Accountable to Whom? A Critical Science Counter-story about a City that Stopped Caring for its Young

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Coming from a critical youth studies perspective, this article sketches a participatory action research project designed by youth and adults in New York City to evaluate the impact of neo-liberal public policies on young people. Through telling the counter-story of the Polling for Justice (PFJ) project, we propose that re-considering accountability at the point of knowledge production is generative for re-imagining — and realising — a more just world. PFJ examined young people's experiences of urban public policy and through embodied participatory research, privileging young people's knowledge of the everyday, attempted deep accountability, provoked precarious solidarity, and activated change. © 2013 John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children's Bureau.

Introduction

Without romanticising or essentialising the stance of youth, we believe that there is no other group that has been systematically researched and written about without their consent, wisdom, outrage or their right to re-present. We are concerned with what Teo (2010) calls 'epistemological violence' in youth and childhood studies; the extent to which the academic literature and popular media bleed psychological deficit and risk onto the most marginalised bodies (see also Lynch, 1999). Much of adolescent psychology tells the story of research *on* or *about* youth — as risky, resilient, victimised, strong, internalising oppression or organising against. In contrast, the present issue circulates fresh air on critical studies of global childhood peering into the keyholes of public institutions, ideologies (govern)mentalities and policies that constrict and construct childhood, troubling notions of care and accountability, offering stunning glimmers of what we might learn from and where we might pause as we engage critical youth studies. We enter this conversation with a trilogy of ethics folded into our practice of critical participatory action research with young people, particularly young people whose lives and dreams have been edited out and scattered onto the cutting room floor of global capitalism and austerity. In these contexts, our research *with* youth is grounded in the belief that young people have a collective right to:

- research the punishing conditions of the neoliberal public sphere upon which they (and we) are profoundly dependent;
- critique and contest mainstream adolescence research that fixes the blame for social problems onto their 'risky' bodies; and
- generate research that stretches the social imagination for what could be, feeds social movements and social media to insist on dramatic shifts in policy, social conditions and cultural representations.

We so appreciate the opportunity to include our work in this collection at a time when structural arrangements are collapsing on poor communities, social welfare nets fraying, inequality gaps widening, surveillance and criminalisation enjoy deep-pocket investment and education and development budgets are being slashed. As Wendy Luttrell reveals so beautifully in this issue and elsewhere, care and solidarity sit on a park bench of justice for children and youth, gently holding them up as they develop. But as governments reduce their contributions to our collective well-being, in the name of austerity, young people find themselves sitting on shaky slabs of wood, often providing for themselves much of the care that was once — unevenly for sure — provided by the State. Globally, and locally, governments are walking away from the social obligation to hold and grow our young, ironically as Strandell points out, in the name of austerity, 'choice' and accountability.

To provide a sense of how this manifests locally — according to Wilkinson and Pickett (2011) — those of us living, working and/or researching in New York City enjoy the status of #1: our nation is among the most unequal in the world; our state among the most unequal in the nation, and our city the most unequal in the state. Thus, is it no surprise that New York City has one of the widest income gaps in the country and the globe. As of the most recent census data, the wealthiest fifth of Manhattan residents earn more than 40 times what the lowest fifth earn (Roberts, 2012). As New York wealthy got wealthier, policy shifts funnelled resources towards surveillance and incarceration and away from access to educational or community rights and resources of/for low-income New Yorkers. The city initiated the closure of a number of public schools in low-income communities for 'poor performance', the opening of a series of selective admission public schools in wealthier, gentrifying communities and, in 1998, the New York Police Department (NYPD) took control of the school security system so that there are now over 5000 police officers inside New York City public schools, but only 3000 guidance counsellors (Mukherjee, 2007). The young people impacted by this disinvestment in education and reinvestment in heavy police presence are predominantly young people of Colour (82% of students in schools with metal detectors are Black and Latino, Mukherjee, 2007). Meanwhile, US prisons are populated with disproportionate numbers of Black and Latino young men from low-income urban areas (Fabricant, 2011), and school completion rates for NYC public school students remain troublingly low. Neoliberal reform has not merely diminished public investment in low-income communities; it has strategically navigated public resources away from youth/community development and towards criminalisation in communities of colour, poverty and immigration. We pause then to ask aloud:

Mic check: accountable to whom? By whom? For whom?

Accountability regimes are always instituted from above, with authority to judge, punish and sanction, while responsibility and blame are scattered below. With a downward glare, enacted by 'objective experts', deficits are documented, while the structural origins and embodied scars of dispossession are erased. The regime persists uncontested until someone says — What if neo-liberalism were held accountable?

In our small installation in this museum of critical childhood studies, we sketch a participatory action research project designed by youth and allied adults, drawn from across neighbourhoods, to evaluate neo-liberalism from the bottom up; to theorise youth experience and embodiments of destabilised public institutions, severed safety nets, strategically distributed collateral consequences, and to linger on the details of building research communities of care and dignity, public science and democratic provocation, deep accountability and precarious solidarity.

