that they could have a table in the back of the classroom for getting away when people are bugging you or when you want a break. I said this was a great idea, and asked the other kids what they thought. (FN 5.1.08)

In this exchange, the graduate student coordinator not only invites participation from Aidole, but explicitly names that Aidole’s contribution is valid and valued. She also affirms Aidole’s strengths and previous engagement by noting that Aidole has successfully engaged in prior conversations. Following this encouragement, Aidole expresses a willingness to engage in dialogue with her peers around the topic of discussion, despite having been reticent to participate up to this

point. After Aidole shared her perspective, the graduate student researcher was provided with an opportunity to invite continuing dialogue from the rest of the group.

Similarly, adults were able to promote critical dialogue by exercising humility in their interactions with participants. In this sense, humility entailed an acknowledgment that neither adults nor children are "complete" and, therefore, both adults and children can learn and promote learning. In the following example, participants were debriefing their visit to the university with adult university research assistants. As part of this visit, the youth participants visited a meeting room in one of the residential colleges that featured a large, highly detailed mural entitled *La Promesa de Loma Prieta* (as seen in Figure 4.1) that depicted themes of colonization and resistance. During this time of reflection, several of the university research assistants identified that they had learned from the youth participants, as the youth participants had made observations regarding the material that were new to the research assistants and provided a perspective they had not previously considered.

> It was Ryan's turn, and he said that even though he didn't get to stay as long as he would have liked, he really liked the cheer and welcoming everyone, as well as listening to "all the amazing things you said about the mural, everyone focused and making an effort to say what it meant to them." Irene agreed and said that she liked hearing their responses, which were "all brilliant." She said they only saw the mural for a couple of seconds and could already relate to things and that she was really impressed, and they are brilliant. Dolores said,

> "Yeah we are!" and we all laughed. Lisa said she also liked the welcome cheer, doing the letters UCSC, and how it was really fun and high-energy. She said she also liked the mural room, and it was her 1st time seeing it too, all the history, and hearing their responses. She said they picked up things she didn't, and that she liked learning from them. She said she got the chance to ask some of them if it had given them ideas for their own mural, and they had come up with some great things, so she was inspired. (FN 4.14.11)

In uplifting the insights of the youth participants, the research assistants implicitly contradicted the banking model of education, as well as the notion that adults are the sole experts in conversations with children. Their acknowledgment of children as capable of contributing a valuable perspective made space for the youth participants to continue to engage in critical dialogue, sharing their own expertise, as shown when the conversation shifted to a review of a slideshow depicting images from the group's visit to the university. There was a particular focus on the *La Promesa de Loma Prieta* mural. This conversation was facilitated by the graduate student coordinator.

> We moved on to a picture of the mural room, and I asked the students about it. Justine raised her hand and said that the mural was "about people helping other people get free, get educational, and educational is not just for white people or colored people, but for everyone." I said this was brilliant and that she was right. She smiled. Yelena raised her hand and said this mural [that

they viewed] was done because the other one [also at the university] didn't show all of that [immigration] story. Lucy said it was also about how we carry good spirits, like of those who are buried, but we keep them alive. I asked if this was like our ancestors, and she said yes. I pointed to an image of a transparent figure holding up some barbed wire and said this looked like a spirit. The kids agreed. I asked what people thought of the barbed wire and what that meant. Cameron said it meant helping people to "cross borders." I asked what kind of borders, and he said, "Mexico." I nodded and asked for more responses.

…

I brought up a picture of some ships and totem poles at the top of the mural. Daniel said this represented Columbus. I asked who Columbus was, and he said a guy who sailed here on the Pacific Ocean. Cameron said he "sailed the ocean blue." I asked what he did. Cameron said that "he supposedly discovered America," and made air quotes with his hands when he said the word supposedly. I asked why "supposedly?" Cameron said that there were already people here, the Indians. I nodded. Julian quickly spoke up in a serious tone and corrected Cameron, "Native Americans, NOT Indians, they're not from India!" Cameron looked down and smiled and said, "oh yeah, I forgot." I asked what else they saw and Julia said migrating birds and

butterflies. Some girls on the other side of the room said that they saw Aztecs, among other things. (FN 4.14.11)

Figure 4.1

La Promesa de Loma Prieta

As she reviewed the slides, the graduate student coordinator actively solicited the perspective and interpretation of the youth participants. Rather than tell the participants what is in the mural and how it should be understood, she made space for them to collaboratively shape their understanding of the mural's themes. In this, she also demonstrated faith in the participant's capacity to engage critically in the discussion of the mural.

Such demonstrations of faith were essential in creating space for critical dialogue. We can also see this in the earlier example of reinforcing the humanity of youth participants. Not only did the graduate student coordinator validate Aidole's perspective, but she expressed faith in Aidole's capacity to engage in the conversation in a manner that would advance the shared goals of the group. The promotion of critical dialogue requires trust that others are equally capable contributors to the co-construction of knowledge. Adults also expressed faith in youth participants' capacity to take on leadership responsibilities within the program, as observed during a conversation between one of the graduate student coordinators and a student who had arrived late to the program. As the rest of the youth participants had gone outside to play, the graduate student coordinator quickly recapped what had been discussed prior to the new participant's arrival. Specifically, the group had been discussing phases of action research, moving from Identifying the Problem, to Collecting Data, to Implementing Action, and, subsequently, to Assessing the Result. The young person, Fatima, was able to process this information in a manner that the graduate student coordinator observed might be beneficial to her peers.

> Fatima asked me why the students were coming outside, and I told her that the students had decided to come out of to play and act out the social science research diagram. I showed Fatima the diagram, and I told her that this was the image that the students had been discussing and talking about in terms of what they would have to do after the "Implement Action" phase.

…

> After the "Implement an Action" phase, the students would have to assess if the mural had represented the students and what they wanted to change, and that this was called the "Assess the Result," [phase] which was the same as the "analyze data" phase. Fatima said that that was when the focus groups came in and I said that was right. I told her that that's why the focus groups were so important, and Fatima gave me an example: if students don't feel that the mural we have now represents them, then when we make another mural, it would be very hard to make all the students be happy because the mural might not be representing them in the way that they want to be represented.
>
> I agreed and told her that that was a great example and that I would want her to share that example with other students at the school and that other students would probably better understand her feedback and input when it came from her. I told her that she should come to the after-school program and try not to forget coming because she was an asset to the after-school program and she usually brought really good ideas to the table with other students and that she gave great ideas that other students would benefit from. Fatima smiled, and she said that she would come next week. (FN 5.5.11)

In this interaction, the graduate student coordinator affirmed Fatima's strengths and the value of her perspective in collaboration with her peers. By demonstrating faith in yPAR participants to take on responsibility, such as

demonstrated in this excerpt, children in the program were better situated to contribute to the creation of a setting that facilitated critical dialogue.

Faith alone was not sufficient, however. In addition, to trust in the capacity of the children to engage in critical dialogue and collaborate in the pursuit of social change, there had to be a desire for an alternative, equitable reality (Freire, 1970/2000). Adults needed to display an expectation that change was possible and that the reality of the present could be superseded by the possibility of the future. Belief in possibilities allowed children and adults to dream together of strategies to realize the shared imagining of more equitable social structures.

We see an example of this in the following excerpt. In this exchange, the principal was taking time to respond to a presentation that the children had given on what they had learned from their research on why children at the school did not care about the state of the bathrooms. She took time to encourage them, not only in regard to the work they had done, but also in reference to the work they were still yet to do in the future.

> [The principal] addressed the kids and told them that it was clear that they had done a lot of work. She said, 'Some day, someone is going to ask you when you became a leader, and you are going to look back at this moment and remember it, and you are going to tell them about what you did here and that this is when you became a leader.' (FN 5.15.08)

The principal gave voice to a belief in the capacity of the children in the present and affirmed the work that had brought them to the current stage of the project. At the same time, she gave voice to their ability to create ongoing change and form meaningful, influential connections with future collaborators. She noted that they were leaders currently, indicating that they were capable of contributing to the democratic production of knowledge and the mobilization of that knowledge in pursuit of social change and, simultaneously, asserting a hope for a future in which that contribution would continue and impact others not present in the current conversation. Hope is exemplified by this idea that the actions they had already taken would emanate into future transformative change and a world in which they would be recognized for their contributions to crafting something new.

Of course, the need for "something new" or a shift from the status quo of social relations and conditions must be preceded by problematizing those relations and conditions (Freire, 1970/2000). Such a problematization requires critical thinking, which adults in the yPAR program also sought to actively promote. Adults encouraged youth participants to ask questions about observed norms while simultaneously stating that there was more than one way to think about a given concept. In the following excerpt, a continuation of a conversation on voting rights, the graduate student coordinator engages with the youth participants to continue their reflections on the rationale for the current expectations of civic participation for children following Cynthia's observation that voting rights reflect the preferences of those in power.

> Cynthia claimed that it was because "the government is mean." I smiled and said, "OK, why else?" One of the students said that it's because kids probably won't really know anything about the people running. I asked, "But could they?" The student thought for a moment and then nodded yes. I asked if sometimes adults might vote without really knowing much about the candidates, and the students nodded. I asked again, "Then why can't kids vote?" Fatima raised her hand and said that it might be because kids may just vote for someone based on something like looks. I nodded and asked if she thought adults might do this sometimes. She and others said yes. One of the girls sitting near the front […] said that it's because kids would probably make the wrong decision or vote for the wrong person. I nodded and asked if adults might do this. She said yes. I asked if kids could make the right decision. She and the others all said yes. Some of the kids were frowning, and I explained that there is no right or wrong answer to this question, it is just something to think about when we think about who has certain rights and why. (FN 5.12.11)

In this example, the graduate student coordinator modeled and encouraged critical thinking around rationalizing who should and should not be able to vote. As they thought through the rationalization together, she stated explicitly that there wasn't a right or wrong conclusion that they were expected to reach. Rather, it is important to engage in the process of critically examining how certain conclusions are made and whose perspectives are incorporated in the establishment of those

conclusions. We also see in this excerpt that the graduate student coordinator utilized problem-posing questions to encourage the youth participants to think critically about assumptions about their own capacities and the relative capacities of adults.

These characteristics of adult interactions (love, faith, hope, humility, and critical thinking) are particularly interesting in light of the existing literature on youth-adult partnerships. Building off of Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, many models of youth-adult participation emphasize a gradual progression toward increased or even primarily youth control of the setting while underemphasizing the ways in which adults can embody values that contradict dominant assumptions about youth capacity. Further, even a structure that emphasizes youth participation and decision-making can reify existing ideologies and hegemonic patterns of interaction (Hart, 2008). This reification is unsurprising given that all programs focused on children's participation exist in the larger social context of adultism, in which the minimalization of children's perspectives and experiences is standard (Taft, 2015). Although designing structures that make space for youth is important, solely increasing youth decision-making falls short of engaging with young people in a manner that challenges existing patterns of oppression and promotes critical dialogue, which could in turn lead to the articulation of transformative counternarratives. Indeed, such problem-posing and critique-promoting engagement with children is demonstrated in the conversation about who can vote and the logic behind that distinction. Accordingly, there are newer models of youth participation that emphasize collaboration between adults and youth that fosters youth empowerment

(Wong et al., 2010). Such a relational focus is vital for moving beyond rote programmatic adjustments to intergenerational interactions that validate mutual humanity and experiential expertise (Mannion, 2007). From an ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), nested between the individual experience of a setting and the structural context are the interpersonal connections and relationships between individuals within that context (Gal, 2017). As increasingly discussed in the child participation literature, it is this aspect of participatory work that requires more intensive attention than has historically been the norm (Gal, 2017; Kennedy et al., 2022; Taft, 2015). This shift in attention is supported by literature in which children have expressed less of a focus on specific activities occurring within child-adult partnership programs and more of a focus on mutual interdependence, recognition, and respect between children and adults (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010). This result builds on existing research by providing empirical support for an increased focus on adult embodiment of intentional critical dialogue values to facilitate youth empowerment in efforts to promote youth participation. By embodying dialogical values, not only is a foundation provided for program design, but also participatory spaces can become locations of mutual investment by adults and children in identifying and, subsequently, challenging adultism. It is this identification of oppression that comprises our second result.

Result 2: Children in the yPAR program under study utilized critical dialogue to name key characteristics or aspects of their relationships with adults that

reflected power disparities, forms of oppression, or assumptions about them as children.

An aspect of oppressive systems that renders them so durable is that the ideologies that underpin them are conveyed implicitly. The hidden curriculum of the context reinforces the existing hierarchies and leans on pre-existing assumptions about the participants in the setting (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Rahman, 2013). In the case of adultism, existing narratives include that children are unable or unequipped to take part in decision-making, that children are unaware of social inequities, and that they are prone to negative or unproductive habits (e.g., laziness, irresponsibility, inattention, etc.) (Langhout, 2005). When such narratives remain implicit, they are difficult to contradict, and the systems they maintain remain entrenched. In the analysis of the archival data, we observed that children utilized critical dialogue to make the implicit narratives and norms that maintain adultism explicit.

