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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

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Abstract

Rockport is an elite, all boys, day school in the northeast United States. It educates mostly white, wealthy, young men. Student researchers, faculty researchers and I collaborated to study bullying at Rockport using an approach to research known as participatory action research (PAR). In the process we also gained a better understanding of how privilege, especially gendered privilege, was socialized and (re)produced. The participatory research spaces that emerged in our project - grounded in the experiences of students, teachers, and administrators - facilitated critical awareness of self and context that Deutsch (2006) referred to as "awaking the sense of injustice." Over the course of a year, our research at Rockport collected data of local consequence and in doing so, built institutional momentum that has since become a school-wide and ongoing initiative to address bullying. As a result, this work was a form of counter-hegemonic action.

Keywords: participatory action research, counter-hegemonic action, privilege, private schools

Rockport is an elite, all boys, day school in the northeast United States. It educates mostly white, wealthy, young men. Elite private schools have traditionally been and continue to be gatekeepers to the upper class as well as a type of inheritance transferred to children by their wealthy families; what Shapiro (2004) called "head-start assets" because they give individuals a non-meritorious lead in the race to get ahead. Cookson and Persell (1985) noted in their extensive studies of elite schools that a culture of cruelty and bullying was commonly observed among the boys. Indeed, educating for power and privilege have long held the tradition of cultivating particular types of "ruling" masculinities (Gathorne-Hardy, 1978). Thus, private education is one fundamental contributor to the American upper class that deserves closer scrutiny. Furthermore, how the maintenance and reproduction of economic privilege is connected with other privileges, particularly masculine privilege, also deserves study.

Of the United States, Peshkin (2001) recognized the "national proclivity, such as it is, favors pulling up those who suffer competitive disadvantages, rather than diminishing the advantages of the advantaged" (p. 122). He wondered of elite schools if, "Is it fair? Is it just? Is it good? that we have such schools that lie a chasm beyond those that most American children attend?" (p. 126). He worried prep school students too often transformed "their advantage into a shield of indifference by means of which they ignore or deny the unfairness of inequality. To do so would be to live a comfortable life while sanctioning the hardship of others" (Peshkin 2001, p. 125). In response, Peshkin (2001) argued for private institutions that promoted values reflecting the common good, "Their education need not give or promise solutions to problems, but it should leave them knowing that the suffering of the least of us is an intolerable indignity, a war being lost that should be seen as the best of all wars to win, the war for the common good" (p. 125). Together with four seniors and four faculty members, we collaboratively conducted research to examine types of bullying at Rockport and its connection with hegemonic masculinity and privilege. Through an approach to research known as participatory action research (PAR), we attempted to create spaces where "common

good" was the foundation from which we proceeded. While we did not have specific ideas for action when the project began, it was our intention to facilitate change inside the Rockport community around the issues of bullying, masculinity and ultimately privilege.

In a 1946 special issue of the Journal of Social Issues entitled "Action and Research: A Challenge," Russell (1946) identified social science as "oil for the lamps of democracy" while Lippit (1946, p. 58) wrote specifically of a method he felt was strongly conducive to the health of our democracy:

> There is a third approach to measurement which in the future we believe will be seen more and more as a basic aspect of democratic group life. This is a situation where one of the methods of change of group life being used is the training of the group members, or a sub-group of the group, in techniques of studying and evaluating its own group processes. For group members to participate in the objective role of fact finding has been found to be one of the most effective attitude changing techniques.

Lippit described what we call today participatory action research (PAR). Indeed, PAR is grounded in a long tradition of social psychological research dating back to the origins of the field and now links researchers across countries and disciplines (Torre et al., 2012). It is an epistemological and methodological approach to the social sciences that questions and reimagines who the experts are. At its core, this approach facilitates the critical use of research in collaboration with community members to better understand and improve their own communities; creating opportunities for democratic participation at every phase of research. Collaboratively the research team reads theory and other relevant literature, develops methods, collects the data, analyzes the data, and organizes actions or interventions that are suggested by the findings. PAR is linked to critical theories such as feminist standpoint, critical race and queer theories and therefore is research explicitly in alliance with those who are marginalized. (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine & Torre, 2004; Torre & Ayala, 2009).

While most participatory scholarship studies with those who are disadvantaged, a wave of scholarship has recently emerged using PAR

to directly study privilege with those individuals and inside those institutions that are most structurally advantaged (see Kuriloff, Reichert, Stoudt & Ravitch, 2009; Stoudt, Kuriloff, Reichert & Ravitch, 2010). The Rockport Bullying Study is one illustration of the critical study of privilege bridged with PAR (see Stoudt, 2006, 2007, 2009; Stoudt, et al., 2010).