Our approach grows from over a decade of critical participatory action research based out of The Public Science Project of the CUNY Graduate Center (Torre and Fine, 2011; Torre and

others, 2012), and from a rich history and present of participatory research and praxis from liberatory scholars around the globe (including Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1982; Lewin, 1951; Lykes and Mallona, 2008; Lynch, 1999; Martín-Baró, 1994; Mayo, 1999; McIntyre, 2008). We are aligned with critical feminist, race and post-colonial emancipatory research (Lather, 1986; Smith, 2012) and believe validity is enhanced by what Harding (1993) calls 'strong objectivity' gained through deep and active participation. We agree with Lynch (1999, p. 55) when she states, 'Unless it is shared with those who are directly affected by it, research data can be used for manipulation, abuse and control. The importance of democratising research arises therefore because knowledge is power'. Indeed, we strive for our research — pivoted on questions linked to social movements — to join in struggles against oppression with people, groups, and perspectives traditionally underrepresented, overlooked, and/or hyper-surveilled in scholarship and denied recognition as political actors and critical knowledge producers (Oliver, 1992).

Polling for Justice: a critical science counter-story about a city that stopped caring for its young

In this paper, we offer a public science counter-story, Polling for Justice (PFJ), a participatory action research project designed by New York City youth and adult researchers interrogating the consequences of urban public policy in neo-liberal New York City, where corporate logic has been insinuated into all things public. A multi-generational research project, PFJ involved over 40 young people from across New York City along with academics, community organisers, public health officials, and community lawyers.[1] The young people were recruited via city-wide listservs, word-of-mouth, flyering, and through teacher/educator/social work networks with over 100 young people expressing interest in participating. Ultimately, the youth researchers were selected based on their availability and willingness to attend regular research meetings. The team of youth researchers was predominantly Black and Latin@ (that is, reflective of New York City public high schools in terms of race/ethnicity[2]), included more girls than boys,[3] and encompassed a range of academic experiences. The adult researchers were also diverse in professional affiliations, race/ethnicity/gender/sexuality, engagement with social movements and familiarity with the methods of public science. In our early research camps, we analysed how urban youth are represented in the media and in academic literatures. The research was designed to document structures and ideologies of oppression while challenging the dominant construction of urban youth as the problem to be explained. We discussed critical science, popular education, education and criminal justice reform, and the long lineage from Du Bois and Freire through to contemporary critical youth research. We educated each other on current policies and conditions that impacted young people, conducting contextual analyses of neoliberal policies. We also took care to establish our research space as a sacred alternative to the more hierarchical environments mixed aged groups generally find themselves. We traded life stories, what we thought of as evidence of oppression and testimonies of surviving despite. With numbers, words and bodies in a collective research space, we built an archive of urban blues and resistance as understood by youth in motion.

As discussed earlier, PFJ was conceived at a time in which already extreme economic, racial and gendered disparities were widening, laminated in an ideological discourse of choice and accountability. Some called these changes progress; others, gentrification; others, homelessness. The New York City mayor declared an educational renaissance of great schools, but in most of the communities where we worked, schools were being shuttered and poor kids, immigrant students, young people with disabilities were being scattered. At the time of our study, and still, government agencies insisted on evidence-based practice: Mayor

Bloomberg was publicising teacher evaluations and school report cards, then punishing teachers and schools by closing/reorganising schools — all based on the results of student standardised test scores. As the achievement gap widened, the NYPD was accelerating its stop and frisk policy, recruiting ever-increasing numbers of Black and Latino people, particularly young men (Stoudt and others, 2011/12) into the criminal justice system, despite widespread evidence of their innocence. This was/is a time when public dollars have been shifted from the presumed development of all to structural and selective opportunities for the few: from cultivation of a system of public schools to the closing of many and opening of a network of selective, often privatised, schools. Public finances, media attention and public policy torqued from community development to security apparatus and technologies of surveillance. They wanted evidence of impact? We were going to generate evidence of impact, collateral damage and resistance.

Our inquiry was organised theoretically around Fine and Ruglis' (2009) conception of *circuits* of *dispossession and resistance*. Spending time with young people in New York City, we knew that problems in school or with the police, in housing or health care, unfolded into troubles with health, police, education and housing; that these circuits were deep and porous, especially in poor communities. With young people at the core of our research collectives, we wanted to study four kinds of (in)justices, documenting a history of the present policy context:

> *Distributive (in)justice* — the dramatically uneven distribution of opportunities, resources and aspirations to young people along the fracture lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and (dis) ability and community

> *Procedural (in)justice* — young people's differential opportunities to challenge, demand or voice organised dissent about these distributed inequities; and further to interrogate whose critique is viewed as civic participation and whose is framed as insubordination or criminally threatening behaviour?

> *A justice of recognition and respect received or denied* — to what extent do individuals and groups experience respect, dignity and sense of ownership within public institutions and by public workers in schools, police, public housing, media, parks, subways and publicly funded research projects

> And *young people's collective right to research* — who is considered a valid researcher of youth lives and struggles?

It was in this historical moment that the PFJ researchers sat around a table in a small windowless classroom at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York deciding as a group of adults and young people how to work together.

Youth and adult researchers divided up into four topic areas: health, education, safety and violence, and criminal justice. Small groups of youth, community researchers/advocates and Public Science Project researchers, worked to sift through stacks of existing literature and surveys relevant to their topic, mining standardised questions and crafting 'home grown' items to fold into the PFJ survey.

Some of the young people imported their knowledge borne in every day experiences with the institutional and policy sectors we were assessing: including being in the midst of a GED[4] completion programme; having been arrested for trespassing on the way to school; caring for an ill family member; or knowing too well the journey upstate to visit an incarcerated parent. Most of the adults contributed expertise embedded in their experience as scholars, educators, community lawyers, and/or public health advocates: working on a school safety/anti stop-and-frisk campaign; advocating for school-based health clinics; researching

schooling practices; counselling homeless LGBTQ young people; or running youth-centred youth organisations in low-income areas of New York City.

