

Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Health and Social Justice Activism in Changing Times"

Activism in Changing Times: Reinvigorating Community Psychology – Introduction to the Special Thematic Section

Flora Cornish^{*a}, Catherine Campbell^b, Cristián Montenegro^c

[a] Department of Methodology, London School of Economics & Political Science, London, United Kingdom. [b] Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science, London School of Economics & Political Science, London, United Kingdom. [c] Millennium Institute for Research on Depression and Personality, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Santiago, Chile.

Abstract

The field of community psychology has for decades concerned itself with the theory and practice of bottom-up emancipatory efforts to tackle health inequalities and other social injustices, often assuming a consensus around values of equality, tolerance and human rights. However, recent global socio-political shifts, particularly the individualisation of neoliberalism and the rise of intolerant, exclusionary politics, have shaken those assumptions, creating what many perceive to be exceptionally hostile conditions for emancipatory activism. This special thematic section brings together a diverse series of articles which address how health and social justice activists are responding to contemporary conditions, in the interest of re-invigorating community psychology's contribution to emancipatory efforts. The current article introduces our collective conceptualisation of these 'changing times', the challenges they pose, and four openings offered by the collection of articles. Firstly, against the backdrop of neoliberal hegemony, these articles argue for a return to community psychology's core principle of relationality. Secondly, articles identify novel sources of disruptive community agency, in the resistant identities of nonconformist groups, and new, technologically-mediated communicative relations. Thirdly, articles prompt a critical reflection on the potentials and tensions of scholar-activist-community relationships. Fourthly, and collectively, the articles inspire a politics of hope rather than of despair. Building on the creativity of the activists and authors represented in this special section, we conclude that the environment of neoliberal individualism and intolerance, rather than rendering community psychology outdated, serves to re-invigorate its core commitment to relationality, and to a bold and combative scholar-activism.

Keywords: activism, neoliberalism, individualism, relationality, social justice, health justice, agency, resistance, scholar-activist, hope

Resumen

Por décadas, el campo de la psicología comunitaria se ha preocupado por aspectos teóricos y prácticos del esfuerzo emancipatorio para enfrentar desigualdades en salud y otras injusticias, muchas veces asumiendo un consenso en torno a valores como la igualdad, la tolerancia y los derechos humanos. Sin embargo, cambios socio-políticos recientes, particularmente la fuerza individualizadora del neoliberalismo y el auge de políticas exclusionarias e intolerantes, han conmovido esas asunciones, creando lo que muchos perciben como un escenario excepcionalmente hostil para el activismo emancipatorio. Esta sección especial reúne una serie diversa de artículos orientados a entender la forma en que activistas en salud y justicia social están respondiendo a las condiciones contemporáneas, con el interés de darle un nuevo ímpetu a la contribución de la psicología comunitaria a estos esfuerzos emancipatorio. Este artículo introduce nuestra conceptualización colectiva de estos 'tiempo cambiantes', los desafíos que ellos introducen and cuatro aperturas ofrecidas por la colección de artículos. En primer lugar, en un contexto de hegemonía neoliberal, estos artículos llaman a un retorno al núcleo relacional de la psicología comunitaria. En segundo lugar, ellos identifican fuentes nuevas de agencia comunitaria disruptiva, en las identidades resistentes, en los grupos no-conformes y en las nuevas relaciones comunicativas mediadas por la tecnología. En tercer lugar, los artículos empujan una reflexión crítica sobre los potenciales y tensiones de la relación entre academia, activismo y comunidad. En cuarto lugar, y de forma colectiva, los artículos inspiran una política de la esperanza, mas que una de la desesperación.

Construyendo sobre la creatividad de activistas y autores representados en esta sección especial, concluimos que este escenario socio-político marcado por el individualismo neoliberal y la intolerancia no vuelven obsoleta a la psicología comunitaria sino que sirve para fortalecer su compromiso esencial con la relacionalidad, y con un activismo radical y combativo.

Palabras Clave: Activism, neoliberalismo, individualism, relacionalidad, justiciar social, justiciar en salud, agencia, resistencia, académico-activista, esperanza

Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2018, Vol. 6(2), 526–542, doi:10.5964/jsp.2018.6.2.1111

Published (VoR): 2018-12-21.

*Corresponding author at: Department of Methodology, London School of Economics & Political Science, Houghton St, London WC2A 2AE, United Kingdom. E-mail: f.cornish@lse.ac.uk



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

This special thematic section is a response to a rapidly changing socio-political environment, which we as guest editors, and many of the authors represented here, often view as hostile to the progressive social and health justice activism that has been inherent to the discipline of community psychology. It brings together a series of articles on the topic of contemporary health and social justice activism, to enrich and develop our vision of contemporary activism, and of how community psychology might engage productively with activism in the 21st century. We aim to contribute to reinvigorating community psychology's capacity to respond creatively to these 'changing times'. In this introductory article, we set out our collective understanding of the 'changing times' and the challenges which they pose to the emancipatory interests characteristic of community psychology. We then discuss the openings to creative, transformative activism identified in this collection of papers.

Community Psychology in 'Changing Times'

The field of community psychology emerged in the 20th century as a critical response to the health inequalities and other forms of social injustice faced by marginalised communities. The traditional canon of community psychology, founded on the work of scholar-activists such as Paulo Freire (1970/2018) and Saul Alinsky (1971/1989), conceptualises activism as arising out of the dialogue between external change agents and disadvantaged groupings, to develop a critical awareness of the social roots of their personal problems. The recognition that their problems are socially rooted rather than the result of bad luck or personal failings, is seen to form the basis of solidarity amongst the excluded. Ideally this leads to their engagement and organisation in collective action (often in partnership with more powerful allies) to demand some sort of redistribution of health-enabling economic wealth and/or political power. It is an emancipatory and progressive project. As typically discussed, the distinction between oppressed/oppressor, justice/injustice have been assumed to be clear, and mobilisation and activism have been seen as the route to achieving a defined social justice goal. This model has energised creative and transformative community psychology collaborations over half a century (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Rappaport & Seidman, 2000; Seedat, Duncan, & Lazarus, 2001). As community psychology scholars who identify with this tradition, in recent years, we have experienced and witnessed a widespread sense of despair at socio-political changes cre-

ating exceptionally hostile conditions for emancipatory activism. This special section creates a space to consider the relevance of traditional community psychology concepts and purposes, in our 'changing times'.

Informed by the descriptions and diagnosis expressed in the papers in this special section, we characterise these times along two dimensions, firstly, the intensification of the individualisation of neoliberalism and secondly, the resurgence of intolerant, exclusionary politics.

Community psychology emerged partly as a response to failures of traditional, individualistic psychology to understand and to tackle injustices stemming from a global liberal order (Dutt & Kohfeldt, 2018, this section; Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddique, 2011; Martin-Baro, 1996). Building on the work of the contributors to the special section, we suggest that these injustices have become even more acute, characterising this period as one of 'peak neoliberalism', after Danny Dorling's (2018) diagnosis of 'peak inequality' in the UK context. By 'peak' we are pointing to the intensification of certain conditions, rather than to a sense of a climax that precedes a resolution or end. In different ways, the papers collected here articulate the extreme individualisation and inequality occasioned by neoliberalism, and a deep sense that the resultant suffering and forms of oppression are no longer tolerable but call for action (see also Piketty, 2014). Social institutions increasingly operate on the basis of notions of personhood that ignore – or directly exclude – the socially contextualised nature of human existence (Capri & Swartz, 2018, this section; Davies, 2014; Dutt & Kohfeldt, 2018, this section; Fine, 2016; Speer & Han, 2018, this section). Racist institutions hide behind liberal claims of colourblindness (Crenshaw & Peller, 2013; Fernández, Gaston, Nguyen, Rovaris, Robinson, & Aguilar, 2018, this section). Collective action, at the same time, is undermined by growing material insecurity and precarity, and by the consolidation of ways of life defined by competitive individualism (Radiszcz & Sir, 2018, this section; Rose, 2018, this section; Speer & Han, 2018, this section). Such a situation often impacts very negatively on the life chances, well-being and even the survival of those positioned outside of the mainstream of dominant groups (Capri & Swartz, 2018, this section; Fernández et al., 2018, this section; Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Groot, & Tankel, 2014; Rose, 2018, this section). On one hand, this individualising and unequal environment is destructive of the conditions for social and health justice activism. On the other, the unbearable nature of these conditions for many excluded groups opens up new spaces to practise and think about activism (Holloway, 2010).

The emancipatory community psychology which we have outlined was also underpinned by a belief in the social injustice of power inequalities, and a belief in the rights of all human beings to lives characterised by health and dignity – values which were fairly widely accepted (though often more in principle than practice) in western societies in the late 20th century. However, the 21st century has seen an erosion of these previously taken-for-granted values (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) and a growing lack of faith in the power of liberal democracies to serve the needs of those with least access to the fruits of globalised industrialised economies (Hochschild, 2016). The successes of right-wing populist leaders and movements in countries in every continent can be seen as one response to the failures of neoliberalism to secure sustaining livelihoods and optimistic futures for large groups of citizens (Fine, 2016; Mouffe, 2018). This populism mobilises a preoccupation with narrowly defined national identities, a growing hostility towards those perceived as 'outsiders' (including immigrants and people with non-mainstream sexualities and lifestyles), and a growing tolerance of racist, sexist and other forms of discriminatory behaviour (Cramer, 2016).

At the same time old alignments of social groupings, such as the political left and right, distinctions between men and women, rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, and so on are shifting in unpredictable ways, which force

us to rethink the ways in which activism can challenge contemporary social inequalities. There is also a need for us to rethink how traditional forms of commonality and solidarity (e.g. among women, indigenous groups or people with certain disabilities) are complicated by intersectional identities and differences, which challenge more simple understandings of the boundaries and alliances between the powerful and the powerless (Crenshaw, 2008). And while community psychology has often concerned itself with the circumstances of small-scale, excluded and minoritised groups, it is increasingly argued that contemporary economic and social policies disadvantage the *majority*, while only a tiny minority elite benefit (Piketty, 2014) – the growth of debt and financialisation of the economy (Graeber, 2011), and the devastation of climate change have attracted particular attention.

Our Trajectory: Community Health Psychology at the LSE

Most of the papers in this special section were discussed at a workshop at the London School of Economics (LSE) in December 2017, entitled ‘Rethinking health and social justice activism in a post-liberal world’. This was the latest of a rolling series of workshops and associated special issues in which LSE scholar-activists in the field of community health have sought to interrogate and invigorate the role of community psychology in the context of a changing social world over 20 years. Early volumes focused on the psycho-social mediators between community mobilisation and health (Jovchelovitch & Campbell, 2000) and the distinction between accommodationist and critical forms of community psychology (Murray & Campbell, 2004). Later volumes explored the complexities of mobilising local communities in a rapidly globalising world, especially in the context of international ‘development’ (Campbell & Burgess, 2012; Campbell, Cornish, & Skovdal, 2012). They called for a new generation of community psychology approaches that moved beyond local community activism to engage in more ambitious forms of activism and resistance to challenge the wider macro-social inequalities that framed local community life (Cornish & Campbell, 2010). The latter volume was informed by a materialist approach to activism – viewed as a power struggle between clearly definable groups: the powerless vs. the powerful. Later Campbell and Cornish (2014) called for more complex approaches to social change activism – ones that took greater account of the complexity of power relationships, in relation to both their intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2008) and their micro-capillarity (Foucault, 1977). Against this backdrop, and in a context of a global upsurge in experiments in direct democracy and intentional communities, Cornish, Haaken, Moskovitz, and Jackson (2016) explored engagements between psychological theorising and ‘prefigurative politics’. This volume encouraged scholars to see emancipatory social change where we might not have previously seen it – in implicitly critical or transformative activities – but also to interrogate the links between small-scale and large-scale social change. Almost at the same moment, large-scale social change in the form of a global rise of authoritarian populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; The Economist 2018) and a politics of self-interest and exclusion (Cramer, 2016; Hochschild, 2016) seemed to make a mockery of such emancipatory potentialities and it is this emerging environment that set the scene for the current special section.

Goals of the Special Section

In our call for papers for the current special thematic section, we asked our contributors to submit papers on how health and social justice activists are responding to changing social conditions characterising the early 21st century, and the role of community psychology in this context. We sought to explore the challenges that such conditions pose to the theory and practice of a community psychology developed in an era that was characterised by a

greater faith in concepts such as democracy, human rights and social justice, especially in more affluent western settings. We questioned whether such a hostile environment rendered community psychology assumptions outdated. The papers address those challenges and draw on their analyses of activist practices to prompt a reinvigoration of established community psychology concepts, as well as to point to new creative tensions. The papers open four broad directions.

First, papers track how contemporary individualisation and co-option of traditional community psychology concepts have changed the landscape for social justice activism. In response, some authors call for a reaffirmation and reinvigoration of the traditional canon of community psychology, particularly its basic insight that the relationality of 'community' – and not the isolated individual – is the condition of possibility for projects of social mobilisation and for social justice. In this line two main questions are opened up: How are traditional community psychology concepts co-opted and neutralised? Why are traditional community psychology concepts needed again?

Second, new disruptive sources of agency are identified by papers, some of which celebrate the subversive resistance of people with nonconformist identities and practices, and some of which focus on the ways in which communications technologies disrupt, challenge and renew activist and scholar-activist interests.

Third, the papers interrogate assumptions about the nature of the insider/outsider partnerships inscribed in the model of activism and social change traditionally espoused by community psychology. Some offer positive examples of ways that scholar-activists work in partnership with communities to produce knowledge that reflects those communities' interests rather than the interests of dominant groups or systems, while others problematise the scholar-activist-community relation, exploring its tensions.

Finally several papers provide evidence and inspiration for a politics of hope in dismal times.

In this introductory article we pick out some of the light the papers throw on each of these themes. Whilst it is obviously impossible to do justice to the complex and multi-layered insights from each paper in a short piece of this nature, our discussion seeks to highlight a few of what we consider to be key insights.

The papers draw on experiences in countries including Australia, Canada, Chile, India, Nicaragua, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States as well as various global media environments. They reflect different academic disciplines (mostly psychology, but also sociology, anthropology, media studies and public health). Activist groups include users of local health services, LGBTQ/Gender Expansive youth, water and sanitation activists, user-survivors of mental health services, persons with intellectual disabilities and students of colour among others. Finally, forms of activism include direct and confrontational forms such as protest marches, 'bare life politics' (bringing private bodily functions into the public eye), activist-academic partnerships in knowledge production, support groups, evidence-based activism and queer activism. They also include other hidden or subtle forms of activism such as intimate activisms, radical wit, wilful subjectivities and refusal to conform through resistant identity construction. Across this diverse subject matter, all the papers remain committed to the values of social equality and rights to health, well-being and social justice, within a paradigm of relationality, characteristic of long-established community psychology.

A Return to Relationality in a Context of Co-Option

Several papers chart ways in which conditions of neoliberalism have worked to threaten, neutralise, or co-opt health and social justice activism in recent years. These papers show the changing environment of activism and the need for activism to re-invent itself to keep up with these challenges. At a very basic level, the neoliberal conditions of austerity have removed state support for user groups that might otherwise have resulted in justice-promoting activism. [Rose \(2018, this section\)](#) discusses how austerity policies in the UK have had disproportionately negative consequences for many mental health service users in ways that put their lives in risk. The associated withdrawal of any kind of support from the National Health Service (NHS) for independent collective action by users has threatened the very existence of vital mental health service user groups.

Activism is also aggressively silenced and threatened. [Barnes \(2018, this section\)](#) provides a case study of the silencing of activists' voices in his study of South Africa's 'poo protests'. Impoverished township residents have sought to draw attention to their lack of access to water and sanitation by activities such as throwing excrement at politicians and smearing it on the walls of a nearby international airport. South Africa is 'the protest capital of the world', with multiple social movements actively highlighting the state's failures to address historical injustices. Yet these social movements are increasingly met with hostile public responses, with their efforts frequently undermined, vilified and dismissed. Barnes' case study interrogates how dominant groupings in government and media manipulate allegedly radical notions (such as 'active citizenship') to blame the poor for government failures to provide water and sanitation, and reinterpret justice-linked notions (such as 'representative democracy') to discredit and delegitimise protest.

This theme of the co-option of potentially emancipatory ideas which have been core to community psychology is taken up by other papers suggesting that traditional values of community psychology have in some ways become victims of their own success. After being taken up by powerful, large-scale organisations, participatory projects may become bureaucratised and depoliticised, becoming tools of governance that contribute to the maintenance of the status quo, rather than serving as strategies for resistance and change by excluded groups ([Cornish, Priego-Hernandez, Campbell, Mburu, & McLean, 2014](#)).

[Speer and Han \(2018, this section\)](#) make this argument clearly in relation to the core community psychology practice of 'community organizing'. They argue that the tradition of democratic community organising in the USA has been undermined through a number of neoliberal trends. Political parties have taken up tools of community organisation, but employ them in an individualising, instrumental way, prioritising 'numbers of individuals mobilised' to turn up to a meeting, or to turn up to vote, rather than the building of 'deep empowering sustainable community structures'. Speer and Han describe this 'mobilisation' approach as anti-democratic, in that the participation of ordinary people in collective life is not treated as important. It is also conservative, in that no new leaders, structures, or relationships are created, and thus no route to new sources of power for change. In the UK context, [Walker et al. \(2018, this section\)](#) points to the hollowing out of the potentially radical notion of public participation in defining the shape of the National Health Service. This has involved the reduction of the role of participants in public consultation about health services from that of 'citizens with views on the wider shape of society' (including issues such as privatisation and funding policy) to that of 'consumers concerned with their individual experiences of health services'.

Two papers directly address the dilemmas for health justice activists of engaging with medicalising diagnoses, with contrasting conclusions in their different contexts. In relation to activism around 'attention deficit disorders' in Chile, [Radiszcz and Sir \(2018, this section\)](#) argue that the limited advocacy that exists has taken an individualising and medicalising form, with parents campaigning for recognition and diagnosis of ADHD as a condition, which thereby merits treatment. They suggest that this approach misses opportunities for a much more radical militancy campaigning for the recognition of neurodiversity and challenging the societal value given to limiting focus on 'attention'. However, [Rose's \(2018, this section\)](#) paper from the UK offers a very different position on diagnosis, in that country's particular history. Rose sets out how the deprivation and stress brought about by austerity has forced mental health service user/survivor activists to re-define their struggles, coalitions and antagonists. Whereas the violence of diagnosis and treatment as implemented by psychology and psychiatry were targeted by mental health activists as the greatest threat in the past, the recent context of austerity changes that landscape. In a context of cuts to state-provided welfare assistance, activists are concerned that anti-diagnosis arguments may now offer a rationalisation to reduce or remove benefit payments. Thus, mental health activists have come to see the neoliberal state as the greatest threat, and diagnoses as potentially welcome, in that they imply access to welfare assistance. As part of these changes, mental health activists have found common cause with disabled people in the deprivation of welfare rights and they have forged new coalitions. Rose's article offers a powerful example of how activists have had to re-read their struggles for the 'peak neoliberal' context, vigilant to the risks of co-optation and even erasure.

This series of papers highlights that there are no easy assumptions about where justice lies, or whether practices such as community organising, participation and advocacy – the bread and butter of traditional community psychology – are emancipatory or not. Furthermore, tools of organising have been taken up by right-wing populist movements, and by state institutions. Ostensibly emancipatory concepts such as 'active citizenship', 'participation' or 'post-diagnosis' can be used to suppress and silence justice-focused activism, maintaining the dominance of powerful groups rather than redistributing power. The papers underline the need for community psychologists to remain vigilant about where power lies, who or what benefits from initiatives, and to question the route and direction of emancipatory action.

Despite the dangers of co-option, however, most papers in this special section recommend holding fast to the core of community psychology assumptions and values, rather than rejecting them. In some settings, particularly US settings, authors have observed a neoliberal 'drift' in community work, and call for a reaffirmation of community psychology's core principle of relationality, revitalising the relational nature of well-being, and the relationships that are at the heart of emancipatory organising.

Using several long-standing strategies of health justice activism, [Nandi \(2018, this section\)](#) documents the story of a struggle against the privatisation of health services in Chhattisgarh, India, showing the effective use of many of the traditional strategies of organising, including building alliances between civil society groups, bureaucrats, politicians and experts, holding press conferences, rallies and marches. Even with very strong forces for the 'liberalisation' of public services, Nandi demonstrates that traditional labour unions and connections to policy-makers are still routes to influence in India, particularly when mobilised by a 'relentless' commitment by activists and bombardment with multiple strategies.

[Dutt and Kohfeldt \(2018, this section\)](#) take inspiration from the practices of latinx youth involved in an activist art project in the United States and women in rural Nicaragua involved in feminist organising. Arguing that dominant

liberal political structures have for far too long failed marginalised groups such as women and people of colour, they look to the practices of such marginalised groups for alternative political forms, identifying a liberatory ethic of care as a productive alternative. The focus on care puts relationships and interdependence centre-stage. Dutt and Kohfeldt look back to the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) who wrote about an ethics of care primarily at an interpersonal level, and forward to the needs of the 21st century, where they suggest a politicized ethics of care could offer a transformative foundation to macro-level environmental and workers' struggles.

Resonating strongly with Dutt and Kohfeldt (2018, this section), Speer and Han (2018, this section), in their critique of what they characterise as a neoliberal capture of community organising, advocate a return to community psychology's roots in 'relational organising'. They seek to bolster an organising style which entails a gradual and labour-intensive process of building up collective power within a community, starting with conversations about priorities, and building sustainable structures and new leaders. They argue that new centres of power are required to tackle established power hierarchies, and the strongest potential resources that excluded communities have to underpin and drive a legitimate centre of power are their relationships and structures.

For these papers, the challenges and changes wrought by the individualisation of liberalism and neoliberalism do not discredit fundamental values and strategies of a community psychology tradition committed to relationality, but call for a reaffirmation of those long-standing values, even in the face of a hostile environment.

New Disruptive Sources of Agency

A series of papers in this special section prompts us to reconsider the nature of activism itself, identifying new sources of disruptive agency in two areas: in grassroots communities and in the technologies which they might use. Two papers suggest that people and groups which transgress mainstream norms can be, by their very existence, disruptive, embodying a form of immanent activism.

For Fine, Torre, Frost, and Cabana (2018, this section), the impetus for resistance and change lies in the 'wilful subjectivities' of LGBT/Gender Expansive youth. The authors locate these in two dimensions. The first is in their 'refusal to straighten'. The second emancipatory impetus lies in the strategies they have developed to resist oppression in their personal relationships with educators, family and peers. These strategies include intimate activisms, such as delicately interrupting family members' exclusionary talk, offering care to each other, or the use of radical wit.

In their study of 'attention deficit disorder', Radiszcz and Sir (2018, this section) explore the idea that a phenomenon which is diagnosed as a 'symptom', an 'error' or a 'problem', instead of being seen as a problem, can be used as a prompt for critical thinking about the system that results in that problem definition. They suggest that children diagnosed with ADHD are disruptive, not of classrooms, but of social norms of attention that prioritise stillness and focus. They are also disruptive of a terrifyingly unequal economy, where parents believe that the lifeline for their children's survival is high attainment at school. Radiszcz and Sir advocate an 'intensification of error' in a way that transforms a 'disability' into a radical critique of society, and call for new partnerships between intellectuals, professionals and families to advance a militancy in this direction.

Starting with an 'inclusion/exclusion' dichotomy, liberal social justice efforts have often sought to bring about the 'inclusion' of minoritized groups. 'Assimilation' to the mainstream has of course widely been critiqued as a

colonising approach to difference, and these papers value *refusal* and *disruption* rather than assimilation, as responses respectful of the diversity and agency of minoritized groups. Excluded groups can resist domination by refusing integration, or rejecting offers of ‘engagement’ with public services (Montenegro, 2018a).

A further set of papers identifies sources of disruption in the mediated ways through which grassroots communities and activists communicate. Speer and Han (2018, this section) suggest that new media and big data have largely been used in ways that control and individualise populations, but that those technologies have potential to be developed as more relational ways of communicating and engaging with data.

This theme is taken up by Gonzalez-Polledo (2018, this section), whose paper is probably the most radical in its efforts to challenge community psychology’s traditional location of agency within the actions of individuals and communities – viewed as locked into relationships through bonds of solidarity. Her work draws attention to the non-human sources of agency, in her framing of the agency of new technologies. She questions the teleology of community agency, using the concept of ‘cosmopolitics’, which suggests that technological politics are situated, multiple and unfinished, and can never be resolved in a single ‘progress narrative’ or universal logic. Digital worlds, she argues, decentre agency, opening new spaces for digital health activism to foreground health experiences. From a cosmopolitical point of view, influencing powerful decision-makers and policies is only one option among many to change power relations. Communication technologies have power and produce social change. Communities of social media users making sense of health conditions have power to rethink health, whether health service reforms happen or not.

Finally, Pausé and Glover (2018, this section) and Barnes (2018, this section) illuminate how new and traditional media are not simply tools for the circulation and expansion of messages of social transformation. When activists use these spaces their messages are shaped, distorted and their causes simplified and used to reinforce prevailing narratives. While Barnes focuses on televised debates involving activists in South Africa, Pausé and Glover (2018, this section) use their own experiences as publicly engaged scholars in New Zealand to reflect on the risks and potentials of participating in ‘debates’ on social media platforms. Despite their own negative experiences of being discredited and silenced online, they call for scholars to arm themselves for ‘sociable scholarship’, rather than avoid it, given the enormous potential of the social media for peer-to-peer communication, raising awareness, building collaborations and communities.

These papers call us to pay much greater attention to the agency of the technologies of activism. The media through which community psychologists and activists communicate are a constitutive part of activism itself. The increased role of social media platforms in shaping public debate, and widespread discussion of their manipulation to bring about political change, demands that community psychology should take technology as a central object of enquiry, one which has been largely neglected to date.

Problematising the ‘Scholar-Activist’ Role

Papers in this special section come with explicit political commitments. Their authors work in different kinds of partnerships with activists and minoritized groups, aiming for their knowledge production to contribute to emancipation and social justice. Some present positive case studies of such collaborations, while others reflect more on their challenges.

Dating back to the work of Paulo Freire, traditional community psychology has often placed great emphasis on alliances or partnerships between the excluded and more powerful actors or groups capable of assisting them in their fight for social justice (Aveling & Jovchelovitch, 2014). Yet in unequal societies, dominant groups generally control the media, the education system, and the funding and evaluation of research – in ways that often lead to the production of forms of knowledge that legitimise their dominant social status and undermine the claims of the excluded. In this particular special section, several authors refer to the production of knowledge about social groups as a key arena for activism, highlighting the role that alliances between activists and academics might play in generating knowledge that reflects the needs and interests of marginalised groups.

Locating himself within the growing tradition of ‘evidence-based activism’ (Rabeharisoa, Moreira, & Akrich, 2013), Walker et al. (2018, this section) point to knowledge-production as a key site of struggle. They reject the current NHS practice of shoehorning the scope of so-called public participation exercises into the knowledge frames of service providers, and the focus on topics relating to technical aspects of service provision rather than the wider politics of service-provision. Their case study of alternative engagement practices by an alliance of local health service users, radical academics and disaffected professionals outlines how they used ‘Statactivism’ as a pathway for knowledge democratisation. Statistics (widely used in service of controlling, managerial goals) formed the basis for a politics of knowledge disruption, highlighting a widespread public dissatisfaction with how services were commissioned and funded – which had been masked by the narrow frame of previous public consultations.

Fernández et al. (2018, this section) pursue knowledge democratisation through a different methodology, namely a participatory action research project bringing together faculty and women of colour student activists in a university context. They show how the participatory project supported the intersectional socio-political development of the student activists, and their wellbeing, through an ethics of care and support. The student activists were pursuing an intellectual project of developing critiques of a marginalising institutional order, and a political project of developing strategies and solidarities to challenge that marginalisation. Participants in this process were all scholar-activists, disrupting the idea of an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. Student participants faced greater risks and challenges than a tenured faculty member, drawing attention to the value of individual and collective care and wellbeing in socio-political development. Activism depends upon the wellbeing of activists as well as on the achievement of their politicising actions.