This naming process took a few distinct forms. First, children in the yPAR program utilized critical dialogue to explore or problematize power relationships between adults and children that might be assumed to be appropriate or normal. In sharing their stories together, the youth were able to identify the various areas in which they were not able to make decisions regarding school resources or their movement through school spaces and moved into asking questions that encouraged further investigation of foundational issues, consistent with what Freire (1970/2000) refers to as a problem-posing model of education.

For example, during the first year of the program, children were working through a process called the 5 Whys with the university research collaborators. As part of this conversation, the children provided five plausible answers to a "why" question formulated based on the observed problem of dirty school bathrooms. They then selected the most plausible of these five options and turned that response into a new "why" question. The goal of this process was to identify a core issue for intervention by the conclusion of five cycles of questions. In the following excerpt, participants were answering the question, "Why don't students feel in control of school property?".

> The kids then said that another problem was:
>
> 4. Because nothing in the school belongs to the students.
>
> Marisol said that you get in trouble for writing on the desk, even if you're not meaning to. She said that she was coloring once on a piece of paper, and then she hit the desk with the crayons, and then the teacher yelled at her. Raul agreed that this was a problem and said, "Just like that rule they made up. You can't ride your bike in the [outdoor] hall." (He pointed to the outdoor/open-air hall.) … Beatrice asked about the rule, and Raul said that it was a new rule and that if you were riding your bike there, you would get into trouble. Marisol said that the same was true with the field. She said that if you get to school early and you want to play on the field, you can't, and you'll get in

> trouble because there aren't enough recess aides, and so you can't use the field when there aren't enough recess aides. (FN 5.1.08)

Children were able to name that there were power disparities in who was able to designate the usage of school spaces and resources. They also observed that the rules for the use of resources were not reflective of their needs or experiences. This is not to say that there were no plausible reasons for expectations. Yet, they were able to identify that these reasons were neither discussed with them nor inclusive of their perspectives.

In another group, children were able to speak even more explicitly about the power disparities that they observed at school. After completing the 5 Whys process, this group ended with a problem definition of "Kids need a break to get away from class work and to have personal space." After identifying this problem, the next step was to discuss and select an intervention. In response to the graduate coordinator's attempts to elicit conversation, the children again noted disparities in adult and child use of resources.

> I asked the kids to think about the issue of needing space away from class and asked them if they had any ideas about how this could happen at school. In general, they all seemed reluctant to believe that there could be a real solution that the teachers would go for. For example, Nico said that the teachers have a teachers' lounge, but the kids could never have something like that. Belinda

said that students are not allowed to just leave class without a good reason. (FN 5.1.08)

Students began to share personal stories and jokes about their frustration with not being able to take breaks when they needed them. Noticing this, the graduate student researcher reflected this back to the children, which prompted the children to engage in solicited problem-posing questions around the disparities that they had observed.

> I told them that it sounded like it can be frustrating when you need a break and are told no. Itzel looked at me and asked, "Why do adults want to control our lives?" I said that was a good question and asked what others thought. Belinda said, "Because they have more power and just want us to do what they say" (I was a bit taken aback by her use of the word "power," as it indicated that, on some level, she is consciously aware of the power hierarchy among children and adults). This prompted a discussion about the uneven distribution of power among adults and kids and its perceived misuse by adults. Itzel asked, "Don't adults understand that kids need to play more than an hour a day? And they punish you for needing a break!" Belinda asked, "Why do adults get to do whatever they want?" Aidole nodded her head, and I asked her if she had experienced any of the things that were being discussed. She nodded her head while opening her eyes widely. (FN 5.1.08)

In this example, children use problem posing to extend discussion on underlying factors that contribute to their lack of control in the setting. Rather than taking for granted that adult control is naturally a standard feature of their environment, they identify that this is instead a reflection of adult disregard for the experiences of children. In doing this, they also elevated instances of oppression by sharing their stories with each other, particularly marginalization, powerlessness, or cultural imperialism via the normalization and centering of adult experiences. Although they didn't use these words to describe their experiences, they were able to discuss and problematize times when they had found themselves excluded from social life, deprived of decision-making opportunities, or having to adapt to the perspectives of adults rather than their own, specifically on the basis of their positionality as children. In the following example, children discuss the statement, “Sometimes kids get in trouble for using school property.” During the discussion of the 5 Whys (where, in this case, the children had added a sixth potential cause), the children identify explicitly that the reason for their powerlessness is not because of their capacity or level of responsibility, but rather because they are children and are assumed to be irresponsible.

> I asked Marisol why she picked #6, and Beatrice said that “Kids should get to do stuff. It’s not right, how we are treated just because we are kids. We were born this way, but we should still get to do stuff and make decisions.” Marisol said that they were actually born as babies, but that they should get to do stuff. Sam asked what kinds of things they should get to do that they don’t get to do.

> Marisol said that they should get to vote. Beatrice said, “I know, huh?!” and smacked her leg. Beatrice then said that another thing is that they should be able to go to the bathroom without asking. “If we have to go to the bathroom, then we should just be allowed to go.” Beatrice said the problem was really that they didn’t have enough freedom. (FN 5.1.08)

Such observations were not constrained to conversations at the school level, but, rather, children were also able to extend these problematizations in dialogue regarding dynamics beyond the bounds of the school itself, as seen in a conversation around who is and who is not able to vote in the civic election process.

> Next, I asked the students more about rights, asking what they think I mean when I say “human rights.” Leo raised his hand and said that a right is something you can do. I said this was correct, and asked if he could think of an example. He thought for a moment and then said that women can vote now, but they didn’t used to be able to. I said that was great, and yes, women now have the right to vote. I explained that, actually, for a very long time, only white men were allowed to vote in this country. The students looked at me, some with their eyebrows raised. I asked the students if kids were allowed to vote. They all said no, some saying it loudly and shaking their heads. This prompted a discussion in which almost all the students were either responding to me or to each other, all talking about this topic. I asked, “Why not?” Cynthia claimed that it was because “the government is mean.” (FN 5.12.11)

In this excerpt, after discussing the previous history of voting rights in the United States, Cynthia asserts that voting is not an issue of deservingness or lack thereof, but rather it is a decision that reflects the preferences of those in power, specifically, "the government." Interestingly, as we saw in Result 1, after this point, children initially began to reiterate certain assumptions about children that rationalized their powerlessness and marginalization. Through adult-supported critical dialogue, however, they were able to name the inconsistencies within those assumptions and form a critique of the hierarchical status quo. As part of recognizing the dominance of adult perspectives, children were able to give voice to implicit assumptions that were made about them as children. By making these implicit assumptions explicit, they were better positioned to contradict or re-explain those assumptions, which they also utilized critical dialogue to do.

This necessity of identifying instances of oppression has been discussed throughout the social psychological literature as a prerequisite for engagement in critical social action (Aldana et al., 2019; Bañales & Rivas-Drake, 2022; Hope et al., 2023; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Engaging in critical dialogue to name key characteristics or aspects of their relationships with adults that reflected adultism encapsulates this identification process, and goes a step further. Just as systems of oppression are multifaceted and built on multiple co-supporting policies, practices, and ideologies, so too are coordinated efforts in pursuit of liberation. This interweaving of strategies for transforming systems of oppression has been referred to as a "web of resistance" (Rozas and Miller, 2009). Within this web, there are internal

and external strategies, falling within six different realms: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, cultural discourse, and political (Aldana et al., 2019). The use of critical dialogue for naming, as demonstrated by yPAR participants, is uniquely situated within this web as it bridges the intrapersonal and interpersonal. It gives tangibility to individual reflections on systems of oppression while simultaneously providing a basis for connection and solidarity with others whose experiences might be similar to one's own, which itself can be healing (Chioneso et al., 2020). As the children in the yPAR program engaged in dialogue with one another, they were able to give voice to instances of oppression, and, simultaneously this articulation served to increase their interdependence and solidarity. Naming served as a both a function of and a contributor to connectedness between participants. This aspect of naming is consistent with our earlier discussion of relational empowerment. Further, utilizing critical dialogue in naming aspects of oppression is also consistent with the interactional component of empowerment.

As described earlier, in the empowerment literature, interactional empowerment entails gaining a more cohesive understanding of how social systems function and how to engage with those systems (Zimmerman, 1995). Understanding the mechanisms that drive social structures positions youth to move more effectively within those structures. These implications for youth movement within structures are as true for developing an awareness and understanding of mechanisms of oppression as it is for understanding organizational maps or bureaucratic norms (Speer, 2000). What both of these increased areas of understanding have in common is that both are

steps that support collaboration between community members. In this instance, naming forms of oppression or existing dominant narratives prepares children not only to navigate the social context in its current state but also to collaborate with others within that context to transform it into something more equitable. Although previous research has detailed the ways in which children engage in critical dialogue (Kim, 2022; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022), this result provides insight on how dialogue supports the process of moving from awareness to problematization to re-creation in the form of counternarratives. Part of that transformation process requires taking up an alternative perspective to existing dominant narratives about the capacity of children and their value within social change movements. Children in the yPAR program engaged in this reframing process as well, as observed in our third result.

Result 3: Children in the yPAR program utilized critical dialogue to reframe aspects of their relationships with adults, providing alternative perspectives of their capacity to engage in social spaces and challenging existing assumptions about children.

After making or naming an observation within their setting, we determined that the children were able to use dialogue with adults and peers to provide alternative perspectives on the significance of those observations. By doing this, they were able to push back on the idea that the only relevant perspective was that of adults. Further, by pushing back on the universality of adult experiences, they were able to affirm the value of their own voices, experiences, and perspectives and to frame a potential site of transformative intervention.

For example, during a discussion around the connection between students feeling that they did not have control over things at school and the condition of school bathrooms, Marcela links dislike of school to students breaking things. She expands on this, though, in response to a university undergraduate research assistant's question, to connect a sense of powerlessness and a lack of other feasible options to express that displeasure as an alternative explanation for why students are "messing things up".

> Marcela was saying that another reason was that students hate school. Sam asked how this related to control over things and Marcela said that kids break things because they don't like the school. (FN 5.1.08)

One potential assumption about children is that they might be more likely to break things due to inattention or a general disregard for the property of others (Langhout, 2005). Yet, in this example, Marcela asserts that it is not simply the case the students break things just to break them, nor do students just break things because they don't like school. Rather, they break things to show that they don't like school <u>because</u> they do not have control over the means to express it in a different way that will be acknowledged by adults.

We also observed that children utilized critical dialogue to build on each other's separate experiences and co-construct a shared understanding of the significance of a common struggle. For example, another assumption about children is that they prefer to engage in frivolous activities rather than schoolwork. This deficit

perspective suggests that the problem in need of intervention is the work ethic and priority development of children, as opposed to there being any issue with the schoolwork itself. Children in the program used dialogue to push back on this assumption. During a conversation about social problems that the children might want to address, Juan began to discuss his inability to engage in his preferred activity of video games, and, in collaboration with other children in the program, gradually explored some of the systemic issues connected with this frustration.

> Juan nodded his head and said that he couldn't think of a problem. I told him that there must be something that he was unsatisfied with and that he might want to change and make it better.
>
> Juan took his hand to his chin, saying, "Hmm." He told me that he didn't have enough time to play video games and that he wishes there would be more time to play video games instead of doing homework. Juan added that he spent too much time in school and there was not enough time for "kid-activities." I asked him what these were, and he said playing video games! Marisa interrupted and added, "Yes, that's right! We work too hard in school!" I asked them what the solution would be and why it was a "problem." I reminded them that while at school, they learned many different things. Juan said that sometimes they learned things, but other times "It's just busy work." I asked him to tell me more about the problem and what he would do to solve it, and asked him if his solution was to make students not have to go to school

> any more and he said that he didn't know. I told him that that was a good idea and a good topic on which to write his book about. Adriana said that she liked being in school, but that she didn't like it when she would have to take homework without being able [to know] how to do it. Juan pointed his finger at her and said, "That's right! That's what I'm talking about, why do they (teachers?) even give homework and don't even tell us what to do- I don't like homework." I asked him if he ever went to get help with his homework, and he said that sometimes he wouldn't because his parents didn't know how to help. Marisa said that she would ask her teacher after class. Adriana nodded. I told Juan that these were all good points. (FN 4.1.10)

It is worth noting that this reframing critical dialogue did not require complete consensus on all points but rather allowed children to leverage their sometimes divergent perspectives to build toward a potentially transformative intervention and avoid interventions that would fail to address the core issue, as seen in the continuation of the conversation on homework.