The task for the research collective was to cultivate, with deliberate attention to our differences, these distinct forms of knowledge and create a space in which there was shared respect, vigorous debate and dialogue, and ultimately a survey with internal, construct and external validity that could produce both theoretical and provocative generalisability within and across communities (Fine, 2008). As Torre and Ayala (2009) would argue, we were knitting together a research team of 'nos-otras'.

Five months after we began, the PFJ survey went live across New York City, distributed at street fairs, and community organisations, after school programmes, GED completion programmes, rallies and protests, basketball courts, listservs, websites, and anywhere else we thought we might find young people. We used a purposive sampling strategy, aiming to achieve broad geographical distribution, and over-sampling for populations of young people too often under-represented, particularly youth of colour from low-income neighbourhoods and LGBTQ young people. Our aim was to gather a sample that represented the geographic, race/ethnic and gender distribution of students attending the New York City public high schools. After 1 year, we collected surveys from over 1000 young people aged 16–21 well-distributed across the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan and in proportions that mirrored the public high school population of the City excluding Staten Island (see Figure 1; for details of design or findings, see Fox and Fine, 2012).

Building a we/constructing a research team

What do we need from each other to do this work?

We agreed: 'we need to show up', 'expect to disagree at times', 'give each other the benefit of the doubt', ask if we don't understand', and 'remember we all bring different knowledge/

Demographics	Freq	%
Gender		
Female	709	64.8
Male	372	34.0
Transgender	13	1.2
Sexual Orientation		
Straight	979	89.0
LGBQ	121	11.0
Race/Ethnicity		
Black (African American/Caribbean)	354	32.2
Latina/Latino or Hispanic	340	30.9
Asian, South Asian or Pacific Islander	183	16.6
Multi Racial	116	10.5
White	93	8.5
Other (Middle Eastern or Native American or American Indian Alaskan Native)	14	1.3
NYC Borough		
Brooklyn	351	33.3
Manhattan	275	26.1
Bronx	212	20.1
Queens	204	19.3
Staten Island	13	1.2

Figure 1. Polling for Justice survey sample demographics.

experiences'. The exercise of creating a group agreement was one of a series that we used to craft a radically alternative accountability structure within our research team, one that leaned away from the familiar top-down/adult-youth/teacher-student models we were all steeped in.

This internal, alternative, accountability structure was a methodology for thinking critically across generation about youth experiences of current public (neoliberal) policies. Furthermore, when completed surveys started coming in, we needed to invent ways to work collaboratively with the statistical database. Our colleague Brett Stoudt introduced our research team to Exploratory Data Analysis (Tukey, 1977), and led us through what he calls 'Stats-in-Action', that is thinking about the data, in real-time, in an iterative way, moving between lives and patterns of evidence, making and challenging theory (Stoudt, 2011).

To give readers a sense of our praxis: In our survey, we asked a set of detailed questions about youth interactions with schooling and with the police (see questions in Figures 2 and 3).

Early in the process, we reviewed the descriptive data on police–youth interactions alongside experiences with schooling to get a sense of the patterns, rhythms and intersections of positive and negative experiences with police and school. We learnt what PFJ survey respondents had to say that was positive about their schooling and experiences with police, and we heard critique. For instance, 94% of students reported caring about getting good grades in school, 89% felt their teachers had high expectations of them and say that teachers help when they don't understand something. Eighty-six per cent felt like their teachers cared about them. Meanwhile, from the policing data, we learned that 24% of survey respondents reported being helped by a police officer within 6 months of taking the survey, 17% were given a second chance. Examining negative experiences, we learned that 14% of survey respondents had been frisked by the police and/or a school security agent in the last 6 months, 18% had received a ticket or a summons, 33% had been spoken to in a disrespectful way, and 23% had been stopped for questioning.

In thinking through the intersections between experiences with policing and education, we placed the survey statistics within the literature on youth, policing and education, and thought together about our individual and collective experiences. We considered the survey responses alongside our personal knowledge, both chilling and comforting, of encounters with school security officers, with subway police on the way to and from school, even with the security officers surveilling PFJ young people as they entered The Graduate Center to conduct research each week.

With data in the form of quotes, graphs, maps, and cross-tabulations projected on the walls, and bodies on floors and couches, we spent our research sessions pop-corning questions from all members of the research team, bouncing from personal experiences to patterns in the aggregated, and then disaggregated data (see Figures 2 and 3). Some of the analytic inquiries could be answered in real-time — what are the gender, race/ethnicity and neighbourhood patterns of negative police interactions? What about LGBQ youth and the police? (see Figure 4) Why do young people have so much exposure to police? What brings youth into the 'streets'/public space/how far do young people travel to get from home to school? What happens after a stop — are they depressed or mad? Did they miss school? Other questions were harder to answer with the existing database: What is the accumulated impact of growing up policed on young people's education? Instead of asking about race and sexual orientation, why did not we ask about skin colour, or gender non-conforming youth? How do young people get help if they do not trust the police? To explore further, we mapped the data, and then went to the neighbourhoods of high rates of negative interactions to seek the expertise of youth in those communities to explain the findings.