Whilst the papers above see a positive role for scholar-activists in partnering with disadvantaged communities in ways that make communities and their members subjects rather than objects in the production of knowledge about them, several papers problematize the canonical role of ‘scholar-activist’ as a specific type of change agent.

Capri and Swartz (2018, this section) write in the devastating context of South Africa’s Esidimeni crisis, where 140 people, mostly persons with intellectual disabilities (PWID), died after moving into completely inadequate ‘community care’ services following deinstitutionalisation. They consider the relationship between PWID and those without, posing a dilemma for would-be advocates without ID. Many of the people with whom they work need assistance with activities of daily living, and are excluded from citizenship or activist roles without assistance, so a liberal model of the concerned individual, expressing her or his independent voice does not work. Nor is inaction an option, in the context of the lethal deprivation of rights. But activists ‘speaking for’ PWID or ‘giving voice’ to PWID are themselves highly disabling actions, colonising potential space for PWID with the hegemonic views of non-disabled activists. Drawing on an ‘ethics of care’, and a vision of a ‘care-interdependent’ society which positively values giving and receiving care, Capri and Swartz put forward a model of ‘voluntary-assisted advocacy’.

This model of advocacy is founded on relationships of trust and respect between PWID and non-disabled advocates. It prompts continual reflection on advocacy's purposes and power relations, in the service of PWID's social justice needs. Such a relationship, they suggest, serves to constitute PWID as citizens, and can be a foundation for broader social and political demands.

Based on his own engagement with a group of mental health service-user and non-user activists in Chile, [Montenegro \(2018b, this section\)](#) explores the complex situation of social researchers attempting to conduct research on activism in the mental health field. Service-user activism is premised on the priority of personal experience. This complicates the role of academically-oriented researchers who lack direct experience of mental health service use, but are drawn into this field, introducing specific tensions and ambiguities to the process of access, participation and exit from the field. Montenegro calls for reflexivity and humility on the part of researchers, arguing that openness to the challenges of academic-activist encounters offers rich rewards in mutual learning. The ways in which service user groups respond to researchers' interests and agendas throws light onto the emergent affinities and solidarities that shape this form of activism.

The discussion of the complexities of engagement between academics and activists resonates with a more general theme in the special section, namely the risks and limits of activism. [Pausé and Glover \(2018, this section\)](#), a Fat Studies scholar and a community psychologist working to prevent tobacco-related harms, consider themselves both scholars and activists. In their paper, they reflect upon the risks involved in this dual identity in the context of an impetus to 'sociable scholarship', that is, scholarship that engages in social media communication as a means of dissemination and of being held accountable to communities. They describe their very negative experiences of taking part in livestreamed 'debates' on their topics of expertise, where they felt treated as 'adversarial fodder', their arguments ridiculed and silenced in shows encouraging audience members to pick a side and comment, enabling *ad hominem* attacks and hate speech of the kind they intend their scholarship to tackle. While Pausé and Glover value the democratising potential of online communication, in these experiences, the technology stimulated aggressive, adversarial and discrediting interactions. They point out that for scholars, whose authority depends on claims of intellectual rigour, such discrediting of their expertise and intellectual contributions is particularly hurtful and damaging.

Finally, [Kronick, Cleveland, and Rousseau \(2018, this section\)](#) reflect on the excruciating dilemmas they faced as clinician-researchers engaging with migrant families in immigration detention in Canada. Their research project about mental health in immigration detention centres was closely controlled and policed by the prison authorities. When they sought to act as clinicians, writing a psychiatric report on the deteriorating health of a child to be used by the child's lawyer, their continued research access was threatened. Thus they had to perform an impossible weighing of their commitment as scholars generating research on the effects of an abusive system, and their commitment as clinicians who should do the best for patients. Like Montenegro, they treat their experience of the research as a source of information on the topic of study, learning about the absolute power enacted in contemporary 'total institutions' such as prisons or detention centres, and the emotional effects of being on the receiving end of that power. They do not claim to have an answer to the problem of 'dual loyalties', but invite further and continual reflection by clinician-researchers or scholar-activists on such difficult balancing acts.

Collectively, these papers problematise a traditional view of the 'scholar-activist' as a collaborative external change agent who, regardless of frictions, is able to build egalitarian relationships with communities and activists while retaining the academic dimension of their role ([Campbell & Murray, 2004](#)). Community psychologists have always

rejected 'speaking for' communities, often advocating 'listening to', or 'amplifying voices' (Fernández et al., 2018, this section; Fine et al., 2018, this section; Walker et al., 2018, this section). But relationships with communities and activists are often asymmetrical and complex. To deal with this asymmetry, Capri and Swartz (2018, this section) in their model of 'voluntary-assisted advocacy', propose 'speaking with' as an option. In the context of repressive total institutions, Kronick et al. (2018, this section) ask scholars to acknowledge the dilemmas when they are called to self-silence in relation to immediate injustices so that they may be allowed to continue to produce their research. Finally, those groups that have been at the receiving end of interventions – and research – have increasingly constituted themselves as hybrid activist-researchers, creating new knowledge and radically problematising the role and validity of the external 'scholar-activist' (Fernández et al., 2018, this section; Montenegro, 2018b, this section; Rose, 2018, this section).

Keeping Alive a Politics of Hope

Whilst complex contemporary social and political scenarios frequently lead to a sense of deep despair amongst many on the left (Campbell, 2014), several of our authors call for a more hopeful approach, echoing both long-standing (Freire, 1992/2014) and recent (Jensen, 2014; Solnit, 2017) calls for optimism. Leaders of this trend in our particular special section are Fine et al. (2018, this section), in their emphasis on 'positive marginality'. They argue that despite the extreme nature of current collective threats to well-being in the US, the wilful subjectivities of LGBTQ/GE youth – one of the most extremely oppressed group in the country – are cause for celebration. They point to the confidence and solidarity of many members of this group, often viciously exiled from home, school, state protection and community in an atmosphere of hate and violence, and emphasise the ambiguous effects of violent misrecognition in this group. Real and symbolic violence against them have indeed led to severely compromised mental and physical health, and high levels of suicidal thinking. Yet their findings highlight how these impacts are buffered by various forms of explicit and implicit activism. Disproportionately high levels of activism by this group, not only challenging their sexual oppression, but also their involvement in other social struggles around prisons, policing, and immigration, have led not only to the possibility of social change, but also to positive individual health benefits. Resonating strongly with this account, Fernández et al. (2018, this section) celebrate the achievements of young people of colour in securing advances in racial equality in the USA, from the civil rights movement, to activism to put race on the agenda in universities, and most recently to movements such as Black Lives Matter and the DREAMers. They document the power of a participatory action research process for both young women's socio-political development and their individual and collective wellbeing.

Other authors who call for greater optimism include Walker et al. (2018, this section) who conclude their study of 'alternative engagement practices' against undemocratic so-called 'public participation' exercises by the UK NHS by urging readers not to forget that 'engagement is possible'. They urge us not to ignore opportunities for citizens to insist on dialogue between themselves and the institutions that represent them, to achieve a critical engagement between top-down accountability by service providers and bottom-up influence by service users.

Somewhat paradoxically, the very destructiveness of impoverishing and individualising economic and social policies provides a productive impetus to action. As Rose (2018, this section) claims, an economic climate of austerity in the UK brought together disability activists and mental health activists under a common cause. Nandi (2018, this section) claims that the campaign against privatisation of healthcare in Chhattisgarh worked because

in India campaigning against privatisation and neoliberal policies was a broad enough rallying cry to bring together a wide coalition of different people and groups who could unite behind the cause.

Conclusion

This special section is an attempt to ‘think with activism’, using authors’ accounts of contemporary activism to promote insights into the nature of current social relations, and into the possibilities and constraints for activism that those social relations entail. In what has often seemed a bewilderingly hostile socio-political environment, we have looked to the practice of activism for insights into potential ways forward for community psychology. In what follows, we first address the question of the nature of current conditions, and then what we have learned of the prospects for an emancipatory community psychology.

The papers collected here outline dangerous times for marginalised communities and difficult times for social justice activism. They position themselves against a backdrop of a liberal and neoliberal hegemony. The landscape of activism has been shaped by the doctrine of liberalism, with its visions of the autonomous individual on a level playing field, and a neoliberal set of social and economic policies that presuppose the inevitability of competitive individualism and individual responsibility. Liberalism, as these papers argue, has individualised community mobilising and community psychology, depoliticized seemingly progressive ideas like citizen participation, representative democracy, or meritocracy, and has crushed the imagination of alternatives by presenting the status quo as the only or natural option. New communication technologies, which promised a democratisation of communication, have often been turned to instruments of control, profit, or sensationalism. Economic shifts, such as the welfare cuts associated with austerity, or rising economic inequality, create new vulnerabilities, forcing activists to rethink the threats they face and coalitions they might forge.

However, the papers’ response is not one of despair. Instead, there is a sense of urgency in response to lethal austerity policies, and violently toxic environments for sexual and racial minorities. Such urgency also accompanies these papers’ calls for vigilance in response to the co-option of core community psychology values and practices. Community psychology has long battled with risks of depoliticization (Campbell & Murray, 2004), with feel-good buzzwords such as ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ all too easily driving attention to the actions of individuals and communities rather than to structural power relations. These papers offer a renewed sense of the urgency of radical transformative efforts, politicising their analyses with reference to the socio-political environment, and refusing to shy away from the contentious and conflictual politics that are likely to be required for such transformation. It is possible that the urgency of responding to the violence of ‘peak neoliberalism’ could energise and reinvigorate a critical community psychology that refuses to be silent or complacent about unequal power relations.

For these authors, the hostile socio-political environment does not refute the core commitments of community psychology or make them outdated. Rather, across their examples of activism and scholar-activism, they make the case that the core community psychology commitment to relationality is made all the more urgent by the prevailing individualist and competitive hegemony. Community psychology has a rich history of transformative theory and practice, which articulates an alternative to that hegemony. The sense of urgency and responsibility to enact that alternative is another source for the reinvigoration of community psychology (Fine, 2016).

Beyond reaffirming established commitments, the collection of papers also identify novel and complex sources of agency being employed by activists, encouraging community psychologists to look for, and to establish, resistance where repressive systems discriminate or pathologise. 'Intimate activism' or 'intensification of error' might not accord with traditional community psychology visions of organised collective action in service of a social justice goal, but offer valuable social change potentials. Technologically mediated communication also offers potentially transformative agency, but in a risky and ambiguous way. Digital communication both centralises data in the interest of control, and decentres agency in distributed peer-to-peer support networks. Social media offer opportunities for building collectivities around social justice goals, but just as many opportunities for malicious and discrediting hate speech. As with the co-option of community psychology concepts, labels of 'participation' or 'peer-to-peer' are no guarantees of transformative potential, but require careful interrogation. These are examples of the complexities of 'progressive' ideals in the contemporary context, again underlining the need for vigilance.

In this special section, the role of scholar-activists, or external change agents, is also made complex and problematic. Authors are acutely attuned to the positionality of scholars or scholar-activists, in their relationships with activists and communities. The researcher does not appear as an abstract liberal individual seeking knowledge for its own sake, or as a well-intentioned knowledgeable 'outsider' bringing useful perspectives to a marginalised groups, but as an occupant of a social position, an interest group, and an identity. Authors call for very careful reflection on the relation between the scholar-activist and her community/activist interlocutors and collaborators, because in those relationships, participants can be constituted as citizens, as creative activists, as critical intellectuals, or as service users or objects of study. While community psychologists have argued this position previously, the backdrop of the hegemony of liberal individualism seems to make this reflection on ethical and political complexities all the more pressing.

In sum, the 'peak neoliberal' environment in some ways serves to clarify and motivate the transformative commitments of community psychology to working towards health and social justice in collaboration with marginalised communities. The relational core of community psychology becomes an increasingly urgent alternative as the damage of competitive individualism accrues. We had questioned whether community psychology's optimistic vision had been outdated by rapidly changing events, but instead, through the creativity of the activists and authors represented in this special section, find a community psychology re-energised and re-invigorated. The hostility of the environment suggests that the community psychology required for this era is unlikely to be a consensus-seeking, accommodationist endeavour, but a contentious and combative scholar-activism. This special section presents a snapshot, at the early stage of responses to our changing times. We expect that community psychology's concepts and tools will evolve further as scholar-activists get to grips with the challenges and potentials of these times. We hope that this special section both reinforces the value of community psychology's original relational commitments and offers provocations and inspirations for new practices, collaborations and thinking that will be needed as community psychology is reinvigorated for a new era.

Funding

The authors have no funding to report.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank all those who participated in the December 2017 workshop in London, and all the authors of papers in this special section for their generous and critical engagement with the collective development of the ideas presented here. We are grateful to Chris Cohrs and the editorial team at the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* for the opportunity to produce this special section and for their support throughout the process.

References

- Alinsky, S. (1989). *Rules for radicals: A practical primer for realistic radicals*. New York, NY, USA: Random House. (Original work published 1971)
- Aveling, E.-L., & Jovchelovitch, S. (2014). Partnerships as knowledge encounters: A psychosocial theory of partnerships for health and community development. *Journal of Health Psychology, 19*, 34-45. doi:[10.1177/1359105313509733](https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105313509733)
- Barnes, B. R. (2018). Politics and activism in the water and sanitation wars in South Africa. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 6*, 543-555. doi:[10.5964/jspp.v6i2.917](https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.917)
- Campbell, C. (2014). Community mobilisation in the 21st century: Updating our theory of social change? *Journal of Health Psychology, 19*, 46-59. doi:[10.1177/1359105313500262](https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105313500262)
- Campbell, C., & Burgess, R. (Eds.). (2012). The role of communities in advancing the goals of the Movement for Global Mental Health [Special section]. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 49*, 379-538.
- Campbell, C., & Cornish, F. (Eds.). (2014). Community health psychology for the 21st century: Pathways to health-enabling social change [Special issue]. *Journal of Health Psychology, 19*(1).
- Campbell, C., Cornish, F., & Skovdal, M. (Eds.). (2012). Using scale to think about HIV/AIDS interventions: Local and global dimensions [Special issue]. *Health & Place, 18*(3).
- Campbell, C., & Murray, M. (2004). Community health psychology: Promoting analysis and action for social change. *Journal of Health Psychology, 9*(2), 187-195. doi:[10.1177/1359105304040886](https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105304040886)
- Capri, C., & Swartz, L. (2018). The right to be Freepeople: Relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy as a psychological and ethical resource for decolonizing intellectual disability. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 6*, 556-574. doi:[10.5964/jspp.v6i2.946](https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.946)
- Cornish, F., & Campbell, C. (Eds.). (2010). The social context of community mobilization: Foundations for success or failure [Special issue]. *AIDS Care, 22*(2).
- Cornish, C., Haaken, J., Moskovitz, L., & Jackson, S. (Eds.). (2016). Rethinking prefigurative politics [Special section]. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 4*(1), 114-363.
- Cornish, F., Priego-Hernandez, J., Campbell, C., Mburu, G., & McLean, S. (2014). Impact of community mobilisation on HIV prevention in middle and low income countries: A systematic review and critique. *AIDS and Behavior, 18*, 2110-2134. doi:[10.1007/s10461-014-0748-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-014-0748-5)
- Cramer, K. (2016). *The politics of resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (2008). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In A. Bailey & C. Cuomo (Eds.), *The Feminist philosophy reader* (pp. 279-309). New York, NY, USA: McGraw-Hill.

- Crenshaw, K. W., & Peller, G. (2013). *Reaffirming racism: The faulty logic of colorblindness, remedy and diversity*. New York, NY, USA: The New Press.
- Davies, W. (2014). *The limits of neoliberalism*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Dorling, D. (2018). *Peak inequality: Britain's ticking timebomb*. Bristol, United Kingdom: Policy Press.
- Dutt, A., & Kohfeldt, D. (2018). Towards a liberatory ethics of care framework for organizing social change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 575-590. doi:[10.5964/jspp.v6i2.909](https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.909)
- The Economist. (2018). *Democracy Index 2017: Free speech under attack*. London, United Kingdom: The Economist Intelligence Unit.
- Fernández, J. S., Gaston, J. Y., Nguyen, M., Rovaris, J., Robinson, R. L., & Aguilar, D. N. (2018). Documenting sociopolitical development via participatory action research (PAR) with women of color student activists in the neoliberal university. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 591-607. doi:[10.5964/jspp.v6i2.900](https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.900)
- Fine, M. (2016). Just methods in revolting times. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 13, 347-365. doi:[10.1080/14780887.2016.1219800](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2016.1219800)
- Fine, M., Torre, M. E., Frost, D. M., & Cabana, A. L. (2018). Queer solidarities: New activism erupting at the intersection of structural precarity and radical misrecognition. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 608-630. doi:[10.5964/jspp.v6i2.905](https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.905)
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London, United Kingdom: Penguin.
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury. (Original work published 1970)
- Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of hope*. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury. (Original work published 1992)
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.
- Gonzalez-Polledo, E. (2018). Can digital health save democracy? Meeting the cosmopolitical challenge of digital worlds. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 631-643. doi:[10.5964/jspp.v6i2.939](https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.939)
- Graeber, D. (2011). *Debt: The first 5,000 years*. Brooklyn, NY, USA: Melville House Printing.
- Hochschild, A. (2016). *Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right*. New York, NY, USA: The New Press.
- Hodgetts, D., Chamberlain, K., Groot, S., & Tankel, Y. (2014). Urban poverty, structural violence and welfare provision for 100 families in Auckland. *Urban Studies*, 51, 2036-2051. doi:[10.1177/0042098013505885](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098013505885)
- Holloway, J. (2010). *Crack capitalism*. London, United Kingdom: Pluto Press.
- Jensen, C. B. (2014). Experiments in good faith and hopefulness: Toward a post-critical social science. *Common Knowledge*, 20, 337-362. doi:[10.1215/0961754X-2422980](https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-2422980)
- Jovchelovitch, S., & Campbell, C. (Eds.). (2000). Health, community and development [Special issue]. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 10(4).
- Kagan, C., Burton, M., Duckett, P., Lawthom, R., & Siddique, A. (2011). *Critical community psychology: Critical action and social change*. Chichester, United Kingdom: Wiley.
- Kronick, R., Cleveland, J., & Rousseau, C. (2018). "Do you want to help or go to war?": Ethical challenges of critical research in immigration detention in Canada. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 644-660. doi:[10.5964/jspp.v6i2.926](https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.926)

- Martin-Baro, I. (1996). *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.
- Montenegro, C. R. (2018a). Beyond participation: Politics, incommensurability and the emergence of mental health service users' activism in Chile. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 42, 605-626. doi:10.1007/s11013-018-9576-9
- Montenegro, C. R. (2018b). 'Are you a radical now?' Reflecting on the situation of social research(ers) in the context of service-user activism in mental health. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 661-676. doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.924
- Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a left populism*. London, United Kingdom: Verso.
- Murray, M., & Campbell, C. (Eds.). (2004). Community health psychology [Special issue]. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 9(2).
- Nandi, S. (2018). Struggle against outsourcing of diagnostic services in government facilities: Strategies and lessons from a campaign led by Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (People's Health Movement) in Chhattisgarh, India. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 677-695. doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.923
- Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Pausé, C. J., & Glover, M. (2018). Exploring the threats to sociable scholarship: An autoethnographic viewing of participatory news making. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 696-710. doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.904
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Belknap Press.
- Rabeharisoa, V., Moreira, T., & Akrich, M. (2013). *Evidence-based activism: Patients' organisations, users' and activist groups in knowledge society* (Papiers de Recherche du CSI – CSI working papers series, No. 033). Retrieved from http://www.csi.mines-paristech.fr/working-papers/WP/WP_CSI_033.pdf
- Radiszcz, E., & Sir, H. (2018). The politics of error: Rethinking the power of the symptom in the ADHD diagnosis case in Chilean society. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 711-727. doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.896
- Rappaport, J., & Seidman, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of community psychology*. New York, NY, USA: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers.
- Rose, D. (2018). A hidden activism and its changing contemporary forms: Mental health service users / survivors mobilising. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 728-744. doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.952
- Seedat, M., Duncan, N., & Lazarus, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Community psychology: Theory, method and practice: South African and other perspectives*. Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.
- Solnit, R. (2017, March 13). Protest and persist: Why giving up hope is not an option. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/13/protest-persist-hope-trump-activism-anti-nuclear-movement>
- Speer, P. W., & Han, H. (2018). Re-engaging social relationships and collective dimensions of organizing to revive democratic practice. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 745-758. doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.929
- Walker, C., Artaraz, K., Darking, M., Davies, C., Fleischer, S., Graber, R., . . . Zoli, A. (2018). Building spaces for controversial public engagement – Exploring and challenging democratic deficits in NHS marketization. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6, 759-775. doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.902

Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Health and Social Justice Activism in Changing Times"

Politics and Activism in the Water and Sanitation Wars in South Africa

Brendon R. Barnes^{*a}

[a] Department of Psychology, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the ways in which activism is undermined in the water and sanitation wars in South Africa. The paper extends previous work that has focused on the politics of water and sanitation in South Africa and is based on an analysis of talk between activists and stakeholders in a television debate. It attempts to make two arguments. First, activists who disrupt powerful discourses of active citizenship struggle to highlight water and sanitation injustices without their actions being individualised and party politicised. Second, in an attempt to claim a space for new social movements, activists paradoxically draw on common sense accounts of race, class, geography, dignity and democracy that may limit activism. The implications for water and sanitation activism and future research are discussed.

Keywords: social movements, activism, water and sanitation justice, citizenship, transitional justice

Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2018, Vol. 6(2), 543–555, doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.917

Received: 2018-01-18. Accepted: 2018-09-28. Published (VoR): 2018-12-21.

Handling Editor: Catherine Campbell, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Johannesburg, PO Box 524, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 2006, South Africa. E-mail: bbarnes@uj.ac.za



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

This paper highlights how activism is undermined in the struggle for water and sanitation justice in South Africa. The paper is written against the backdrop of transitional justice where the state has attempted to address, albeit incrementally, injustices created by racist apartheid. Yet, South Africa remains one of the most economically unequal societies in the world (Beinart & Dubow, 1995; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005; Terreblanche, 2002). While there is a growing black African middle class, income inequality remains mapped onto race and geography. For example, despite constituting 79% of the population, black Africans make up 90% of South Africa's poor (Leibbrandt, Finn, & Woolard, 2012).

'New' social movements, positioned outside of mainstream civil society organisations and party politics, have been active in highlighting the failures of the state in addressing historical injustices (Ballard, Habib, & Valodia, 2006). Known as the protest capital of the world, protests focus on unemployment; poor service delivery such as inadequate housing, water and sanitation, education, and healthcare; crime; corruption; and low wages (Patel,

2013). Activists are met with increasingly hostile police and public responses (Alexander, Lekgowa, Mmope, Sinwell, & Xezwi, 2012).

The paper stems, in part, from my observations of activists' difficulty in highlighting water and sanitation injustices without their efforts being undermined by more powerful ideas of 'citizenship' and 'development'. In my work in water and sanitation, household energy and toxic chemicals; I have been struck by how activist efforts are undermined, vilified and dismissed. Equally striking is how activists struggle to forge a 'new' discursive space to legitimise their activism without drawing on 'old' language about citizenship and development.

On a scholarly level, the paper contributes to the growing literature on the role of social movements in relation to water and sanitation injustice globally (see, for example, Ayee & Crook, 2003; Doron & Raja, 2015) and in South Africa. South African studies, reviewed below, have revealed the complex politics of water and sanitation activism, justice and development in post-apartheid. This paper extends previous work by analysing talk, language and discourses about water and sanitation injustice among a diverse group of stakeholders in a television debate. The analysis of talk and language may be useful to illuminate the discourses that shape the way activism is framed.

I attempt to make two arguments. First, activists struggle to highlight injustices without their actions being individualised and party politicised because they aim to disrupt powerful discourses of active citizenship in South Africa. Second, in an attempt to claim a legitimate space for new social movements, activists draw on common sense accounts of race, class, geography, dignity and democracy that may, paradoxically, limit their activism.

The Politics of Water and Sanitation Justice in South Africa

Despite the right to a healthy living environment being enshrined in the constitution of South Africa, poor South Africans living in informal settlements continue to bear the brunt of apartheid racial and spatial segregation. Of particular concern are the inadequate water and sanitation services in low income communities. In 2011, 11% of households were without access to piped water, 11% did not have access to sanitation services while a further 26% had inadequate sanitation services that did not meet minimum standards (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The state's view is that the immediate provision of universal water and sanitation services in informal settlements is impossible because of the backlogs and high infrastructural costs, and that there should be 'progressive realisation of rights' as written into the constitution to achieve long term universal coverage.

Two problematic initiatives, prepaid water meters and portable sanitation, have been aggressively promoted by large municipalities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg to address the backlog of water and sanitation services in poor communities. Prepaid water metres dispense a certain amount of free water per month (usually not enough to sustain a household for a month) and people have to pay for the extra water *before* they use it (McDonald & Ruiters, 2005). If people do not have money for water, they have to do without clean water until the next month. Municipalities argue that prepaid water metres are beneficial because the devices provide a limited amount of free water for the poor (water is free if people keep their consumption low), allow cost recovery for consumption over and above the free basic allocation (to offset non-payment of services), promote water conservation (people are more likely to save water if they pay for it upfront), and allow households to control their finances (no unexpected utility bills at the end of the month).

Portable sanitation, in the form of 'porta potties', are provided by the state and are removed after a predetermined period. Porta potties are framed as temporary solutions to more expensive permanent sanitation programmes.

The City of Cape Town justifies porta potties because many of its informal settlements are built on ground that is unsuitable to build permanent flush sanitation because of a high water table, it is difficult to plan infrastructure because of high levels of urbanization and migration, and the city is doing its best to provide interim solutions under difficult circumstances. While both programmes are constructed as for-the-good-of-the-poor, in reality, however, the poor are subjected to insufficient water, inadequate sanitation and unhygienic conditions. Importantly, middle and upper class South Africans are typically spared these programs.

In addition to ongoing legal challenges (one of which was contested as high up as the Constitutional Court), water and sanitation justice activists aligned with 'new social movements' have mobilised in protest. For example, in 2013, activists under the banner of the Ses' Khona People's Rights Movement in Cape Town, threw human faeces from porta potties in a number of public spaces including legislature, at politicians' cars, a national freeway and, most famously, in the Cape Town International Airport. The 'poo protestors' aimed to draw attention to the unhygienic conditions caused by inadequate water and sanitation services. Activists were arrested and prosecuted. Similarly in 2011, activists drew attention to unenclosed toilets using similar tactics. The unenclosed toilet scandal played an important role in local elections in Cape Town in that year (Robins, 2014). Similar activism has taken place around prepaid water meters by the Anti Privatisation Forum, a coalition social movement, in Johannesburg. For example, in 2009 female protestors in Johannesburg wore soiled underwear to highlight the negative hygiene implications of inadequate water and used slogans such as 'stop the war on women's bodies'.

What was once considered a private matter, water and sanitation has become firmly embedded in the *political* in South Africa (McFarlane & Silver, 2017). Local elections have been contested over water and sanitation justice (Robins, 2014); social movements continue to form, morph and distance themselves from civil society formations and political parties in complex ways (Gready & Robins, 2017); and activist tactics vary from slow activism that rely on evidence to make injustice 'legible' to 'spectacle' activism such as throwing faeces and 'sabotaging' prepaid water metres. There are a multitude of actors (scholars, nongovernmental organisations [NGOs], religious organisations, lawyers, the state, social movements, community leaders and so forth) and important concepts such as dignity and the progressive realization of rights in the constitution are being contested (von Schnitzler, 2014). Meanwhile, municipalities attempt to solve technical, engineering and financial mechanisms to deliver water and sanitation services and figure out how to get communities to participate in the programmes. The water and sanitation wars also take place against the backdrop of water restrictions and a drought in Cape Town, increasing urban migration, pressured budgets, and shifting party politics.

