

Youth are often seen as being in the process of developing their personhood. However, human development is not staged or unidirectional. It is socially and culturally situated, and youth are already powerful agents in their lives and in their communities. By not taking youth autonomy seriously, youth development research/practice can reinforce the normalization of youth disenfranchisement and disempowerment. To address these concerns, my current research focuses on: (1) centering social justice for youth in developmental research/practice, (2) critically examining adult-centered institutions (e.g. schools, families, youth development spaces, etc.), policies, and practices that purport to benefit youth wellbeing and (3) developing/adapting participatory methods with/for youth empowerment in research.

Research Experience

In several projects with local school districts, my research activities focused on identifying/interrupting racism in school climate improvement efforts and social-emotional learning practice. Using participatory research approaches with students and school staff, I centered youth lived experience in school data systems, and developed a series of data-to-action workshops to help teachers and administrators translate research into school improvement. I was a principal investigator for three projects, a research analyst for one and a research assistant for two. One first-author paper, titled *'Collaborative Autoethnography as a Tool for Research-Practice Partnerships: Facilitating Self and School Transformation'* is currently under review and three other papers have been published at the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *Journal of the Society for Social Work Research* and *Psychology in Schools*.

For the past 4 years, I have been a core researcher for a community-based participatory evaluation project with King County Public Health's Best Starts for Kids Initiative (BSK). We are developing a protective & promotive measurement tool for (1) positive racial, ethnic and social identity development, (2) social and emotional development and (3) empowering program environments. My first-authored paper titled *'Re-Defining Indicators of Positive Youth Development: A community-based qualitative study with gender diverse youth and adults of color'* outlines some of this work and is currently under review. Simultaneously, I work with BSK to help them develop data systems that can sustain diverse epistemologies and data types. Multiple other papers are in progress and the tool is in its' final stages of testing.

In my dissertation research I explore social media's impact on youth sociopolitical development (SPD). SPD is the process by which knowledge, skills and capacity for social and political action are acquired. This multi-site case study with youth is aimed at clarifying: (1) social media's impact is on youth social awareness, critical consciousness, sociopolitical action and (2) clarifies how we can better use social media for youth empowerment and transformative societal change. I have received two competitive research awards to support the development of this work: the Magnuson Health Science fellowship and the NIH Pre-Doctoral Translational Health Science Training Grant (TL1). Three academic papers are in progress, as well as a series of infographics for public dissemination and a youth-led consciousness-raising campaign.

Future Directions for Research

In the next 2-5 years, I will focus my research on the role of community, context and social networks in youth development and empowerment. In my research with BSK, minoritized youth & youth workers emphasized the importance of understanding youth development as happening in relationships (youth-youth, youth-adult, youth-community, youth-institutions), rather than in individual skill, quality or character development. I will continue participatory action research with minoritized communities to better develop better ways of researching/practicing youth development in more collective/communitarian ways.

My dissertation research contributes to the development of a working model of social media's relationship to sociopolitical development and youth organizing. I will be applying for major research grants to (1) further develop and test of this model with a larger sample, (2) link existing, adapt or develop new programs/interventions to mitigate the negative effects of social media on SPD and facilitate the positive and (3) measure the impact of those interventions for youth empowerment.