In my school... (%)

POSITIVE FEELINGS TOWARDS SCHOOL

	Disagree	Agree
In my school I care about getting good grades.	5.7	94.3
In my school my teachers have high expectations of me.	11.3	88.7
In my school my teachers help me when I don't understand something.	11.6	88.4
In my school my teachers care about me.	14.1	85.9
In my school my culture is respected.	17.4	82.6
In my school the school helps me feel prepared for college.	24.5	75.5
In my school I can talk to teachers about problems I am having in class.	28.3	71.7
In my school I feel challenged by what I'm learning.	32.6	67.4
In my school I feel like people really know me.	33.6	66.5

□ Disagree ■ Agree

In my school... (%)

NEGATIVE FEELINGS TOWARDS SCHOOL

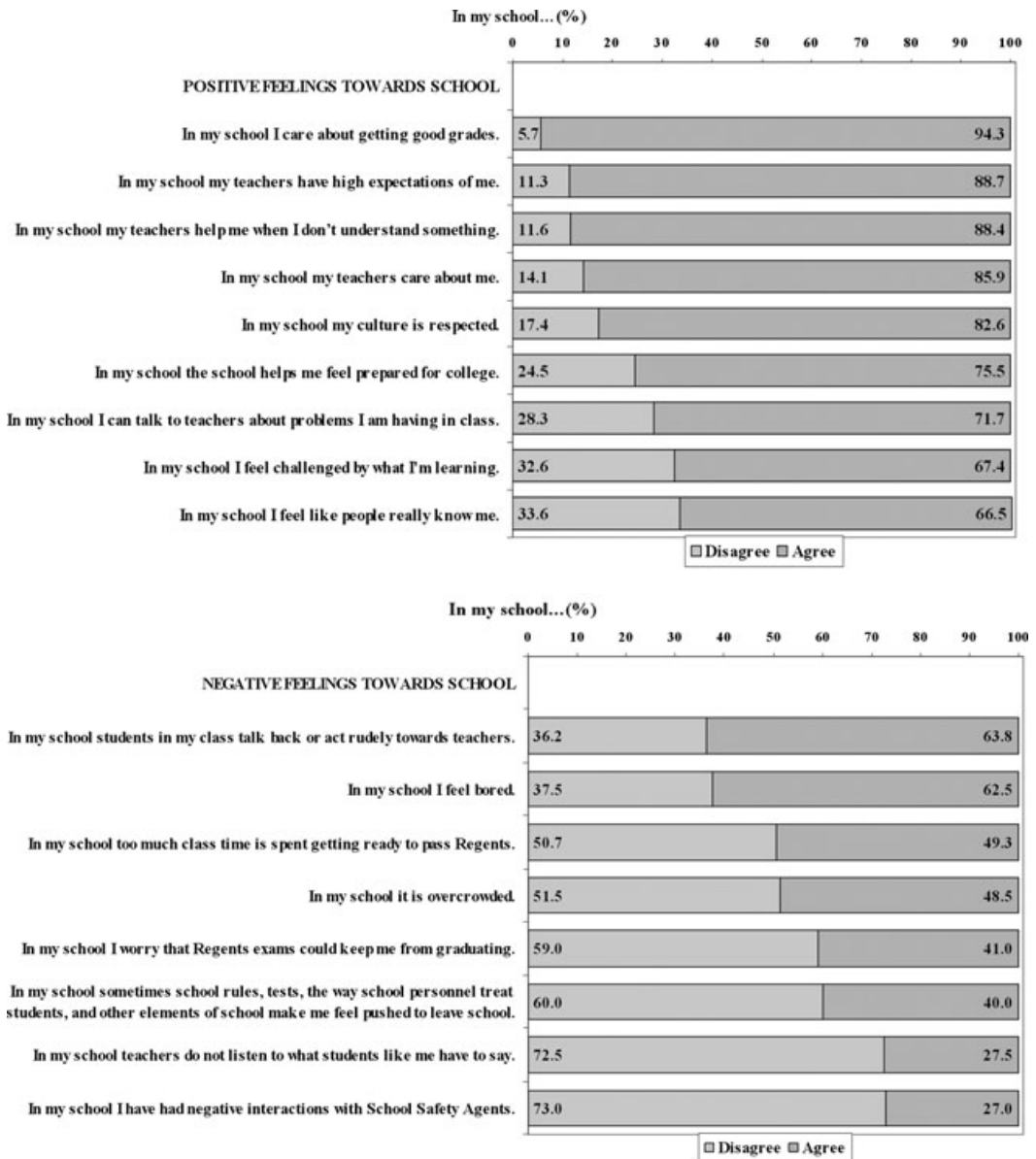|	Disagree	Agree
In my school students in my class talk back or act rudely towards teachers.	36.2	63.8
In my school I feel bored.	37.5	62.5
In my school too much class time is spent getting ready to pass Regents.	50.7	49.3
In my school it is overcrowded.	51.5	48.5
In my school I worry that Regents exams could keep me from graduating.	59.0	41.0
In my school sometimes school rules, tests, the way school personnel treat students, and other elements of school make me feel pushed to leave school.	60.0	40.0
In my school teachers do not listen to what students like me have to say.	72.5	27.5
In my school I have had negative interactions with School Safety Agents.	73.0	27.0

□ Disagree ■ Agree

Figure 2. Polling for Justice survey experiences with schooling.