In addition, the water and sanitation wars raise larger political questions about the judiciary's role in compelling the state to provide adequate water and sanitation. For example, in the case of Mazibuko and others versus the City of Johannesburg and others, prepaid water metres were deemed illegal by the Guateng High Court but the decision was overturned by the Constitutional Court. The water and sanitation wars also raise questions about the very nature of transitional justice itself (Robins, 2014), and the role of participation (Barnes, 2009). These important questions have been taken up in previous work. Important for this paper, however, is the manner in which *citizenship* is evoked and resisted in the water and sanitation wars.

Citizenship, Behaviour and the Water and Sanitation Wars

The post-apartheid state has promoted a version of active citizenship that emphasizes partnerships with the poor to assist with their development. In some instances, communities are asked to help build facilities or complete their construction. By the very least communities are asked to adopt technologies such as prepaid water metres

and porta potties in the short term until the state can figure out long term solutions. This version of active citizenship acknowledges rights but emphasizes agency, choice, volition, responsibility and participation (Barnes & Milovanovic, 2015). Citizenship discourses are ever present in national campaigns such as the large scale Masakhane campaign that promoted partnerships between communities and the state to 'make South Africa better'. Summed up at the launch of the Masakhane campaign in 1995, Nelson Mandela stated that "with freedom comes responsibility, the responsibility of participation" (African National Congress, 1995).

Within this discourse, poor South Africans have a right to be unhappy about the slow progress of South Africa's development, but they should express their discontent responsibly (see, for example, IFAISA, 2012). LeadSA, for example, is a national campaign that is widely endorsed by the state, the private sector, the media, and many civil society organizations. It promotes the idea of South Africans taking responsibility for improving the country (Barnes & Milovanovic, 2015). Among others, the campaign promotes a Bill of Responsibilities (to complement the country's official Bill of Rights) that outlines how South Africans should *behave* in order to improve the country and achieve their basic human rights. The discourse also endorses the right to vote, arguing that the poor should exercise their democratic right to vote for an effective political party (Barnes & Milovanovic, 2015).

The behaviour of the poor is central to ideas of active citizenship. The poor should not only take up programs such as prepaid water meters and porta potties, or by the very least be patient with interim solutions while the state figures out long term solutions to the provision of universal basic services; but that they should also express their grievances in appropriate ways such as through local ward councillors, NGOs or recognised community leadership structures. The state also relies on behaviour change campaigns to promote the uptake and sustained appropriate use of the technologies in mass campaigns such as 'Operation Gcina Manzi' that gave behavioural advice about how to use water frugally (including how many times to flush the toilet!) (Barnes, 2009). Importantly, the campaign evoked the need to pay for services as an act of citizenship through slogans such as "your right to services equals your right to pay" and "I've paid for my services, have you?" Thus, porta potties and prepaid water meters are not just technological devices but also 'moral pedagogical' devices (von Schnitzler, 2014) that frames the problem and solution to water and sanitation within a language of morality that promotes ideas of agency, partnerships, volition, participation, responsibility and appropriate behaviour because 'this is the right thing to do'.

Activists disrupt this version of active citizenship by distancing themselves from formal civil society structures (they are mostly 'new' social movements that exist outside of mainstream civil society and the state); are impatient with the progressive realisation of rights (they have had inadequate sanitation and water services for over two decades since the end of apartheid); call into question how much say they actually have in the decisions (participation and consultation are a ruse); and deliberately draw on a 'politics of the spectacle' such as throwing faeces and 'sabotaging' prepaid water metres that deliberately destabilise the idea of a good citizen. It is important to mention at this point that social movements *do* employ other tactics but that spectacle politics are particularly transgressive of active citizenship and are, therefore, the focus of this paper.

Assuming that the politics of water and sanitation justice in South Africa draw on a number of discourses (language, ideas, and interpretive repertoires that frame conceptualisations of activism), I was curious to find out how they played out in 'everyday talk'. There is an established literature in political and social psychology that has revealed how social asymmetries such as race, class and gender are represented and reproduced in everyday talk (Han, 2015). For example, studies have shown that even when speakers are trying to not be racist, they may subtly draw on and reinforce racist notions that they aim to resist (Myers & Williamson, 2001). An analysis of talk among

a group of stakeholders may be useful to not only illuminate the various levels of water and sanitation politics that have been identified in the literature, but to also identify discourses that may inadvertently undermine their activism.

Methods

This paper is based on an analysis of transcribed data from a television program, *The Big Debate*, which aims to promote debate about important South African issues. The program was aired on a free public broadcaster channel and I downloaded the program from YouTube a few months later. The episode focused on activism in relation to water and sanitation services in low income settlements. The programme was selected for analysis because it demonstrated just how difficult it is for activists to highlight their plight and justify their strategies. The episode (32 minutes and 3 seconds) included members of the public, a representative from the City of Cape Town (the municipality in which the study is located), health activists, public interest lawyers, students, members of social justice organisations, engineers and the leader of the Ses'Khona People's Rights Movement who led the faeces throwing protests mentioned above. These are referred to as 'stakeholders' in the discussion below. In addition, unlike previous studies that have focused on one sector such as prepaid water metres or portable sanitation, this study involved both issues.

The debate was facilitated by an interviewer, Siki Mgabadel. I refer to Siki as 'interviewer' to differentiate her from the audience members. The interview was transcribed using a modified Jefferson method (Jefferson, 2004) and the data were analysed using discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Tileagă & Stokoe, 2015) with a special focus on identifying the subject positions (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998) that were evoked in the discussion. It is important to note that the analysis was not limited to the interaction between the stakeholders (as perhaps some forms of conversation analysis would advocate). This talk was also seen to reflect broader discourses related to the topic (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

I was particularly interested in discourses of how activists should 'behave' and 'develop' and what functions these might serve. In this sense, language is not merely a reflection of the individual's inner world constructs or behaviour, but reflects broader discourses about 'citizenship', 'development' and 'activism'. A discourse analysis moves us away from the assumption that language conveys 'truths' about how people 'think' and 'behave'. Rather this approach views language as used to produce and reproduce subject positions in the contexts of talk.

I also draw on studies that have highlighted how accounts of development, justice, race and class manifests in talk and how alternative accounts, for example, resistance to neoliberalism are undermined (for example, Barnes & Milovanovic, 2015; Dominguez-Whitehead & Whitehead, 2014; Whitehead, 2013).

Findings

Excerpt 1 is taken from about 16 minutes into the debate when Andile Lili, the leader of the Ses'Khona People's Rights Movement, is introduced.

Excerpt 1

1 Interviewer: One of the **poo protestors** is here with us today. Andile Lili. **Poo protests. Now**
 2 **come on?** [incredulous tone] **This is not how you change government policy.** Are you
 3 really? (.) Do you really think that this is going to work?
 4 Andile Lili: Obviously (.), I know, (.) you might have that kind of a perception [fidgeting with
 5 shirt sleeve]. Where we live, we wanted to expose how the African people and coloured
 6 community in Cape Town are subjected to. And, eh, (.) as **individuals and activists**, we
 7 cannot tolerate to walk right [showing walking action] across the faeces in our street in Cape
 8 Town. We are saying that (.) that is totally unacceptable. **And we are saying (.) that is**
 9 **unhygienic. If it is unhygienic for people who live in Cape Town (.) Eh (.) If it is**
 10 **unhygienic for people in airport, then it is unhygienic for us.**
 11 Interviewer: **But come on. One wrong though does not make eh two wrongs don't make**
 12 **a right. It is a criminal activity** that you're engaging in.
 13 Andile Lili: I think eh (.) we wanted to expose this to the authorities that eh (.), people are
 14 living with faeces for 24 hours. And it can never be correct.
 15 Interviewer: If you wanted to expose these to the authorities, **why go to the airport? Go to**
 16 **THEM.**
 17 Andile Lili: Yes, we went to legislature and later on we went to airport to expose not only here
 18 in Cape Town but internationally. It must be known that our people here are treated so badly
 19 by a **racist government.**
 20 Interviewer: **But you're playing politics. You're playing politics,** let's be fair, there are
 21 other municipalities run by the ANC all over the country. You could have gone to the North
 22 West, you could have gone to the Eastern Cape, KZN, bucket systems there. Will you tell us
 23 that the poo protests are going to move into ANC municipalities as well?
 24 Andile Lili: No, I don't think think that we are paying any politics. **I live in those informal**
 25 **settlements so I don't play any politics.** In fact just now, **I am just a suspended member**
 26 **of the ANC** so you cannot say that I am playing politics. **In fact I am talking to the issues**
 27 **affecting the black people in Cape Town.**
 28 ALL: Applause [Andile Lili sits down]
 29 Interviewer: Show of hands from everybody in the room. How many of you feel that the so
 30 called poo protests are justified?
 31 [Approximately 70% of the audience put their hands up]
 32 Interviewer: Interesting, interesting, that's a lot of people Ernest [turning towards Ernest
 33 Sonnenberg from the City of Cape Town].
 34 Ernest Sonnenberg: I think the point that you have just made is that this is not just in the City
 35 of Cape Town. In actual fact in a lot of other cities it is even worse. But one must understand
 36 also and **I am putting it to Andile Lili that his (.) his first suspension was not because of**
 37 **the poo protests.** His first suspension was because of other charges where the City took a
 38 decision to ask the provincial minister to remove him from council. So in actual fact **his** poo
 39 protest was having a second bite at the cherry of becoming or remaining a councillor and
 40 trying to get communities to show the ANC that he has got community support. Because
 41 subsequently when the 8 members who were with him got arrested, then suddenly the poo
 42 protests subsided.

Despite Andile's attempts to justify the protests, the interviewer and the City of Cape Town representative (Ernest Sonnenberg) question the motives behind the protests. They suggest that the protests were driven by individual and political motives to promote the African National Congress (ANC). Cape Town, at the time of writing, was run by the Democratic Alliance (DA). This is done in a mocking and infantilising tone (for example, Lines 1-3) and by calling the protests the 'poo' protests, by using terms such as 'playing' politics and by pointing out how the protestors

should have dealt with their concerns (“why go to the airport, why not go to THEM”) to raise concerns. Even when Andile mentions that he is a suspended member of the ANC, and that he speaks as an individual on behalf of all black and coloured people in the City of Cape Town, his actions are put down to his personal motives to promote party politics. In Lines 20 and 21 for example, the interviewer asks. “*Will you tell us that the poo protests are going to move into ANC municipalities as well?*” In Lines 31-39, Ernest argues that the reason Andile led ‘his’ poo protest was to garner support to be able to get back into the ANC. He also suggests that Andile cannot speak on behalf of all the poor black people because it was only Andile and eight others who participated (not all black people) and the protests stopped as soon as they were all arrested. Put differently, the protests would have continued if the protesters were speaking on behalf of so many people. We see, therefore, attempts to undermine the Andile’s *independent activist* position and focus on his individual motivations and desires to get back into, and promote, the ANC.

What is interesting is how difficult it is for Andile to speak against the programs from the position as an individual *and* an activist who is aligned with a social movement that is independent of political parties. When confronted with the accusation that he is ‘playing politics’ he goes to great lengths to position himself as an independent activist, that he lives in the communities and that he is speaking from first-hand experience of living with the faeces. He emphasizes that he has to walk through the faeces and that people like him have to live with the faeces for 24 hours. His emphasis on walking is meant to demonstrate his ‘closeness’ to the issues.

Interestingly, he draws on common sense South African discourses of race, class, geography and politics. For example, that the Democratic Alliance (DA) is a racist party driven by white interests whose members are out of touch with the lives of poor, black township residents (like himself); that the poor are less likely to be in the airport compared to the rich (hence the protest action there) and that politicians do not live in poor communities (therefore, he cannot be ‘playing politics’). Despite his attempts to be apolitical in the party political sense, he draws on precisely the same common sense notions of party politics, race and class that he attempts to avoid.

The interviewer and the City of Cape Town representative draw heavily on the ‘active citizenship’ discourse mentioned above that provides a moral framework for how citizens *should* behave. Much of the discussion focuses on Andile’s individual psychological ‘motives’ behind the protests, his inferior ways of understanding the situation, his repulsive behaviours (throwing faeces in public spaces) in addressing the issues, his misperceptions of his influence in, and representation of, the community, and that residents will have poorer health and dignity and be in weaker position to ‘develop’ without the programs. In addition, in resisting the programs in the manner the protestors did, Andile and fellow protestors signalled that are not willing to work *with* the state. Within this discourse, poor people have the right to protest but they also have the *responsibility* to protest in appropriate ways (mentioned throughout the debate).

The exchange could have taken a very different form. The discussion could have focused on the fact that there are legitimate reasons for the protests; hinted at by the interviewer ‘two wrongs don’t make a right’ but not followed through in the discussion (prepaid metres and porta potties have been fought in the courts as high up as the Constitutional Court). Andile Lili could have agreed that *he was* playing politics but not party politics (around the world, people engage in protest using their bodies to draw attention to injustices, it is not difficult to find examples of this). In response to the accusation that he was playing politics, he could have argued that he was indeed trying to get back into the ANC (which he eventually did following the last local government elections), but that party politics do not preclude him from voicing his and others’ dissatisfaction. It is perfectly possible to assume that

politicians from the DA would be black and even live in resource poor communities. It is possible that the poor can, and do, find themselves in the airport. It is also possible that Andile Lili and co-accused could have represented the interests of the poor without having to be democratically elected by them. Each of the speakers, however, drew on common sense accounts of class, race, geographic inequalities, party politics and democracy. Importantly, Andile found it very difficult to construct a discursive frame that allows for 'new' activist sub-politics (Rose, 2000) without drawing on an 'old' language of race, class, party politics and geography.

Dignity is an important theme in the water and sanitation justice debates. For example, the question of *how much* water is needed for dignity was an important theme in the legal battles around prepaid water meters in Gauteng, what von Schnitzler (2014) calls 'metrologies of dignity'. In overturning a high court judgement, the constitutional court concluded that prepaid water meters and the free basic water allocation were constitutional because they met the basic needs of the poor – nothing more. What was ignored in the courts, however, was the indignity of running out of water when, for example, there is funeral or when there is no money to buy water upfront, the indignity of being told how many times to use the toilet or the indignity of knowing middle class South Africans are spared these technologies.

In his accounts of dignity in Excerpt 1, we see Andile drawing on 'bare life' politics (von Schnitzler, 2014) that, similar to 'metrologies of dignity', reduces dignity to its minimum. In the poo protests, and evident in his account above, Andile brings private bodily functions into the public gaze to highlight indignity and injustice. Such tactics were also used in the open toilet scandal where activists evoked the imagery of poor black women having to use the toilets without doors in open fields and being subjected to sexual violence. Similar tactics were deployed in panty protests where old women wore soiled underwear to highlight the indignity of prepaid water.

The danger of bare life politics, however, is that they represent the black body in its minimal form - a body only in need of help to avoid suffering. Bare life politics may also inadvertently reinforce mainstream ideas about the backwardness of the poor (what kind of a person would collect and throw faeces or wear soiled panties in protest?), their entitlement at wanting water and sanitation for free without 'working' for it, and provides more evidence of the need to educate them about the reality of water and sanitation provision through 'a change of behaviours' indicated by Ernest Sonnenberg in the following extract.

Excerpt 2 is from 30 minutes into the debate. The debate turns to prepaid water meters and water conservation, or the alleged lack thereof, by the poor in drought stricken Cape Town. Water conservation was a major motivator for the implementation of prepaid water meters based on the assumption that because water was subsidised for the poor, then they would be inclined to waste it. An audience member questions why it is that only the poor are subjected to prepaid water meters while the rest of the city are not. The audience member suggests that the biggest water users are agriculture, industry and rich Capetonians. It does not make sense, therefore, to have restrictive and unfair prepaid water meters implemented only among the poor. The excerpt picks up when Ernest Sonnenberg from the City of Cape Town defends the prepaid water metre initiative and suggests that it is not only the poor that receive prepaid water meters but that rich Capetonians who have payment arrears are also given the option of prepaid water meters in exchange for having their debts written off. Clearly missing the point that rich South African are given the option to have prepaid water meters only when they are in arrears; to add insult to injury, Ernest Sonnenberg indicates that the rich can have their debts written off if they choose prepaid water meters. The debate includes Phumeza Mlungwana, an activist from the Social Justice Coalition - a social movement focusing on justice issues in South African informal settlements.

Excerpt 2

1 **Ernest Sonnenberg: If a person are in arrears with their water what we say is before we write**
 2 **off your arrears we give you the option of installing the water management device so that we**
 3 **can have a change in behaviors. It's about teaching people that this is 350 liters and if I am**
 4 **going to wash the clothes on Friday I need to conserve so that I can build up reserves.**
 5 *Interviewer: Phumeza what do you make of this?*
 6 *Phumeza Mlungwana: We know that we do not have enough water. But like that a lot of the*
 7 *taps you see they are always leaking, there's no repairs. This speaks directly to the issue of*
 8 *maintenance. It is not like there is not money or there is no water or there is no nothing but*
 9 *its engagement and the fact that we they not doing enough in informal settlements.*
 10 *(Audience member, name not given.): If I may go to [Andile] Lili's first statement then. Lili*
 11 **was elected by us as the members of the community and we don't care the council fired**
 12 **him or whatever but he clearly is a born fighter. He is fighting for our rights and he was**
 13 **called by the community and law so. And this may come and but this government of this**
 14 **Western Cape only care about the white people, the white rich people. And they are taking**
 15 **the issues on the racist way. Because of if you, you can check the issue of water, the**
 16 **shortage of water, it's black and coloured people. The issue of the water is black and**
 17 **coloured people. Why does some van Tonder and the van der Merwe not using this**
 18 **porta potty (.) =**
 19 **= Interviewer: Isn't that from apartheid?**
 20 *Speaker: No! The city of Cape Town is upgrading (sarcastic tone) from the apartheid*
 21 *system into nowadays because they changed the colour of the bucket to be white*
 22 *(Audience laughing). You see the colour of the bucket was black. So they make the colour of*
 23 *the porta potties to white because of they are trying (laughing) (audience laughing), what*
 24 *they are trying to do they want us to think the porta potty is better than the bucket but they*
 25 *are upgrading the same system of apartheid.*

Ernest Sonnenberg expresses how the ultimate goal of prepaid water meters is a 'change in behaviours' to conserve water and 'build up reserves' again calling on an active citizenship discourse. The assumption is that the majority of poor households will waste water if they do not have to pay for it, that the poor and the few who cannot afford to pay for that water can change their behaviours through expert knowledge and technological intervention (prepaid water meters are often accompanied by psycho education campaigns to 'educate' the poor about water conservation and the benefits thereof, for example, saving water, no unexpected bills and so forth). He uses the example of washing clothes in a condescending tone to explain how the poor should think about conserving water through careful planning and taking responsibility and control for their water consumption. The point made by the second speaker (Lines 7-9) that the real problems lie with the poor maintenance of existing water infrastructure (for example, leaking communal taps) in informal settlements is ignored.

The assumptions he makes are that the poor are wasteful and irresponsible because they do not care how water is consumed because it is free or highly subsidized, that they need intervention from experts who can 'teach' them about water conservation, and that they could be better, more responsible citizens if they adopted the prepaid water meters. Prepaid water meters are for their own benefit (they will get their free basic water allowance every month, they can carefully plan their water consumption and take control of their expenditure with no unexpected bills), the city will benefit (less water wastage which means that money can be redirected to more pressing development programs) and that there will be environmental benefits through water conservation. The dubious sub-text here is that poor have relied too heavily on state handouts for the basic needs, which is financially unsustainable and that the poor should exercise responsibility in terms of how they consume water. Again, the rest of Cape

Town are spared prepaid water meters or, by the very least, have the option of having them. We see, again, the construction of active citizenship that places the blame and responsibility for water and sanitation on the poor.

An audience member redirects the conversation to Andile Lili and the allegations that he was operating as a lone wolf criminal with party political aspirations whose intention was to disrupt the DA led municipality (Line 10). He attempts to legitimise Andile's claim to speak on behalf of the poor by suggesting that residents elected him regardless of his party political affiliations because of him as a person. By using phrases such as "*Lili was elected by us as the members of the community and we don't care the council fired him*", he alludes to the possibility of a different but legitimate democratic structure in social movements that works independent of the party political structure. He further emphasizes the individual qualities of Lili as a born "fighter" who is "fighting for our rights" outside of party politics. As in Excerpt 1, the speaker attempts to legitimize activism through the creation of discursive space for this new social movement by using the same call for democracy that he is critical of (our elected officials have let us down).

He proceeds to argue that the city is racist because the prepaid water meters and porta potties are directed at blacks and coloureds while whites are spared, "*Why does some van Tonder and the van der Merwe not using this porta potty*". As in Excerpt 1, he draws on common sense accounts of race, class and geography in South Africa. It is possible that there are black people with that surname who live in informal settlements (in fact there are), but what he means is rich white people of Afrikaans descent who live in more affluent suburbs who are spared the scourge of porta potties.

In Line 19, the interviewer interrupts the speaker and attempts to 'explain' the situation by suggesting that water and sanitation inequality was caused by the apartheid state and that the city is doing their best to resolve the issues. The speaker dismisses this argument firmly (No!) and suggests that racism has continued as poor black and coloured populations continue be treated unfairly. Using humour and sarcasm to emphasize his point about racism, he states that all that has changed in the 'upgrade' from apartheid to 'nowadays' is that the black buckets used in the bucket system have changed to white porta potties. Because porta potties are white, the city expects the poor to believe them to be superior "but they are upgrading the same system of apartheid".

Concluding Remarks

There is a growing body of literature focusing on water and sanitation justice in South Africa. This paper extends previous studies by identifying how activism may be undermined in talk. Resistance to activism by new social movements draws on notions of individual agency and responsibility that are embedded in powerful discourses of active citizenship promoted by the state. In addition, activists' justifications draw on common sense accounts of race, class, geography, dignity and democracy that may, paradoxically, limit how new activisms can be framed. For example, it is possible that new social movements can be aligned to party politics, cut across race, class and geography (for example, the recent drought in Cape Town galvanised water conservation activities across race, class and geography), promote more complex conceptualisations of dignity beyond bare life politics and that new social movements can exist without democratic structures (Andile did not need to be elected by the community to represent them). None of these positions, however, were possible in the discourses drawn on in the debate.

This study's findings may influence future studies of activism in the context of transitional justice. Future studies could investigate how the discourses elicited in this study translate into how activism is framed. For example, how do academics, policy makers, activists and the judiciary draw on active citizenship discourses and how does this serve to promote or impede activism? The findings may also have practical implications for activism. If activists are aware of the subtle ways in which their framings are limited, then they could perhaps anticipate, adjust and construct a new language of activism that extends beyond the entrenched lexicon of active citizenship in South Africa.

One criticism of this study is that the findings are based on a single debate that may have limited applicability to the broader issue of water and sanitation. What can talk about poo protests reveal about actual poo protests? The intention of this paper was not to analyse the activism itself but to identify the ways in which activism is framed and impeded at the discursive level. I have attempted to show how the analysis of talk can reveal how activism is framed and, importantly, undermined. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate further political and social psychology research on activism in water and sanitation justice in the global South.

Funding

This work is based on funding from the National Research Foundation (grant number 90791).

Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The author has no support to report.

References

- African National Congress. (1995). *Address by President Nelson Mandela at the launch of the Masakhane Campaign, Koeberg*. Retrieved from http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1995/950225_masakhane.htm
- Alexander, P., Lekgowa, T., Mmope, B., Sinwell, L., & Xezwi, B. (2012). *Marikana: A view from the mountain and a case to answer*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media.
- Ayee, J., & Crook, R. (2003). *"Toilet wars": Urban sanitation services and the politics of public-private partnerships in Ghana*. Brighton, United Kingdom: Institute of Development Studies.
- Ballard, R., Habib, A., & Valodia, I. (2006). *Voices of protest: Social movements in post-apartheid South Africa*. Durban, South Africa: University of KwaZulu Natal Press.
- Barnes, B. R. (2009). Community 'participation', resistance and the water wars. *Journal of Health Management*, 11, 157-166. doi:[10.1177/097206340901100111](https://doi.org/10.1177/097206340901100111)
- Barnes, B. R., & Milovanovic, M. (2015). Class, resistance, and the psychologization of development in South Africa. *Theory & Psychology*, 25, 222-238. doi:[10.1177/0959354315573546](https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354315573546)

- Beinart, W., & Dubow, S. (1995). *Segregation and apartheid in twentieth-century South Africa*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Dominguez-Whitehead, Y., & Whitehead, K. A. (2014). Food talk: A window into inequality among university students. *Text & Talk*, 34, 49-68. doi:10.1515/text-2013-0037
- Doron, A., & Raja, I. (2015). The cultural politics of shit: Class, gender and public space in India. *Postcolonial Studies*, 18, 189-207. doi:10.1080/13688790.2015.1065714
- Edley, N. (2001). Analysing masculinity: Interpretive repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Gready, P., & Robins, S. (2017). Rethinking civil society and transitional justice: Lessons from social movements and 'new' civil society. *International Journal of Human Rights*, 21, 956-975. doi:10.1080/13642987.2017.1313237
- Han, C. (2015). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- IFAISA. (2012). *Know your rights, claim your rights*. Cape Town, South Africa: Institute for Accountability in South Africa.
- Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G. H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation*. (pp. 13-31). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Leibbrandt, M., Finn, A., & Woolard, I. (2012). Describing and decomposing post-apartheid income inequality in South Africa. *Development Southern Africa*, 29, 19-34. doi:10.1080/0376835X.2012.645639
- McDonald, D. A., & Ruiters, G. (Eds.). (2005). *The age of commodity: Water privatization in Southern Africa*. Pretoria, South Africa: Earthscan.
- McFarlane, C., & Silver, J. (2017). The poolitical city: "Seeing sanitation" and making the urban political in Cape Town. *Antipode*, 49, 125-148. doi:10.1111/anti.12264
- Myers, K. A., & Williamson, P. (2001). Race talk: The perpetuation of racism through private discourse. *Race and Society*, 4, 3-26. doi:10.1016/S1090-9524(02)00032-3
- Patel, K. (2013, May 16). Public protests: Gauteng's rising pressure cooker. *Daily Maverick*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-05-16-public-protests-gautengs-rising-pressure-cooker>
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. Los Angeles, CA, USA: Sage.
- Robins, S. (2014). The 2011 toilet wars in South Africa: Justice and transition between the exceptional and the everyday after apartheid. *Development and Change*, 45, 479-501. doi:10.1111/dech.12091
- Rose, N. (2000). Community, citizenship, and the third way. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 43, 1395-1411. doi:10.1177/00027640021955955
- Seekings, J., & Nattrass, N. (2005). *Class, race, and inequality in South Africa*. New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press.
- Statistics South Africa. (2012). *Census 2011: Census in brief*. Retrieved from http://www.statssa.gov.za/census/census_2011/census_products/Census_2011_Census_in_brief.pdf
- Terreblanche, S. J. (2002). *A history of inequality in South Africa: 1652-2002*. Durban, South Africa: University of Natal Press.

- Tileagă, C., & Stokoe, E. (Eds.). (2015). *Discursive psychology: Classic and contemporary issues*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- von Schnitzler, A. (2014). Performing dignity: Human rights, citizenship, and the techno-politics of law in South Africa. *American Ethnologist*, 41, 336-350. doi:[10.1111/amet.12079](https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12079)
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretive repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9, 387-412. doi:[10.1177/0957926598009003005](https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926598009003005)
- Whitehead, K. A. (2013). Race-class intersections as interactional resources in post-apartheid South Africa. In C. M. Pascale (Ed.), *Social inequality and the politics of representation: A global landscape* (pp. 49-63). Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage.

Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Health and Social Justice Activism in Changing Times"

The Right to Be Freepeople: Relational Voluntary-Assisted-Advocacy as a Psychological and Ethical Resource for Decolonizing Intellectual Disability

Charlotte Capri^{*a}, Leslie Swartz^b

[a] Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa. [b] Department of Psychology, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Abstract

Participating in social activism implies responsibility for its exchange and creation. We focus on Intellectual Disability (ID) as an advocacy site for individuals who are dependent on assistance with activities of daily life, and attend to the process of taking care during social justice projects. Our paper responds to current South African social justice controversies perpetrated against people who may be unable to independently mobilize against increasingly othering – even deadly – socio-political conditions. Underpinned by relational Ethics of Care, voluntary-assisted-advocacy can be a psychologically relational, intersubjective, and societal project that strives for ID citizenship-making and social justice. This paper draws on numerous interviews and a number of ethnographic observations in exploration of ID care. Empirical material was subjected to thematic content analysis, and participant quotes bring our argument to life. Relationships among people with Intellectual Disability (PWID) and non-ID assistant-advocates are asymmetrical. We can either uphold dominant non-ID voices, or transform socio-political ruling relations that maintain dependence on conditions of power and inequality. Our contributions to the advocacy we co-create today will shape the activism we will depend on in the future. We consider relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy as a psychological and ethical resource for sustainable, mutually satisfying social change.

Keywords: Intellectual Disability, relational psychology, social activism, voluntary-assisted-advocacy, rights crises, South Africa

Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2018, Vol. 6(2), 556–574, doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.946

Received: 2018-02-25. Accepted: 2018-10-08. Published (VoR): 2018-12-21.

Handling Editor: Cristian Montenegro, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Santiago, Chile

*Corresponding author at: Alexandra Hospital, c/o Alexandra and Annex Roads, Maitland, 7405, South Africa. E-mail: Charlotte.Capri@uct.ac.za



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

In this paper, we grapple with the socio-political location of people with Intellectual Disability (PWID)ⁱ in a country in the Global South. PWID are equally dependent, if not more so than others, on scarce public resources, but the direction of policy decisions and distribution of appropriate services rarely occurs in their favor (McKenzie, McConkey, & Adnams, 2013). PWID in South Africa are confronting socio-political changes that affect their lives, but have little to no opportunity to give input (Capri, Watermeyer, McKenzie, & Coetzee, 2017).

In what is now known as the Esidimeni crisis, 140 South Africans, most of them PWID, died after being moved from state-supported care to inadequate and, indeed, fatal care arrangements (Capri, Watermeyer, McKenzie, & Coetzee, 2018). The lethal treatment of care dependent people begs for changing those conditions which perpetuate social injustice and deprecating health. Our ideas regarding *voluntary-assisted-advocacy* emanate from our feelings about such injustices against PWID. We turn to some examples as background to our study. As the paper's authors, and members of broader disability advocacy, we illustrate with examples from our own experiences and introduce the dilemma that drives our argument: do we advocate for people who are assumed unable to do so, but risk upholding dominant voices, or do we withdraw assistance so as to not colonize and contaminate ID issues with non-ID voices?

Voluntary-Assisted-Advocacy

Advocacy by dominant, non-ID voices could disempower PWID by perpetuating “only what other people [want]” (Clegg, 2006, p. 131). In this discussion we introduce our notion of voluntary-assisted-advocacy, an approach which, if defined at its core, holds the principle that PWID drive social change agendas in relationship with non-ID assistant-advocates. Once a social justice claim has been identified, the principle that PWID approve ideas that reflect their experiences, and “reject those that do not”, is central to voluntary-assisted-advocacy relationships (Clegg, 2006, p. 131). Voluntary-assisted-advocacy is egalitarian, recognizes that a truer ID expertise is held by PWID than by non-ID activists, and espouses respect for the specific needs of PWID who set the kinds and levels of assistance needed. Equitable support requirements during advocacy activities will exceed minimal levels but are still provided – whether assistance is accepted remains an individual's choice and is the point of voluntary-assisted-advocacy.

We will talk about how voluntary-assisted-advocacy engages with disability scholarship by drawing from Tronto and Kittay's Ethics of Care principles. By intersecting activism and research, voluntary-assisted-advocacy might be useful for informing research and policy, foregrounding self-identified life requirements, designing services and care practices, lobbying for ID citizenship and rights implementation, developing political behavior, realizing socio-economic participation, and facilitating engagement among PWID and assistant-advocates who wish to change restrictive socio-political conditions.

In order to further conceptualize voluntary-assisted-advocacy, we offer some examples where it could be of relevance, interrogate our ensuing dilemma and pull out its resultant questions. Although the issues raised might be equally relevant to PWID in countries that train ID physicians (the Netherlands) and ID psychiatrists (the United Kingdom), we draw on South African examples and quotes from our research participants. Some related implications for voluntary-assisted-advocacy bring our discussion to a close.

Background

Most individuals with disabilities live in the Global South, representing nearly one quarter of the world's poorest people (Emerson, 2007; Groce, Kumbhavi, et al., 2011; Groce, Kett, et al., 2011). Approximately 200 million people live with ID, making it the world's most prevalent disability (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). With less expectation of competence but of increased problems, PWID are more often unemployed or underemployed compared to the general population and other disability groups (Carvalho-Freitas & Stathi, 2017). Socio-political exclusion, isolation, segregation, abuse, neglect, stigma, and death have resulted from ignorance,

fear, misconceptions, and discrimination regarding PWID (Byrne, 2018; Flores, 2017; Maclean et al., 2017; Makgoba, 2016; Wissink, van Vugt, Smits, Moonen, & Stams, 2018).

Frequently violated rights of PWID in private and public settings pertain to sexual and physical abuse; problems accessing services; involuntary institutionalization; denial of consensual sexuality, marriage or parenting; exploitation; unemployment and occupational restrictions (De Vries, Venter, Jacklin, & Oliver, 2013; Drew et al., 2011; Roy, Roy, & Roy, 2012).

Despite ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) a decade ago (United Nations [UN], 2007), South Africa's legal system has yet to assimilate the international conventions into domestic legislation on behalf of PWID (Huus, Granlund, Bornman, & Lygnegård, 2015). South Africans with ID, however, are entitled to social justice as equal citizens (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). Yet PWID are often at risk of lifelong dependence on caregivers, a relatively powerless societal position (Calitz, 2011; Reeve, 2006), and have little access to resources. Relative to levels of functioning (see Figure 1), some individuals with ID can resist subordination, practice self-determination, participate autonomously, and exercise their potential with less assistance. Voluntary-assisted-advocacy can support self-advocacy, but would only occur if asked for and in adherence to the requirements and requests of the person with ID. While individuals with Mild ID might be more able to self-advocate, people living with more severe levels of ID would be less likely to do so unaided.

Parallels exist between politics of voice in the Global South and access to voice by PWID, broadly defined to include non-verbal PWID who also have something to say. As with conditional aid arrangements between the Global North and South, little space is left for PWID to negotiate power when their every support requirement depends on others' socio-political practices. Given the direction of power in asymmetrical relationships, protest by PWID is readily viewed as a hindrance and "likely to be taken as resistance or obstruction" (Tronto, 2010, p. 165). Efforts at behavioral self-representation can be dangerous when powerful assistants attribute this means of protest as aggression and behaviors that challenge. Similarly, resistance from the Global South to conform to aid conditions can result in withheld benefits as a form of political pressure to comply.

The following examples highlight a lack of consultation with PWID, lend context to the questions we ask in light of our dilemma, and illustrate how discriminatory policies can impact the lives of PWID when denied "a place at the table where their fates may be decided" (Kittay, 2009, p. 620). Excluding PWID from decision-making processes that can cost their lives is unjust (Kittay, 2009). The Esidimeni disaster evinces ignorance of non-derogable rights violations that make it hard for PWID to be alive. It also reveals consequences of disregarding advice.

Fatal Care: Esidimeni

An arbitration into the most catastrophic care disaster in South African recorded history heard closing arguments on Friday, 9 February 2018 (Nicolson, 2018). Although the Gauteng (province of South Africa) Director of Mental Health Services was warned in 2015 that community care for deinstitutionalized PWID was lacking, the "Gauteng Mental Health Marathon Project" continued into 2016 and 2017 for disputably financial reasons (Makgoba, 2016, p. 1; Rahlaga, 2018).

By June 2016, 2 267 people had been transferred from Life Healthcare Esidimeni facilities to community based non-governmental organizations. Three months later, the National Health Minister initiated inquests into mounting deaths of former Esidimeni residents (eNews Channel Africa, 2018). A Health Ombud report was released on 11

February 2017. Arbitration began in October 2017 chaired by former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke (African News Agency, 2017).

At least half of the deceased lived with high support needs and severe to profound ID, and died from cold, hunger, dehydration, and infection (Capri et al., 2017; Makgoba, 2016). At the time of writing, 140 people have died while more than 50 remain unaccounted for (Chabalala & Pijoos, 2018). The dead cannot speak, but Esidimeni victims who are still suffering have as little voice. Clinicians, families, and officials were called to testify at the hearings, but no PWID were heard (J. McKenzie, personal communication, 2018). Makgoba's (2016) Ombud report equally lacked testimony from PWID.

PWID Do not Count

State counsel argued that Esidimeni victims are not entitled to constitutional damages and that evidence of non-derogable rights violations must be ignored (Bornman, 2018). Although a formally dismantled political project, *apartheid* is seemingly perpetuated in human worth politics. South Africa's 2001 National Census excluded PWID in institutional care, effectively remanding them to non-entities. Despite exceeding ID rates in high-income countries, South Africa's last accurate prevalence studies date to the 1990s (Christianson et al., 2002; Kromberg, Christianson, & Manga, 1997; Kromberg et al., 2008).

Furthermore, "[i]ntellectual disability was not measured directly" during the 2011 Census either, while (very) young children with disabilities were not profiled at all (Statistics South Africa [SSA], 2014, p. 23). Although SSA (2014) is aware that persons with severe disabilities tend to live in care facilities, PWID in such settings were again excluded from the 2011 count. Applying the Washington Group Short Set of Disability Questions to South Africans with "difficulty remembering or concentrating" was the closest inclusion criteria for ID (SSA, 2014, p. 34; Washington Group on Disability Statistics, 2018).

South Africans With ID: No Person No Vote

Citizenship encapsulates rightful participation in national spaces while duties and obligations toward others are upheld (Yeung, Passmore, & Packer, 2008). Although South Africa's political rights enfranchise prisoners (Constitutional Court of South Africa, 1999; s19.3a, RSA, 1996; Swart, 2015), PWID 18 years and older may not vote freely in political contests more than two decades after the famed 1994 general election (Combrinck, 2014; Hartley, 2013; Ndenze, 2013; RSA, 1998a). An outmoded "unsound mind" aphorism still justifies disenfranchisement regardless of constitutional citizenship (s8.2c, s20, RSA, 1996), international support (Article 29a, UN, 2007; Combrinck, 2014) and suffrage elsewhere (Hood, 2014; Kjellberg & Hemmingsson, 2013; The Electoral Commission UK, 2015).

By ratifying the UNCRPD (UN, 2007), South Africa committed to championing the human rights of PWID (Officer & Shakespeare, 2013). A decade later, lawmakers' ongoing lack of political will to understand what "intellectual disabilities actually *mean*" surely constitutes a political injustice (emphasis added) (Government Gazette, 2015, p. 50).

Multi-Layered Socio-Political Injustices

When combined with poverty, lack of government services integration to meet basic needs of PWID creates dire living conditions (Saloojee, Phohole, Saloojee, & IJsselmuiden, 2007). Graduates from various disciplines are ill-prepared for meeting ID service needs (Geiger, 2012; Roberts, Chetty, Kimmie-Dhansay, Fieggen, & Stephen,

2016), but ID expertise is predominantly located in non-ID individuals at tertiary institutions from which PWID remain excluded.

Although there is South African literature on justice for PWID who are crime victims, three studies published during the past 25 years barely touch on offenders with ID (Capri, Abrahams, et al., 2018). Without assistance and consideration of their specific needs, offenders with ID face obstacles to procedural justice. They enter a criminal justice system where even non-ID individuals find rules, processes and procedures difficult to understand. Testifying to their own case, fair treatment and equality before the law becomes problematic for PWID.

Selecting a Theoretical Frame for the Work

Our Dilemma

When PWID with high support needs are mistreated, the temptation to advocate increases, especially when political responses are tepid (Mahlase, 2018; Masweneng, 2018a, 2018b). There has to be a way of resolving the dilemma of either withdrawing under the guise of fostering independence (while Esidimeni unfolds in the press); and working toward social justice in a dignifying and collaborative way (Capri et al., 2017; Swartz & Marchetti-Mercer, 2018). “Giving” voice to people who may be unable to independently mobilize against injustices becomes problematic – we silence them while paradoxically reproducing dangerous stereotypes of PWID who cannot express their grievances for themselves (Capri et al., 2017; Swartz & Marchetti-Mercer, 2018).

While it matters that we act for “people who cannot think, remember, speak, or write” (Sinason, 2010, p. 3), and that we articulate the worth of individuals who cannot contribute in commonly valued ways (Kittay, Jennings, & Wasunna, 2005, p. 456), it is also maintained that traditional knowledge hegemonies have marginalized “the most important voices ... in discourses on disability” (Capri & Coetzee, 2012, p. 2). As ID activists, we can battle perceived injustice but run the risk of imposing our hegemonic narrative on non-dominant voices. Our power to speak on behalf of PWID can limit inclusive spaces for ownership of the conversation (Capri et al., 2017).

Since inaction is a counter-productive and unlikely option, relational advocacy as a form of social activism can be one way of interrogating our dilemma. Transforming unhelpful socio-political attitudes toward marginalized individuals requires mutually satisfying critical engagement with oppressive structures we comply with and ableist practices we collude with (like speaking-*for*-advocacy).

During any given work day, we deal with issues that speak to the predicament of using our agency and inadvertently disabling PWIDs’ use of voice. While the above examples complicate our project of voluntary-assisted-advocacy, they elicit questions pertinent to our discussion:

1. If appropriate representation is absent, would a victory in the above examples be empowering (Swartz & Marchetti-Mercer, 2018)?
2. We can encourage PWID to make justice claims for supposedly guaranteed protections and resources (Kittay, 2009, p. 624), but how are people, less able to self-advocate without assistance, to make these initial claims?
3. How can PWID influence their own fates if disability activists occupy advocacy spaces in their stead?

4. If we reproduce patronizing advocacy by colonizing ID voices (Child, 2017; Swartz & Marchetti-Mercer, 2018), is it still “politically correct” to advocate on behalf of PWID? Should we not rather stay silent in order to avoid the politically offensive practice of colonizing ID issues?
5. Not positioned as post-liberal citizens or consumers of the capitalist complex (Tronto, 1993, 2010), PWID are kept out of mind as non-productive individuals who, in their consumption of our labor, do not deserve to protest. Can PWID rightfully engage in dissent on condition that they turn into producers who may complain if something does not suit?
6. If one cannot express disagreement verbally, or if you can but are not heard, how do you protest? Where do you turn if you need to inconvenience the agenda of powerful assistants?
7. Can we honor PWID by increasing interpersonal compensation and reassurance in a collaborative way *because* individual powers have failed (Morris, 2001)?
8. Can we decolonize the voices of PWID by taking a speaking-*with* position that dilutes non-ID dominant narratives (Swartz & Marchetti-Mercer, 2018)?

We believe ID voices must contribute to the reorganization of dominant political complexes.ⁱⁱ But because we cannot know what a person with ID might need, since (a) we do not have ID, and (b) every person with ID has particular needs (Tronto, 2010), we also believe that PWID should self-determine the targets for change and assistance required, as far as possible (see Figure 1). Since the interests of PWID are preferenced, our assistance can be requested once an individual identifies a life quality claim and enlists our help to think about what needs to be said and done (Capri & Coetzee, 2012; Walmsley, 2014).

Our notion of relationship among PWID and non-ID assistant-advocates engages with disability scholarship and draws from Tronto and Kittay’s Ethics of Care principles. When applied to issues of ID citizenship and policy creation, the former speaks to socio-political participation as freepeople and the latter to the ethical collection and value of insider narratives for understanding ID issues.

Ethics of Care Theory and Human Interdependence

Generally, Ethics of Care is a normative theory that questions justice and injustice, and does so by drawing attention to how we respond to people who are vulnerable to our choices and depend on our care – especially if “[w]e human beings are the sorts of beings we are because we are cared for by other human beings” (Kittay, 2009, p. 625).

More specifically, Tronto (2010) and Kittay (2009) suggest that human life is relational, that we are not isolated selves, and that we exchange care in every relationship. Dependence and interdependency are central to being human, and individualist human independence is interrogated. We cannot survive without assistance in times of vulnerability and need. Care is provided when required, and we strive to eliminate barriers that constrict “freedom to exercise whatever capacities one has or can develop” (Kittay et al., 2005, p. 458). Whereas a just society would meet needs within the constraints of available resources, it can be disabling when constraints are cited as an excuse for *not* meeting needs in ways that contribute to developing capacities across various adaptive domains.

Kittay et al. (2005) do not view needing assistance as a limitation, but as a social resource. If commonplace, assistance secures relationships in which having unequal support needs is safe. If assistance is not withheld, regardless of required support level, it becomes equally safe to need more or less support. Ethics of Care promotes dignity of dependence since we are moral equals in our inevitable need for care. PWID are not obliged to accept

inappropriate care, and may refuse assistance that makes them feel bad. Care ethicists value human variation that is not contingent on independence. Value is found in needing one another, and dignity does not require reciprocal exchanges in symmetrical relationships of power (Kittay, 2009).

Humans' continuous and inevitable need for assistance implies interdependence, celebrates others' support of dependents whom we are unwilling or unable to assist ourselves, and emphasizes that the individuals who care for others (and thus also for us) be justly cared for in turn (Tronto, 2010).

From an Ethics of Care perspective, disability advocacy should examine its purpose, recognize power relations among PWID and non-ID assistant-advocates, and meet individuals' social justice ends by means of particular assistance. ID activism is not over once we believe a protest has been executed successfully (Tronto, 2010), but completed and legitimate only if accepted by PWID (Kittay, 2014).

Engaging in mutually satisfying activism now, in the form of relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy, can help create a care-interdependent society in which we need not feel bad about our selves when we become unable to advocate for ourselves.

Method

Positionality of the Authors

The terms “we”, “our”, and “us” include other willing disability rights advocates and locate our voices as the authors. As does the Bill of Rights (RSA, 1996), we believe PWID should be equally enabled to not only claim social justice, but receive its subsequent resources and protections (Kittay, 2009, p. 624). We both are clinician-researchers and licensed psychologists in South Africa, perhaps the most unequal society in the world (World Bank, 2017), and one of us works in public ID mental health care facilities. Our key performance areas include advocacy and community engagement. Our experiences of studying institutionalized psychiatric ID care (Capri, 2016), together with Esidimeni and its aftermath, play the biggest role in wanting to change deteriorating political relations and social conditions pertaining to PWID.

Working in the field of ID as able-bodied and non-ID is not uncomplicated (Capri & Swartz, 2018; Swartz, 2010), as is being occupational specific professionals in the Global South who earn a relatively good South African wage. We consider ourselves well-meaning when we point to performances of racism as White people, and when we write about the injustices of infantilization on behalf of PWID. In both instances, voice and expertise is located in the wrong place, and authenticity – the issues that *really* matter but we have no awareness of because we are not Black nor do we live with ID – is lost. This brings us back to our dilemma: contingent on level of severity of ID, there are people who are not as able to make justice claims for resources and protections as ID self-advocates are. But is advocating on behalf of PWID presumably unable to self-advocate an appropriate form of engagement, does it serve the ID community, is it socially just, and can it help society welcome PWID?

The examples of how PWID are treated and responded to in South Africa highlight areas in which voluntary-assisted-advocacy, alongside self-advocacy, can enable action for social justice. They also identify ongoing issues that we can collaborate on with self-advocates in order to inform appropriate policy within a broader Ethics of Care frame.

Data Collection

Our thoughts regarding voluntary-assisted-advocacy stem from exploring ID care performance with PWID who live with mental ill-health in psychiatric settings, interviewing their non-ID assistants, and collecting ethnographic data on inpatient wards (see [Table 1](#)). We gathered data from three sources within two separately functioning South African specialized ID care sites. Information of participants with ID (see [Table 2](#)) includes terminology per the Employment Equity Act ([RSA, 1998b](#)). Descriptors that would have rendered participants of this racially diverse group identifiable were excluded.

Table 1

Qualitative Research Methodology and Data Collection

Research method	Participants	Data collection	Data capturing	Data treatment	Data analysis
A. Ethnography	Wards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care participant observation 3 wards 45 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpreting field notes Triangulating with B and C 	Observational data were examined and interpreted for common themes
B. Narrative	Nurses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free Association Narrative Interviews 16 nurse participants 14.9 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital voice recorder Research journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcription Triangulating with A and C 	Narrative data were examined and interpreted for common themes until saturation reached
C. Narrative	Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intersubjectivity informed therapeutic interactions 10 resident participants 59 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital voice recorder Research journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcription Triangulating with A and B 	Narrative data were examined and interpreted for common themes until saturation reached

Table 2

Resident Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Race	Research site	Level of ID	Interview language	Consent or assent
Resident J	Male	White	2	Mild	Afrikaans	Consent
Resident J2	Female	Colored	1	Moderate	Afrikaans	Assent
Resident N	Male	White	2	Mild	Afrikaans	Consent
Resident E	Female	White	2	Moderate	Afrikaans	Consent
Resident G	Male	Colored	1	Moderate	Afrikaans and English	Declined
Resident R	Male	Colored	1	Severe	Afrikaans	Assent
Resident W	Male	Colored	2	Mild	English	Consent
Resident T	Male	White	2	Moderate	Afrikaans	Consent
Resident G2	Male	White	2	Moderate	English	Declined
Resident D	Female	White	2	Mild	English	Consent

The impairments PWID live with are no longer considered fixed and categorical but move along a continuum of domains that inform on severity level of ID. Impairments are likely not reversible and assistance needs will vary according to required levels of support, but individuals can be aided in developing adaptive skills to overcome particular limitations.

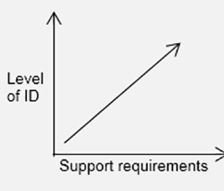
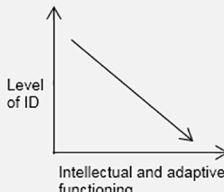
	INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONS	ADAPTIVE FUNCTIONING		
	Conceptual Domain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the individual uses reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgement, learning from experience, and learning in educational settings How the individual uses time, money, the telephone, and technology devices 	Socialization Domain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses job skills (community) interacts with others (interpersonal relationships) uses leisure time demonstrates responsibility and sensitivity to others (coping skills) 	Communication Domain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the individual listens and pays attention, and what he/she understands (receptive) What the individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> says, how he/she uses words and sentences to gather and provide information (expressive) understands about how letters make words, and what he or she reads or writes (written) 	Daily Living Skills Domain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How the individual eats, dresses, and practices personal hygiene (personal) What household tasks the individual performs (domestic)
	Level of Intellectual Disability			
	Mild Intellectual Disability	Moderate Intellectual Disability	Severe Intellectual Disability	Profound Intellectual Disability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support is needed in one or more areas to meet age-related expectations Few barriers to social inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing and generalized assistance is required on a daily basis to complete conceptual tasks of daily life Care givers assist person with life decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care givers provide extensive supports with all activities of daily living and problem solving throughout life Individual requires supervision at all times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual is dependent on others for all aspects of daily physical care, but might be able to participate in some of these activities Co-occurring physical and sensory difficulties are frequent barriers to participation and social inclusion

Figure 1. Continuum of support needs according to severity of ID^a.

^aAdapted from: APA. (2013). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition: DSM-5.

Findings

ID Activism by Means of Relational Voluntary-Assisted-Advocacy?

Ethics of Care theory implies that a traditionally dependent person can drive, request, reject, accept, suggest, or modify activities and relationships with non-ID assistants. By involving PWID directly in their own treatment, change could be initiated in ableist institutional systems. During our research, Resident J enquired about assistance with behaviors that challenge and whether his self-determined transfer request was discussed with a self-identified audience:

RJ: *So did you tell [clinician M] what I said?...I'll get out of here. (Resident J)*

CC: *How?*

RJ: *They'll talk about my behavior and manners. The nurses. The staff.*

CC: *What will they say?*

RJ: *They'll say, "No, let him go back, you might as well. He was nicely behaved and his manners were nice. He wasn't rude".*

Accounting for interdependence, relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy focuses on (a) assisting PWID now, and (b) assisting our future selves while doing so. We are contributing to the kind of society and assistants we want for ourselves when we become increasingly dependent in *that* society on *those* assistants. We are culpable in

shaping the society we will be vulnerable in, policies that will enable or disable us, and assistants that will co-create our care with us.

Relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy asks us to reflect on the kinds of people we make during activism performances by challenging our contributions to the disablement of those who, for now, depend on us. Because it lets us relinquish power imbalances that suspend the voices and agendas of PWID (Lynggaard, 2008), we can admit to our non-expertise in living with ID without needing to shame people for their vulnerability or hold power over them. Given dominant neo-liberal societal power relations, socio-political inclusion similarly depends on the ways in which non-ID politicians, as fellow person-makers, practice inclusion.

Co-Creating Socio-Political Citizens

As do we all, PWID use others' minds to gain knowledge about themselves (Fonagy & Target, 2007). "To know that one arouses dismay", however, "sickens the spirit of anyone" (Mairs, 1996 as cited in Morris, 2001, p. 103). PWID might internalize others' dismay as disgust for their condition (Sinason, 2010). Using non-ID researchers' findings to learn about oneself becomes the self one knows. Within a colonized mind, little space remains for self-identified research questions with which to drive socio-political change.

Intersubjectivity holds that any interaction potentially generates spaces in which interdependent people are constantly being made. In taking social action with PWID, we are essentially creating our own and others' selves. Our subjectivities – and the activism we pursue from these – are accessible for use by others as a perceived external representation of themselves, available to their inner reality as knowledge of a world that celebrates or misrepresents them. We are constantly making, and being made into, the kinds of people who produce enabled or disabled others.

In beginning to consider intellectually disabled South Africans as socio-political persons, assisting PWID with developing policy formulating and research capabilities can delineate conditions for life enhancing care and participation in citizenship (Capri, 2019; Walmsley, 2004a). Opportunities for citizenship and autonomous research might help to increase resilience against subordination and decrease subjugation dynamics.

Re-Doing Policy

A presidential report on disability did not seek input by PWID, yet claims to have used commissioned research and information from "roundtable discussions with a range of stakeholders" (Van Der Byl, 2014, p. 2).ⁱⁱⁱ When non-ID experts, perhaps in pursuit of their own agendas, differ from PWID in what is politically needed, knowledge presumed on behalf of PWID can distance them from their own experiences (Capri, 2016; Tronto, 2010, p. 163; Walmsley, 2004b) and perpetuate their unintelligent dependent status:

You must be dumb here. If you try and be clever, you'll walk into trouble. (Resident J)

In principle, relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy shifts the locus of expertise (cleverness) by holding PWID as experts on life with ID. Researchers and policy makers with ID, as contributors to political artefacts like presidential reports on disability, can inform socio-political change agendas from an empirical base (Walmsley, 2004c).