> I told Juan that he should write about that. Marisa then said that she could write about having after-school programs in schools to help students to do their homework. Adriana said, a "homework club!" Then, Juan said that an after-school program would then leave less time for fun activities and video games, and he shook his head again, saying, "No, no, no!" I asked him what he was saying no about, and he told me what his day would look like if

> something like a homework club happened. Juan said, “I would come to school, work here, then go to after-school program work again, go home do homework and do other things at home, and then, it’s night, you’re tired, and there’s not much time for anything else!” (FN 4.1.10)

In this excerpt, Juan names that he is obliged to participate in activities that have been prioritized by adults, rather than those of personal interest to him. This statement, taken alone, initially reifies assumptions that children are irresponsible or unable to focus on tasks that will lead to their growth or development independently. In dialogue, however, we see Juan, Marisa, and Adriana collaboratively reframe the issue that cannot be reduced to poor priorities for children. Rather, the issues that they describe are that the work being assigned does not facilitate learning, there is a lack of instruction in completing the assigned work, and teachers assume that parents have the time or familiarity with the subject matter to assist in the completion of homework. Rather than simply "not liking" homework, the children collaboratively conclude that the structure of homework is not one that facilitates engagement or learning

We can see from the use of critical dialogue demonstrated in the above examples that developing consciousness of oppression extends beyond the process of naming instances of that oppression. Upon collectively becoming aware of, identifying, and problematizing power inequities, the yPAR participants moved into making meaning of the oppressive circumstances that have now been named. This reframing, such as that in which the yPAR participants engaged, has previously been

identified in the literature as a factor for resilience that situates resiliency not as an individual point of arrival, but rather as a ongoing, dynamic, relational process (Shelton et al., 2018; Saltis et al., 2023; Wexler et al., 2009). From this perspective, the shared interpretation of societal forces equips individuals and communities to evaluate the nature of and re-orient themselves to oppressive systems (Wexler et al., 2009). With this new, collective, locally-situated understanding of social structures, participants are now able to forge a counternarrative that pushes back on dominant conceptualizations of their identity and their respective engagement within those structures (Shelton et al., 2018). Dialogue such as that seen in this example adds to the existing literature by demonstrating how children begin to move from a baseline awareness of oppression to making sense of those observations in the context of their own experience. Children leveraged these conversations in partnership with supportive adults to establish counternarratives that contradicted dominant narratives around the role and capabilities of children. This articulation of counternarratives is reflected in our fourth result.

Result 4: Children were able to leverage the critical dialogue utilized in the yPAR program to articulate their own counternarratives that directly contradicted certain dominant narratives about the role and capabilities of children.

Interview participants pushed back on a number of dominant narratives regarding the capacities of children. Rather than accepting that children require shaping by adults, children were able to articulate a counternarrative that they are able

to think independently and contribute a valid perspective based on their personal experiences. Instead of the idea that children are unable to contribute to adult conversations, also known as being seen and not heard, children voiced a counternarrative that children and adults can work together successfully while also recognizing that this often doesn't happen because of assumptions about children and power disparities. Finally, in response to the dominant narrative that adults are fully formed, while children are incomplete, children were able to articulate the counternarrative that there are things that adults don't know and that children and adults can teach each other. I will provide examples of each of these narratives in turn.

In a manner consistent with Friere's (1970/2000) problem-posing model of education, children challenged the notion that they were empty vessels waiting to be filled with the knowledge of adults. Despite a common narrative that children are incapable of generating valid contributions based on their perspective as children, participants from the yPAR program voiced an understanding that they were able to effectively bring their own experience and expertise to bear in critical dialogue, problem identification, and intervention creation. One participant, Celina, shared that her own ability to engage based on her personal experiences both surprised her and gave her an incentive to proactively engage in the learning process by asking questions. Analysis of her interview with the Listening Guide resulted in the following I-poem:

I always thought of myself being quiet

Then I realized

I'm not that quiet at all

I noticed that I talked a lot

I don't usually do that

I do it more

I actually am doing, asking more questions

- Celina, 2012

We see here that not only was Celina fully capable of contributing, but she was able to realize her own capacity when provided space to contribute. Her own assumptions about herself were challenged when she found herself in a setting which valued and encouraged her input. The emphasis on critical dialogue in the space provided incentive for Celina to lean into her curiosity and assert control over her own participation, both actively connecting personal experiences to the conversation and pushing the conversation forward using questions.

This process did not exclude adults, but rather situated the young person as capable of meaningful participation. In fact, active adult participation was a key factor in the co-construction of a setting that encouraged critical dialogue. At the same time, however, excessive adult interjections were seen as a deterrent to effective collaboration instead of as a support. During her exit interview, when asked about what she did not like about the program, Belinda explicitly pointed out that adults, specifically teachers from the school, would interrupt when the children were

speaking rather than allow them to come to a conclusion on their own, as we see in this I-poem:

[The teacher]'s saying everything

Then she [the teacher] interrupted on everything mostly that everyone [the students] said

When we [the students] said something

She[the teacher]'s like it's not true

I didn't like that

Maybe we [students and university adults] should do it

Just the kids and you guys

Nobody hears, no teachers

Sometimes the teachers went in

When we were doing

I didn't like that

They were interrupting

They would hear everything

We were talking

It would be better if you guys did

Nobody's hearing

- Belinda, 2008

In her reflection on her frustrations during her time in the afterschool program, Belinda expressed an awareness that children are capable of generating

ideas independently. The primary difficulty was not that the children didn't have ideas nor that children were not engaged in the conversations. Rather, participating students encountered regular contridications to their observations from adults external to the program as the childen attempted to engage in dialogue. This made it difficult for children to build off of each other's ideas and experiences to exercise self-determination in the direction of the program. Notably, Belinda did not express a complete lack of interest in adult input, as she also observed that the adults responsible for facilitating the programs were supportive collaborators. As such, adult-child collaboration was both possible and desirable, but required that adults recognize the validity of child contributions and resist adultist assumptions that only adults are capable of critical thinking and knowledge production.

This idea that adults and children could collaborate successfully was echoed by other participants as well. Children acknowledged that adults had valuable skills and experience that could be brought to bear on the activities of the program. The stipulation upon which successful collaboration was predicated, however, was that children were provided with space to engage in dialogue based on their own experiences. Aidole voiced this in her exit interview, observing that adults were active contributors and that part of that contribution was making space for youth to engage. This was articulated in the following I-poem:

They [adults] were typing [our ideas]

They [adults] were like explaining things and stuff

They [adults] didn't nag us [children] if we [children] were talking a lot

- Aidole, 2008

Aidole contradicted the narrative that adults and children cannot effectively collaborate, instead suggesting that adults were key supports in certain instances. The university-based adult research assistants in this space had acquired and practiced certain technical skills that the children had not necessarily had the opportunity to develop. They also had exposure to certain concepts or strategies that they could share with the youth participants. With these skills and experiences, they could provide useful input to the activities of the program. At the same time, however, the children had valuable knowledge and expertise. As such, part of effective adult-child collaboration required adults to avoid "nagging" and instead make space for critical dialogue by and with children. To successfully collaborate, supportive adults needed to balance acknowledging the validity and necessity of youth participant input while simultaneously sharing skills, experiences, and resources. Leana raised this point when asked what adults did in the program and how adults and children worked together, as expressed in this I-poem:

They worked together

Everyone needed help

They need ideas from the kids

Everyone would help

When we would do…candy sorting

They would help

They told us

They would give us ideas

We should put it right there

Everybody has different, like, ideas

That's what they came to, like, to help

We didn't know how to put the words

We're kids

We need help from the adults

We can't do everything by ourselves

They can help us

I think they were helpful

They would always be there for us

If I needed something

They would always be there

They would, like, get it done

- Leana, 2012

Here, Leana makes it clear that adults do have a role to play in the program. She acknowledges that the social positioning of children in the space does not provide them with access to the same resources or experiences as adults. Yet, she notably emphasizes that "everyone" needed help, and, accordingly, "everyone" would help. She also distinguishes between adults helping or making suggestions and taking over the activity themselves. When posed the same question regarding collaboration, Vanessa provided a similar response.

We decided on what we were going to do next together

We decided that… um doing things together always made it easier

We decided that we needed to make a change

We decided on what we were gonna make the change on together

- Vanessa, 2010

Again, Vanessa emphasizes the shared responsibility of adults and children to move the program forward. Mutual engagement in the program activities, as she describes it, suggests a focus on both meaningful youth participation and intentional adult support. This balance of providing access to adult resources and making space for youth voice and contribution requires humility, an awareness of room for continued growth, and a validation of the experiences of other, more marginalized voices. Not surprisingly, practicing this humility and creating space for critical dialogue by youth participants contradicted the dominant narrative that adults are complete and children are incomplete. On the contrary, it modeled a growth mindset and affirmed that children can partner in the democratic production of knowledge. Belinda made just such an observation later in her interview when asked about how adults and children worked together during the yPAR program.

We learned together

We learned different things

The grown-ups learned things they didn't know

We learned things we didn't know

- Belinda, 2008

In this poem, we see a counternarrative that both adults and children have room to learn, and both adults and children have valuable expertise to contribute to the space. Such a counternarrative provides a foundation for critical actions that are undertaken with and alongside youth participants, as opposed to on behalf of or in consideration of youth participants. Changemaking and critical thought are not exclusively the purview of the most privileged, but, rather, are made possible when all participants are able to engage in collective imagining and the democratic production of knowledge.

We can see from all of these counternarratives that the children vocalized an alternative understanding of reality that challenged the rationale of a coercive hierarchy that privileges the knowledge of dominant groups. These counternarratives identify that dominant stories, expectations, and stigmas faced by children do not define their experiences with the world. This observation adds to past literature that suggests that although many dominant narratives are internalized and reiterated by children and other marginalized groups, there are simultaneously alternative understandings of reality that provide a different picture of the present and, accordingly, potential futures (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Hasford, 2016; Henriques et al., 2022; Saltis et al., 2023). In these alternative narratives, children and other marginalized peoples are able to engage in resistance through radical hope for a more equitable future, built out of their collective contradictions of logics of oppression and engagement in the democratic production of knowledge (Henriques et al., 2022). For example, the leveraging of personal and collective stories as testimonios demonstrates

how young people have used a diligent recounting of their own stories to create counternarratives, consejos, and confessions (Cervantes-Soon, 2012). In deeply exploring their own experiences, young people are able to challenge stigmas and dominant expectations, identify structural root problems, situate advice to share with peers, and gain a deeper awareness of their own complicity with systemic injustices (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Henriques et al., 2022). Together, all of these allow children, along with collaborators and allies, to proactively disrupt dominant narratives and define directions for transformative change.

Such dominant narratives also serve to maintain other forms of oppression, external to and intersecting with adultism. Given this observation, we wished to identify the ways in which children proactively extended these counternarratives to apply to other systems of oppression. In analyzing exit interviews, we discerned that children did not frequently explicitly make linkages to other forms of oppression. However, they were able to extend the counternarratives formed during the program into generalizable observations for their social engagement, as described in our fifth and final result based on the archival data.

Result 5: Children broadened some specific counternarratives into generalizable life precepts but did not frequently make explicit connections between their experiences with adultism and other forms of oppression.

Despite demonstrating an awareness of other forms of oppression, as seen in some of the above excerpts from program fieldnotes, most children participating in the yPAR program did not explicitly tie their experiences in the program or thoughts

on the capacity of children to observations regarding other forms of oppression during their interviews. We did observe, however, that they were able to discuss the implications of their experiences in the program for what it means to engage equitably with others in general and how people generally can effect change. Of particular note, we found that children distinguished between "power to" and "power over", noting that "power to" accomplish their goals required collaboration and the inclusion of diverse perspectives as a building block for action.

This distinction was particularly salient for yPAR participants who were present for the design and painting of the first mural created during the course of the program. Entitled *We Are Powerful*, the development process for this mural encouraged participants to think critically about what they meant when they asserted that they were powerful. As this project was proceeding in the context of school, where children are afforded few decision-making opportunities, children were able to process what it means to have power as a marginalized group. For example, during her interview, Vanessa made clear that their age did not keep children from being powerful, as they were able to create something based on their own experiences and expertise.

> We are powerful
>
> Even though we are just 5th graders
>
> We have the power to make something
>
> That even the adults couldn't make

In the title of ours [mural], to have power, it didn't mean to have, to control the people

We can control what we want to do with our lives

- Vanessa, 2010

Vanessa is fully aware that her and her fellow participants' status as 5th graders precludes them from accessing the same decision-making as adults. She simultaneously recognizes from participating in the creation of the mural that, even as a member of an oppressed group, she and her peers still have power, including power to accomplish things that the dominant group alone cannot. In recognizing that she and her peers had unique capacities compared to those of adults, Vanessa refuses a powerless identity (Suarez, 2018), and, instead, articulates a counternarrative that pushes back on the idea that power is something that can be held by one person or group to constrain or enable the behavior of another individual or group. This counternarrative, which was also expressed by several of Vanessa's peers, depicts a picture of power that is relational, dynamic, and rooted in action, including actions directed at resistance to oppression and marginalization, consistent with power as described by Clarissa Hayward (1998). When asked in succession about what it means to be powerful and if children can have power, Ulisis offered this perspective:

People should stand up for themselves

To be powerful is, like, to stand up for yourself

They [kids] have the power to learn

They have the power to respect

They have the power to hate

They have the power to think

They have the power to stand up for themselves

They have the power to be themselves

- Ulises, 2010

In this poem, Ulises makes clear that power is not something constrained to one group or another. Rather, he focuses on the different actions that children can engage in to impact the relationships and social contexts that impact their lives. In effect, Ulises is pointing out many ways that children can leverage various forms of community cultural wealth to effect change (Yosso, 2005). Power, as he describes it, despite his use of the possessive verb "have", is not something held, but something which is exercised. Similarly, children also discussed the idea of honoring the strengths and value of a broad range of perspectives. In preparation for the second mural, entitled *Maplewood Stories*, youth participants conducted a series of focus groups in which students and their families were invited to come and share their experiences at the school and in the community. Over the course of these focus groups, Celina observed that students and family members participating in the focus groups had diverse stories to tell, and many were leveraging those diverse histories and perspectives to shape their community.