We ventured into those neighbourhoods, with data as our provisional and navigational guides. We learnt indeed that gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, probably skin colour and definitely neighbourhood matter in terms of the extent to which young people report accumulated negative experiences. Interested in the intersections of youth experiences with schooling, policing and its impact on health, our research team honed in on aggressive policing inside and outside schools as an area of heightened concern. We could trace statistically, through a young person's life, the collateral consequence of 'just a stop' — in terms of mental and physical health (Fine and others, 2010).
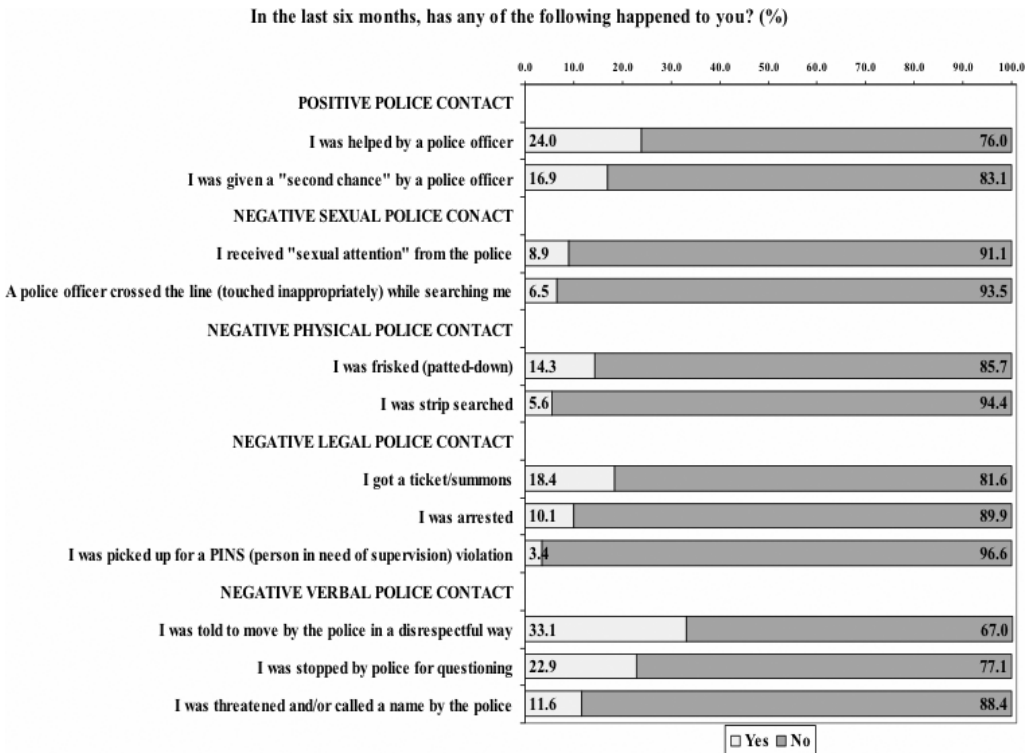
In the last six months, has any of the following happened to you? (%)

POSITIVE POLICE CONTACT
I was helped by a police officer — 24.0 / 76.0
I was given a "second chance" by a police officer — 16.9 / 83.1
NEGATIVE SEXUAL POLICE CONACT
I received "sexual attention" from the police — 8.9 / 91.1
A police officer crossed the line (touched inappropriately) while searching me — 6.5 / 93.5
NEGATIVE PHYSICAL POLICE CONTACT
I was frisked (patted-down) — 14.3 / 85.7
I was strip searched — 5.6 / 94.4
NEGATIVE LEGAL POLICE CONTACT
I got a ticket/summons — 18.4 / 81.6
I was arrested — 10.1 / 89.9
I was picked up for a PINS (person in need of supervision) violation — 3.4 / 96.6
NEGATIVE VERBAL POLICE CONTACT
I was told to move by the police in a disrespectful way — 33.1 / 67.0
I was stopped by police for questioning — 22.9 / 77.1
I was threatened and/or called a name by the police — 11.6 / 88.4

□ Yes ■ No

Figure 3. Polling for Justice survey items on interactions with police.

In data-driven focus groups (Billies, Brewster, Hyacinthe, 2011),, young people who identified as LGBTQ were invited to consult to PFJ, drawing on their experience and expertise to dig deeply into the data and theorise about how and why their communities experienced high levels of aggressive policing. As one participant told it:

> N: Let's say, okay, I was, I'm walking out on the street with my girlfriend and a cop grabs me inappropriately, how would that sound? Like, I think that's how people think. Like how would that sound if I told somebody? 'Like, yeah, we were walking down the street, I was walking down the street with my girlfriend'. It's gonna stop right there. 'You were walking down the street with your girlfriend?' People are not gonna care. 'Like, why were you walking down the street with a girl?'