But if one's survival depends on others it might be terrifying to show dissatisfaction for dread of abandonment (Sinason, 2010). As severity of impairment increases, dependency fear of offending powerful assistants might obstruct protest. Given the positions PWID may be negotiating from, some compliance with systemic inequality

and resistance to change can be anticipated. Opposition can be costly, and care dependence might increase reticence to individuate from asymmetrical relationships (Sinason, 2010; Tronto, 2010). Ingratiating one's self to powerful assistants could remain a way of bargaining for survival:

CC: *But E, for you it feels like, only if you do something for people then they take an interest in you, and...if you don't have anything to do for them, then they go away?*

RE: *Then they don't know you. (Resident E).*

Ethics of Care principles that underpin relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy spoil such asymmetry, while claims to just treatment represent assertions of power:

RJ: *I don't know what is wrong in this place. We've reported [the problem] how many times. How's this place? Broken or working?*

CC: *You could be treated better?*

RJ: *Exactly. These things should have been fixed long ago. (Resident J)*

Eliciting Self-Identified Life Requirements

Before the policy contributions of PWID can dilute dominant non-expert voices in control of decision-making, we must "get to" expert voices of PWID with care (Capri & Coetzee, 2012, p. 956). We found that the free association narrative interview (FANI) method meets the objective of co-creating knowledge with PWID, foregrounding previously under-investigated contributions, and facilitating self-representative environments (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

Literature on *how* consent, assent, and particularly, refusal can take place is moving beyond issues of whether PWID can or may participate in policy informing research (Calveley, 2012; Capri & Coetzee, 2012; Kidney & McDonald, 2014; Walker, 2013):

CC: *You're looking at this [voice recorder]. Do you know it?*

RR: *Cell phone.*

CC: *Voice recorder. What you say is important. I don't want to forget. Is that ok?*

RR: *[Nods]. (Resident R, Session 1)*

CC: *Everything that we talk is private and confidential. In other words, nobody...*

RJ: *...will be told.*

CC: *Do you have any questions? (Resident J, Session 2)*

RJ: *What do you play on that thing [voice recorder]?*

CC: *I am recording so that I don't forget. Everything you say is important.*

RJ: *So where do you take that thing? And only you are going to listen?*

CC: *Because what we discuss is private.*

RJ: *Exactly. (Resident J, Session 3)*

Decision-making aids, like a protracted consent process, can assist PWID during permission processes (Capri & Coetzee, 2012). This includes viewing the decision not to participate, or to withdraw from a study after initially agreeing to participate, as indicative of a successful consent procedure:

CC: *I apologize, it's going to take me a while to learn your speech. If I don't understand you well, that's my fault, ok?*

RG: *Don't want to talk.*

CC: *That's ok. (Resident G, Session 1)*

Discussion

Implications for Voluntary-Assisted-Advocacy Practice

In considering a mutual shaping of people during interactions, advocacy is as relational an exchange as care (Kittay, 2009). Voluntary-assisted-advocacy and ID care relationships draw on this intersubjectivity precept in similar ways. If all care is relational, good or bad, and both influence the kinds of persons made during its planning and practice (Tronto, 2010), we must take cognizance of mutually exchanged and internalized subjectivities of whomever we are interacting with. But because care or advocacy is never a simple good-bad binary, we can at a minimum reject gradation among humans, foreground inclusion, emphasize mutually satisfying participation, and interrogate our hand in making enabled or disabled persons during social activism performances (Smith-Chandler & Swart, 2014; Stein & Stein, 2007). Government vows that “Esidimeni” will not be repeated (Phakgadi, 2018), but has not solicited input from PWID on avoiding such future occurrences. Voluntary-assisted-advocacy can either enable direct participation by PWID, or assistant-advocates can present recommendations from PWID.

Our ambitious idea raises questions about feasibility, implementation, and monitoring the progress of voluntary-assisted-advocacy activities. How could we go about expanding the scope of ID advocacy further? What if we start with ourselves first, then begin at work by designing the precepts of voluntary-assisted-advocacy into our supervisions, staffing budgets, Operational Protocols, and Quality Assurance documents? We can gauge attitude and disposition toward availability as an assistant-advocate on interview panels, or measure ourselves and one another against underlying principles. We could consider academic socialization, professional training modules, and research expansion. We could try and help Community Healthcare Clinics accept PWID as a matter of fact, thereby integrating services and treatment rather than “exiling” them to specialist care sites. By means of voluntary-assisted-advocacy, PWID can occupy boardroom seats and perhaps consult on future National Core Standards or Quality Standards for Healthcare. PWID and assistant-advocates could submit accessible articles based on their research, comment on draft bills, work on new legislation (like a Vulnerable Adults Act), write to newspaper editors, lobby for socio-political inclusion, participate in justice proceedings (e.g., the Esidimeni hearings), or insist that the next National Census accurately includes South Africans with ID.

Omitting PWID from censuses renders them invisible in the socio-political discourse of living with ID. We perpetuate exclusion by neglecting to question such practices (Goodley, Hughes, & Davis, 2012). If the estimated South African population is 55 908 865 (World Bank, 2017), and those with “difficulty remembering or concentrating” approximate 4.1% of the population (SSA, 2014, p. 34), there might be more than 2 000 000 South Africans with

ID. Regardless of topic, representative research samples need to include four PWID in every 100 participants. Legislators should be vying for the approval of more than one in every 25 South Africans. Assistant-activists can help lawmakers understand what ID actually means and appropriately advocate for enfranchisement (voting), suitable services (assistive technology during voting) and protections (against voter intimidation).

By excluding instructors with ID from health practitioner training programs, we lose opportunities to broaden practitioner understanding and integrate ID services (Grut, Braathen, Mji, & Ingstad, 2012). By means of fresh understanding and responses to ID, assistant-advocates can help PWID claim expertise on ID matters (Capri & Coetzee, 2012).

Concluding Thoughts

Just societies remove barriers to competency development and encourage self-determination. Relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy focuses on current and future interdependence, and on the kind of society and assistants we create for our own inevitable dependence to be cared about. ID activism for socio-political change implies advocating in a mutually satisfying way – now and for the future – with individuals who aim to support ID voices, dismantle restrictions and develop political behaviors. This also means engaging with those who prefer to uphold structural and attitudinal barriers.

Within voluntary-assisted-advocacy, emancipatory research and policy formulation can assist PWID in affecting change towards an enabling justice that tempers dangerous beliefs about ID (Clegg, 2006). If we break away from dominant voices to ultimately be led by PWID as ID experts, we might help create counter-hegemonic claims to “knowing ID”. In relational voluntary-assisted-advocacy spaces, experiences of disability are no longer bestowed upon but voiced by real experts who live with ID in a disabling world.

Notes

- i) Intellectual Disability (ID) is the clinical term used in South Africa according to the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) and equates with the term Learning Disabilities (LD) in the United Kingdom.
- ii) The terms “we”, “our”, and “us” include other willing disability rights advocates and locate our voices as authors of this paper.
- iii) The same document’s disclaimer admits to “a low prioritisation of resources for persons with intellectual disabilities” (p. 32).

Funding

This study was made possible, in part, with funding from the Vera Grover Scholarship Trust.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the participants for their contributions to this article.

References

- African News Agency. (2017, December 9). Life Esidimeni hearing to resume in January. eNCA. Retrieved from <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/life-esidimeni-hearing-to-resume-january>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC, USA: Author.
- Bornman, J. (2018, February 9). Life Esidimeni victims must not qualify for Constitutional damages – State. News24. Retrieved from <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/life-esidimeni-victims-must-not-qualify-for-constitutional-damages-state-20180209>
- Byrne, G. (2018). Prevalence and psychological sequelae of sexual abuse among individuals with an intellectual disability: A review of the recent literature. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 22(3), 294-310. doi:10.1177/1744629517698844
- Calitz, F. J. W. (2011). Psycho-legal challenges facing the mentally retarded rape victim. *South African Journal of Psychiatry*, 17, 66-72. doi:10.4102/sajpsychiatry.v17i3.280
- Calveley, J. (2012). Including adults with intellectual disabilities who lack capacity to consent in research. *Nursing Ethics*, 19, 558-567. doi:10.1177/0969733011426818
- Capri, C. (2016). *Thinking about intellectual disability care: An intersubjective approach* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/98387>
- Capri, C. (2019). The politics of person-making: Ethics of care, Intellectual impairment citizenship, and a reclaiming of knowledge. In B. Watermeyer, J. McKenzie, & L. Swartz (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of disability and citizenship in the Global South* (pp. 269-292). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Capri, C., Abrahams, L., McKenzie, J., Coetzee, O., Mkabile, S., Saptouw, M., . . . Swartz, L. (2018). Intellectual disability rights and inclusive citizenship in South Africa: What can a scoping review tell us? *African Journal of Disability*, 7, Article a396. doi:10.4102/ajod.v7i0.396
- Capri, C., & Coetzee, O. (2012). On the unethicity of disablism: Excluding intellectually impaired individuals from participating in research can be unethical. *African Journal of Disability*, 1, Article a23. doi:10.4102/ajod.v1i1.23
- Capri, C., & Swartz, L. (2018). 'We are actually, after all, just children': Caring societies and South African infantilisation of adults with intellectual disability. *Disability & Society*, 33, 285-308. doi:10.1080/09687599.2017.1409102
- Capri, C., Watermeyer, B., McKenzie, J., & Coetzee, O. (2017, December 8). Esidimenis are going on all the time. *Mail & Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-12-08-00-esidimenis-are-going-on-all-the-time>
- Capri, C., Watermeyer, B., McKenzie, J., & Coetzee, O. (2018). Intellectual disability in the Esidimeni tragedy: Silent deaths. *SAMJ: South African Medical Journal*, 108, 153-154. doi:10.7196/SAMJ.2018.v108i3.13029
- Carvalho-Freitas, M. N. D., & Stathi, S. (2017). Reducing workplace bias toward people with disabilities with the use of imagined contact. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 47, 256-266. doi:10.1111/jasp.12435
- Chabalala, J., & Pijoos, I. (2018, February 6). 4 of 144 patients do not form part of Life Esidimeni arbitration process – ombudsman. News24. Retrieved from <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/4-of-144-patients-do-not-form-part-of-life-esidimeni-arbitration-process-ombudsman-20180206>

- Child, K. (2017). Judge Moseneke to Esidimeni tragedy official: 'Maybe you just didn't care!' *TimesLive*. Retrieved from <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-11-23-judge-moseneke-to-esidimeni-tragedy-official-maybe-you-just-didnt-care/>
- Christianson, A. L., Zwane, M. E., Manga, P., Rosen, E., Venter, A., Downs, D., & Kromberg, J. G. R. (2002). Children with intellectual disability in rural South Africa: Prevalence and associated disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 46, 179-186. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2788.2002.00390.x
- Clegg, J. (2006). Understanding intellectually disabled clients in clinical psychology. In D. Goodley & R. Lawthom (Eds.), *Disability and psychology: Critical introductions and reflections* (pp. 123-140). Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Combrinck, H. (2014). Everybody counts: The right to vote of persons with psychosocial disabilities in South Africa. *African Disability Rights Yearbook*, 2, 75-100.
- Constitutional Court of South Africa. (1999). Case CCT 8/99. Retrieved from <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/1999/3.pdf>
- De Vries, P. J., Venter, A., Jacklin, L., & Oliver, C. (2013). Behavioural phenotypes and neurodevelopmental disorders in Africa. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 57, 793-795. doi:10.1111/jir.12070
- Drew, N., Funk, M., Tang, S., Lamichhane, J., Chávez, E., Katontoka, S., . . . Saraceno, B. (2011). Human rights violations of people with mental and psychosocial disabilities: An unresolved global crisis. *Lancet*, 378, 1664-1675. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61458-X
- Emerson, E. (2007). Poverty and people with intellectual disabilities. *Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 13, 107-113. doi:10.1002/mrdd.20144
- eNews Channel Africa. (2018, January 22). *Infographic: Life Esidimeni timeline*. Retrieved from <http://www.enca.com/south-africa/infographic-life-esidimeni-timeline>
- Flores, R. L. (2017). State reform and respect for the rights of the disabled people: A reflection on the Olmstead decision the case of New York state. *Cogent Medicine*, 4, Article 1360542. doi:10.1080/2331205X.2017.1360542
- Fonagy, P., & Target, M. (2007). Playing with reality: IV – A theory of external reality rooted in intersubjectivity. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 88, 917-937. doi:10.1516/4774-6173-241T-7225
- Geiger, M. (2012). Communication training for centre-based carers of children with severe or profound disabilities in the Western Cape, South Africa. *African Journal of Disability*, 1(1), Article a10. doi:10.4102/ajod.v1i1.10
- Goodley, D., Hughes, B., & Davis, L. (2012). Introducing disability and social theory. In D. Goodley, B. Hughes, & L. Davis (Eds.), *Disability and social theory: New developments and directions* (pp. 1-14). New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Government Gazette No. 38802. (2015, May 18). *General Notice: Notice 445 of 2015*. Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printer. Retrieved from <https://search.opengazettes.org.za/text/7034?dq=actually%20mean&page=50>
- Groce, N., Kumbhavi, G., Wirz, S., Lang, R., Trani, J., & Kett, M. (2011). *Poverty and disability: A critical review of the literature in low and middle-income countries*. Retrieved from http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lc-ccr/centrepublishings/workingpapers/WP16_Poverty_and_Disability_review.pdf
- Groce, N., Kett, M., Lang, R., & Trani, J.-F. (2011). Disability and poverty: The need for a more nuanced understanding of implications for development policy and practice. *Third World Quarterly*, 32, 1493-1513. doi:10.1080/01436597.2011.604520
- Grut, L., Braathen, S. H., Mji, G., & Ingstad, B. (2012). Accessing community health services: Challenges faced by poor people with disabilities in a rural community in South Africa. *African Journal of Disability*, 1(1), Article a19. doi:10.4102/ajod.v1i1.19

- Hartley, W. (2013, September 16). IEC rejects suggestions that mentally impaired be allowed to vote. *Business Day*. Retrieved from <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2013/09/16/iec-rejects-suggestions-that-mentally-impaired-be-allowed-to-vote>
- Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2013). *Doing qualitative research differently: A psychosocial approach* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Hood, I. (2014, September 16). How will Scots with learning disabilities be voting in the referendum? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Huus, K., Granlund, M., Bornman, J., & Lyngnegård, F. (2015). Human rights of children with intellectual disabilities: Comparing self-ratings and proxy ratings. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 41, 1010-1017. doi:10.1111/cch.12244
- Kidney, C. A., & McDonald, K. E. (2014). A toolkit for accessible and respectful engagement in research. *Disability & Society*, 29, 1013-1030. doi:10.1080/09687599.2014.902357
- Kittay, E. F. (2009). The personal is philosophical is political: A philosopher and mother of a cognitively disabled person sends notes from the battlefield. *Metaphilosophy*, 40, 606-627. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9973.2009.01600.x
- Kittay, E. F. (2014). The completion of care – With implications for a duty to receive care graciously. In A. M. González & C. Iffland (Eds.), *Care professions and globalization* (pp. 33-42). New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kittay, E. F., Jennings, B., & Wasunna, A. A. (2005). Dependency, difference and the global ethic of longterm care. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 13, 443-469. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9760.2005.00232.x
- Kjellberg, A., & Hemmingsson, H. (2013). Citizenship and voting: Experiences of persons with intellectual disabilities in Sweden. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 10, 326-333. doi:10.1111/jppi.12056
- Kromberg, J. G. R., Christianson, A. L., & Manga, P. (1997). Intellectual disability in rural Black children in the Bushbuckridge district of southern Africa. *Southern African Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 9, 2-11. doi:10.1080/16826108.1997.9632485
- Kromberg, J., Zwane, E., Manga, P., Venter, A., Rosen, E., & Christianson, A. (2008). Intellectual disability in the context of a South African population. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 5, 89-95. doi:10.1111/j.1741-1130.2008.00153.x
- Lynggaard, H. (2008). On learning from people with intellectual disabilities: Invoking reciprocity. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 52, 708.
- Maclea, M. J., Sims, S., Bower, C., Leonard, H., Stanley, F. J., & O'Donnell, M. (2017). Maltreatment risk among children with disabilities. *Pediatrics*, 139(4), Article e20161817. Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/139/4/e20161817>. doi:10.1542/peds.2016-1817
- Mahlase, M. (2018, March 10). Ramaphosa defends disgraced Qedani Mahlangu's appearance at his Soweto walk. *News24*. Retrieved from <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/ramaphosa-defends-disgraced-qedani-mahlangus-appearance-at-his-soweto-walk-20180310>
- Makgoba, M. W. (2016). *The report into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of mentally ill patients: Gauteng Province – No guns: 94+ silent deaths and still counting*. Retrieved from Republic of South Africa, Office of the Health Ombud website: <https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/Esidimeni%20full%20report.pdf>
- Masweneng, K. (2018a, March 12). Ramaphosa slammed for walking with Qedani Mahlangu. *Times Live*. Retrieved from <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2018-03-12-ramaphosa-slammed-for-walking-with-qedani-mahlangu/>

- Masweneng, K. (2018b, July 24). Panyaza Lesufi defends re-election of Qedani Mahlangu to ANC provincial committee. *Business Day*. Retrieved from <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/politics/2018-07-24-panyaza-lesufi-defends-re-election-of-qedani-mahlangu-to-anc-provincial-committee/>
- McKenzie, J. A., McConkey, R., & Adnams, C. (2013). Intellectual disability in Africa: Implications for research and service development. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 35, 1750-1755. doi:10.3109/09638288.2012.751461
- Morris, J. (2001). Impairment and disability: Constructing an ethics of care that promotes human rights. *Hypatia*, 16, 1-16. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2001.tb00750.x
- Ndenze, B. (2013, September 17). Prisoners will vote in 2014 elections. *IOL*. Retrieved from <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/prisoners-will-vote-in-2014-elections-1.1578772>
- Nicolson, G. (2018, February 2). Life Esidimeni: Arbitration – Painful, flawed, full of lies – Still honoured the victims. *Daily Maverick*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-02-02-life-esidimeni-arbitration-painful-flawed-full-of-lies-still-honoured-the-victims>
- Officer, A., & Shakespeare, T. (2013). The world report on disability and people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 10, 86-88. doi:10.1111/jppi.12031
- Phakgadi, P. (2018, February 17). Makhura: Esidimeni tragedy will not happen again. *Eyewitness News*. Retrieved from <http://ewn.co.za/2018/02/17/makhura-esidimeni-tragedy-not-happen-again>
- Rahlaga, M. (2018, January 30). Creecy discredits health dept's claims in Esidimeni hearings. *Eye Witness News*. Retrieved from <http://ewn.co.za/2018/01/30/creecy-discredits-health-department-s-claims-in-esidimeni-hearings>
- Reeve, D. (2006). Towards a psychology of disability: The emotional effects of living in a disabling society. In D. Goodley & R. Lawthom (Eds.), *Disability and psychology: Critical introductions and reflections* (pp. 94-107). New York, NY, USA: Palgrave.
- Republic of South Africa. (1996). *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996: Chapter 2 – The Bill of Rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf>
- Republic of South Africa. (1998a). *Electoral Act 73 of 1998*. Retrieved from http://us-cdn.creamermedia.co.za/assets/articles/attachments/03302_elect_act73.pdf
- Republic of South Africa. (1998b). *Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998*. Retrieved from <http://bee.b1sa.co.za/docs/The%20Employment%20Equity%20Act%201998.pdf>
- Roberts, T., Chetty, M., Kimmie-Dhansay, F., Fieggen, K., & Stephen, L. X. G. (2016). Dental needs of intellectually disabled children attending six special educational facilities in Cape Town. *South African Medical Journal*, 106, 94-97. doi:10.7196/SAMJ.2016.v106i6.11006
- Roy, A., Roy, A., & Roy, M. (2012). The human rights of women with intellectual disability. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 105, 384-389. doi:10.1258/jrsm.2012.110303
- Saloojee, G., Phohole, M., Saloojee, H., & IJsselmuiden, C. (2007). Unmet health, welfare and educational needs of disabled children in an impoverished South African peri-urban Township. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 33, 230-235. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2214.2006.00645.x
- Sinason, V. (2010). *Mental handicap and the human condition: An analytic approach to intellectual disability*. London, United Kingdom: Free Association Books.

- Smith-Chandler, N., & Swart, E. (2014). In their own voices: Methodological considerations in narrative disability research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24, 420-430. doi:10.1177/1049732314523841
- Statistics South Africa. (2014). *Census 2011: Profile of persons with disabilities in South Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-01-59/Report-03-01-592011.pdf>
- Stein, M. A., & Stein, P. J. (2007). Beyond disability civil rights. *The Hastings Law Journal*, 58, 1203-1240.
- Swart, M. (2015). The prisoner voting dilemma: A comparison between the position in the United Kingdom and South Africa. *Journal of South African Law*, 2015, 706-718.
- Swartz, L. (2010). *Able-bodied: Scenes from a curious life*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Zebra Press.
- Swartz, L., & Marchetti-Mercer, M. (2018). Disabling Africa: The power of depiction and the benefits of discomfort. *Disability & Society*, 33, 482-486. doi:10.1080/02684527.2017.1400240
- The Electoral Commission (UK). (2015). *Voters with a disability are reminded there should be no barriers to them casting their vote on 7 May*. Retrieved from <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>
- Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. New York, NY, USA: Routledge.
- Tronto, J. C. (2010). Creating caring institutions: Politics, plurality, and purpose. *Ethics & Social Welfare*, 4, 158-171. doi:10.1080/17496535.2010.484259
- United Nations. (2007). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) A/RES/61/106*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>
- Van Der Byl, C. (2014). *Twenty year review South Africa 1994-2014. Background paper: Disability*. Retrieved from http://accessstech.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/12%20Disability_20YR.pdf
- Walker, E. M. (2013). Reflections on opportunities for people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities to give informed consent to participate in research [Abstract]. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 10, 181.
- Walmsley, J. (2004a). Involving users with learning difficulties in health improvement: Lessons from inclusive learning disability research. *Nursing Inquiry*, 11, 54-64. doi:10.1111/j.1440-1800.2004.00197.x
- Walmsley, J. (2004b). Inclusive learning disability research: The (nondisabled) researcher's role. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 65-71. doi:10.1111/j.1468-3156.2004.00281.x
- Walmsley, J. (2004c). Towards full citizenship, identity and people with intellectual disability (ID) [Abstract]. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 48, 476.
- Walmsley, J. (2014). Telling the history of self-advocacy: A challenge for inclusive research. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 27, 34-43. doi:10.1111/jar.12086
- Washington Group on Disability Statistics. (2018). *The Washington Group short set of questions on disability*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Washington-Group-Short-Set-of-Questions-on-Disability.pdf>
- Wissink, I. B., van Vugt, E. S., Smits, I. A., Moonen, X. M., & Stams, G.-J. J. (2018). Reports of sexual abuse of children in state care: A comparison between children with and without intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 43, 152-163. doi:10.3109/13668250.2016.1269881
- World Bank. (2017). *South Africa overview: World Bank Group*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/overview>

World Health Organization and World Bank. (2011). *World report on disability*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

Yeung, P. H., Passmore, A. E., & Packer, T. L. (2008). Active citizens or passive recipients: How Australian young adults with cerebral palsy define citizenship. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 33, 65-75.
doi:[10.1080/13668250701875129](https://doi.org/10.1080/13668250701875129)

Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Health and Social Justice Activism in Changing Times"

Towards a Liberatory Ethics of Care Framework for Organizing Social Change

Anjali Dutt^{*a}, Danielle Kohfeldt^b

[a] Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH, USA. [b] Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts, California State University, Long Beach, CA, USA.

Abstract

Community psychology originated as a discipline designed to reduce societal inequities and promote social justice. The field's development, however, coincides with the proliferation of neoliberal policies and ideology that run counter to many of the aims of community psychology. In light of the contemporary socio-political landscape, this paper advances a liberatory ethics of care model as a path forward for community psychologists interested in societal transformation. We illustrate liberatory care as a guide for social change via case studies of two different groups involved in transformation-oriented projects to improve the well-being of their communities (i.e., Latinx youth in the United States involved in an activist art project and women in rural Nicaragua involved in feminist organizing). We specifically illustrate that an ethics of care framework both guides the actions of these groups, and offers an alternative focus for community psychologists interested in promoting transformation towards more healthful and just societies. We aim to contribute to efforts to promote justice-oriented change by explicating the role of care-oriented communal values in promoting liberatory practices.

Keywords: ethics of care, social justice, qualitative research

Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2018, Vol. 6(2), 575–590, doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.909

Received: 2018-01-10. Accepted: 2018-10-08. Published (VoR): 2018-12-21.

Handling Editor: Cristian Montenegro, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Santiago, Chile

*Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Cincinnati, PO Box 210376 Cincinnati, OH 45219-0376, USA. Phone: (513)556-5516. E-mail: Duttal@ucmail.uc.edu



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Community psychology originated as a discipline designed to reduce societal inequities and promote social justice. The field's development, however, coincides with the proliferation of neoliberal policies and ideology that run counter to many of the aims of community psychology. Where community psychology emphasizes social change to enhance the wellbeing of marginalized groups, neoliberalism encourages limited interference in the existing social order, privatization of social goods, and a focus on self-improvement rather than collective liberation. Moreover, a consequence of the neoliberal era is the exacerbated socioeconomic inequality both within and between countries. Consequently, although the activist heart of community psychology has long been at odds with prevailing social practices and value systems (often those stemming from the United States), we currently find ourselves at

a point where the intellectual and empirical tools at our disposal are insufficient given the grave inequities surrounding us.

In light of the contemporary socio-political landscape, this paper advances a liberatory ethics of care as a path forward for community psychologists interested in liberatory transformation. A focus on ethics of care involves foregrounding human interdependence and shared responsibility to one another as essential processes in creating community change. Additionally, this paper implores us to ask what outcomes we desire in seeking more just realities, and encourages interrogation of the value frameworks utilized to achieve these goals. Moreover, our analysis of care ethics in propagating more liberatory environments responds to calls to move away from research narratives focused on damaged realities, and instead contributes to building a legacy of thoughtful and impactful strategies employed by marginalized communities to create meaningful change (Langhout, 2016; Tuck, 2009). In what follows, we discuss the origins and implications of dominant approaches to structuring communities and societies, and contrast this with approaches grounded in a liberatory ethics of care. We then more fully explicate the ecology of liberatory care ethics, with each theoretical tenet accompanied by examples from our work that demonstrate the enactment of care ethics among Latinx youth in the United States and women living in rural Nicaragua, all involved in efforts to contribute to just social change. These examples are intended to serve as sketches from the field to illustrate the concepts as well as the utility of ethics of care as a conceptual tool for understanding the nature of community-grounded justice efforts. The ultimate aim of this paper is to elucidate the transformative possibilities that exist when community psychologists and activists ground their efforts to promote change in liberatory care.

Liberalism, Neoliberalism and Their Influences on Contemporary Society

Scholars across disciplines have demarcated the previous several decades as the era of neoliberalism, noting that neoliberal policies and ideologies have become the dominant, often imposed, blueprint utilized to structure political change (Parker, 2014; Sastry & Dutta, 2013). Although neoliberalism and its philosophical predecessor liberalism are regularly mentioned in political critique and discourse, this often occurs in an acontextual manner in which the historical meanings are diluted, potentially hindering goals to seek more transformative and just alternatives (Harvey, 2007). In the broadest sense liberalism is associated with individual freedoms and protections. Many connect the promotion of liberal thought and policy to historical events including the English Civil Wars, the American and French Revolutions, and the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and later Adam Smith (Ball, Minogue, Girvetz, & Dagger, 2017). These events and connected philosophies mark periods of rapid social change directed towards freeing individual citizens from the political and financial chains of monarchs and aristocracy, albeit importantly the individual citizens of focus were overwhelmingly white men. As theories of liberalism have evolved and diverged, significant additions include arguments to remove barriers such as poverty, discrimination, and inequitable access to healthcare and education that prevent individuals from living freely (Ball et al., 2017). However, as in neoliberalism, many continue to view the reduction of any governmental influence beyond the protection of individual rights as the ultimate goal of modern governments (Harvey, 2007). It can be viewed as paradoxical that methods to promote freedom via neoliberal tactics can manifest in widespread disenfranchisement due to the social, rather than legal, barriers that are created or bolstered. Indeed, the very barriers liberals argue must be removed to promote freedom arise in connection to neoliberal policies (Harvey, 2007; Parker,

2014). Nevertheless, a primary focus on the individual rather than the relational, interconnected realities of human existence remain unifying links in both liberal and neoliberal narratives.

The concept of neoliberalism is derived from classic liberal economic theory, which argues for the elimination of barriers to trade and a belief in the efficiency of markets without governmental interference as a path to prosperity (Harvey, 2007). The prefix 'neo' refers to the reemergence and renewed implementation of this economic policy beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s, largely stemming from the United States. What began as an economic policy influenced by specific manifestations of liberal thought has grown into widespread ideology (Nafstad et al., 2007; Sastry & Dutta, 2013; Spivak & Sharp, 2008). The economic growth, largely experienced by those with preexisting power, that was associated with neoliberal economic policy incentivized decision makers in several sectors to make use of similar logic to rethink and restructure various aspects of society. For example, researchers have connected cuts to public spending on health care in the US, UK and Australia with neoliberal arguments stating that private markets are more cost-effective and efficient (McGregor, 2001). Similarly, neoliberal ideology in education casts students as potential profit makers, leading to a de-emphasis of civic values in education and increased focus on standardized testing (Connell, 2013; Parker, 2014). Perhaps ironically, despite the political left's frequent condemnation of anything associated with neoliberalism, Western societies' grounding in liberal individualism contributes to the proliferation of neoliberal values.