I learned that many people have a life stories [sic]

Of how their past has been

Or they're living right now

We are trying

A lot of us are trying to make the community a better place

- Celina, 2012

Celina identifies that even with different stories and perspectives, many of the participants are engaged in enacting social change. Further, in using "we" and "a lot of us", she is linking her efforts with those of others whose stories might differ from hers or who might hold different identities than her own. Adela pushes this narrative even further, citing collaboration across a range of experiences as a necessity for creating transformative change, while still affirming her own capacity. When asked about the meaning of the We Are Powerful mural, Adela's response provided the following I-Poem:

We get more ideas

Just working by myself would be hard

We can do anything

I am powerful

One person couldn't make anything possible

It's as a team

- Adela, 2010

As the children nuanced the nature of power, who can exercise power, and the value of diverse perspectives, they were also able to speak to the implications for their own engagement with the world around them and civic responsibility. Just as Adela asserts, children recognized that leaning on one set of perspectives creates a

disadvantage in advocating for social change, particularly when the experiences and voices of those most impacted are omitted. Nico points this out in his own interview response, identifying the long-term impacts of environmental decisions being made by adults that will have enduring repercussions for children now and as they enter emerging adulthood. Far from simply expressing a desire for adults to make better decisions, Nico expresses a desire to make direct contributions to decisions being made that effect his family.

> And, right now, we get, we got, um, oil spill
>
> That company can get away with it
>
> They have the money
>
> They can't clean it up
>
> My mom and my grandma are sad because of them
>
> They like, um, shrimp
>
> They're [shrimp] gonna die
>
> They're probably gonna spread it to all the animals
>
> Then we're gonna die
>
> I wanna sue that company
>
> We're not only kids
>
> We're the future
>
> They should actually let us vote
>
> We are gonna be here tomorrow
>
> The adults and grandpas and -no offense- are gonna, like, die

They’re not going to be here for when they make those changes

We’re gonna be here

Yeah, they should actually let us vote

The adults had their chance

Now let us

Some of us are really sad

If all of us joined together

We could actually sue that company

They have to clean it up

We’re gonna be here tomorrow

- Nico, 2010

In the context of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Nico expresses an awareness that environmental decisions have very real implications for his family in the present, as well as for him and his peers in the future. Although he stops short of fully exploring the systemic justice implications of his observations, we can see that Nico’s statements do provide a foundation for the argument that the voices of those most impacted by policy decisions should be prioritized. As with many of the other observations made by program participants, this precept cuts across various domains of oppression and is not limited to adult-child power relationships.

This result contributes to the existing literature in this area by demonstrating the potential application of liberatory consciousness across domains for children. This ability to draw upon narratives in one context, based off of one aspect of identity-

based oppression, to inform consideration of a broad variety of oppressive systems is a key component of arguments to create spaces for children to engage in critical dialogue early in life (Aldana et al, 2019; Gómez & Cammarota, 2022; hooks, 1994; Rozas & Miller, 2009; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). With the proliferation of dominant narratives in our education system, failure to address social inequities and power hierarchies risks their normalization (Gómez & Cammarota, 2022). Given this, the development of critical consciousness is aided by the intentional promotion of critical dialogue to create awareness of injustice and develop strategies for rectifying those injustices (Freire, 1970/2000). By creating a space in which children can challenge the rationales of adultism, there is the potential for them to recognize and disrupt those rationales as they become evident in other domains of oppression (DeJong & Love, 2015; hooks, 1994). I will discuss this evaluation of parallel logics of oppression further in presenting results from the follow-up interviews with emerging adult former yPAR participants.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented five results that emerged from analysis of ethnographic fieldnotes and childhood exit interviews collected during the original yPAR program. These results addressed the first two research questions of this study, specifically: 1) How do children participating in an afterschool yPAR program utilize critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces, and 2) To what extent are those narratives replicated or

expanded to address forms of oppression based on membership in different marginalized groups?

In answer to these questions, we found that children in the yPAR program utilized dialogue in collaboration with and with the support of adults, who utilized Frierian standards for critical dialogue to promote children's engagement in the space. With this support, children utilized critical dialogue to name key characteristics or aspects of their relationships with adults that reflected power disparities, forms of oppression, or assumptions about them as children. Upon naming inequities, children also utilized dialogue to reframe aspects of their relationships with adults, providing alternative perspectives of their capacity to engage in social spaces and challenging existing assumptions about children. Engaging in this naming and reframing process facilitated the articulation of their own counternarratives that directly contradicted certain dominant narratives about the role and capabilities of children. Child participants did not frequently make explicit connections between their experiences with adultism and other forms of oppression, but they did broaden some of these specific counternarratives into generalizable life precepts that could be applied to other forms of oppression.

In the next chapter, I will present results from the emerging adult follow-up interviews that explore how former yPAR participants have maintained and applied these childhood counternarratives. Specifically, the next chapter will seek to answer the following research questions: 3) To what degree are childhood counternarratives

maintained into emerging adulthood, and 4) How do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action?

Results: Emerging Adult Data

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how children develop transformative counternarratives during an afterschool program, apply counternarratives across domains of oppression, maintain those counternarratives into emerging adulthood, and mobilize counternarratives into adult social action. Specifically, the research questions of focus in analyzing the emerging adult data are: 3) To what degree are childhood counternarratives maintained into emerging adulthood, and 4) To what extent do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action? This chapter presents results obtained from the analysis of newly collected adult individual and group follow-up interviews.

In our analysis of emerging adult interviews, we made the following observations in connection to the stated research questions:

1. Emerging young adults continued to reiterate childhood counternarratives about who is capable of contributing to social change efforts, whose perspective has value, and the importance of elevating marginalized voices.
2. Emerging young adults simultaneously continued to negotiate dominant narratives about power relations and standards of behavior, particularly in their conversations about respect and how to express disagreement appropriately.

3. Emerging young adults incorporated their childhood counternarratives into their own current involvement in social action by highlighting the importance of listening, collaboration, advocacy, and understanding why they believe the rationales they support.

Following is a discussion of each result in turn with necessary details to explain and support the respective observation. I will begin by discussing how emerging adults continued to articulate childhood counternarratives, after which I will discuss the ways in which they continued to balance those counternarratives with maintained dominant narratives. Having established their relationship with childhood counternarratives, I will conclude by discussing how emerging adults translated their maintained counternarratives into adult critical action.

Result 1: Emerging young adults continued to reiterate childhood counternarratives about who is capable of contributing to social change efforts, whose perspective has value, and the importance of elevating marginalized voices.

As emerging adult participants reflected on their time in the yPAR program, they reported being struck by the stark distinction in their experience within and outside of the program. They frequently identified that they felt that their voice was heard and validated during the program. Not only did they notice this difference in terms of their own participation, but they also noticed the alternative experiences of their classmates who were not involved with the program. This observation is significant, as it suggests that the distinction between themselves and their peers was

not the presence of a perspective on important social issues but rather being given an opportunity to reflect, discuss, and act upon those perspectives. During his interview, Cesar noted these differences in conversation within and external to the program while also observing that children are aware of community issues, even if they are not engaged in dialogue regarding those issues.

> So the kids that weren't, you could tell the difference
>
> As in, they're not talking about these issues
>
> They're not informed about this stuff that is important to everybody
>
> Some parents would probably not see it as, "Oh, you need to open my–"
>
> Or, "You need to open my kid's eyes."
>
> "We'll tell them about that kind of thing."
>
> I feel like that's what a lot of the students that didn't join the program
>
> I feel like I did remember seeing that the parents were kind of like,
>
> "No, no, we don't want you knowing about all that stuff going on in the community," when it's like pretty useful
>
> We see it
>
> - Cesar (2012-2014)

Cesar demonstrates an awareness that some adults, specifically parents of his peers, felt that the topics being discussed in the yPAR program were too advanced for children. At the same time, however, he notes that children were already cognizant of local dynamics to which they were regularly exposed but were not necessarily perceived as being mature enough to receive additional information or engage in

dialogue regarding community issues. The yPAR program provided children with a space to gain additional background information, as well as to reflect upon and discuss those issues further. Vanessa made a similar observation during the group interview, as seen in the following I-poem:

It made me feel good that I was having deeper conversations

I would go talk to my friends on the playground the next day

They'd be like "I've never even heard of these topics"

It made me feel a little more in-tune to what was actually going on

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

In these examples, Cesar and Vanessa suggest that children's engagement in critical dialogue around complex topics was not an issue of children's capacity. Rather, both realized that children were fully capable of discussing important issues, but often did not. They attribute their own engagement in "deeper conversations" to their participation in a space that prioritized such dialogue. In fact, multiple interviewees directly pointed out the approach of the university collaborators in creating such a space, which subsequently provided an opportunity for the children to exercise their capacity and contribute to social change. Vanessa pointed this out during her individual interview, noting that she still thinks of the collaborative approach of program adults as a major factor in meaningful participation for children in the yPAR program:

I always felt really welcomed by the grad students

Look at them [the grad students], they're older

They're hanging out with a bunch of kids during their summer

It really spoke to me

I think that's what I've carried through

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

Vanessa added to this thought later when asked about any present-day conversations she has about her time in the yPAR program. She shared that, although she no longer lives in the area, she has driven friends past her former school to show them the mural that she and her peers created as their chosen social intervention. In response to their impressed reactions, she provides insight into the unique nature of the yPAR opportunity:

They were like, "It's crazy."

"How did you guys come up with that?"

I was able to be like, "Well, because we were allowed to have these open and honest conversations, and really have creative freedom"

And, our principal at the time, like working with us to make those things happen

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

The prioritization of adult-child collaboration in the space had major repercussions on how participating children viewed themselves and on their capacity to engage in such collaborative efforts more generally. During the group interview, Andrea shared that she simultaneously gained an increased interest in these forms of

dialogue and saw herself as more capable due to the collaborative nature of the program:

> It was really exciting
>
> I didn't really have a lot of that outside of school
>
> I had more interest in it and paid more attention to it because I felt like we were on the same team trying to do it together
>
> It made me feel like I would gain more knowledge and understanding of what I was doing by working with them
>
> It made me feel more, like, equal

- Andrea (2009-2011)

Later, during her individual interview, Andrea expanded on this thought and how the lessons from the yPAR program contributed to her academic engagement and progress in future years:

> I definitely feel like around that age, I was trying to understand the relationship between teachers and myself and my friends
>
> I think that that program definitely had me look at things through a different lens of collaboration
>
> I definitely thought of it as more of fun,
>
> more engaging than I would have before
>
> I kind of brought that into my middle school
>
> I think that when I was really young, I had a hard time with school
>
> I just was not really great with attention and just sitting and listening a lot.

I think that having a collaborative space kind of changed my viewpoint on what learning should be.

I definitely took that into middle school

Definitely looked at things with a different viewpoint because I was able to have more collaboration and try to use that even with school that was a very similar style.

- Andrea (2009-2011)

Spaces in which children can engage in dialogue with each other and adult supporters with the expectation that their input will be valued have historically been limited (Spray, 2024; Taft, 2015). Andrea felt more excited for learning and for participating in collaborative change efforts not solely due to the content of the program, but because of the potential for sharing in the democratic production of knowledge. This value for children's perspectives was meaningful to emerging adults as they moved out of the yPAR space, even when memories of specific activities began to fade, as Cesar noted during his individual interview:

I definitely talked to my partner a little bit about

what I had done in the program

I think that some of my core memories of maybe not what I learned,

But some of the things that really just always stuck with me were just how kind and collaborative the environment was

I was really lucky to be able to do that

I just kind of felt as a kid,

I was being appreciated

It was just a really enriching program for me as a kid

I don't really remember a lot of the specific little things I learned

- Cesar (2012-2014)

Cesar and Andrea's observations, in addition to highlighting the importance of kindness and empathy in facilitating critical dialogue, also serve as a critique of the banking approach to education. In Andrea's case, she gained an increased motivation for engagement with academics when she felt a personal connection to the material and agency to collaborate in her learning experience. For Cesar, he did not retain the specific technical details of the program activities, but he did retain lessons he had learned for effective collaboration. In both of their reflections, they demonstrated an increased awareness that their perspective as children had value and should be factored into making decisions that impacted themselves and their community. Consistent with this observation and childhood counternarratives, multiple interviewees expressed a belief that the incorporation of youth input and perspectives is an important factor in creating necessary equitable systemic changes. For example, Vanessa, who now works with children and adolescents professionally, observed how she still holds a value for the perspectives of children and incorporates that into her work:

A lot of the kids that I work with,

they have gone through severe trauma

The way that they view the world is usually really different

I can have some conversation with these kids

Even though they might not be able to express how they're feeling

They still have so many great opinions

And, just like, hearing them out

I think that any kid at any age can have such great ideas

They just need to be listened to

I'm a firm believer that we shouldn't treat kids like kids

We should treat them like people

and let their ideas be heard

I do think that a lot of the kids I work with,

if they were given a little more of a voice,

they would be able to have more of an opinion on specific things

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

Again, we see from Vanessa's observations that she understands children as not only having ideas but also having ideas that should be heard and incorporated into decision-making. The issue at hand, as Vanessa understands it, is not that children do not have valid perspectives or are not capable of thinking critically about social issues, but rather that adult decision-makers frequently do not listen to or provide space for children's voices. Andrea sees this shift as a critical step in supporting transformative social change. When asked about the best way to create social change, she provided the following response:

I think reaching our youth is really important, starting people young with a deep understanding of others

I think having people from a young age be comfortable to speak out

And making sure people know that they have a voice

So when it's time for questions, they don't feel afraid to ask those questions

I think, also, just exposing people, all ages, all types of people, to every other type of person

Learning to accept people for who they are

Not to change them and make them what you think that they should be

I think that's something that people kind of forget to do sometimes.