We catalogued those schools, public housing units, zip codes and 'hang outs' for queer youth that were particularly prone to high rates of negative interactions with police. We compared our community-generated data with those published by the NYPD and discovered substantial convergence of findings. While PFJ data allowed us to calculate the wildly disproportionate rates of negative interactions for LGBQ youth from PFJ data (because we had respondent self-report information about sexuality), the NYPD data revealed that 90% of stop and frisk incidents were 'innocent stops' — no weapon, no crime and no arrest (because they could track over time the outcome of each stop) (Stoudt and others, 2011/12). We heard, from our open-ended data, a palpable sense of powerlessness and anger voiced not only by victims but also bystanders and witnesses watching friends, family members and neighbours being harassed, abused, cuffed, searched, ticketed, cursed … unable to intervene lest they themselves be arrested for interference.
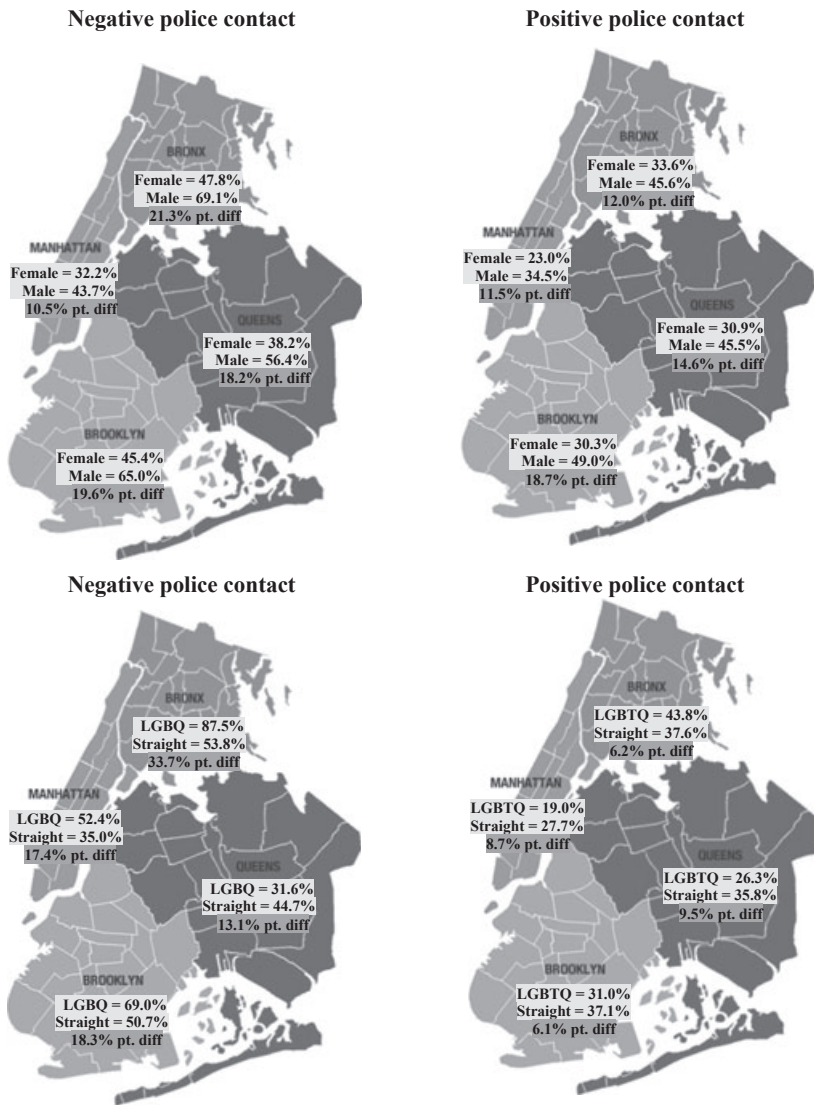
Negative police contact   **Positive police contact**

Female = 47.8%
Male = 69.1%
21.3% pt. diff

Female = 32.2%
Male = 43.7%
10.5% pt. diff

Female = 38.2%
Male = 56.4%
18.2% pt. diff

Female = 45.4%
Male = 65.0%
19.6% pt. diff

Female = 33.6%
Male = 45.6%
12.0% pt. diff

Female = 23.0%
Male = 34.5%
11.5% pt. diff

Female = 30.9%
Male = 45.5%
14.6% pt. diff

Female = 30.3%
Male = 49.0%
18.7% pt. diff

Negative police contact   **Positive police contact**

LGBQ = 87.5%
Straight = 53.8%
33.7% pt. diff

LGBQ = 52.4%
Straight = 35.0%
17.4% pt. diff

LGBQ = 31.6%
Straight = 44.7%
13.1% pt. diff

LGBQ = 69.0%
Straight = 50.7%
18.3% pt. diff

LGBTQ = 43.8%
Straight = 37.6%
6.2% pt. diff

LGBTQ = 19.0%
Straight = 27.7%
8.7% pt. diff

LGBTQ = 26.3%
Straight = 35.8%
9.5% pt. diff

LGBTQ = 31.0%
Straight = 37.1%
6.1% pt. diff

Figure 4. Polling for Justice maps on youth interactions with police.

    In participatory work, when the 'subjects' are the researchers, simple data points became intimate flashbacks and political mysteries, ethical challenges and sites of injustice to denaturalise and contest. Our collective analysis of survey data and life stories made structural causes visible; private experiences public; acquiescence unthinkable; resistance imperative. But words and numbers were not enough.

Analysis and Dissemination

Harvesting embodied knowledge and choreographing provocative performance

Each week, we heard more and more from the youth researchers about experiences that echoed the disturbing racialised, classed and sexualised patterns of dispossession emerging from

our survey analyses. Moments small and large, thrilling and alarming were shared from being arrested for trespassing, to getting into college; from falling asleep in English class, to being locked out all night; from getting grandma to the doctor, to reading a good book on the subway. Sometimes in the quiet, smaller space right after a meeting, someone would share that s/he was homeless again, or trying to scrape together the fees to take the SAT. We would strategise about how to get the morning after pill with no ID, or about trying to get pregnant. We noted how the events of our daily lives mirrored and complicated the data we were analysing from the survey.