In recent years, exacerbated economic disparity has increased frustration with the existing configuration of the political order. The growth of both nationalist movements in the United States and Europe, and anti-capitalist movements globally can all be understood as increasingly audible actions calling for political change. In this sense, the neo/liberal logics that have created the contemporary socio-political and economic status quo have been recognized as insufficient and unjust. However, the recent rise of neoliberal nationalism in the West also casts light on the deceptive narrative of individualism in neo/liberalism (Harmes, 2012). For example, in psychology the notion of the independent self, affiliated with the West, stems from liberal individualism intertwined with colonial and neoliberal quests for domination (Adams & Estrada-Villalta, 2017). The establishment of the contemporary political order thus has not come about solely through the efforts of powerful, independently minded individuals. Rather, colonial and neoliberal practices establish a protective order for communities with preexisting power (e.g., white elites), in part through the myth of individualism. Similarly, the liberal independence used to define Western societies overlooks the lived experience and worldviews of women, people of color, and other groups with less sociopolitical power (Markus, 2017). Moreover, these groups historically and persistently have been tasked with more caregiving labor, both creating vantage points more attuned to the necessity of care and ideal voices to prioritize in theorizing equitable social transformation (Fine, 2007; Kurtiş & Adams, 2015). Indeed, efforts to create "a more equitable world requires cultivation of mentalities [more honestly] attuned to the interdependence of everyday life" (Adams & Estrada-Villalta, 2017, p. 37), and more interested in the wellbeing of the broader community.

Recent pushes for political change including the rise of nationalist, populist leaders in the U.S. and Brexit in the U.K. demonstrate alarming consequences associated with the accumulation of power at a global level (Dutt, 2018a). The individualist narratives that bolster Western economic dominance (and particularly that of the U.S.) continue to allow for an intensification of the destructive patterns that prioritize voices, concerns, and experiences of those with more preexisting power. Importantly, these tactics illuminate a collectivist orientation towards preserving the white, male, and Western hegemonic status quo. In discerning a path towards more transformative social change we urge researchers to focus on the values and strategies that have been expounded by those

who have long been underserved by existing political structures (e.g., women and people of color), who thus have been required to develop grassroots activism to ensure care for their community. More specifically, we call for a focus on a liberatory ethics of care as a prioritized theoretical framework in seeking transformative and socially just change.

Promoting a Liberatory Ethics of Care

Carol Gilligan (1982) conceptualized ethics of care as a moral orientation that focuses on maintaining relationships, responding to the needs of others, and a responsibility not to cause harm. During the 1980s and early 1990s much of the theorizing around ethics of care centered upon situating work that was typically gendered as feminine (e.g., taking care of children; tending to those who are aging or ill) as philosophically and morally rigorous and arduous, and deserving of greater societal valuing and compensation (Fine & Glendinning, 2005). Although Gilligan's work has been critiqued for its emphasis on gender differences that have not been empirically substantiated (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000), in recent years scholars outside of psychology have asserted that an ethics of care orientation is helpful for promoting more healthful and equitable societies (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). For example, theorists suggest that addressing social issues related to environmental stewardship and worker protections, might be more adequate if approached from an ethics of care, rather than solely a liberal, rights-based orientation (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Robinson, 2006). As such, scholars have begun to discuss the need for a *politicized* ethics of care to ensure that these values are reflected in social institutions and the culture at large (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Sevenhuijsen, 2003; Tronto, 1995).

Perhaps one reason ethics of care discourses have not been more prominent in work to promote social justice is that such relationally oriented values are in stark contrast to more prominent liberal discourses. Indeed, an ethics of care “calls on us to *take* responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone” (Held, 2006, p. 14-15). Furthermore, much of the most transformation-oriented theorizing around care ethics stems from members of communities who have been particularly underserved by the existing political order, namely Black women, whose theorizing calls into question individualistic myths in strategies for wellbeing (Thompson, 1998). For example, both Patricia Hill Collins (2005) and bell hooks (1984) have discussed the centrality of communality in Black women's lived experience, evidenced in practices such as othermothering. The experience of caring for children, or being cared for by women, who are not biologically/legally related cultivates a deeply ingrained sense of interdependence and collective responsibility to others in the community that subverts individualistic narratives about the nuclear family. Interestingly, despite the reality that wealthy families have long hired nannies (largely women of color) to care for their children, which could also disrupt romanticism of the nuclear family, the attached narrative is more frequently associated with neoliberal idealization about opportunities that arise through wealth. Similarly, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (1994) illustrates the creative strategizing Black women employ in community work that necessitates an understanding of herself as powerful because of her knowledge on interdependence and capability of challenging structures and practices that disadvantage her community. This notion of the self as powerful is similar to narratives about the self in liberal individualism, however in Gilkes's analysis women use their individual power to affirm their own self-worth for liberatory aims. Moreover, by asserting that care ethics must center the dismantling of systemic power inequities that acutely impact people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, poor, and disabled communities, Black women theorists unveil practices that transcend the individual/collective divide and push us towards envisioning an ethics of care that begets justice.

Uniting calls for a politicized ethic of care and Black feminist theorizing on care with liberation psychology further enhances our ability to identify an ethics of care that promotes transformation. Liberation psychology is an approach to psychology that aims to understand the experiences of oppressed communities by actively identifying and addressing the sociopolitical structures that contribute to oppression. A leader in this approach, Maritza [Montero \(2007\)](#) identifies de-ideologization and de-alienation as two processes involved in promoting liberatory environments and experiences. These interwoven processes involve developing an understanding that individual experience is shaped by socio-political structure, and that there is thus an inherent interconnectivity uniting lived realities. Acknowledging this connected experience urges concern for the collective and caregiving action to address identified sources of inequity. In many societies, caregiving is regularly conceptualized and experienced as a burden, in large part because the inequitable distribution and inadequate compensation of caregiving labor imposes undue burden to those tasked with this work. However, through de-ideologizing and de-alienating practices care is no longer relegated as a sole concern of families and intimate circles. Rather, care becomes a lens of concern for the community and broader society. Fostering care oriented environments and structures can thus alleviate the individual burden of care, while simultaneously propagating justice, wellbeing and a sustained sense of solidarity. Building upon calls for a politicized ethics of care, a liberatory ethics of care encourages both integration of care values at the structural and policy level, and necessitates prioritization of voices and perspectives that have been underacknowledged and underserved in the existing sociopolitical order. In this sense, a focus on care begets and maintains iterative movement towards collective liberation.

This vision of liberatory care builds upon processes identified by feminist psychologists working collaboratively with marginalized communities and suggests links between care and justice. For example, several scholars have noted the role of involvement in consciousness raising communities as catalyzing understanding of connections between the personal and political, and consequent interest in work to promote social justice ([Dutt & Grabe, 2017](#); [Moane, 2006](#)). That the foundation for interest in promoting more equitable distribution of wealth, services, and opportunity is linked to involvement in community spaces where care work likely occurs is both important and not surprising. Additionally, researchers have documented connections between economic-inequity driven migration and the negligence of social justice and care, namely that individuals from the Global South are regularly forced to take on care-giving labor in the North, rendering substantial unmet care needs in their home communities ([Kofman & Raghuram, 2006](#)). Care and justice are inherently interconnected, and only through their united focus can we begin to adequately create more healthful, equitable, and compassionate societies.

Collectively, the reviewed works bring to focus two false dichotomies associated with theorizing on care: (a) the individual/collective divide, and (b) the notion that care and justice can be separated from one another. Collectively oriented care tactics have long been utilized to maintain the hegemony of elite groups, and care for the self is essential for both realizing self-worth and having the sustained capacity to contribute to community improvement. Thus, although care has been used to impede justice, care processes have also always been essential, albeit often overlooked, elements for fostering social justice. [Table 1](#) illustrates different examples of ways care has been utilized for individuals and collectives, for both justice attenuating and promoting means. Given the complex possibilities that arise through a focus on care, we focus the remainder of our paper on processes to promote liberatory care.

Table 1

Example Manifestations of Care Ethics That Either Maintain or Challenge Inequity

Manifestation of care	Care for the Individual	Care for the Collective
Care that maintains inequitable status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual hoarding of Wealth Self-care that neglects how other's might be harmed in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Welfare Political and corporate nepotism
Care for equitable social transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-care that centers on substantiating self-worth Bonding with others who have shared experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing to address inequities that inhibit the health and wellbeing of communities Paid parental/family leave in the workplace

In the next section of the paper we draw on secondary data from two case studies of community-based, action-oriented research projects to examine how liberatory care shapes the actions and goals of two collectives involved in efforts to improve community wellbeing. The Mural Arts Program endeavored to build collective identity and solidarity to combat social exclusion. The feminist organizing in Nicaragua through *Xochilt Acalt* aimed to address gendered inequities throughout the community through various solidarity-oriented strategies. Both focused on promoting well-being and transformative change in marginalized communities and conceptualized a theory of change founded upon a liberatory ethics of care. Our motivation for the inclusion of these projects is the critique that narratives of care have been used to justify colonial practices without consideration of local definitions of care (Narayan, 1995). Thus, we aim to contribute to building an understanding of social change driven through care ethics by foregrounding the voices and actions of communities more regularly portrayed as recipients of care and liberation: Latinx youth in the United States involved in an activist art project and women in rural Nicaragua involved in feminist organizing. Simultaneously, the goal of highlighting the liberatory care approaches that undergird the perspectives and actions of these two groups is not to suggest that marginalized groups should be responsible for enacting or upholding caring practices in communities. Rather, the goal is to illuminate and amplify the insights and skills honed within communities who have had little choice but to seek their own realization of care-oriented priorities.

In the following section we turn to two case study examples to illustrate the role a liberatory ethics of care can play in promoting justice-oriented community change. Note that the projects presented in this paper are offered as a vehicle for more thoroughly grounding our theoretical propositions in an effort to provoke further discussion of liberatory care ethics. In contrast to a conventional empirical research paper, our aim is not to prove, but rather to illustrate, enactments of liberatory care to aid researchers in imagining how these concepts might manifest within diverse applied care settings. We believe that synthesizing the outcomes of two settings, disparate in their geographies and social locations, allows greater insight into the diverse contexts that generate liberatory care ethics, as well as the possibility for an ethics of care framework to cross borders, age, nationality, and other socially constructed differences. Simultaneously, both groups of participants are socioculturally constructed as dependent in their own localities (children and women). Those most impacted by injustices seem also to be most active in employing care perspectives to inform their activism (Fine, 2007). Therefore, in this paper we foreground the perspectives of two groups particularly impacted by inequities in their given contexts.

The case studies highlighted in this paper have been the source of multiple empirical research publications by both authors. We conceptualize the current paper as a comparative case study (Yin, 2003), and proceed in the vein as other social-community psychologists who seek to construct deeper understandings of community-based

projects to inform future work (e.g., [Campbell & Cornish, 2010](#); [Cornish & Campbell, 2009](#); [Cornish, Shukla, & Banerji, 2010](#)).

The Mural Arts Youth Program

The Mural Arts Youth Program was a public elementary school-based youth participatory action research (yPAR) project. The program intended to create an empowering setting to facilitate critical inquiry and youth-directed social change ([Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012](#)). The school hosting the program is located in the central coastal region of California, and serves primarily low-income and Latinx students. The yPAR program met weekly for one hour per week during the academic year, and four days per week for four hours each day over five weeks during the summer. The program was facilitated by two graduate students, eight undergraduate research assistants, and an associate professor from a local university.

Based on their research, 4th and 5th grade youth researcher-participants identified a number of interlacing problems within their school community, including a lack of a sense of belonging due in part to a dearth of value or respect for their culture, values, and families at the school. Values and beliefs are upheld in part through narrative discourses ([Rappaport, 1995](#)). During the 2011-2012 cycle of the yPAR program, 21 youth researchers held small group meetings with various community stakeholders (e.g., peers, parents, teachers, neighbors) to gather stories about experiences with power and/or lack of power in their community. Stories served as the basis for a large, publicly visible mural on an external wall of their elementary school. Community-based, participatory, social-justice oriented art is one strategy psychologists and activists use to create alternative narratives that work toward changing the values, beliefs and norms that underlie systems ([Thomas & Rappaport, 1996](#)). Thus, the mural served as a means of reflecting back to the community their own diverse strengths, struggles, and experiences in order to assert a counter-narrative more aligned with the lived experiences of actual community members. Interviews with Latinx youth were conducted by Danielle as part of a larger project on children's involvement in activist art-making processes (for more information on this project see [Kohfeldt, Bowen, & Langhout, 2016](#)).

Feminist Organizing Through Xochilt Acalt

El Centro por Mujeres Xochilt Acalt (The Xochilt Acalt Women's Center) emerged out of a women's movement in Nicaragua as an effort to address women's rights violations in the rural sector. The center formed shortly after a conservative shift in presidential power in 1990 introduced several neoliberal structural adjustment policies that yielded severe cutbacks to public sector commitments. These policies were associated with weakening the already precarious governmental support for women's rights. Consequently, within this context of decreasing social support from the national government, Xochilt Acalt was founded by a self-mobilized group of women in 1992, specifically to address high levels of ovarian cancer in the remote area in which they lived. Over the past two decades, the organization has expanded to address additional problems and demands from women that were arising within the community including: lack of food, illiteracy, lack of resources for family planning, high levels of gender-based violence, high rates of male migration for work, and a need to improve unequal power relations between women and men. This expansion reflects the capacity for a grassroots organization to evolve and improvise, transforming to reflect the needs and desires of the community where they operate.

The interviews with Nicaraguan women were conducted by Anjali as part of a larger, mixed-methods study on feminist community change (for more information on the context, primary research questions, and participants in this project see [Dutt, 2018b](#)). All interviews were administered in Spanish via simultaneous translation with the aid of a bi-cultural female interpreter from Nicaragua, and occurred privately in women's homes. The interviews focused on women's experiences, opinions, and efforts to create change in their own lives and their community.

Case Studies of Liberatory Care

In both case studies we explored our interviewee's reflections on their participation in the respective projects. We placed an emphasis on identifying patterns reflecting a liberatory ethics of care in how the Latinx youth and Nicaraguan women constructed their identities, values, and visions for their respective communities. Although in each set of interviews a number of themes were identified and refined, for this paper we focused upon themes related to embodying liberatory care ethics in efforts to promote change, at four different ecological levels of analysis: (a) the self (b) the interpersonal, including family, peers, and other smaller networks, (c) the community, including neighbors, school, social identity groups, and geographically bound groups, and (d) structural change, including desires or efforts to create change to institutions, policies, and/or dominant cultural narratives. By focusing on four levels, rather than just the individual and the collective, we add more nuance to traditional dichotomy, showcasing more complexity in care-oriented strategizing for change. With an interest in optimizing space for analysis we provide one exemplar of change-related effort at each level.

Liberatory Self-Care

In our analysis of care ethics, self-care may either maintain inequitable systems or disrupt those systems through substantiating self-worth and building connection to similarly situated others. Informed by neoliberal ideologies, self-care manifests in performative acts of (often feminized) consumption in the name of pampering and individual indulgence – purchasing a massage, an expensive meal. In this formulation, self-care entails a hyper-focus on the self at the expense of the wellbeing of others (e.g., often the underpaid labor of poor women and immigrants). In terms of social justice aims, an additional outcome of this form of self-care may be attempts to alleviate the consequences of oppression (e.g., stress, discomfort, guilt) through palliating the individual, thereby directing attention away from collective organizing.

Alternatively, the notion of self-care as developed by marginalized groups – namely black, queer, and feminist communities – conceptualized attending to one's own wellbeing as an act of defiance and resistance to oppressive systems that dictate whose lives are worthy of care ([Lorde, 1988](#)). Self-care can be viewed as a political act and a critique of the inordinate burden of care labor apportioned to women of color in family and community contexts, as well as an act of defiance in the face of dominant cultural narratives that demean and devalue. Additionally, although self-care that advances socially just transformation is conceptualized at the individual level of analysis, it is not individualistic. Liberatory self-care is enacted in and with community. As Sarah [Ahmed \(2014\)](#) writes, "in directing our care towards ourselves ...we are not caring for those we are supposed to care for... And that is why in queer, feminist and anti-racist work self-care is about the creation of community" (para. 35).

Both communities echo this sentiment in their own conceptualizations of the self in relation to their social change work. For example, Layla, a Latinx youth illustrates how she cultivated a sense of confidence and self-esteem through her connection to the community:

“My role in the program was helping the community get closer...I think it was also something that all of us created, you know I think my role was just, helping...get the stories from the community, being part of it, being a part of the community...the program helped me get through things, because I mean in the fourth grade I didn't believe in myself as much to run for secretary and president...I had really low self-esteem so I thought you know like, if [participating in the program] helped me, why can't I help others, and reach out to them?”

It is noteworthy that building self-esteem and self-confidence were not explicit purposes of the participatory research program in which Layla participated. Yet, she attributes this capacity building to her participation in community-based change efforts. In her estimation, the self-esteem and confidence translated into her running for (and obtaining) formal leadership positions within her school council. Moreover, she conceptualized this self-work in terms of its potential reverberations out into the community, as she considers how she may in turn help others who may need similar kinds of support. Self-care is realized when social support structures are available to allow one the resources to focus on individual capacity building. Thus, Layla's experience mirrors Cheryl Townsend [Gilkes \(1994\)](#) research illustrating how women use their individual power to affirm their own self-worth for liberatory aims.

Interpersonal Liberatory Care

It is likely unsurprising to come across evidence of Latinx youth and women in Nicaragua expressing care for their loved ones and peers. Additionally, some might argue that the interpersonal domain is where caregiving belongs, and thus a focus on care in this context does little to disrupt traditional beliefs about care. Our interviews, however, were filled with examples of ways in which participants' depth of understanding about the necessity of care resulted in an internalized understanding of the self as one inherently connected to others, who fosters wellbeing and justice through interpersonal caring relations. This diverges from dominant views on caregiving as a paternalistic practice in which compassionate or obligated people may engage. Rather, because the self is always connected to others, care is an essential practice in expressing full humanity and building capacity for justice. In both interview sets, efforts to help those who were closest to them extended beyond traditional notions of charitable caregiving, and incorporated a focus on addressing inequities to promote a more sustainably caring and just environment. In Nicaragua, this was often evident in values that women intentionally taught their children, which involved efforts to disrupt the status quo regarding women's treatment. For example, Julia shared:

“With my son, I tell him he has to respect women's rights a lot. That he cannot offend them in any way. Because, you are the son of a woman. You have to respect women. To my daughter I say, she has to gain respect and value herself as a woman. That she can't take into account what men say, rather she has to say that she has rights as a woman.”

Julia's explanation of what she discusses with her children demonstrates an understanding of self as connected to others, and the importance of acknowledging relational realities in dialog for change with younger generations. Transmitting values to one's children, and showing concern about their experiences are important but not under-acknowledged aspects of parental care. They also are not particularly surprising statements to encounter from a member of a feminist group. However, the power of the statement rests in identifying the relational understanding of human reality entrenched in her advice. The values Julia conveys illuminate aspects of a liberatory ethics of

care by articulating the reality that people are always connected to others, and thus the ways in which our actions affect others should play a critical role in influencing our beliefs and behaviors (Held, 2006). Further, they showcase knowledge about caring relations that are cultivated from the margins (bell hooks, 1984). Julia is aware from her own lived experience that gendered inequities will shape her children's lives. In seeking to create a world that is better for all people, she shares wisdom with her children aimed towards subverting the inequitable narratives her children undoubtedly encounter.

Collectively, the insights gained from care expressed by both the women in Nicaragua, as well as the Latinx youth who regularly discussed the desire to help others, contributes to building a framework for conceptualizing liberatory care at the interpersonal level. Conventional understandings of parental caregiving and altruism are transcended, emphasizing an ethic of care that engenders solidarity over conventional power relations. Altruism and traditional parental caregiving are often about an individual with more access to power helping those with less, underemphasizing the agency of those afforded less access to power, and overlooking the complexity of relational exchange that occurs in interpersonal relationships. The interviewees, however, weave an understanding that our destinies are intertwined, and caring relations are part of a process to sustain wellbeing. Thus it is not selflessness, nor is it solely for personal benefit; rather, it begets solidarity. A liberatory ethics of care does not bifurcate the interests of the individual with the common interests of collectives (Held, 2006). Instead, it recognizes that they overlap. Seeds of liberation are planted through acknowledged interdependence that obligates collective care.

Liberatory Care for the Community

Ethics of care at the community level involves expressing care in change strategies and activities that impact neighbors, school, social identity groups, and geographically bound groups. This manifested among interviewees in both groups via a commitment to subvert alienating systems and experiences. For example, the Latinx youth stressed that a goal of their community-based activism was to provide social support to overcome individualistic narratives and alienation. Carmen explains that a mural she and her co-creators painted at their elementary school reminds the people in her community that the experience of struggle is ubiquitous:

"It [the mural] could help them, with their life, I guess, if they have, if they're going through a tough time, it could really help them. Let's say they think their life is worth nothing...well, everybody's been through something at least and so it's, they have their own history."

Overcoming individualism and alienation demands a recognition of shared inequities, which is necessary for attributing the source of social problems within structures rather than individuals. Thus, the social action these young people undertook (i.e., a public mural) enhances a sense of ownership and belonging within the community. As another youth, Lilianna, asserts, "the mural, it shows how you can change the perspective of things...it makes you see the perspective of others...do they have people to love them? Do you think everyone feels peace in the world?" In turn, their activism also builds collective concern, empathy, and commitment to helping others, through relational organizing. In other words, solidarity is enhanced through bonding among people with common experiences and bridging across difference (Warren & Mapp, 2011). This produces solidarity – the recognition that our destinies are linked in a network of mutuality (King, 1963/1991).

Both the Latinx youth and Nicaraguan women directed their social change efforts toward reducing harm in ways that built and sustained relational networks. The Latinx children interviewed described their social action (i.e., the mural) as a tool to provoke self-reflexivity within the larger community, encouraging people to consider their own responsibilities to others (e.g., by taking care of others). Additionally, women working for change in Nicaragua,

described combatting structural violence through mobilization of social connections to other women. Although operating in different social contexts, our interviewees describe taking others' perspectives, consideration of their emotional wellbeing, and imagining possibilities for supporting them, especially those most impacted by social exclusion. In this sense they demonstrate a compassionate critical analysis of social problems. Again, rather than freedom from meddling in the affairs of others, an ethic of care as demonstrated by these activists, involves concern, attention and attunement to community-wide struggles.

Liberatory Care and the Push for Just Structures

Finally, both groups interviewed discussed interest and efforts to produce structural change, which included desires or efforts to transform institutions, policies, and dominant cultural narratives, that inhibited justice and wellbeing in their respective communities. Although structural change is predominantly viewed as a justice rather than care-related concern, caring relationships both incentivize and sustain efforts to create structural change. A final example from a Nicaraguan woman, discussing collaborative works to bring electricity into the community demonstrates this relationship:

Anjali: *What other things have you learned since you were organized?*

Dalena: *First of all, to get along with the others in my community, and to have good relationships with other women in the community, because together we can do a lot. When we want something that benefits the community, because they give benefits elsewhere, we can defend ourselves. For example, we submitted a letter to a person in Managua about bringing electricity... We took that letter to the [government official] of the community. Then we went to visit the mayor. But they would not let us enter, because they said they were in the municipal session, they said that the people from the community could not enter. Then we said, if they do not allow us to enter, we will form a commission of people. And by force we entered... We were not scared to speak because we were prepared... We said, we are citizens of this community and the government has to take into account everyone... they let us in and they heard us.*

In this example Dalena illustrates how, working in solidarity with other women, she was able to pressure the local government to bring electricity into her community. Importantly, she emphasizes both the value of maintaining good relationships and working together. Conscious interdependence and collective concern is crucial to improve community wellbeing. In several interviews conducted with women who lived in communities where electricity was not available (roughly a quarter), women described the importance of having electricity and how this could improve the community. This was a considerable challenge because the local government often did not want to expend the resources to bring electricity into communities. As this excerpt demonstrates, however, women united the knowledge that they had the right and capacity to demand this benefit for their community, with a relational lens focused on collaboration and mutual encouragement. This illustrates the transformative potential that unfolds through liberatory care, wherein an iterative process of action and reflection (Dutt & Grabe, 2017; Martín-Baró, 1994) and thoughtful focus on community interdependence produces change. Ultimately, working in caring relationship with other women allowed dialog and strategies to emerge that encouraged continued participation, despite obstacles, and eventual success.

Conclusion

As described, ethics of care refers to a moral orientation focused on maintaining relationships, responding to the needs of others, and a responsibility not to cause harm. This orientation runs in direct contrast to the values artic-

ulated (albeit not always practiced) within neoliberal policies and ideology which prioritize individual needs, freedom from responsibility, and efficiency over collective concerns. Moreover, while historically conceptualized as distinct from justice, a united focus on care and justice creates conditions for liberation. Although justice is primarily focused upon producing equitable distribution of all that sustains a healthy life, care is inherently linked because it is associated with ensuring that the needs of individuals within communities are met in a compassionate manner. In this sense, justice is the tile and care the grout in paving a path towards collective liberation.

Indeed, as illustrated among the Latinx youth and Nicaraguan women interviewed, interdependent processes associated with care and social justice are utilized in the promotion of community change. Among the Latinx youth involved in the activist art program, an ethics of care framework aligned with how the children conceptualized and constructed meaning from their own community membership. Furthermore, and perhaps more profoundly, the influence of care ethics in shaping the children's actions and perceptions also presented a challenge to dominant modes and conceptualizations of activism and citizen participation that limit actions directed to promote social justice to a narrowly defined scope of behaviors and actions (e.g., protesting, picketing, voting in elections) that systematically exclude large swaths of the population (i.e., those who are constructed as dependent or who are ineligible to vote, etc.). Despite their status as marginalized youth, too young to participate in many forms of political decision making, the children in this study enact their values and goals for their community through thoughtful, collaborative processes in creating a mural.

Similarly, as members of communities who have been denied rights historically, a strong commitment to working for change that is linked to a sense of collective responsibility was evident across the interviews with Nicaraguan women involved in the feminist organization. The women held an acute understanding of a shared fate with others in the community, and a need to work collaboratively and on behalf of each other. A liberatory ethics of care appears to become an implicit road map utilized in political mobilization, guiding women's efforts as they seek to create transformative and equitable change in their communities.

Collectively, the theories and examples examined in this paper showcase manifestations of care ethics at individual, interpersonal, community and structural levels. In essence, they illustrate bottom-up processes of resistance to neoliberal ideology. The analysis also provokes a number of unanswered questions that we encourage future researchers to explore. For example, how do communities enact and respond to care related concerns differently, and what tensions and/or contradictions arise in these processes. There is also much room to further interrogate the role of power in caring processes, and, in particular how care related priorities, obligations, and actions shift as power dynamics change (e.g., as individuals gain power do they exhibit less care?; who is excluded from care practices, and under what structural circumstances?). Although we argue that care and justice are intimately connected, we do not encourage anyone to overlook the many tensions embedded in their relationship.

With this in mind, we underscore specific commitments that should be maintained in future research and action on liberatory care. First, despite our assertion that care ethics are often developed and honed within marginalized communities, let us be clear that the implications of this paper do not suggest that marginalized communities alone should be responsible for enacting liberatory care. We do not aim to essentialize marginalized communities as inherently caring; rather, we underscore that because of circumstance, communities who cannot depend on the state or dominant structures to ensure care of their communities regularly hone creative tactics to promote care. Neither do we call for the institutionalization of a one-size-fits-all method to promote care. Both ethics of care and liberation psychology were introduced into the fields as values systems and approaches to conceptual-

izing processes to address inequity and enhance the human experience. In other words, they were not defined as answers to problems, but rather as lenses through which to analyze inequity that could produce transformative change. Thus, we propose a liberatory ethics of care as a framework for community psychologists to ground their research. More specifically, we aim to compel researchers to view care as a primary ingredient for equitable social transformation that can promote wellbeing at individual, interpersonal, community, and structural levels.