I think it would bring a lot more kindness if people would just slow down and accept people for who they are.

I think also accepting people

for who they are comes with exposure as a young person

Just getting down with the youth and with people on a human level is the best way to make change.

I think having people work with me as a youth really made me recognize

that's something that I think worked

I definitely remember having people come and want to be interested in what we had to say

Even though we were kids

It felt like we did have a voice.

- Andrea (2009-2011)

In Andrea's response, we see that, as an adult, she still recognizes that it was highly impactful to have her perspective acknowledged and validated. As part of that, she highlights priorities for both those who benefit from and those who experience marginalization. For those who experience marginalization, she points out that it is essential to gain comfort in asking questions and advocating for justice. Similarly, for those who benefit from marginalization, in this case, adults, she sees it as essential to value people as they are rather than trying to shape them to meet dominant expectations. When asked about what social changes are necessary, she emphasized this point:

> I think that a lot of different types of social change are necessary
>
> I think it's a pretty broad topic
>
> There's just so many different angles you can take for social change
>
> I think something that's super necessary is kindness and the way that people view other people
>
> I think it's crucial that people have a better
>
> understanding and patience with others
>
> I think that it's important that we do that because it kind of will lead to more community outreach, more people getting heard, and the youths especially having resources for food, homes, water, and making sure that people's basic human rights are being met
>
> I think that also making sure that people are asking questions

and are digging deeper

I think conversations are crucial for everybody's future

- Andrea (2009-2011)

This poem articulates the reality that the most expedient approach to addressing the needs of marginalized communities is to actively attend to marginalized voices (Henriques et al., 2022; Spray, 2024). Andrea points out that an emphasis on hearing and understanding members of marginalized communities will provide an avenue for addressing basic needs and human rights. A failure to consider multiple perspectives in addressing social inequities and subsequent pursuit of a "correct" solution predicated on dominant perspectives can result in negative consequences for those who have been excluded from the conversation (Rappaport, 1981). Effectively, Andrea extends a childhood counternarrative that engaging in collaborative dialogue, including asking critical questions, can allow those in positions of privilege to learn and grow in their capacity to recognize the necessity of and support liberatory change.

Such counternarrative development and maintenance patterns are compelling as there is very little existing research on sustained counternarratives to adultism. Given the embedded nature of adultism in social structures and institutions, it would not be surprising to see emerging adults ascribe to assumptions of adult superiority typical of dominant narratives. We see here, however, that multiple former yPAR participants espoused counternarratives regarding the validity of youth experiences and promoting the amplification of the "inconvenient voices" of marginalized groups,

which has previously been discussed as a hallmark of equitable models of participation (Corney et al., 2022).

Despite the dearth of retrospective studies of emerging adult outcomes from childhood yPAR participation, research has been done on maintaining positive youth development outcomes stemming from participation in youth sports programs (Gould, 2023). This research suggests that the lessons from childhood participation in such programs can have long-lasting effects into late adulthood, which is consistent with our observation that emerging young adults continued to reiterate childhood counternarratives (Gould, 2023; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al., 2017). The psychosocial outcomes from participation in sports, however, diverged from the outcomes discussed by the current study participants in that sports participation primarily supported individual and interpersonal skills but did not encourage interrogation of power dynamics, social structures, or liberatory strategies (Holt et al., 2017). Indeed, this focus on social transformation is a major distinction between the critical consciousness and positive youth development literature. Yet, the results of the current study suggest that childhood counternarratives developed through critical dialogue could have similar sustainability over time, potentially supporting the development of critical consciousness far beyond a given participant's involvement in a yPAR program.

Such childhood narratives, however, are not monolithic or homogenous. For example, even as Andrea expresses the counternarrative of hearing and understanding perspectives of marginalized groups, aspects of her response demonstrate a somewhat

flattened power analysis. Her emphasis on the ways in which "people view other people" and people having a "better understanding and patience with others" suggests a level of mutual antagonism that fails to fully acknowledge the hierarchical nature of social structures. This balancing of dominant and counternarratives was common throughout emerging adult interviews, as observed in our second result.

Result 2: Emerging young adults simultaneously continued to negotiate dominant narratives about power relations and standards of behavior, particularly in their conversations about respect and how to express disagreement appropriately.

As former yPAR participants reflected on their time in the program and their application of what they had learned during adulthood, the complexity of their currently held narratives became evident. The voices articulated by the participants, as depicted in the I-poems derived from the application of the Listening Guide to their interview responses, occasionally expressed perspectives that at times felt at odds with each other. This is unsurprising, given that verbal responses are not neutral, nor do they exist in isolation, absent of historical and social context (Eun, 2018). Rather, aligned with the dialogical consciousness theories of Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and Vološinov, the responses of participants reflect an inner dialogue between the individual and voices that they encounter, both directly and indirectly, beyond the present conversation (Eun, 2018; Karsten, 2023; Van Raalte et al., 2019). At times, this second, "hidden" voice became evident as participants navigated, echoed, and projected the individual and collective voices with which they engaged in an internal

conversation (Karsten, 2023). For example, even as participants problematized various forms of oppression and expressed a desire for systemic justice, some of their observations reflected a prioritization of mutual individualized positive regard, which, in some cases, they felt had been a key feature of the yPAR program. Specifically, they felt that it was the responsibility of individual members of marginalized groups to engage with civility or individual members of dominant groups to not engage in interpersonal antagonistic behavior. In expressing this, they simultaneously reified dominant narratives of civility or respectability politics, as well as narratives of meritocracy and individual responsibility. Although this framing was mostly conveyed as participants considered social justice from their current positioning as adults, some also shared narratives that reinforced adult superiority and a banking approach to education. For example, in the following I-poem from Emelio, he expresses that engaging with undergraduate research assistants as an elementary school student was particularly motivating for him during the program.

> You're interacting with people who are in university, who think different,
> have already gone through teenage years
> They help you,
> guide you
> Once you go back to class
> You're like, "Oh, it's like I got to pay attention to this,
> so I can keep going and continue my studies."
> You got to keep doing good,

so you can help out others in the future too.

- Emelio (2012-2014)

We see here that Emelio prioritizes the experiences of university students who "have already gone through teenage years." Although their interactions with him and his desire to be a similar source of support inspire his academic engagement, he still suggests that age-based expertise is valid, as opposed to experiential and contextual expertise. As such, increased focus and attention on what is being shared by adults became a greater emphasis for him than it had been previously. In effect, he suggests that a key resource in supporting children is the knowledge that can be provided by adults.

In this particular example, Emelio describes how his relationship with school changed during childhood based on his time in the program. Other participants also reflected on how their adult beliefs around social justice and social change have been impacted by their involvement in the yPAR program. Interestingly, multiple participants situated their discussion of change efforts in utilizing strategies that were either individualistic or protective of the comfort of those in positions of power and privilege. For example, one of the counternarratives that emerged from the analysis of archival data was that neither adults nor children are fully formed and, therefore, both can teach each other. In the following I-poem, Vanessa extends that counternarrative to a general analysis of relationships between individuals who disagree on social justice issues. Yet, even as she recommends persisting in one's values and beliefs, she

also adopts dominant narratives regarding the appropriate way to engage with those who push back against transformative change.

I think it takes a lot of, kind of how I mentioned earlier, is understanding
that everyone's going have an opinion and a different perspective
Just having an understanding that you may have people that disagree
You may have people that want to combat your beliefs,
but still staying strong in those
Not being rude to those people, I think, is a big thing
I think that's where a lot of conflict comes from
It's hard, right, not to be upset because you're like, this is literally a basic right
However, I think that's understanding like,
maybe that person's view is completely different because of something they went through
Let me move on and just let that person go
I think that's the hardest part
Then, on the flip side, you want people to at least listen to you
I do think that being willing to listen is a big part of it
That means even if it's someone that has a disagreement
with what you're passionate about changing

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

In this poem, Vanessa balances a desire to be listened to regarding social issues with a concern of being rude to those who resist social change. She does not

situate the source of the problem in social dynamics in social structures or ideology but instead focuses on individual decision-making (listening or not listening) and positive interpersonal relationships (being rude or not being rude). Emelio echoed a similar sentiment in his reflection on what he feels to be necessary areas for social change, as he also emphasizes interpersonal acceptance in the following I-poem:

I feel like there's always been a good amount of discrimination here in the US
I feel like that's one thing that definitely should change
But I do understand also it's going to be very hard to change as well
But, yeah, I think that's one thing,
that we could all just learn to accept each other
You don't have to agree with someone else,
But also, you don't have to go get up in their face
You can just let them be and do their thing,
And then you go do your thing
You're not going to agree with everyone,
You're not going to be able to get everyone to agree

- Emelio (2012-2014)

After sharing what kinds of social change he viewed as necessary, Emelio commented on how his perspective on the ideal way to create social change connected to his time in the program. He begins by sharing the importance of keeping an open mind, consistent with Freire's emphasis on humility in dialogue and the counternarrative of the validity of children's perspectives. Having established this, he

then shares a similar narrative as Vanessa regarding how such conversations should be conducted, as seen in the following I-poem:

Just like teaching kids to have an open mind,

but also have them stay focused and true to themselves,

I just remember at the Change 4 Good program, everyone would get along

Everyone would have a smile on their face

No one would be upset or throwing a fit about anything

I think that's a very good example or mindset to carry on

Just be open-minded, respectful, and have empathy for other people

- Emelio (2012-2014)

This frame of analysis perpetuates dominant narratives of civil dialogue, particularly that there is a correct way for members of oppressed groups to express their displeasure to members of dominant groups (Callahan, 2011; Hawn 2020). Rooted in colonial and white supremacist definitions of who is "civilized" and who is not, an insistence on civil discourse is a function of power disparities (Hawn, 2020). As such, what is or is not considered rude or uncivil communication shifts and is ultimately leveraged to preserve hegemonic norms, with standards that are likely to be applied more stringently to those in positions of marginalization. This contradicts Freirian requirements for liberatory dialogue, particularly love and humility (Freire, 1970/2000). Where mutual collaborative liberatory dialogue is not welcomed, resistance takes its place, and resistance is frequently deemed uncivil by those in positions of power and privilege (Callahan, 2011).

This narrative of civility shared by participants seems to be connected to a distinction between individual actions and systemic implications. Interpersonal kindness, or the ability to endure interpersonal unkindness, was discussed in a manner that fixated on individual responsibility and engagement but deprioritized structural change. For example, Vanessa found herself balancing her desire for justice and liberation (along with the counternarratives consistent with those desires) with her affection for individuals who not only did not share her views but supported causes that actively contributed to her continued marginalization. She cited the following example of an incident that occurred while a Trump rally was being held in her college town:

> I worked at a barbecue shop,
>
> The owner definitely supported [Trump]
>
> They were very nice people
>
> I was actually called the N-word as a car was driving past
>
> I came into work and I was, like, distraught
>
> My boss, who I know believes in certain things I don't
>
> He actually went out there and stopped every single car
>
> that I said looked like the car
>
> We both know he may agree with those people
>
> But, he still is willing to fight for someone
>
> Just because you disagree with someone's views
>
> Doesn't mean that you should treat them like less

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

Here, Vanessa found herself the target of racial violence[3] and was in need of emotional support. In response, her employer was available to attempt to confront those who had enacted that violence, which is a memory that Vanessa still carries with her today. It is understandable that she would see the value in the actions that her employer took as he, in that moment, didn't make her feel "like less." What is interesting, however, is that Vanessa interprets her employer's behavior exclusively on the individual and microlevels of analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). She had experienced harm at the individual level, and, because of their mutual affinity at the microlevel, her employer had stepped in to address that harm. Vanessa does not consider her employer's support for an administration touting racist and nationalist policies to be as othering or harmful as the person who insulted her with a racial epithet, again reinforcing the dominant conceptualization and narrative of civility. Civility here becomes a method by which the scope of analysis is reduced to individual behavior, to the exclusion of political and ideological implications. When the source of the problem is identified as individual in nature, the source of the solution must stem from the individual as well.