  Deutsch (1974, p. 61) examined what it meant to "awaken a sense of injustice" in those who are given structural advantages and argued that the social sciences too often focus on the victims rather than the victimizers:

> It has been a too common assumption of victimizers (even those of good will), as well as of many social scientists, that the social pathology has been in the ghetto rather than in those who have built the walls to surround it, that the disadvantaged are the ones who need to be changed rather than the people and the institutions who have kept the disadvantaged in a submerged position.

The victim/victimizer distinction (perhaps more apt the privileged/op-pressed or the advantaged/disadvantaged distinction) cannot be studied as a simple dichotomy and instead is intersectional and contextual.The list of privileges that accrue to most of the students of Rockport, at minimum, include being White, wealthy, boys attending an elite private school. Researching people and institutions that are privileged may seem counterintuitive for justice scholars. The students of Rockport are the benefactors of social structures set up for them to succeed. However, as Deutsch reminds us, privilege is not examined enough and in fact, the absence of this critical gaze helps to make normal, invisible, and natural the social structures that advantage a few at the cost of many. There is much at stake for all of us, as Peshkin (2001) argued, when those who benefit from others disadvantages remain unaware of their systemic connection to injustice and its larger implications.

    This article will illustrate the ways in which participatory research was a transformative process for the students and faculty involved at Rockport. It was a project that provided opportunities for developing a sense of injustice and ethic of responsibility. In the next section I will

briefly describe six transformative moments in the research: defining thecontours of bullying, naming bullying as civilized oppression, denaturalizing the presence of civilized oppression, shifting the gaze towards systemic injustice, acknowledging uncomfortable emotions, and developing a responsibility for community change. I will conclude with thoughts about using PAR towards counter-hegemonic action in privileged contexts.

The Rockport Bullying Study

The Rockport Bullying Study involved a student and faculty research team made up of two White teachers named Mary and Sara, two White college counselors named Jill and Greg as well as four senior White boys named Paul, Steve, John, and Dave. The work described in this article lasted one school year, August to June. Together, the student and faculty researchers set out to examine the ways that bullying was performed at Rockport, its socio-emotional connection to masculine privilege, and ultimately how it contributed to civilized oppression (Harvey, 1999) within and beyond Rockport.

We crafted a research design that could analyze bullying as a cultural phenomenon across levels of status within the school through a survey for students and in depth interviews for faculty. The student researchers identified four types of verbal and physical bullying, which they defined broadly as ridiculing/teasing, bullying/intimidation, hazing/initiations, and fighting/physical violence. They created an instrument using a range of closed and open-ended questions designed to address the complex and relational experiences of bullying at Rockport. They collected a sample of 96 classmates in 9th through 12th grade. Faculty researchers then developed an interview protocol based on the student researchers' broad conceptual understanding of bullying. The faculty research team conducted semistructured interviews with 10 colleagues (7 males and 3 females; 8 teachers and 2 administrators). In addition, faculty intervie-wees were asked to react to some of the data collected by student researchers.

The student and faculty researchers then worked with me to collaboratively analyze the multiple layers of data they collected. This article will explore the conversations student and faculty researchers had as they grappled with these layers of data and their own experiences as victims, victimizers, and witnesses to bullying. Labels in parentheses are included throughout the text to help readers identify from where the quotes were derived: SR=student researcher; FR=faculty researchers; AD=administrators.

Defining the Contours of Bullying: The student researchers led the development of our conceptual and methodological framework. We began with several informal discussions of their experiences with bullying at Rockport and what seemed from an outsider's perspective as a masculine culture of cruelty among the boys. Based on our discussions, we decided to develop a short survey that students could fill out quickly at lunch, in advisory groups or other free time throughout the school day.

The student researchers created the first draft of our survey. In the email to which it was attached, Steve (SR) wrote, "Paul and I came up with a rough draft of a survey…we worked on the definition of *this* "bullying"."Constructing the survey was an exercise in explicitly defining our theory in practice. Steve's mention of "this 'bullying'" in parentheses (italics added) seemed to suggest a tension in their use of the word bullying, possibly with finding a definition that accurately matched their experiences at Rockport. The majority of the questions in this first draft represented the victim's perspective of bullying. Though certainly a rough draft, the questions revealed the student researchers were interested in if and to what extent bullying occurred, what its causes and effects were, and also if bullying led to negative or hurtful experiences. Furthermore, while most of the original questions in the draft were written as traditionally scaled items, the student researchers did include a few open-ended questions suggesting the potential need for mixed methods. Our first draft had significant theoretical and methodological implications. Once highlighted, these elements became guiding markers for further dialogue, dialogue, reflection and future drafts.