There are two additional cautions about the implications of promoting a liberatory ethics of care for which we must remain vigilant. First, Latin American theorists have noted a trend in which NGOs have been forced to address societal inequities in areas where the state was lacking (Alvarez, 1999). In turn, this reduces the state's obligation and willingness to address societal inequities at the level of political structure because the work has already been taken up by NGOs. Secondly, feminist researchers have also noted that an emphasis on women's community participation and obligation to support others via community development adds substantial burden to the already inequitable distribution of labor women the world over endure (Batiwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Grabe, 2015). The current research thus does not suggest that NGOs more attuned to the caring factors that sustain life should replace state responsibility of governments to address societal inequities, nor does it intend to imply that this work should be additional labor added to the backs of women and oppressed communities. Rather, the findings are meant to underscore that liberatory care begets justice and wellbeing at all ecological levels of human life. Indeed, the implications more closely align with policies such as paid parental leave and universal basic income than any policy that shepherds the state away from its obligation to its people.

Finally, although care is irregularly discussed among theorists of social change across the political spectrum, caring tactics among those most privileged have been utilized to maintain hegemonic wealth and power. Indeed, contemporary society is awash with the consequences of this reality, propagated by neoliberal ideology and policy, and illustrated in practices ranging from corporate welfare and political nepotism to raising nationalism among the economically powerful. To resist these trends we must work towards prioritizing and augmenting the voices, concerns and perspectives of communities who have been underserved by existing social structures. There is growing need to cultivate care ethics that bring about equitable social transformation, and we encourage community psychologists to increasingly engage in this effort. Liberatory care carries us towards the possibility of manifesting this boldly compassionate and more socially just alternative world.

Funding

This research was made possible by financial assistance from the Ruth Landes Memorial Research Fund, a program of The Reed Foundation and two University of California Chancellor's Dissertation Fellowships.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

Our sincere gratitude goes to several people who supported this work: Drs. Shelly Grabe and Regina Langhout, the research teams at Change 4 Good and CINASE, and the members of Xochilt Acalt. We are also very grateful to Dr. Michelle Fine and the participants at the Rethinking Activism Workshop for their thoughtful comments and constructive criticisms on earlier drafts of this paper.

References

- Adams, G., & Estrada-Villalta, S. (2017). Theory from the South: A decolonial approach to the psychology of global inequality. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 18, 37-42. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.07.031
- Ahmed, S. (2014, August 25). *Selfcare as warfare* [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/>
- Alvarez, S. E. (1999). Advocating feminism: The Latin American feminist NGO 'boom'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1, 181-209. doi:10.1080/146167499359880
- Ball, T., Minogue, K., Girvetz, H., & Dagger, R. (2017). Liberalism. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism>
- Batliwala, S., & Dhanraj, D. (2004). Gender myths that instrumentalise women: A view from the Indian frontline. *IDS Bulletin*, 35, 11-18. doi:10.1111/j.1759-5436.2004.tb00150.x
- bell hooks. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Boston, MA, USA: South End Press.
- Campbell, C., & Cornish, F. (2010). *How can community health programmes build enabling environments for transformative communication? Experiences from India and South Africa* (HCD Working Papers, 1). London, United Kingdom: London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Collins, P. H. (2005). Black women and motherhood. In S. Hardy & C. Wiedmer (Eds.), *Motherhood and space* (pp. 149-159). New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Connell, R. (2013). The neoliberal cascade and education: An essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2), 99-112. doi:10.1080/17508487.2013.776990
- Cornish, F., & Campbell, C. (2009). The social conditions for successful peer education: A comparison of two HIV prevention programs run by sex workers in India and South Africa. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 44, 123-135. doi:10.1007/s10464-009-9254-8
- Cornish, F., Shukla, A., & Banerji, R. (2010). Persuading, protesting and exchanging favours: Strategies used by Indian sex workers to win local support for their HIV prevention programmes. *AIDS Care*, 22(Suppl. 2), 1670-1678. doi:10.1080/09540121.2010.521545
- Dutt, A. (2018a). Being bold: Building a justice-oriented psychology of women's human rights. In S. Grabe (Ed.), *Women's human rights: A social psychological perspective on resistance, liberation, and justice*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Dutt, A. (2018b). Feminist organizing in rural Nicaragua: Assessing a psycho-social process to promote empowered solidarity. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 61, 500-511. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12247
- Dutt, A., & Grabe, S. (2017). Gender ideology and social transformation: Using mixed methods to explore processes of ideological change and the promotion of women's human rights in Tanzania. *Sex Roles*, 77, 309-324. doi:10.1007/s11199-016-0729-4
- Fine, M. (2007). The social division of care. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 42(2), 137-149. doi:10.1002/j.1839-4655.2007.tb00045.x
- Fine, M., & Glendinning, C. (2005). Dependence, independence or inter-dependence? Revisiting the concepts of 'care' and 'dependency'. *Ageing and Society*, 25(4), 601-621. doi:10.1017/S0144686X05003600

- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.
- Gilkes, C. T. (1994). If it wasn't for the women...": African American women, community work, and social change. In M. B. Zinn & B.T. Dill (Eds.), *Women of color in US society* (pp. 229-246). Philadelphia, PA, USA: Temple University Press.
- Grabe, S. (2015). Participation: Structural and relational power and Maasai women's political subjectivity in Tanzania. *Feminism & Psychology*, 25(4), 528-548. doi:[10.1177/0959353515591369](https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353515591369)
- Harmes, A. (2012). The rise of neoliberal nationalism. *Review of International Political Economy*, 19(1), 59-86. doi:[10.1080/09692290.2010.507132](https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2010.507132)
- Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Held, V. (2006). *The ethics of care: Personal, political, global*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Jaffee, S., & Hyde, J. S. (2000). Gender differences in moral orientation: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(5), 703-726. doi:[10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.703](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.703)
- King, M. L. (1991). Letter from Birmingham city jail. In J. M. Washington (Ed.), *A testament of hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (pp. 289-302). New York, NY, USA: Harper Collins. (Original work published 1963)
- Kofman, E., & Raghuram, P. (2006). Gender and global labour migrations: Incorporating skilled workers. *Antipode*, 38(2), 282-303. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-8330.2006.00580.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2006.00580.x)
- Kohfeldt, D., Bowen, A. R., & Langhout, R. D. (2016). "They think kids are stupid": yPAR and confrontations with institutionalized power as contexts for children's identity work. *Revista Puertorriqueña de Psicología*, 27(2), 276-291.
- Kohfeldt, D., & Langhout, R. D. (2012). The Five Whys method: A tool for developing problem definitions in collaboration with children. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 22(4), 316-329. doi:[10.1002/casp.1114](https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1114)
- Kurtiş, T., & Adams, G. (2015). Interdependence and relationality across dimensions of culture and gender. *Psychology and Society*, 7, 29-50.
- Langhout, R. D. (2016). This is not a history lesson; this is agitation: A call for a methodology of diffraction in US-based community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 58(3-4), 322-328. doi:[10.1002/ajcp.12039](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12039)
- Lawrence, T. B., & Maitlis, S. (2012). Care and possibility: Enacting an ethic of care through narrative practice. *Academy of Management Review*, 37(4), 641-663. doi:[10.5465/amr.2010.0466](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2010.0466)
- Lorde, A. (1988). *A burst of light, essays*. London, United Kingdom: Sheba Feminist Publishers.
- Markus, H. R. (2017). American = Independent? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(5), 855-866. doi:[10.1177/1745691617718799](https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617718799)
- Martin-Baró, I. (1994). *Writings for a liberation psychology* (A. Aron & S. Corne, Trans.). Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.
- McGregor, S. (2001). Neoliberalism and health care. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 25(2), 82-89. doi:[10.1111/j.1470-6431.2001.00183.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2001.00183.x)
- Moane, G. (2006). Exploring activism and change: Feminist psychology, liberation psychology, political psychology. *Feminism & Psychology*, 16(1), 73-78. doi:[10.1177/0959-353506060823](https://doi.org/10.1177/0959-353506060823)
- Montero, M. (2007). The political psychology of liberation: From politics to ethics and back. *Political Psychology*, 28, 517-533. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-9221.2007.00588.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2007.00588.x)

- Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M., Carlquist, E., Phelps, J. M., & Rand-Hendriksen, K. (2007). Ideology and power: The influence of current neo-liberalism in society. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 17(4), 313-327. doi:[10.1002/casp.931](https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.931)
- Narayan, U. (1995). Colonialism and its others: Considerations on rights and care discourses. *Hypatia*, 10(2), 133-140. doi:[10.1111/j.1527-2001.1995.tb01375.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1995.tb01375.x)
- Parker, I. (2014). Managing neoliberalism and the strong state in higher education: Psychology today. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(3), 250-264. doi:[10.1080/14780887.2013.872214](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.872214)
- Rappaport, J. (1995). Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 795-807. doi:[10.1007/BF02506992](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506992)
- Robinson, F. (2006). Care, gender and global social justice: Rethinking 'ethical globalization'. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 2(1), 5-25. doi:[10.1080/17449620600677213](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449620600677213)
- Sastry, S., & Dutta, M. J. (2013). Global health interventions and the "common sense" of neoliberalism: A dialectical analysis of PEPFAR. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6(1), 21-39. doi:[10.1080/17513057.2012.740682](https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2012.740682)
- Sevenhuijsen, S. (2003). The place of care: The relevance of the feminist ethic of care for social policy. *Feminist Theory*, 4(2), 179-197. doi:[10.1177/14647001030042006](https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001030042006)
- Spivak, A. L., & Sharp, S. F. (2008). Inmate recidivism as a measure of private prison performance. *Crime and Delinquency*, 54(3), 482-508. doi:[10.1177/0011128707307962](https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128707307962)
- Thomas, R. E., & Rappaport, J. (1996). Art as community narrative: A resource for social change. In M. B. Lykes, R. Liem, A. Banuazizi, & M. Morris (Eds.), *Blaming the powerless: Contesting social inequalities*. Philadelphia, PA, USA: Temple University Press.
- Thompson, A. (1998). Not the color purple: Black feminist lessons for educational caring. *Harvard Educational Review*, 68(4), 522-555. doi:[10.17763/haer.68.4.nm436v83214n5016](https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.68.4.nm436v83214n5016)
- Tronto, J. C. (1995). Care as a basis for radical political judgments. *Hypatia*, 10(2), 141-149. doi:[10.1111/j.1527-2001.1995.tb01376.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1995.tb01376.x)
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-428. doi:[10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15](https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15)
- Warren, M. R., & Mapp, K. L. (Eds.). (2011). *A match on dry grass: Community organizing as a catalyst for school reform*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, California, USA: Sage.

Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Health and Social Justice Activism in Changing Times"

Documenting Sociopolitical Development via Participatory Action Research (PAR) With Women of Color Student Activists in the Neoliberal University

Jesica Siham Fernández^{*a}, Jasmyne Y. Gaston^a, Madeline Nguyen^a, Jaia Rovaris^a, Rhyann L. Robinson^a, Danielle N. Aguilar^a

[a] Santa Clara University, San Clara, CA, USA.

Abstract

Political activism attests to the sociopolitical development and agency of young people. Yet the literature sparingly engages the intersectional subjectivities that inform the sociopolitical development of young people, especially women of color. Important questions remain in the theorizing of sociopolitical development among youth engaged in political activism within higher education settings. Thus, we focus on the following question: What experiences informed or catalyzed the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within a racialized neoliberal university in the United States? In addressing this question we demonstrate how student-led participatory action research (PAR) within the neoliberal university can facilitate and support sociopolitical development. Of most value, this paper demonstrates how PAR can be used as a tool to support the intersectional sociopolitical development of student activists organizing within racialized neoliberal settings of higher education that threaten the academic thriving and overall wellbeing of students of color, specifically women of color. Sociopolitical development theorizing must engage elements of relational healing as a dimension of wellbeing. Therefore, our work contributes to these conversations by centering the experiences of women of color student activists.

Keywords: political activism, participatory action research (PAR), sociopolitical development, relational healing, Black feminist thought

Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2018, Vol. 6(2), 591–607, doi:10.5964/jspp.v6i2.900

Received: 2018-01-04. Accepted: 2018-09-20. Published (VoR): 2018-12-21.

Handling Editor: Flora Cornish, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author at: Ethnic Studies Department, Santa Clara University, 500 El Camino Real, San Jose CA 95053, USA. E-mail: jsfernandez@scu.edu



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Since its early formation U.S.-based community psychology has called upon community psychologists to be political activists, agents of social change, and “participant-conceptualizers” (Bennett et al., 1966); to be dissenters and transgressors in pursuit of liberation and empowerment for disenfranchised communities. Community psychology was born out of the frustrations with the field, specifically clinical psychology’s approach to mental health and wellbeing, as well as the discipline’s modest engagement with civil rights efforts. These shortcomings were viewed as antithetical to the discipline. Thus, in recent years community psychologists have repositioned the discipline on the frontlines of social justice through empowerment and liberation frameworks that seek to deconstruct the

racialized neoliberalⁱ structures that reproduce systems of power/privilege/oppression (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Within liberation struggles, the contributions of young people have figured prominently. These movements and efforts are the focus of much empirical study that shape multidisciplinary perspectives on youth's social and political development. Examples include research on the positive development of young people from communities of color (Delgado & Staples, 2007; Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2006; Hope & Jagers, 2014); empowerment among youth from low-income and working class communities (Diemer et al., 2010; Kornbluh, Ozer, Allen, & Kirshner, 2015); young girl's feminist identity development through engagement in activism (Taft, 2010); and critical consciousness among African American young men (Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002; Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). We add to these examples of sociopolitical development the experiences of women of color student activists within the racialized neoliberal university – a private and predominantly white institution characterized by a culture of colorblindness.

We argue that sociopolitical development must be theorized through an intersectional lens that centers the identities, subjectivities, and racialized and gendered positionalities of women of color student activists. Research on the sociopolitical development of student activists can contribute to a deeper understanding of how women of color with intersecting identities are pushing against racialized neoliberal regimes that render their contributions as insignificant or invisible. The oversight on the sociopolitical development of women of color is troubling because it limits deeper theoretical conceptualizations of sociopolitical development. Furthermore, this negligence leaves unexamined possibilities for supporting the sociopolitical development of women of color. Indeed, accounting for the experiences of women of color within inherently racialized neoliberal spaces is warranted, especially when considering that their lived experiences, agency, and social justice-oriented practices within sociopolitical development writings are sparingly theorized and empirically documented in community psychology.

In weaving together Black feminist thought with sociopolitical development theory, we document the sociopolitical development of women of color engaged in political activism, specifically student-led organizing. The question that guides this research, and constitutes the specific focus of this paper, includes the following: What experiences informed or catalyzed the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within the racialized neoliberal university? We address this question through an analysis of the critical moments that facilitated their sociopolitical development. We also describe how we engaged a student-activist informed participatory action research (PAR) process that allowed us to document and support women of color student activists' sociopolitical development by identifying and describing their experiences.

In utilizing PAR as a tool to identify and facilitate sociopolitical development among women of color student activists, we are contributing to the emerging scholarship that seeks to trouble current sociopolitical development theorizing (Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015). Based on our analysis, we therefore posit that embodiments of difference, experiences with institutional racism, opportunities for critical intellectualism, and healing are all important triggers or dimensions of sociopolitical development. Indeed, discerning the experiences that shape sociopolitical development is necessary for liberatory and sustainable efforts in political activism. Therefore, the purpose of this manuscript is threefold. First, to contribute to the sparse, yet growing theoretical and empirical scholarship on the intersectional sociopolitical development of women of color student activists. Second, to center the voices of women of color student activists who describe the intellectual, social, embodied and emotional challenges of engaging in political activism within the neoliberal university. Third, to demonstrate the use of PAR as a political activism strategy that

aids in documenting sociopolitical development processes among and with women of color student activists. In addressing these goals, we are contributing to the sociopolitical development literature within community psychology and allied disciplines, as well as the body of work committed to advancing social justice-oriented theory, research, and action in post-liberal times of racialized neoliberalism.

Literature Review

Young people with intersecting positionalities on the margins of the *status quo* have been key political actors in bringing about social change in the United States. Much progress has been achieved within education institutions; from the 1954 school desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, wherein the Supreme Court ruled racial segregation as unconstitutional (Ladson-Billings, 1998), to the development of ethnic studies curricula and a federal court decision purporting that House Bill 2281, which banned ethnic studies (e.g., culturally-oriented, local/community-centered and socio-historical curricula), was unlawful (Depenbrock, 2017; Kelly, 2017). Indeed, there have been great strides toward racial justice and social progress, yet more needs to be realized to dismantle the racialized neoliberal structures that perpetuate capitalist immiseration.

Conceptualizing Sociopolitical Development

Within the context of community organizing, political activism is often characterized by concerted collective efforts, like direct actions and non-violent demonstrations. Various approaches have been proposed to conceptualize a social movement; yet, it is generally described by a collective of formal and informal networks that together strive to engage in organized sociocultural and political actions to effect structural change (Buechler, 1995). Within political activism, sociopolitical development has been identified as an important outcome.

Sociopolitical development theory is defined as a psychological process, characterized by a critical structural analysis of social conditions, and the political attitudes and behaviors enacted to address systemic issues (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003; Watts et al., 1999). Political activism is identified as an important context for facilitating youth's sociopolitical development, including their leadership, critical consciousness, and positive youth development (Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts et al., 2003). Sociopolitical development theory expands on conceptualizations of civic and political participation by considering the social and individual factors that shape agency, political efficacy, and self and collective determination among institutionally marginalized youth (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Watts et al., 1999). Via a sociopolitical development framework, scholars have documented how youth within and outside of educational institutions are reconstituting the conditions of their political engagement (Delgado & Staples, 2007; Ginwright et al., 2006).

Sociopolitical Development Within Political Activism

Youth community organizing has a long history in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Contemporary accounts from the 1960's liberation movements demonstrate that political activism has been, and still is, primarily led by young people (Hope & Jagers, 2014). For example, the Rainbow Coalition (RC), founded by Black Panther Party member Fred Hampton, was established as a multi-racial/multi-ethnic alliance to strategically unite and politically organize various ethnic and social groups (Rhoads, 2016; Williams, 2013). Much like other youth-led social movements, the RC mobilized the political power of youth and low-income working-class communities to address institutionalized racism and systemic inequities. The Black Panthers, Young Patriots and Young Lords, despite their differences,

came together to organize. These groups were united by their shared struggles for human and civil rights, racial justice, economic enfranchisement, and an end to police violence. Today, the power of youth activists remains unwavering before the preponderance of racism and injustice.

In the U.S., political activism aimed at redressing the racialized neoliberalism of institutions, like universities, is notably taking place. Students continue to organize to hold institutions accountable and responsive to their needs (Kezar, Acuña Avilez, Drivalas, & Wheaton, 2017; Kirshner, 2015; Rogers, 2012). In 1968 the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) student strike at San Francisco State University catalyzed a movement toward the implementation of ethnic studies curricula, and diversity initiatives in faculty and student recruitment and retention (Rhoads, 2016). A year later, at Cornell University, students organized similar actions to establish a Black Student Union and the first African American Studies program in the U.S. (Williamson, 1999). In effect, the Civil Rights Movement catalyzed the collective political power of youth and student activists within and beyond higher education.

Historical initiatives like the RC and TWLF demonstrate the power of youth striving to redress the pillaged conditions of their communities disenfranchised by the racialized neoliberal state. These forms of political activism attest to the sociopolitical development of young people, and also challenge hegemonic notions of young people as politically *apathetic* and disengaged (Watts et al., 2003). Then and now, youth and student from predominantly communities of color are at the forefront of social justice efforts. Youth of color, for example, often engage in extra-parliamentary forms of engagement meant to contest the *status quo* (Diemer & Li, 2011), or undertake non-traditional modes of political participation that transcend existing service and volunteerism models of civic engagement (Kirshner, 2015). Cultural movements involving art, like spoken word poetry, hip-hop, muraling and theater (Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016), as well as the use of social media (Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Zimmerman, 2016) are more representative of the strategies and practices through which youth enact their political activism. These forms of engagement reflect contemporary social movements, like Black Lives Matter and the DREAMers movement (Conner & Rosen, 2016).

Black Feminist Thought: Intersectionality

Over the last half century, the concept of intersectionality has been used to describe the subjectivities and positionalities of Black women's experiences with race, gender and class discrimination. Intersectionality within Black feminist theory, therefore, unfolded out of collective efforts to center the voices and embodied subjectivities of Black women's lives. Informed by the work of bell hooks (1994), Collins (1990/2000), Crenshaw (1991), Lorde (1984), and the Combahee River Collective (1974/1982), among other Black scholars, writers and activists, Black feminist theory is a radical epistemological movement to center the intersectional subjectivities of Black women's lives, which were neither fully situated within the Civil Rights Movement, nor the (white) feminist movement. Grounded in Black feminist thought, and conceptualized by Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality posits that race and gender categories, along with other dimensions of positionality, are legible and have social, legal, political and economic implications. Intersectionality is a sociolegal theory that problematizes an "anti-discrimination regime that always presumes the mutual exclusiveness of race and gender" (Nash, 2013, p. 6). Intersectionality provides a theoretical lens for re-conceptualizing race beyond identity politics. In other words, instead of attending to the politics of difference, intersectionality describes the interlocking patterns of marginality in people's lives, and the race and gender structures that allow for matrices of oppression to remain (Collins, 1990/2000).

Drawing from Black feminist thought, this paper engages intersectionality in the process of documenting sociopolitical development among women of color student activists, many of whom identify as Black women. Given that

women of color student activists are engaged in transformative and powerful ways that differ, yet echo the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement, sociopolitical development theory must center intersectionality to better characterize the political activism that youth enact. Comparing past and contemporary social movements is beyond the scope of this paper; yet we refer to these accounts as examples of student organizing efforts within racialized neoliberal settings, such as institutions of higher education. Within a sociopolitical development framework that engages intersectionality, as purported in Black feminist thought, and through the use of PAR, we examined the experiences that catalyzed the sociopolitical development, and eventual political activism, of women of color student activists in a student-led movement called Unity IV.

Unity IV, which we describe more fully in the section below, is a university-based student-led movement to address institutional racism, and advocate for the implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. The concerns raised by Unity IV student activists parallel the issues and demands made fifty years earlier by the TWLF. Although differences exist, the perpetuity of institutional racism continues, and is exacerbated by the racialized neoliberalism of education institutions in the U.S. Through this analysis we describe women of color student activists' sociopolitical development.

The Sociopolitical Justice-Oriented Citizenship PAR Project

Study Background

As a community-based researcher, trained in social-community psychology, I (Jesica) ground my work in a multi-disciplinary and intersectional study of race, age, gender and citizenship. My work follows a community-based PAR paradigm that involves developing community collaborations that are action-driven, social justice-oriented, and community-centered. These values lead me to use and share these skills with institutionally marginalized groups, most often students and young people of color.

In the spring of 2016 I was awarded a grant to continue my research on the *Sociopolitical Justice-Oriented Citizenship PAR Project*. The goal was to document the sociopolitical development of student activists within the Unity IV student-led movement at Claradise Universityⁱⁱ (CU) that began in the spring of 2015 in response to recurring incidents of racism on campus. I sought out student activists engaged in Unity IV and inquired about ways for us to collaborate, and how my research expertise in PAR could support their student organizing efforts. Four Unity IV student organizers (Jasmyne, Jaia, Madeline, and Rhyann) agreed to collaborate, and together we formed our PAR collective. In fall 2017 the assistant director to the Office for Multicultural Learning (Danielle) joined our team as a way to further our work in raising awareness about student of color experiences at CU and ways to support their needs, as well as help inform institutional changes for diversity, equity and inclusion.

As a collective of women of color with distinct positionalities within CU, and varied experiences in community organizing, we have all experienced in some form the intellectual, social, embodied, and emotional labor that is expended in political activism. Among student activists, their labor has been guided by efforts to resist racism via the co-production of knowledge, the documenting of their/our stories (e.g., data), and the co-creation of empowering spaces for them to heal and build community. Through a PAR process we have worked to produce research and actions that support the sociopolitical development, political activism, and healing of Unity IV student activists.

In this paper we therefore highlight our use of PAR as a tool in documenting and supporting the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within the neoliberal university.

Research Setting: Claradise University and Unity IV

Claradise University is located in the Silicon Valley of California, one of the wealthiest yet most segregated and inequitable regions of the United States (Park & Pellow, 2004). CU boasts of a population of approximately five thousand undergraduate students. As a primarily white institution (51%), CU has strived to increase student demographic diversity over the past years. Although 47% of the student population consists of students of color, only 3% identify as African American or Black, and 18% identify as Latino/Hispanic. Indeed, the proportion of students of color remains marginal compared to the ethnic/racial and cultural diversity that characterizes the Silicon Valley. Despite the creative entrepreneurialism, technology innovation, and financial generativity produced in the region, the communities that are within and beyond CU are not exempt from social inequities. The Silicon Valley has a widening income gap, characterized by inflated housing market prices, a diminishing middle class, and growing poverty rates (Allen & Li, 2016). The area has been identified as one of the most unequal counties in the U.S. (Park & Pellow, 2004).

CU students have not been sheltered from experiencing injustices. From incidents of blatant racism on campus to everyday micro-aggressions within and outside of the classroom, these cumulative experiences severely impact students. To offer some context, the first student-led Unity movement at CU began in 1985 with six ethnic/cultural student organizations coming together to advocate for the establishment of a multicultural center for students. Over the past decades iterations of Unity movements have emerged, with Unity I in 1985 and most recently Unity IV in 2015. Unity movements have re-emerged in large part to raise awareness about student concerns, and to address the needs of students of color, LGBTQ students, and other under-represented students at CU.

Unity IV in particular was formed to raise awareness about the experiences, needs and struggles of Black and African American students at CU. One of the strategies Unity IV student activists employed was to convene quarterly campus wide forums, where university administrators, students, faculty, and staff gather to discuss diversity, equity and inclusion related initiatives to address the demands outlined in the Unity IV Statement. The Unity IV Statement consists of a list of twenty-one specific demands organized into four broad categories: academics, student and residential life, transparency, and recruitment and orientation. A specific demand within the Unity IV Statement was the creation of an Ethnic Studies Department and recognition as a standalone major. In the fall of 2016 the collective request of Unity IV student activists, Ethnic Studies faculty and students, and campus allies was met, thereby institutionalizing Ethnic Studies as an official department at CU. Despite this achievement, however, more demands remain to be fulfilled. Given the recurrence of Unity movements, a PAR project with student activists documenting their sociopolitical development within the context of the neoliberal university, was warranted.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

As a collective, we engaged PAR to document the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists. PAR is a research paradigm that involves an iterative process of reflection-action-transformation. Consistent with a research justice framework (Jolivéte, 2015), PAR allows for the democratization of knowledge by facilitating opportunities for critical consciousness, self-determination, shared decision-making, leadership, and civic engagement (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). As a methodological orientation, PAR challenges conventional research

approaches by developing relationships of meaningful collaboration between researchers and community members in the process of conducting action research (Torre & Ayala, 2009).

The PAR process is characterized by four interconnected phases: 1) collaboration with community members to identify a topic, issue, or structural condition that allows for the problem to exist; 2) collection and analysis of data to learn more about the condition; 3) implementation of an action to address the problem; and 4) evaluation of the impact of the action, and whether it addressed the problem. PAR strives to problematize researcher-participant dynamics by fomenting values of transparency and shared decision-making, whilst emphasizing collaboration in every step of the research process (Torre et al., 2012). Through this process researchers and community members collectively identify a problem to address, and agree upon the best approach to bring about change. In partnership with communities who are most affected by social problems, PAR strives for a liberatory approach to research and action by centering the community's voice.