This individual lens held true not only in shaping the parameters of discourse between members of privileged and marginalized groups but also extended to narratives around methods for addressing oppression, specifically interpersonal racial

[3] Violence, as used in this text, is not constrained to acts of physical violence, but also includes psychological, ontological, and epistemic violence (Coşkan & Şen, 2023; Pillay, 2022).

violence. Although critical dialogue, as leveraged in the yPAR program, attempts to restore the collective memory and engage in collective imagining to foment critical action, emerging adult participants did not necessarily always consider social justice issues from a collective lens. For example, when asked about his thoughts on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and what next steps should be implemented to gain progress, Felix responded with an interpersonal perspective and highlighted his perceived individual responsibility.

> I've experienced a bit of racism here and there
>
> Me personally,
>
> I don't see it affecting me in a bad manner
>
> However, I don't think anybody should be treated
>
> in such a demeaning kind of way
>
> I think it all just goes back to conversations that
>
> We should have had a long time ago
>
> We just keep pushing them off or setting them to the side
>
> Either one side isn't heard enough and they want to be heard more,
>
> or the other side just decides to brush it off
>
> My patience level would just kind of–
>
> has always helped me to tolerate that kind of treatment
>
> I'm able to keep my calm, and if anything needs to be said, it will
>
> I don't let things escalate to a worse degree

I definitely feel like things could definitely get fixed more– or not fixed, but solutions to certain issues could definitely be reached out if more difficult conversations could be held.

- Felix (2007-2008)

In this response, Felix acknowledges the existence of racism and that he himself has experienced it. Akin to the childhood counternarrative that children and adults can effectively collaborate, he also expresses a belief that collaborative dialogue that elevates marginalized voices is not only possible but necessary for social change. He does not, however, see it as an issue of systems, policies, or ideologies but rather sees racism as being comprised primarily of race-based interpersonal violence. As such, he only recollects occasional instances of it impacting him personally and, in those instances, has relied on his individual capacity to tolerate interpersonal violence. Further, when faced with interpersonal racial violence, he considers it his responsibility to prevent situations from escalating by remaining calm. Again, we see reflected in this poem dominant narratives of individual accountability and civility, even as we also see aspects of liberatory counternarratives.

Such balancing of dominant narratives and counternarratives should hardly come as a surprise. Even as they are encouraged to engage in critical dialogue, which might produce liberatory counternarratives, children continue to be bombarded with messages that affirm and reify existing dominant narratives that support the social status quo. Unsurprisingly, the net result of this near-constant exposure to dominant

perspectives regarding their intersecting social identities can lead to the retention of those narratives in tension with burgeoning counternarratives (Smith & Hope, 2020). The difficult and life-long work of resolving this tension requires time and intentionality. As counternarratives emerge from critical dialogue, they influence the iterative processes of critical reflection, further dialogue, and critical action. Without opportunities for reflection and access to spaces for dialogue it may be difficult to expand counternarratives in such a way that destablizes retained dominant narratives, such as recognizing the role of civility in maintaining oppressive structures.

During this destabilization process, however, it is important to note that the complexity of the internal dialogue of participants extends beyond a single, linear dominant narrative and a single, linear potential counternarrative. In the voices expressed by participants, we can also understand that part of the retention of a civility narrative might be understood as participants' response to not only voices of oppression but also the intense polarization of our current historical moment (Francescato, 2018). Given the historical and transpersonal nature of voice (Karsten, 2023), it cannot be ignored that participants are sharing these perspectives in a context in which polarization has been leveraged to deter productive strategic dialogue that might lead to transformative change (Miles & Shinew, 2022). What may perhaps be reflected in the contrapuntal voices of participants is a need to increase public literacy in scaffolding critical dialogues in an era in which divisiveness impedes progress toward the creation of more liberatory social structures (Aguilar, 2021). As such, participants' voices may convey not only a distinct counternarrative

contradicting a distinct dominant narrative but also a nuanced understanding of what will ultimately support the transformation of an oppressive status quo.

Fortunately, even as they navigated the tension between dominant narratives and counternarratives, emerging adults participating in the study were able to leverage the counternarratives that they had maintained from childhood into critical action. In this study, we observed, consistent with previous literature, that critical dialogue in the yPAR program supported ongoing reflection and action, with counternarratives playing a key role in that process. This subsequent application of counternarratives to critical action comprises our third result.

Result 3: Emerging young adults incorporated their childhood counternarratives into their own current involvement in social action by highlighting the importance of listening, collaboration, advocacy, and understanding why they believe the rationales they support.

Although emerging adult participants engaged in social action to varying degrees and in various ways, several leveraged identified childhood counternarratives to inform the ways in which they work towards transformative change as adults. As seen in the childhood exit interview analysis, participants in the yPAR program articulated that people in positions of marginalization are capable of independent thinking and have valid perspectives rooted in their personal experiences. Similarly, they conveyed a counternarrative that collaboration, although possible, is often undercut by power disparities and assumptions regarding marginalized groups. Finally, they suggest that expertise is not the exclusive purview of dominant groups

but that members of marginalized groups can and should be included in the democratic production of knowledge.

Recognizing the value of subaltern perspectives, including one's own experiences as a member of a marginalized group, was a key factor in participants' willingness and desire to engage in social action and advocacy. Participants felt that moving away from individualistic priorities and toward collective collaboration was vital to the pursuit of transformative change. To effectively collaborate, marginalized voices need to be elevated. During the group interview, Vanessa shared a recollection of the variety of experiences present during the yPAR program and the importance of not limiting the discussion to a subset of those perspectives.

> It prepared me for working in group projects
>
> It really taught me that, no, everyone's opinions matter
>
> I don't know if I would have been as capable without the group
>
> I think my willingness to be open-minded and hear other people's opinions
>
> We have so many different opinions in the group
>
> Everyone came from a different background
>
> I think it just taught me that everyone is different,
>
> You should take the time to hear everyone out
>
> You don't have to agree with them
>
> You can still have respect to hear them out
>
> - Vanessa (2008-2010)

In this I-poem, Vanessa sees that her own ability to enact change and actively participate in the yPAR program was entangled with the participation of others. Specifically, the perspectives of others were helpful in that they provided her with insights beyond the limitations of her own experiences. By honoring and listening to those experiences, Vanessa was better equipped to collaborate with her peers in co-constructing knowledge and pursuing their shared goals and direction. Cesar expressed a similar sentiment when reflecting on what he remembered from the program as an adult. He and two of his close friends had joined the yPAR program together. After each meeting, he and his friends would spend time together in their neighborhood and chat about how the meeting had gone that day. He felt that this opportunity to share perspectives and hear one another's experiences was a key part of shaping a shared understanding of the world around them, rather than simply banking dominant forms of knowledge, as seen in the following I-Poem:

I guess other kids get to see the perspective through all three of our eyes
I guess the way you see it is you'll see more things
if you have three cameras rather than one
Maybe I didn't see something that they did see
Dialogue within three is you're communicating
with other people and making these ideas

- Cesar (2012-2014 participant)

Here, Cesar recognizes that placing his perspectives in conjunction with those of his friends allowed them to build on each other's experiences in a way that

contributed both to their individual understanding and the learning of the larger group. Such recognition requires humility, such as that described by Friere, to acknowledge that one's individual perspective is limited. As such, we can be more effective change agents when we work in community with others. This collaboration was significant as it suggested a certain degree of responsibility and accountability to the larger group. One's own contributions and the contributions of others were seen as mutually necessary for progress. As such, participants felt a responsibility to welcome the voices of others, as well as to share their own experiences and perspectives in a way that might inform the shared goals and priorities of the group.

As adults, the participants emphasized how this collaborative responsibility and accountability translated to their current perspectives and engagement in social change efforts. Andrea shared that, in her own work, she was motivated by her connections with others to be an advocate for their shared liberation. During her interview, she shared that she became involved in advocacy work due to her personal connection to issues impacting both her and those who share core aspects of her identity.

> I would say that being a woman for me
>
> I recognize the history of how women have been treated
>
> I definitely have had that affect me in my life
>
> I work to advocate for women
>
> I was doing fundraising for abortion rights and going door-to-door
>
> It's something that was important to me

and something I felt my identity reflected on

I wanted to make sure that my aunt is protected

and people who feel a similar way to me are also protected

Advocating for myself and others is something I was able to learn and practice

Realizing that not only I deserve to be advocated for

but all the people around me too

- Andrea (2009-2011)

In this I-poem, Andrea identifies that, as an outcome of her time in yPAR, along with her subsequent life experiences, she has come to problematize the normalization of marginalization for people who share her identity. She recognizes that the social inequities she has observed are not a natural state of social relations that must be accepted. On the contrary, she realizes that she and those around her "deserve to be advocated for." For such advocacy to be effective, Andrea also expressed that it must include perseverance on the part of the advocates, as well as humble listening on the part of those to whom they are advocating. When asked what needs to happen next to continue the efforts of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, she outlined this double-sided responsibility:

I would say that it would be nice to say that things got better

I'm not sure if they did

It's important for people to raise their voice and bring attention and awareness

What people choose to do with the voices that they hear telling them things is

what's important the most

I did see a lot of people express a lot of hate during that time
because of other people feeling empowered to raise their voice
I think that it did definitely make progress in some areas
Even if people aren't listening for a long time, people are against what you say, continuing to say it and continuing to be louder and louder is what's important
Not letting them shut you down
is what's the most important part of any movement
I think that what needs to happen is for families and for schools to show more kindness and acceptance and to talk about the Black Lives Matter movement
If we're not talking about it in our homes and in our classrooms,
then it's going to go right over people's heads.

- Andrea (2009-2011)

Andrea recognizes the value of persistence in social movements, especially in the face of active opposition. Simultaneously, she sees the need for empathy from those who see and hear the experiences of marginalized voices working toward liberation. In doing so, she suggests that the responsibility for facilitating social change does not reside solely with members of oppressed groups. Vanessa advances a similar theme in her reflection on the necessary next steps for the BLM movement. Despite having previously articulated a need for respectful communication, thereby endorsing a civility narrative, in her response here, she voices frustration with the failure to listen by those in positions of power and privilege.

What I believe is both parties have to be able to listen

I'm going to go against that

I think there's only one party that needs to listen

And, see why people are fighting for what they're fighting for

I have family members who are very vocal

about their "all lives matter" saying

I truly disagree

"See, what you're saying is not what that represents"

They're trying to reason with it

I think if you can't defend why you're putting something out there

You probably shouldn't put it out there

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

Not only does Vanessa suggest that members of privileged groups should listen to marginalized voices, she also indicates that she believes that knowing why you believe what you do is an important factor in meaningful dialogue and collaboration. Even though she begins by stating that she is contradicting her initial suggestion that both parties need to listen, the root of her frustration seems to be that her family members who push against the BLM movement do not seem to be able to defend their stance. This critique replicates the earlier observation regarding double-sided responsibility. In this instance, Vanessa sees it as equally important to be listened to and to know why you believe what you do. Andrea expresses a similar thought in discussing her approach to door-to-door advocacy.

I think that maybe having a deeper thought process to things
I kind of started to be able to practice more during that program
I think that being able to be in a space where they allowed questions
and were able to talk deeper about things you were curious about
definitely opened my eyes to wanting to be curious about everything and not just take everything for what it is
I'm just more curious to be like,
"Wow. There's probably a lot of things that I don't know."
I don't want to just take the answer.
I want to know a little bit more about than just the answer that it is.
I think in my last job when I was working for door-to-door fundraising,
we did a lot of campaign updates and information about the world
I would definitely be more into finding out more information, fact-checking it, understanding where those numbers came from, and not just taking it for what it is and repeating it to other people
Wanting to make sure that what I was saying was true
and that I saw the truth behind it.

- Andrea (2009-2011)

Andrea expresses that having an awareness of what she believes and why allows her to be a more effective advocate for the issues that she cares about. She effectively rejects the idea of taking information at face value but instead emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and reflection on the underlying causes of social

issues. Both Andrea and Vanessa seemed to link this approach to advocacy to the problem-posing model of learning that they experienced during their time in the yPAR program. In using critical dialogue to shape transformative counternarratives, the children were able to ground eventual social action in their own collective experiences rather than in dominant forms of knowledge. Vanessa highlighted that connection during her individual interview.