Our meetings still braided lives with data — but now we incorporated Playback Theatre into the work (Fox, 1994; Salas, 2007), creating dramatic interpretations of the data, tapping into the knowledge stored in our bellies, earlobes, calves and shoulders. Joined by performance artist Una Osato, we found many different ways to 'Make the numbers come to life', as PFJ researcher Darius Francis would say.

To access the knowledge between lives and structures, between lives-in-motion and data in the statistical aggregate, we worked with findings by projecting a graph onto the wall and developing a human sculpture, a brief monologue, or a short scene that re-enacted our understanding/interpretation of each piece of data. By introducing movement and embodied methods, we softened what looked like a 'fixed relationship' to understand nuance, mediators, complexity, intersectionality, multiple interpretations, desire and despair.

The turn to embodied methodologies radically and deliciously complicated our collective analysis. Through embodied sculptures, images, or scenes, the room filled with a range of voices and banished affects of shame, fear and despair, as well as joy and solidarity (Fox & Fine, 2012). We decided to examine 'risk' — a prominent analytic framework in the literature on urban youth of colour. When analysed using the PFJ database, from a structural point of view, the findings were not very surprising, pretty, or hopeful. The more young people 'accumulated dispossession' (e.g. being pushed out of school, without health care, involved with criminal justice and living in precarious housing situation, e.g. foster care or homeless), the more likely they are to report engaging in 'risky behaviours', e.g. being involved in a violent experience, a risky sexual experience, and/or doing or taking drugs or alcohol (Fine and others, 2010).[5] This dominant story is not untrue, but it is only partial, distorting the popular conception of urban violence, doing violence to the wisdom and agency of the young researchers aggregating the findings.

Our embodied approach to analysis not only facilitated the research team to focus on the multi-dimensionality of the data, but in addition, facilitated our group to think dialectically across generation and experience. When we metabolised the data into a scene or human sculpture, our accountability to the data (the 1000 teenage survey respondents) and to outliers, we released complex narratives of what it means to craft a life-in-motion in a city-in-turmoil.

Dissemination: performing radical evidence, provoking collective accountability and inviting new solidarities

As we were developing cumulative analyses of public policies and their disproportionate impact on particular populations of youth of colour from low-income areas, we were simultaneously invited to share findings in college classes, at academic conferences, to teachers, and in schools. We knew that we wanted our findings to be disseminated widely. We also knew that we did not want to evoke empathy, pity or shock. We wanted to provoke action.

The PFJ project developed a performance genre from/with/through the evidence to communicate with audiences our *shared fates, braided lives, and our collective debt* to one another. The PFJ performances told the story of our project, shared findings from the survey,

and then insisted that the audience participate with us in making meaning and widening the social imagination for how things ought to be.

In March 2011, at the academic conference that many of the papers in this special issue were presented at, the PFJ researchers performed their research for the fifth time.

A glimpse from the performance:

> Sixty-four per cent of students say that in their school, students talk back or act rudely towards teachers. Sixty-three per cent feel bored in school. And 49% say there's too much class time spent getting ready to pass the Regents.

Niara read out loud while Terell, Darria, Candace, and Tash formed a classroom scene in front of the projected graph. They acted out the character of a young woman putting on a light backpack in the morning to have it filled up throughout the school day with the burdensome, metaphoric weight of the experiences described in the data. They continued with more scenes reflecting the data on youth experiences with education, policing, with home and family life, with health. The presentation was brief, only 15 min, but by the end, the adult audience had sense of a wide breadth of NYC young people's experiences. The youth researchers turned to the audience to hear audience members' responses:

> I'm feeling angry thinking about all the police officers in schools, and how young people are treated in places where they should be able to learn

> I'm wondering how does it feel to be in such a hostile place (school). I feel very sorry, and indignant.

> I feel inspired and hopeful from watching the performance and seeing the research.

The PFJ researchers transformed each response into a small moment of theatre, acknowledging the range of affect the PFJ data provoked. In the final step of the performance, the PFJ researchers invited the audience to think with them about mutual responsibility, about complicity, and about action.

Through this embodied research encounter, although fleeting and metaphoric, the audience had to make sense of the paradox between the data on dispossession and negative experiences of young people they were hearing, and the sophisticated work of the youth researchers presenting/performing the research. They had to think about their own/adult complicity in the conditions that were presented and responsibility for action. Using small scenes and physical sculptures, the researcher-performers could quickly communicate multiple and complex perspectives, and provoke a dissonance tilted towards new solidarities. It was our aim that for the few moments we had the stage, we might transform the conference into a multi-generational, participatory lab, steeped in data, affect, and ideas for action.

Boler (1999) cautions that empathic readings permit readers to go under the false assumption that it is possible to fully imagine others, and allow for a passive consumption of the subject's experience/emotions without also having to examine the reader's social responsibilities. She calls instead for an active empathy, or a 'testimonial reading', where the responsibility for action lies with the reader/audience. In PFJ, as a group of mostly African American and Latin@ young people, we were especially concerned that we not encourage our predominantly White, adult, middle-class audiences to want to save or rescue poor Black and Brown youth. We used playful, nuanced, powerful embodiments of our data as one way to guard against portraying youth of colour as suffering and as victims. We worked to avoid a performance setting where rows of comfortable audience members re-enacted the watching of others' pain as onlookers. We considered bystanders, witnesses, and non-victims, although

seemingly unaffected, to be potentially powerful in their liminal roles (Fine, 2002). Our hope was to incite a recognition of collective responsibility and to illuminate the cross-circuits of dispossession, privilege and responsibility coursing through the performance space.