PAR in Practice: Our Process

We engaged PAR by collectively discerning a question informed by our experiences and interests in sociopolitical development, political activism, and healing. This led us to develop the broad question: What experiences informed or catalyzed the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within the racialized neoliberal university? (phase one). To engage this question, we developed an interview protocol to help guide our interviews with Unity IV student activists at CU. We conducted a total of twenty interviews, each one lasting an average of sixty minutes, with a snowball sample of Unity IV student activists (phase two). Twenty interviews were conducted, however two of those interviews involved self-identified men of color, and eighteen self-identified women of color. Interviews were also conducted with members of our PAR research collective (Jaia, Jasmyne, Madeline, and Rhyann).

In the process of conducting the interviews it became evident that sociopolitical development was reinforced by and was also an important outcome of political activism. Sociopolitical development, although empowering, also led women of color student activists to experience an overwhelming socio-emotional burden. Our interviews indicated that while most activists were committed to their political activism, many of them were emotionally and physically depleted. The emotional labor and burnout they described in their interviews was attributed to their frustrations with the slow pace of progress to address the institutional racism, and colorblindness within the structure and culture of CU. To attend to the needs expressed by women of color student activists, and to support their healing toward sociopolitical wellbeing, we planned and implemented a one-day event, entitled the Quest for Unapologetic Emotional Emancipation is Now! (Q.U.E.E.N!) Retreat (phase three).

The Q.U.E.E.N! Retreat was informed by Lorde's concept of radical self-love "as an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 1984). Only a select number of women of color student activists were invited to attend the retreat. The purpose of the Q.U.E.E.N! Retreat was to provide women of color student activists with opportunities for healing through individual and collective reflections, dialogues, affirmation circles, writing tasks, and interactive community building activities for relational self-care. The retreat was also a response to the lack of socio-emotional support, and wellness resources available to women of color and student activists at CU. As a woman of color PAR collective the Q.U.E.E.N! Retreat constituted our action within a PAR process.

In line with efforts to re-think and re-imagine social justice activism in post-liberal times – which for us in the U.S. is marked by the heightened racialized neoliberalism of higher education – we have chosen to focus this paper

on our research outcomes from phases one and two of our PAR process. A discussion of these outcomes will allow us to explain the intersectional sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within the neoliberal university.

Data Analysis

Our data constitutes ethnographic fieldnotes of Unity IV meetings, forums and actions, as well as interviews. Given our use of Black feminist theory, our focus is on the eighteen interviews that involved women of color only. All data was analyzed through a thematic analysis approach, characterized by an inductive and deductive data analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that began with a close reading and re-reading of the data to discern patterns and themes. The discerned themes were then complemented and informed by the relevant literature on sociopolitical development (Diemer & Li, 2011; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015; Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002; Watts et al., 2003; Watts et al., 1999), as well as Black feminist theory, specifically intersectionality (Collins, 1990/2000; Combahee River Collective, 1974/1982; Crenshaw, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Nash, 2013). Through this thematic analysis procedure, we discerned four themes: embodiments of difference, experiences with institutional racism, critical intellectualism, and healing. The discerned themes correspond to and address our research question: What experiences informed or catalyzed the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within the racialized neoliberal university?

Sociopolitical Development Among Women of Color Student Activist

Through a PAR process we documented the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists. In doing so, we discerned four themes that describe the experiences that informed and catalyzed women of color student activists' sociopolitical development within the neoliberal university. Below we highlight some of these outcomes.

Intersectionality in Embodiments of Difference

In using the term “embodiments of difference” we are calling attention to the multiple intersectional positionalities women of color, and Black women in particular, experience in the clashing of race and gender oppressions. Rooted in Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory, we posit that bodies are read and positioned on account of their perceived differences. These embodiments of difference shape the intersections of women of color's experiences, and determine which identities become most salient, and therefore are conceived as subordinate to the dominant group(s) (Collins, 1990/2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

The compounding accounts of race and gender oppressions made women of color student activists' intersectional positionalities most salient and central to their political activism. Women of color student activists reflected upon the ways their identities and bodies informed their embodied differences as students, women, people of color and activists. The markers of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and immigration status, among other categories, made visible their positionalities. That is, their embodied difference vis-à-vis the whiteness and colorblindness within the neoliberal university. Some of the experiences shared by women of color student activists included

feeling outcaste, hyper-visible and, in some cases, *invisible* in the classroom. These experiences are reflected in Angela's statement:

"Honestly my experience at [CU] from the beginning was very isolating, and I knew it had a lot to do with the Business School which is a predominantly white area. The school is predominantly white. But then also I'm a woman, I'm a Black woman, so that's like two things against me." (Angela, Interview)

Angela's response demonstrated the "clashing" of her intersectional positionalities as a visible Black woman within the neoliberal university. The isolating experience that Angela described highlights her racialized and gendered positioning within a predominantly white and presumably male space, such as the Business School. The recurrence of having to be made aware of these identities, embodiments, and positionalities of race and gender difference, within an ostensibly "white space," underscored Angela's sociopolitical development as a Black woman. In having to confront such struggles, Angela became aware of her embodied difference, and how this shaped the intersections of her positionality as a student activist.

Some of the interviewees described how CU rendered their intersectional positionalities and identities as being outside of the *status quo*. This point was demonstrated by Angela, and furthered by Ashley, who described her classroom experiences in the following way:

"I can walk into a classroom and not see anyone look like me and that's normalized for me and other people don't even have to notice that. I sat in my history class this week as we were talking about race and gender, and I was the only Black person in one out of four girls. To talk about race and gender and things like that - and that's what you're surrounded by - It's difficult when you're so aware of who you are all the time." (Ashley, Interview)

Ashley's positioning as a Black woman within a predominantly white space lacking diversity characterized her embodiment of difference; an experience she and many other women of color often experience (Collins, 1990/2000; Nash, 2013). In describing her experiences as a Black woman, Ashley reflected on the difficulty of always having to be seen, of having to be made "aware of who you are all the time." The taxation of embodied difference, of having to constantly be reminded of that, and yet must normalize the isolation of "not see[ing] anyone look like me [Ashley]," is a depleting experience. For many women of color, these moments were considered foundational in shaping their sociopolitical development. Furthermore, experiences characterized by the salience of their embodied difference were, by many student activists, also perceived as meaningful encounters to help them engage in political activism to claim and create spaces of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Institutional Racism in the Neoliberal University

Experiences with racism, micro-aggressions, and discrimination were unfortunately quite common among women of color student activists at CU. Yet these experiences were crucial to their sociopolitical development because it led them to confront the colorblindness within the neoliberal university that foreclosed opportunities for race-conscious dialogues. The onset of racist events that specifically targeted Black students at CU, challenged the presumed social justice values of the institution. In her interview Angela described the racist incident that catalyzed the student-led Unity IV movement in spring 2015:

"I always felt like I didn't have much of place here [CU]. Then what really shifted me was how I was going to confront these issues. The spring quarter I was with some girls from [Black Student Union] outside of a dorm hall, and we had an event where the men appreciate the women, and then the women have an-

other day to appreciate the men. And so we were delivering invitations to the guys that night. It was a Wednesday night, which is a known day for partying. We weren't being disruptive, but we weren't being quiet because everyone else was just as loud. We were outside in the quad area, and we were joking around, super excited because this is like the first event, especially for the first years. Then we heard people from the window yelling at us, telling us to shut up, to get off the lawn. We continued to talk because we were just as loud as everyone else. We were on Yik Yak, which is like a social media app where you're able to say something in I think 140 characters - And it's anonymous. And someone went on and said: 'Monkeys outside [residence hall], shut your watermelon eating mouths!' And we knew it was directed at us! One, because we were the only people in [residence hall], and two 'monkey' is very derogatory term to us Black people. Watermelon is also something that's used as a stereotype against Black people! So there was no way that they were targeting anyone else. We called campus safety, told them what happened, and I don't think much happened because they couldn't target who it was. From there Unity IV started and that's where I think a lot of people got a wake-up call about the racial climate on campus, and how no one else is going to stand up for us [Black students]. So we have to do it ourselves. That was really like a turning point." (Angela, Interview)

Angela described the incident that culminated in organizing the Unity IV movement. The incident, which was a typical occurrence and experience among students of color, reflected the culture of colorblindness and racism within the neoliberal university. For students of color, specifically those engaged in Unity IV, such incidents were considered symptomatic of broader issues tied to institutional racism within CU, as well as the racialized neoliberalism of higher education. Furthermore, because there were no explicit institutional consequences in place to hold students accountable for their racist speech or any explicit efforts to change the culture of the institution, these issues were seen as commonplace, yet deeply harming to students of color.

As explained by Angela, after reporting the incident to campus safety, the university administration was not able to discern who was responsible, and as a result no one was held accountable. The incident, along with the inadequate response by the university administration, led students like Angela to take action. Angela powerfully stated, "no one else is going to stand up for us. So we have to do it ourselves. That was the turning point." For Angela, like the other Black women who witnessed this and other incidents, racism was taking a toll on their sense of belonging, academic thriving and overall wellbeing as college students. The impact of everyday racisms on the health and psychological wellbeing of people of color are not a new phenomenon. Recent scholarship demonstrates that such recurring accounts of everyday racisms, from micro-aggressions to bigotry, have a detrimental impact on an individual's overall health (Lewis, Cogburn, & Williams, 2015; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). For students of color this can have a ripping impact in their capacity for meaningful learning and academic engagement (Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

The recurring experiences of institutional racism produced critical shifts for women of color students specifically Black women at CU. The inadequacy or inability to individually challenge the culture of colorblindness within the neoliberal university, triggered Unity IV women of color student activists to come together and organize. Student experiences with institutional racism were deeply compounded by the inaction, slow pace of progress, and lack of transparency from the university administration on matters of diversity, equity and inclusion. The seemingly bureaucratic process in handling matters of institutional racism by the university administration, indicated for many women of color student activists a need for longer, more sustained efforts, within the Unity IV movement. Sociopo-

litical development within Unity IV political activism emerged as a reaction to manifestations of institutional racism that went unaddressed.

Critical Intellectualism

Sociopolitical development among women of color student activists, which was characterized by their embodiments of difference and experiences with institutional racism, was also shaped by their critical intellectualism. Conceptualized as a form of critical social analysis, critical intellectualism facilitates the capacity to discern the historical, social, political and structural factors that shape institutions, and consequently the conditions of structural marginality and disenfranchisement (Romero, 2015). For women of color student activists, sociopolitical development often began in the classroom and through quotidian college experiences that made salient their embodied difference and intersectional racialization, as evidenced in the above statements by Ashley and Angela.

Most women of color student activists were social science majors, and many had taken courses in sociology, ethnic studies, women and gender studies, as well as allied disciplines that centered on a structural analysis of systems of power and oppression. Therefore, some women of color student activists, like Yvonne, easily related their lived experiences to their academic curricula as a means to further, and also complement, her sociopolitical development.

“Part of my development as a student activist at [CU] had to do a lot with my course work. There’s a diversity requirement that all students have to fulfill and I took it in my freshman year. So grateful for doing that because it allowed me to see that there is this whole other aspect of the curriculum that doesn’t just focus on old white men and the history they want us to learn. There was an Ethnic Studies class that I took and I was just blown away because I was learning something that I was interested in. It was really empowering to learn about the history of my people.” (Yvonne, Interview)

Yvonne’s critical intellectualism, fostered by the personal and culturally relevant curricula, informed her sociopolitical development. Yvonne described her ethnic studies experience as important to her political activism within Unity IV because it allowed her to feel empowered about what she was learning. These critical intellectual connections furthered her radical wit to situate her lived experiences through an ethnic studies lens. In turn, this allowed her to de-normalize her intersectional racialized experiences as a Black woman. Reflecting on her classroom experiences, Yvonne claimed that “it was really empowering to learn about the history of my people.” Experiences such as these supported Yvonne’s sociopolitical development, specifically her capacity to analyze the socio-historical systemic conditions that have allowed for institutional racism in higher education to persist.

By applying course concepts and theories to their lived experiences, women of color student activists were able to see the relevance of what they were learning academically to their political work and thereby build their sociopolitical self-determination. The sociopolitical development reflected in Yvonne’s critical intellectualism empowered her to discern the best course of action to take to address the oppressions she experienced as a Black woman at CU. Several other student activists expressed the impact of ethnic studies, as well as women and gender studies, in shaping their critical intellectual understandings beyond mere academic knowledge and toward their development as sociopolitical actors and change agents. Sociopolitical development, fostered through opportunities for critical intellectualism often in relation to experiences of embodied difference produced by the structure of institutional racism, led women of color student activists to engage in political activism to challenge the neoliberal university.

Healing as (dis)Engagement in Political Activism

The desire for healing, wellbeing and emancipation from racism was a central theme that characterized women of color student activists' sociopolitical development. The significance of making space for love, care and healing within contexts of political activism is often understated (bell hooks, 2014; Lorde, 1984; Nash, 2013). Women of color student activists, despite their exhaustion and frustration with the slow pace of change within the neoliberal university, often expressed the need to "do the work" because no one else would. As reflected in Angela's statement, many women of color student activists approached healing as an intentional political act to resist and respond to racism in ways that allowed them to be seen and heard.

Healing within sociopolitical development was characterized by moments of individual and collective reflection, including the centering or troubling of one's most salient identities. Calliope's statement, for example, spoke of the importance of her activism work and how that unfolded into her identity as an activist:

"I value myself more as an activist and that's why I prioritize my activism more than my student work. At the end of the day, I suppose I look to the idea of lifelong learning. Before I saw my role as a student as a priority, but that work stays in the classroom - nothing changes. I'm like first and foremost a woman of color, and an activist more than a student. My activism helps me heal from my experiences as a student - As a women of color." (Calliope, Interview)

Calliope reflected on her commitment to political activism, and her role as a student being second to her activism. In naming her identities as "a woman of color, and an activist more than a student," Calliope posited that it is through her political activism that she is able to engage in what she describes as "lifelong learning." Calliope's sociopolitical development, marked by her reference to activism as personal, social and political growth, also included fomenting a process of healing. Indeed, she described that through her political activism work she found a way to heal from her experiences of racism and sexism as a woman of color and a student.

In order care for and look after themselves, and others whose intersectional positionalities are also disenfranchised, women must often name their experiences of pain (Lorde, 1984). Black feminist writers, such as bell hooks (1994), Collins (1990/2000) and the Combahee River Collective (1974/1982), describe this as a process of seeing their struggles reflected in that of others, and building intersectional solidarities. Women of color student activists, like Calliope, understood the need to name their identities – those that gave them strength and caused them pain. Thus, women of color student activists' sociopolitical development was characterized by a process of healing from sources of pain, and was marked by experiences of being in solidarity with each other, as well as finding ways to care for themselves – even if that meant taking a pause from their political activism.

Indeed, there were instances where women of color student activists had to take a step back. In these moments, sociopolitical development was thus marked by their prioritizing of themselves. Healing through self-care was viewed as necessary to their sociopolitical wellbeing. Leah, for example, underscored this point:

"Organizing can become your entire life, so I am learning how to step back. I feel like I had endless energy last year and now I'm at the end. [...] We haven't done a very good job of teaching ourselves how to know when to pause and take care. We kind of re-expose people to trauma and we need to be a lot more careful about it - all of us. I only realize that because it has personally affected me." (Leah, Interview)

For Leah sociopolitical development was characterized by moments of solidarity with others, as well as the prioritizing of the self above their political activism. The intentionality of centering the self in the healing process described

by Leah, although individualistic, can render opportunities for relational healing that involve building intimate relations with one's self that allow for self-love, care, wellbeing and emancipation. Healing as engagement, or disengagement, from political activism was another characteristic of sociopolitical development among women of color student activists. As women of color student activists, both Calliope and Leah found ways to honor their true whole selves by naming and making space for their identities and needs.

Summary

Through a PAR approach we documented the experiences that informed and catalyzed the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists engaged in political activism within the neoliberal university. The experiences we identified as critical to their sociopolitical development included confronting the salience of their embodied differences, specifically within contexts of heightened institutional racism. Moreover, having access to spaces, such as classrooms, to deconstruct and unpack the institutional racism they faced was crucial to their sociopolitical development. For some women of color student activists, opportunities that allowed them to deconstruct, problematize and challenge the racism was critical, as it allowed them to heal from trauma, whilst build their political activism within Unity IV.

As a PAR collective, with many of us positioned differently within the neoliberal university yet committed to anti-oppression, racial justice and education equity, we sought to document the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within Unity IV. We found strength in documenting their/our sociopolitical trajectories, while we critically examined the conditions that produced these within the structure of the neoliberal university. Through the rendering of women of color student activist's voices, we celebrate, honor and recognize their sociopolitical activism, as well as their struggles in challenging and seeking to transform the neoliberal university.

Conclusion

In unpacking some of the processes that characterize the sociopolitical development of women of color student activists within the neoliberal university, some noteworthy implications are discussed; specifically, as these tie in with efforts to re-think social justice-oriented activism and research in neoliberal and post-liberal times. First, research epistemologies and methods should attend to the intersectional embodiments of political subjects, and how they can participate in the co-production of knowledge. In this paper, we offered PAR as an approach to challenge positivist research epistemologies and the researcher-participant dynamics. Through the rendering of our PAR collective process, we have offered an example of a research justice project that centered the lived experiences of women of color student activists. To deconstruct racialized neoliberalism, new epistemologies and methods must be deployed to amplify the embodiments and subjectivities of those most affected by systems of power. Among women of color student activists, embodiments of difference were identified as important for facilitating their sociopolitical awareness, and eventual political activism within the neoliberal university.

Second, the resurgence of white supremacy, nativism, sexism, and homophobia in the U.S. has unearthed and amplified the institutional marginalization, and disenfranchisement of individuals and communities, especially of communities of color. Therefore, opportunities for critical intellectualism must be forged as a means to challenge the current neoliberal and post-liberal context that has fractured an embracing of and respect for difference and diversity. Among women of color student activists, critical intellectualism was facilitated by opportunities for critical

thinking and reflection where they were able to connect their lived experiences within historical accounts of struggle and resistance. These experiences made salient their embodied differences, and it also fostered their sociopolitical development. Critical intellectualism was central to women of color student activists' sociopolitical development, and was important in catalyzing their organizing to confront institutional racism within the neoliberal university.

Third, compounding experiences of oppression and disenfranchisement require attending to the sociopolitical wellbeing of those on the margins; in this case women of color student activists at a predominantly white institution. In this paper we have described healing as a process of sociopolitical development that aims to lessen the weight of having to carry one's struggles alone, and instead fosters self and collective care, as well as intersectional solidarity. Researchers, activists and practitioners engaged in the study of political movements should consider how research, theory and action can be developed to advance not only the political aims of social justice activism, but also to support the sociopolitical wellbeing of activists, among other marginalized individuals or communities working to redress systems of power.

Within community psychology in particular, efforts must be directed at understanding and examining what must be done within institutions of higher education to support, and bring to the fold the political activism of students, specifically of women of color and others with intersecting positionalities. The political activism of women of color student activists in Unity IV exemplifies contemporary social movements within and beyond the neoliberal university that seek to challenge the impending culture of colorblindness. Therefore, our role as researchers, educators, and social justice allies, must be to facilitate the sociopolitical development and collective power of communities disenfranchised by the *status quo*.

In this paper we have described our use of PAR as one approach toward documenting and supporting women of color student activists' sociopolitical development within the neoliberal university. For those of us who position our work as activist-scholarship, we must also use our privilege to make visible the contributions and efforts of those organizing within oppressive structures. In our case, women of color students within the neoliberal university. To sustain the democratic principles of social justice and civic engagement that underscore the purpose of higher education, we must support and amplify the political activism and sociopolitical wellbeing of students who are ultimately seeking to *de-neoliberalize* the university.

Notes

i) We use the term the "racialized neoliberalism" specifically in relation to higher education or universities, to describe settings that resemble market-driven institutions characterized by systems of governance and leadership employed within a corporate neoliberal model of profit and production. Within these technologies of capitalism and power, the racialized neoliberal university functions to maintain the *status quo*, whilst upholding ideologies of meritocracy, rugged individualism, and colorblindness that overlook the systemic institutional racism and whiteness embedded within higher education that forecloses educating for social transformation and racial justice.

ii) To maintain the confidentiality of all participants, we provide a pseudonym for interviewees, including interviewed members of our PAR collective. In the body of the paper we also offer a pseudonym for the university.

Funding

The first author, who is the principal investigator, received funding from the Santa Clara University Research Grant Office to support earlier planning, development and data collection for the research. Subsequently, two Faculty-Student Research Assistant Project (FSRAP) Grants were provided to the faculty member.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Unity IV student activists, as well as the participating student researchers and activists who contributed to this project. We also thank Santa Clara University's Faculty Research Development Office for their funding support, as well as the Ethnic Studies Department, the Office for Multicultural Learning, and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion for their support of the Q.U.E.E.N! Retreat.

References

- Allen, S., & Li, E. Y. (2016). *A look at Bay Area Poverty*. Retrieved from United Way Bay Area website: https://uwba.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Bay_Area_Poverty_Brief_June_2016.pdf
- bell hooks. (2014). *Teaching to transgress: Education as a practice of freedom*. New York, NY, USA: Routledge.
- Bennett, C. C., Anderson, L. S., Cooper, S., Hassol, I., Klein, D. C., & Rosenblum, G. (Eds.). (1966). *Community psychology: A report of the Boston conference on the education of psychologists for community mental health*. Boston, MA, USA: Boston University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Buechler, S. M. (1995). New social movement theories. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36(3), 441-464. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.1995.tb00447.x
- Collins, P. H. (1990/2000). The politics of Black feminist thought. In P. H. Collins (Ed.), *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (pp. 3-18). New York, NY, USA: Routledge.
- Combahee River Collective. (1974/1982). A Black feminist statement. In G. T. Hull, P. Bell Scott, & B. Smith (Eds.), *But some of us are brave*. Old Westbury, NY, USA: Feminist Press.
- Conner, J., & Rosen, S. M. (2016). *Contemporary youth activism: Advancing social justice in the United States*. Santa Barbara, CA, USA: Praeger.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1241-1299. doi:10.2307/1229039
- Delgado, M., & Staples, L. (2007). *Youth-led community organizing*. Boston, MA, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Depenbrock, J. (2017, August 22). Federal judge finds racism behind Arizona law banning ethnic studies. *NPR - All Things Considered*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/08/22/545402866/federal-judge-finds-racism-behind-arizona-law-banning-ethnic-studies>

- Diemer, M. A., & Li, C. H. (2011). Critical consciousness development and political participation among marginalized youth. *Child Development*, 82(6), 1815-1833. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01650.x
- Diemer, M. A., Wang, Q., Moore, T., Gregory, S. R., Hatcher, K. M., & Voight, A. M. (2010). Sociopolitical development, work salience, and vocational expectations among low socioeconomic status African American, Latin American, and Asian American youth. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(3), 619-635. doi:10.1037/a0017049
- Ginwright, S., Cammarota, J., & Noguera, P. (2006). *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change: New democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth*. New York, NY, USA: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Harwood, S. A., Hunt, M. B., Mendenhall, R., & Lewis, J. A. (2012). Racial microaggressions in the residence halls: Experiences of students of color at a predominantly White university. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 5(3), 159-173. doi:10.1037/a0028956
- Hope, E. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2014). The role of sociopolitical attitudes and civic education in the civic engagement of black youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24(3), 460-470. doi:10.1111/jora.12117
- Hope, E. C., Keels, M., & Durkee, M. I. (2016). Participation in Black Lives Matter and deferred action for childhood arrivals: Modern activism among Black and Latino college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 9(3), 203-215. doi:10.1037/dhe0000032
- Jenkins, H., Shresthova, S., Gamber-Thompson, L., Kligler-Vilenchik, N., & Zimmerman, A. (2016). *By any media necessary: The new youth activism*. New York, NY, USA: NYU Press.
- Jolivé, A. J. (2015). *Research justice: Methodologies for social change*. Bristol, United Kingdom: Policy Press.
- Kelly, A. (2017, August 22). State ban on ethnic studies unconstitutional. *Arizona Public Media*. Retrieved from <https://news.azpm.org/p/news-topical-edu/2017/8/22/115686-state-ban-on-ethnic-studies-unconstitutional/>
- Kezar, A., Acuña Avilez, A., Drivalas, Y., & Wheaton, M. M. (2017). Building social change oriented leadership capacity among student organizations: Developing students and campuses simultaneously. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 2017(155), 45-57. doi:10.1002/yd.20249
- Kirshner, B. (2015). *Youth activism in an era of education inequality*. New York, NY, USA: NYU Press.
- Kornbluh, M., Ozer, E. J., Allen, C. D., & Kirshner, B. (2015). Youth participatory action research as an approach to sociopolitical development and the new academic standards: Considerations for educators. *The Urban Review*, 47(5), 868-892. doi:10.1007/s11256-015-0337-6
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24. doi:10.1080/095183998236863
- Lewis, T. T., Cogburn, C. D., & Williams, D. R. (2015). Self-reported experiences of discrimination and health: Scientific advances, ongoing controversies, and emerging issues. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 11, 407-440. doi:10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032814-112728
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider*. Berkley, CA, USA: Ten Speed Press.
- Nash, J. C. (2013). Practicing love: Black feminism, love-politics, and post-intersectionality. *Meridians*, 11(2), 1-24. doi:10.2979/meridians.11.2.1
- Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and wellbeing*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Park, L. S.-H., & Pellow, D. N. (2004). Racial formation, environmental racism, and the emergence of Silicon Valley. *Ethnicities*, 4(3), 403-424. doi:[10.1177/1468796804045241](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796804045241)
- Rhoads, R. A. (2016). Student activism, diversity, and the struggle for a just society. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 9(3), 189-202. doi:[10.1037/dhe0000039](https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000039)
- Rogers, I. (2012). *The Black campus movement: Black students and the racial reconstitution of higher education, 1965–1972*. New York, NY, USA: Springer.
- Romero, A. (2015). Critically compassionate intellectualism: The pedagogy of barriorganic intellectualism. In J. Cammarota & A. Romero (Eds.), *Raza studies: The public option for educational revolution* (pp. 14–39). Tucson, AR, USA: University of Arizona Press.
- Sánchez Carmen, S. A., Domínguez, M., Greene, A. C., Mendoza, E., Fine, M., Neville, H. A., & Gutiérrez, K. D. (2015). Revisiting the collective in critical consciousness: Diverse sociopolitical wisdoms and ontological healing in sociopolitical development. *The Urban Review*, 47(5), 824-846. doi:[10.1007/s11256-015-0338-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-015-0338-5)
- Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69, 60-73.
- Taft, J. K. (2010). *Rebel girls: Youth activism and social change across the Americas*. New York, NY, USA: NYU Press.
- Torre, M. E., & Ayala, J. (2009). Envisioning participatory action research entremundos. *Feminism & Psychology*, 19(3), 387-393. doi:[10.1177/0959353509105630](https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353509105630)
- Torre, M. E., Fine, M., Stoudt, B., & Fox, M. (2012). Critical participatory action research as public science. In H. Cooper & P. Camic (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology* (pp. 445-469). Washington, DC, USA: American Psychological Association.
- Watts, R. J., Abdul-Adil, J. K., & Pratt, T. (2002). Enhancing critical consciousness in young African American men: A psycho-educational approach. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 3(1), 41-50. doi:[10.1037/1524-9220.3.1.41](https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.3.1.41)
- Watts, R. J., Griffith, D. M., & Abdul-Adil, J. K. (1999). Sociopolitical development as an antidote for oppression – Theory and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(2), 255-271. doi:[10.1023/A:1022839818873](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022839818873)
- Watts, R. J., Williams, N. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(1-2), 185-194. doi:[10.1023/A:1023091024140](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023091024140)
- Williams, D. R., & Mohammed, S. A. (2013). Racism and health: Pathways and scientific evidence. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(8), 1152-1173. doi:[10.1177/0002764213487340](https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213487340)
- Williams, J. (2013). *From the bullet to the ballot: The Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party and racial coalition politics in Chicago*. Chapel Hill, NC, USA: UNC Press Books.
- Williamson, J. A. (1999). In defense of themselves: The Black student struggle for success and recognition at predominantly White colleges and universities. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 68, 92-105. doi:[10.2307/2668212](https://doi.org/10.2307/2668212)