> "We want to put this on a wall."
>
> We would say that,
>
> and they'd [the UCSC adults] be like, "Okay, but why?"
>
> They would really help us break down those ideas
>
> We felt confident enough to paint that and have it for everyone to see
>
> We got feedback that some people didn't understand
>
> What we were taught is
>
> As long as you know why it's up there
>
> You can share that with your classmates
>
> If I feel strongly in what I believe when I put it out there in the world
>
> And I can defend it
>
> I think that's important
>
> - Vanessa (2008-2010)

Vanessa's assertion of the importance of knowing what you believe and being able to defend it highlights the linkages between critical reflection, dialogue, and action. Her interactions with university adults in the yPAR program helped her

formulate a counternarrative that children are indeed capable of thinking independently, contributing a valid perspective based on their experiences, and using their experiences to support growth for other children and adults. Part of the way in which they do this is by engaging in dialogue to develop a shared understanding of the world around them and, subsequently, what actions they need to engage in to transform it into a more equitable condition. Upon doing this, not only are they able to engage in critical action, but they are able to do so with confidence. For Vanessa, her time in the yPAR program and the counternarratives she developed while participating became a key contributor in her eventual career and ongoing interactions with young people, as she shared in the following I-poem:

I do work in the post-adoption field
I think that Change 4 Good was the kind of the start
of me wanting to change society
That's like one of the reasons I think I landed in this field
Being in a group taught me so young
No matter your age or no matter what you look like
You can still fight for something

- Vanessa (2008-2010)

In all of these examples, we see how emerging adult participants are able to effectively leverage counternarratives to shape and drive their critical action strategies. This is consistent with prior research regarding the utility of counternarratives, born of critical dialogue, in informing how members of

marginalized groups collaborate to create transformative social interventions (McNeil-Young et al., 2023; Silva & Gatas, 2023; Wilcox et al., 2022). Prior research has also detailed how young people specifically engage in these processes to problematize dominant narratives and identify foundational social issues that can be acted upon (Dull et al., 2024; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022). The current result, however, demonstrates how counternarratives formed in childhood can continue to inform engagement in critical action later in life, even when, ostensibly, participants benefit from the maintenance of dominant narratives of adultism. This observation suggests that troubling the logics of social dominance early in life may be beneficial in supporting critical action that addresses structurally maintained power disparities, even when that power disparity may privilege the holder of a critical counternarrative.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented three results that were discerned from the analysis of the emerging adult interviews conducted for this study. These results addressed the second two research questions of this study, specifically: 3) To what degree are childhood counternarratives maintained into emerging adulthood, and 4) How do these young adults bridge their childhood counternarratives into critical action?

In response to these questions, we observed that former yPAR participants continued to espouse narratives reflective of counternarratives developed during the yPAR program. They balanced those counternarratives with prevalent dominant narratives, particularly dominant perspectives of the necessity for civility in social

change efforts. In the context of this complex confluence of narratives, emerging adults were still able to leverage their childhood counternarratives into social action to varying degrees. Adult participants drew from childhood counternarratives to inform the prioritization of listening to marginalized voices, active engagement in advocacy on behalf of marginalized communities, and critical thinking regarding social issues. This expands on the existing literature by describing the complex and nuanced ways in which adults maintain and apply childhood counternarratives. Although previous literature has discussed the application of counternarratives, little research has focused on how adults engage with childhood narratives to make meaning and engage in social action.

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify processes by which children begin to critique dominant narratives that support identity-based hierarchies and subsequently form liberatory counternarratives that can be leveraged in transformative social action. Furthermore, this study sought to explore children's maintenance of these counternarratives into emerging adulthood and application in social action across dimensions of oppression. The conclusions for this study address four areas: (a) childhood utilization of critical dialogue to construct counternarratives relative to the capacity of youth to participate in social spaces; (b) the extension of counternarratives to address intersecting forms of oppression beyond adultism; (c) maintenance of counternarratives into emerging adulthood; and (d) the extent to which emerging adults bridged childhood counternarratives into critical action. In this chapter, I present my conclusions based on the results of the study. This discussion is followed by my recommendations based on those conclusions and a final reflection on the study.

Childhood Utilization of Critical Dialogue to Construct Counternarratives

In response to the first research question, we discerned four relevant results. First, children in the yPAR program utilized dialogue in collaboration with and with the support of adults, leveraging love, hope, faith, humility, and critical thinking. This result suggests that critical dialogue for young people requires effort on the part of both children and collaborating adults. It is not solely the responsibility of members of marginalized groups to drive critical dialogue to initiate transformative change.

Rather, allied members of privileged groups are also responsible for liberation efforts. This responsibility of members of privileged groups does not entail the centering of privileged perspectives. Yet, adults do have a role to play in facilitating critical dialogue.

As part of their role in facilitating critical dialogue, adults need to be intentional in the manner that they engage in spaces designed to promote critical consciousness. This intentionality goes beyond simple role modeling. Rather, children are supported in processing critical reflections through dialogue when adults work collaboratively to create mutually humanizing dialogic spaces. Creating such spaces requires seeing children and youth as fully human, with valid experiences and perspectives (love), belief that change is possible (hope), trust in the capacity of children as collaborators (faith), an understanding that adult/dominant perspectives and experiences are not all-encompassing or absolute (humility), and a willingness to investigate underlying causes and contributing factors to oppression (critical thinking) (Freire, 1970/2000). Although Western models of youth participation tend to have a more individualistic approach to supporting youth engagement (Hart, 2008), the Freirian values of critical dialogue can support a space where both children and adults can participate as members of a community of mutual care and responsibility (Freire, 1970/2000).

Second, children in the yPAR program utilized critical dialogue to name power disparities, forms of oppression, or assumptions about them as children. The first step in forming a counternarrative is identifying narratives in need of

problematization. Such problematization is particularly important given the implicit nature of dominant narratives (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Rahman, 2013). Children were able to point out what stories already exist regarding who they are and how they should interact with the world. Exposure to a narrative, in and of itself, does not equate to developing an understanding of its significance (Bañales et al., 2019). The results of the current study demonstrate that we can support children in seeing social problems by providing them with opportunities to collectively make meaning of social interactions and opportunities to bring their own experiences to bear through critical dialogue.

Upon naming existing narratives, disparities, and forms of oppression, children in the yPAR program utilized critical dialogue to reframe aspects of their relationships with adults, providing alternative perspectives/interpretations of their capacity to engage in social spaces and challenging existing assumptions about children. Once a narrative has been identified, it can be re-interpreted based on subaltern perspectives and contexts. It is not sufficient to promote awareness of injustice through dialogue (Hope et al., 2023). Rather, we must also examine that new awareness in the context of our (subaltern) lived experiences (Wexler et al., 2009). The results of this study add to the existing literature by demonstrating how children begin to move from a baseline awareness of oppression to making sense of those observations in the context of their own experience.

Finally, we discerned that children were able to leverage the critical dialogue utilized in the yPAR program to articulate their own counternarratives that directly

contradicted certain dominant narratives about the role and capabilities of children. Critical dialogue served to promote multiple contributing steps to narrative development, as demonstrated through the previously mentioned ways in which children leveraged critical dialogue. They identified existing narratives, evaluated those narratives in the context of their lived experiences, and then collaboratively constructed a new narrative based on their dialogically situated perspectives. We must be intentional about not only promoting awareness of inequity and power disparities but also placing that awareness in conversation with subaltern lived experiences (Freire, 1970/2000; Henriques et al., 2022). Prior to moving this contextualized awareness into action, a new story or framework must be created that can subsequently be mobilized by children, youth, and their allies (Cervantes-Soon, 2023; Saltis et al., 2023).

Extension of Counternarratives to Address Intersecting Forms of Oppression

In addressing my second research question, we were surprised to find few instances in which children made explicit connections between their experiences with adultism and other forms of oppression. We did see, however, that children broadened some of these specific counternarratives into generalizable life precepts and demonstrated awareness of other forms of oppression. Although children weren't necessarily making one-to-one comparisons between the age-based oppression they experienced and intersecting forms of oppression, they did identify generalized beliefs and value statements based on their counternarratives that could be leveraged in addressing other systems of oppression. This result suggests that multi-domain

critical consciousness is not a given. On the contrary, intentional effort and ongoing problem-posing can serve to help forge connections to parallel forms of oppression for those who have begun to develop a liberatory counternarrative relevant to one aspect of identity (Aldana et al, 2019; Gomez & Cammarota, 2022; hooks, 1994; Rozas & Miller, 2009; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). As adult collaborators seek to encourage critical thinking in support of dialogue, part of that encouragement should include asking how counternarratives might be applied to other contexts or identities.

Maintenance of Counternarratives into Emerging Adulthood

Regarding my third research question, we observed that emerging young adults continued to reiterate childhood counternarratives about who can contribute to social change efforts, whose perspective has value, and the importance of elevating marginalized voices. Even after transitioning from age-based subordination to age-based privilege, emerging adults can maintain a narrative throughline of how the world works that honors children's perspectives and experiences. Encouraging critical conversations early in life and supporting the childhood development of critical counternarratives can help create a baseline of adult counternarratives. These adult counternarratives can, in turn, contribute to ongoing adult critical consciousness development. Little research has previously explored how counternarratives and critical consciousness can be sustained into adulthood, yet these results display similar sustainability to that of life skills as described in the positive youth development literature (Gould, 2023; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al., 2017). This literature suggests that the benefits of childhood activities such as engagement in

sports and other life skills activities persist into adulthood, much as is indicated for counternarratives in the current study.

Supporting such ongoing critical consciousness is important, as we also observed that emerging young adults simultaneously continued to negotiate dominant narratives about power relations and standards of behavior. Understandably, individuals continue to negotiate dominant narratives throughout their lives and these narratives exist in conversation with emerging counternarratives (Eun, 2018; Karsten, 2023). It's not a matter of turning dominant narratives off and counternarratives on. Indeed, individuals negotiate the relationship between dominant narratives and potential counternarratives based on the context of the current moment, such as in the context of extreme political polarization (Aguilar, 2021; Karsten, 2023; Miles & Shinew, 2022), as observed with our participants. Yet, by encouraging the practice of critical dialogue, emerging adults can continue to re-evaluate and critique dominant narratives in relation to their own lived experiences. Consistent with the repudiation of adultist assumptions, we are never "done" with conscientization, even as we develop and maintain liberatory counternarratives (DeJong & Love, 2015; Freire, 1970/2000). Further, although the disruption of logics of oppression are relevant to parallel forms of oppression, critical consciousness is multidimensional and context-dependent (Mathews, 2023; Tyler et al., 2020). Given the intentional labor required to draw links between systems of oppression, current and potential advocates for liberation require ongoing opportunities to engage in critical dialogue around social

conditions and standards of social engagement to further problematize existing dominant narratives.

Emerging Adults Bridging of Childhood Counternarratives into Critical Action

Finally, in answer to the fourth and final research question, we observed that emerging young adults incorporated their childhood counternarratives into their own current involvement in social action by highlighting the importance of listening, collaboration, advocacy, and understanding why they believe the rationales they support. Rather than acting based on a predetermined best approach to social action, we act based on our narratives of how the world works or how we believe it should work (Dull et al., 2024; McNeil-Young et al., 2023; Silva & Gatas, 2023; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022; Wilcox et al., 2022). Accordingly, participating adults in the current study were able to take aspects of counternarratives regarding adultism and apply them to engage in social action focused on a different intersecting form of oppression. For example, if members of subordinated groups are capable of full participation and subaltern perspectives have value, advocates for social change must listen to marginalized groups, engage in mutually restorative collaboration, and work to elevate subaltern voices. These actions require members of dominant groups to critically reflect on subaltern perspectives that have been engaged in mutually humanizing critical dialogue, simultaneously developing a greater understanding of what all participants in critical dialogue believe and the underlying rationale of those beliefs.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions that I have drawn following the results of the study, there are certain recommendations that are implicated for future work in the field. I approach this discussion in two stages. First, I present recommendations for adults who work in the field with youth outside of a research setting. The results of this study suggest certain best practices that might be implemented when working with children and youth with a prioritization of liberation. I then provide recommendations for future research to address additional questions that might be posed to better understand the development and application of counternarratives for children and youth.

Recommendations for Practitioners

After observing how children utilized critical dialogue to construct counternarratives, it is clear that practitioners and those preparing to partner with youth in learning spaces must be trained on how to uphold values that contribute to a mutually humanizing critical dialogue, as described by Freire (1970/200). The specific goals of a setting may differ, but if the broader goal of working with youth within that setting is to support their empowerment and development of critical consciousness, then adult allies must engage with intentionality. This requires assessing what love, hope, faith, humility, and critical thinking might look like within that setting and working with youth to make sure that those principles are an integral part of the organizational and institutional culture.

In forging such a culture, it is essential that practitioners prioritize time to talk about what is going on in the lives and experiences of children in a way that

demonstrates authentic value for their perspectives and opinions. I recommend that practitioners create space where children can pose and be posed with problems to consider that are relevant to their daily lives, even (or especially) when their answers to those questions might include a critique of dominant-subordinate hegemonic relationships. Further, once we collaborate with children to identify dominant narratives and power disparities, practitioners must also hold space for children to interrogate the meaning of those narratives based on their own social positioning. Upon giving attention to each of these steps in the dialogic processing of lived experiences, practitioners can support children in articulating and mobilizing liberatory counternarratives that they believe to be true based on that process.

As children develop these counternarratives, allied adults can also contribute to problem-posing questions that encourage children to expand those emerging narratives to other contexts and identities. By encouraging children and youth to apply their counternarratives to other domains of oppression, adults can promote further critical thinking and reflection for all participants in dialogue. Such expansion of dialogue to consider cross-domain implications of counternarratives can serve to deepen participants' understanding of the many ways in which they experience, perpetrate, or witness oppression, thereby equipping them with a foundation to be more effective organizers, advocates, and allies, both as children and later in adulthood. Further, this creativity can be an asset for children, youth, and adults in engaging in the utopic imagining of possible realities in which liberation is made real

through the transformative labor of dedicated collaborators and co-conspirators (Watkins & Shulman, 2010).