Mic check: Research on, for, by, with youth! What's in a preposition?

Audience: Everything! epistemology, theory, methods, action, justice and sustainability

With the story of PFJ, we have tried to suggest the power of critical participatory research as a strategic manoeuvre to queer dominant conceptions of governmentality and accountability, but also to register our concerns with the epistemic violence of most research on youth. PFJ youth researcher Jessica Wise wanted our research findings to have impact on policy changes for young people:

> I think at the end of the day, our job is to inform others about our experiences. And, it's not only our experiences, it's something that people all over the world, and young people especially, go through every day — injustice, learning how to be resilient, dealing with the police. This — our data and performances — is just a small way to see into what happens every day. Our role is not only just to say, 'Oh, this is what we learned', but, at the end of the day, 'what are we going to do about that?' The point is, it doesn't stop with the performances, it starts with them. We ask ourselves and our audiences, after we perform, or present our data, where do we go from here? How do we get this important data to the big lawmakers and to the people who actually make decisions. They don't matter the most, but they are the ones who are basically in charge, so how do we get up to their level to say, 'listen, this is what we need you to do for us. Because you work for us, you don't work for yourself'.

As generative as we found embodying and performing research, it was vital to our research goals that the PFJ data circulate outside the performance space as policy, organising and public education. We made efforts to ensure that key PFJ findings were used in youth-friendly media (Cushman, 2010), public hearings (for instance on school discipline reform) policy reports, community speak-outs (on community and school safety), and academic papers on education, safety reforms, and social critique. In particular, the PFJ data on youth experiences of aggressive policing fed organising efforts across New York City. Additionally, PFJ spawned further research, lead by Brett Stoudt and María Torre that, is building a body of evidence for community-based police reform (see Stoudt and Torre, Submitted) via research, policy reform and direct action (Wall, 2012).

The PFJ project was formed by a coalition of community organisations, community members and academic researchers in a moment when there was need, from various perspectives, to develop a grounded empirical understanding of youth experiences of public policy, steeped in analyses of power as a tool for understanding neoliberalism, expertise and what constitutes science. Ebbing and flowing according to the needs of the research, PFJ was at moments quite large (the survey was developed with over 40 youth researchers), and at other moments (like when doing embodied research), our research team was a concentrated group of 8–10. To conduct the study, we were fortunate to receive small grants from a number of interested foundations. Their support made it possible for us to acquire the funding necessary to carry out a project of this scale without being beholden to any single organisation/funder agenda. Working with small grants, linked to community-based organising work, from a number of funding sources enabled us to distribute accountability. As Lynch (1999) points out, it is inherently difficult for academics to contribute to radical social change while bound by the rules of the academy or, we would add, philanthropy or even one specific public funding source. In PFJ, in cross community–academy collaboration, we were mindful of our

commitment (and accompanying challenges) to radically democratise the production of knowledge. PFJ attempted to construct a working reality where young people had power to shape inquiry into their experiences, decided how to interpret the findings, and then took a lead role in action, in part through radically inverting conventional understandings of who/what should be held accountable so that we might all feel that policies, their impact and their makers, are indeed 'working for us'.

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Contributors' details

Madeline Fox is a doctoral candidate in Critical Social Psychology at the Graduate Center, interested in embodied participatory research on youth experiences of every day oppressions and dignity and research methodologies for provoking political solidarity. She was the director of the Polling Justice Project, a participatory action research project on youth experiences at the intersections of education, criminal justice and public health in New York City. Madeline is the Institute Coordinator for the Public Science Project and co-edited the volume Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims with Rickie Solinger and Kayhan Irani.

Michelle Fine, PhD, is a Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Urban Education and Women's Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and Chair of Social/Personality Psychology program. Her recent awards include the 2011 Kurt Lewin award from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the 2010 Higher Education and Criminal Justice award from the College and Community Fellowship, the 2008 Social Justice Award from the Cross Cultural Roundtable at Teachers College, Columbia University, the 2005 First Morton Deutsch Social Justice Scholar Award from Columbia University, and the 2001 Carolyn Sherif Award from APA. For over 15 years she has been involved in a rich set of participatory action research projects focused on circuits of dispossession and resistance in schools, communities, and prisons. These projects seek to produce public science for social change through legislation, critical social theory, and popular mobilization for educational justice.

Notes

1 This article was written in connection with the PFJ research team including Niara Calliste, Darius Francis, Candace Greene, Una Osato, Jaquana Pearson, Maybelline Santos, Brett Stoudt, and Jessica Wise.
2 According to data from the New York City Department of Education, in 2007, the year preceding the PFJ study, NYC schools were made up of 32% African American, 39% Hispanic, 13% Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino, 14% White, and 2% Other.
3 The PFJ study attracted interest from more girls than boys with regard to participating as researchers and as survey respondents.
4 General Education Diploma, or a set of tests that when completed qualify as an alternative high-school degree in the U.S.A. To take the GED exam, a person must be at least 16 years old and not currently enrolled in high school.

5 It is important to note, a minority of young people reported being involved in violent situations, engaging in risky sexual behaviours and/or using drugs or alcohol (Fine and others, 2010).

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