Given that such collaboration can extend from childhood into adulthood, practitioners with a desire to encourage lifelong critical consciousness development would benefit from creating opportunities for children to continue to engage in critical dialogue as they move into adulthood. The children who participated in the yPAR program forged counternarratives through critical dialogue and continued to reiterate those counternarratives during emerging adulthood. Upon normalizing critical dialogue in childhood, it could be impactful to have spaces to continue those conversations through adolescence and into adulthood. This should also include working with participants to identify opportunities to mobilize those counternarratives throughout the lifespan.

Seeing counternarrative development as a necessary step between critical dialogue and critical action, I recommend that practitioners make this connection explicit. As children, and later emerging adults, express liberatory counternarratives, practitioners can push toward, "If that's true, now what?" Of course, this support comes with an awareness that the development of counternarratives is complex and occurs in a context where we continue to be exposed to contradictory hegemonic dominant narratives. Those engaged in liberatory work must have continued opportunities for critical dialogue to identify and critique those narratives. As many narratives are so pervasive and ingrained that they may feel natural or like common sense, practitioners can support children, youth, and adults in asking fundamental

questions about why they believe what they do and what action steps are implied based on that belief.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study suggest that there are additional directions for research that might be fruitful in supporting conscientization through childhood counternarratives that might be applied throughout life. Consistent with my recommendation that practitioners build on maintained counternarratives, researchers might also explore how adult critical action is impacted when given the opportunity to engage in long-term critical dialogue that spans socially constructed age limits. We might learn more about how the reflection, dialogue, and action of participants are enriched over time if child participants are given the opportunity to build on their experiences as a cohort into late adolescence and adulthood. By creating a study focused on following participants over time, relationships could be maintained, and researchers could better understand what helps and hinders the maintenance and expansion of childhood counternarratives as children move through life stages into a position of age-based privilege. This line of research would also address a limitation of this study, as it was difficult to reconnect with former yPAR participants after such an extended period of time.

Another limitation of this study was that it did not compare counternarratives for former yPAR participants to individuals who did not participate in the program, as we only spoke to former yPAR participants. Although we are able to draw connections between the narratives expressed as children and the narratives that they

hold as emerging adults, we don't know that those narratives might not have been equally likely to emerge based on other life experiences between their time in the program and now. Comparing narratives between yPAR participants and non-yPAR children and emerging adults could be beneficial as it could point toward what aspects of the program were most influential in supporting the development of critical counternarratives and engagement in future critical action. Further, such a study, should it demonstrate an increase in critical counternarratives for program participants, would serve as a further endorsement of creating programs that intentionally encourage critical dialogue and conscientization.

Finally, this study also carries implications for the development of instruments for the measurement of critical consciousness. Not only is critical consciousness multidimensional, but the counternarratives produced by critical dialogue are incredibly complex as they are contextual and reflect the contrapuntal voices of individuals. Scales currently designed to assess critical consciousness (Deimer et al., 2017; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Orsini et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2016, 2018; Thomas et al., 2014) generally assess awareness of some forms of social inequity but typically fail to account for the role of dialogue (Miles & Shinew, 2022), analysis of power (Suarez, 2018), intersectionality (Collins, 1990/2022; Crenshaw 1989), or socioculturally contextualized polyphony (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Karsten, 2023) in preparing to engage in critical action. An effective measure of critical consciousness must account for the multidimensional nature of critical consciousness, collaborative critical dialogue, sociocultural context, and emergent counternarratives

that might be leveraged for transformative change. This set of considerations is understandably a lot to ask of a single measure. What we must ask ourselves as researchers seeking to understand the development of critical consciousness, then, is whether or not a single measure can be devised that accounts for the complexity of individual critical consciousness. More fully capturing the components of critical consciousness may entail using mixed methods or, perhaps, developing or selecting measures in conversation with the local community.

Researcher Reflections

And the dark-faced child, listening,

Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.

He knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories

Out of any book at all,

But that they came

Right out of her own life.

- Langston Hughes (From *Aunt Sue's Stories*)

I have greatly enjoyed the opportunity to engage in this study. Stories, which drive so much of our understanding of the world, are best when they're shared. In Langston Hughes' poem, the imagery portrays intergenerational collaboration and a value for lived experiences. Aunt Sue had lived a full life. Her stories did not come from what she had read, the media, or what she was told about herself. Rather, they reflected her lived experiences, which the child who is listening is able to cherish because he cherishes Aunt Sue. What is unsaid, and the question that this study

highlighted, is whether or not that child's stories are cherished as well. There must be mutually humanizing dialogue to demonstrate such regard for children's experiences. When critical dialogue is facilitated, we can build on each other's stories to create something new and transformative that repudiates the stories that rationalize subordination.

Perhaps most of all, I've enjoyed being able to reflect on the narratives of the childhood yPAR participants and young adult former yPAR participants. As a graduate student coordinator for the program, spending time working alongside the students was a highlight of my week for three years. To see how students from that program, albeit students that I did not work with personally, have reflected and built upon their time in the program has been a source of joy and motivation throughout the course of this study. I feel honored to have had the opportunity to share in dialogue with them and to observe how they are engaged in transforming the world into a place of equity and justice. In whatever comes next, I hope they and I are able to continue to be a part of challenging systems of domination in collaboration with communities whose stories matter and need to be told.

Appendices

Appendix A: Focus Group/Group Interview Protocol

Good (morning/afternoon/evening) and thank you all for agreeing to participate in today's focus group. You should have received the consent form via docusign, but I would like to quickly review that document and what our study is about. [Provide overview of consent form and purpose of the study.]

Before we begin, I like to quickly provide some ground rules for our time together today. The goal of this conversation is to reflect together on your experiences in a youth participatory action research project. Each of your experiences and voices are critical to this conversation, so I'd like for us to talk about what this space needs to look like for everyone's voice to be honored and heard.

[Hand out confidentiality forms and explain ground rules.

a. Explain that the focus group should be kept confidential for all parties and everything should stay in the room so that people can feel confident to share freely.
b. Explain that I am the facilitator and want to hear from each and every one of the participants, and that they should be talking to each other and not just to me.
c. I want to hear differing opinions and want the conversation to flow organically. I will not hesitate to cut people off if they are dominating the conversations.

d. There are no right or wrong answers, and the participants are the experts in this process.
e. Use “I” statements.
f. Please turn off your cell phones.]

What else needs to happen for your voice to be heard and for you to be able to hear others during this conversation?

[After discussion] Great, thank you all for your input. Can we agree to hold ourselves and each other accountable to these agreements?

If at any point in today’s conversation you no longer wish to participate, you may choose to stop at any time. If you do decide to stop, you will still receive your gift card as a thank you for your participation.

I will be recording today’s conversation to accurately capture what you’re sharing with me. Only people working on the project will see or hear this recording and the file will be deleted after it has been transcribed and coding has been completed.

To inform our conversation today, I’d like to share a documentary that was put together by one of the yPAR cohorts for the second mural. After we’ve watched the video, I have some questions I’d like to ask you about your own experiences.

[Video]

1. What do you remember about the purpose of the UCSC program?
2. What would you say was the highlight of the program for you, and why?

3. When you reflect on the conversations you had during Change 4 Good, how did your conversations and activities shape the way you thought about yourself and other children? Can you tell me about a time that happened?
4. In what ways are children or youth capable of creating change in the world? What helps and what gets in the way of them being able to do this?
5. Are you currently involved in any efforts for social change? If so, how and why are you involved? Do you relate your involvement to anything you did or learned in Change 4 Good?

As part of this study, we're also looking back at the notes and transcripts from your time in and immediately following the yPAR program. We're using a form of analysis called the Listening Guide, through which we identify different "I"-poems that reflect participant voices and narratives. I'd like to share a couple with you now and ask you about what, if anything, feels connected to the way you see the world or yourself now. For the purpose of confidentiality, I won't be sharing whose transcripts the "I"-poems were drawn from.

[Share "I"-poems from fieldnotes and original follow-up interviews.]

6. As you look at the "I"-poems from the original yPAR program and the follow-up interviews, what stands out to you?
7. Do you feel like these narratives reflect the way you think about the world now?
    - Why or why not?

8. For those who do see these narratives reflected in their current worldview, how do you see yourselves acting on those narratives?

That concludes our time together. Thank you all for your time and participation. If you have any questions about this study or anything related to it, please feel free to reach out to me any time.

Appendix B: Emerging Adult Interview Questionnaire

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me regarding some of your experiences in the Change 4 Good research program. The purpose of this interview is to better understand how young adults such as yourself reflect upon their experience in programs like Change 4 Good. I'm going to ask you a series of questions based on your time in the program and your current involvement with similar conversations. There are no correct answers, as the goal is to understand how you are reflecting on your own experiences. If any of the questions are unclear, however, please let me know and I will try to clarify. If at any point you do not wish to answer a question, let me know and we can move onto the next question. Similarly, please let me know if at any point you would like to take a break or stop the interview and we will do so. If you do decide to stop, you will still receive your gift card as a thank you for your participation.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

1) Can you please share with me what you remember about your personal involvement with Change 4 Good?
2) We all have multiple intersecting identities. For example, I identify as a Black cisgender man, a graduate student, and a father. Depending on the context, certain identities might be more noticeable or important to me from one moment to the next. What identities are most salient to you? How did these affect your experience in the Change 4 Good program?

3) How did your conversations during your time in the program impact the way you thought about your identity or people who share your identity?
4) How did your conversations during your time in the program impact the way you thought about school?
5) How did your conversations during your time in the program impact the way you thought about the world in general?
6) Are there any things that you learned during your time in Change 4 Good that you still feel like you use today? If so, what? If not, why do you think that is?
7) Do you ever or have you ever discussed what you learned during your time in Change 4 Good with others as an adult? If so, what have you shared?
8) What types of social change do you see as necessary, if any, and why?
    a) If you do not see any social changes as necessary, why are they unnecessary?
9) If there are necessary forms of social change, what do you see as the best way to create that change?
    a) How did you come to this "best way" idea?
    b) Does your "best way" reflect anything you learned in the Change 4 Good program?
10) One current area of social change that has received significant media attention in recent years is systemic racism. This conversation has been accompanied by increased attention on the Black Lives Matter movement. What are your reflections on the conversation up to this point and what do you think needs to happen from here?

11) Thank you again for your time. Before we close, is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your thoughts on social change and social movements?

Appendix C: Childhood yPAR Program Exit Interview Protocol

1. What was your favorite thing to learn?
2. What was the most boring or what didn't you like to learn about?
3. What changes could we make to make the project more fun?
4. What changes could we make to help you learn more?
5. Was there a time when you did not understand what was going on? In other words, have you ever felt lost or confused? (If yes, then how did you respond?)
6. What did you do that you thought you were really good at?
7. Why did you think you were good at that?
8. Did you get even better at the thing you were already good at? How?
9. What kinds of decisions did you make through the process?
10. What kinds of decisions did you want to make that you didn't get to make?
11. What did adults do in this program?
12. How did adults and students work together in this program?
13. In what ways did the adults help you the most (probe for these if not talked about: emotional, social, food, information, fun)?
14. How could the adults have been more helpful (probe for these if not talked about: emotional, social, food, information, fun)?
15. When you were working on the project, did you learn anything you didn't already know about your school? If so, what? (Note: Look for broadening vs. replacement)

16. When you were working on the project, did it change the way you think about your community? If so, how?
17. When you were working on the project, did it change the way you think about yourself? If so, how? (Note: Look for broadening vs. replacement)
18. How was this program different from other programs you have been in? (in terms of decision making, climate, etc.)
19. How was it the same?
20. Did any of the work you did with the project change the way you think about Maplewood? If so, what? How? (Note: Look for broadening vs. replacement)
21. When you talk to your friends about Maplewood, do you tend to agree or disagree? Do you have different ideas/opinions, or are they kind of the same? Has this changed since you started the project? (Note: Look for broadening vs. replacement)
22. Can you tell me a little bit about the [project you did, e.g., focus groups, photovoice]? Why was this done? What was the purpose?
23. What did you do in the [the project, e.g., focus groups, photovoice]? How did you feel when doing this? What about the [focus groups, photovoice] made you feel that way?
24. What did you learn about [focus groups, photovoice]?
25. What things did the children, youth, adults and others who participated in the [focus groups, photovoice] say about the Maplewood community?

26. Did you agree with some of things that were said? Which things and why? Did you disagree? Which things and why?
27. What did you learn from the stories told during [focus groups, photovoice]?
28. What themes did you come up with based on those stories?
29. What symbols or scenes were created based on those stories or themes from the [focus groups, photovoice]?
30. What do you hope happens in the future, in the community-youth program?
31. What were some of your reasons for staying involved in the program?
32. If you had the chance to do it over would you do this project again? Why or why not?
33. Was there anything I didn't ask you that I should have asked you?
34. Do you want to ask me anything?

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