   The second draft of our survey was longer and more conceptually complicated. Steve (SR) wrote, "I touched a little on [bullying] being verbal or physical…" Including both verbal and physical positioned us to think beyond the most overt types of bullying such as "playground fighting" towards identifying a continuum of behaviors. Questions were added to help us, as Steve (SR) explained, "Completely understand the survey taker's role in [bullying]." Their original survey focused mostly on "the victim." In the second draft other perspectives were accounted for. The addition of "getting a laugh" or "putting someone down" in the new definition implied a connection between audience, standpoint and social power. As Steve (SR) suggested, "the audience does matter. I added a question at the end touching on the survey-taker as an 'observer.'" Also, "To understand the role of the observer more, this question was added: Do you laugh or show signs of approval of this behavior when you are an observer of it?" In addition, "to get a better understanding on whether this survey taker is the prey or the predator (if that makes sense) I added a quantitative question stating that 'I intimidate others.'" Steve (SR) explained that the students' additions allowed us to "touch on the subject as a victim, predator, and an observer." Though survey items remained rough, the theoretical intent of the questions was gaining sophistication.

   After the second draft, we took the assumptions of our emerging theory and our second draft to a social psychology class taught at Rockport to get their comments and suggestions. The classroom feedback to our survey challenged us to think critically about it in ways we had not anticipated. In our discussion, evidence emerged that what we were studying may exist beyond the individual students and their peer relationships. As one student suggested, "As far as the verbal abuse and stuff like that I really think that a lot of teachers, not all of them but I think a lot of teachers kind of think 'boys will be boys' attitude and these adolescents will work it out on their own." Paul (SR) agreed and added, "It becomes an accepted like part of the class that it is almost becomes awkward for the teacher to call him out on it…. Like there are definitely times in class when it has gotten over the line." Together they implied that teachers can help to facilitate the "verbal abuse" that occurs between the students. That a school or classroom culture can potentially

exist that is tolerant of "verbal abuse" and is sustained by the hegemonic gender ideologies that "boys will be boys." Therefore, in the final survey draft, we addressed bullying beyond the student by asking if and to what extent the institution, culture, ideology or others in the community helped contribute to bullying.

Our work represented the gradual expansion from victim to victim/perpetrator/witness of a broad spectrum of masculine-oriented bullying behaviors that are embedded and enacted by individuals and the culture. Our theory and instrument progressed collaboratively over time. The final draft of our instrument and underlying theory represented a broadened conceptualization of bullying (ridiculing/tea-sing, bullying/intimidation, hazing/initiations and fighting/physical violence), an emphasis on positionality in that there were likely at least three different experiential standpoints (victim, perpetrator, witness); and an understanding that bullying may potentially be part of a culture, an ideology and even facilitated by faculty.

Naming Bullying as Civilized Oppression: Our initiative to study bullying emerged locally out of previous research with faculty where it became apparent many young men were struggling with an aggressive, traditionally masculine school culture. Bullying was a highly relevant research topic within the school walls that straddled multiple, sometimes competing interests. As a result, the study helped to awaken for students and faculty the broad, sometimes hidden, often normalized ways that bullying was performed at Rockport. The study also held strong implications for the pursuit of social justice as we revealed the socio-political capacity of bullying to exclude and censure, to impose power and build hierarchy, and reproduce privilege.

Acts of bullying at Rockport were often neither arbitrary nor neutral. Take, for example, the representations of masculinity, sexuality, and class in Dave's (SR) quote:

> Waking up in the morning and coming to Rockport has so many added pressures besides making sure that all of your homework is done. On top of the demands that the teachers put on you, the students subconsciously put pressures on other students. Pressures that include making sure your tie is not considered a gay tie because of its coloring, or that the car you are getting out of is up to the standards of a [local wealthy] community. On a dress down day there is the added pressure of wearing a certain pair of jeans because they won't be considered tough enough, or the saying on your sweatshirt is as gay as the pink tie you wore two days ago.

In our data, we found these values were too often reproduced through teasing, ridiculing, joking, hazing, fighting and a host of other subtle interactions throughout the school day. At the institutional level, bullying was connected to a highly competitive culture focused on elite college admittance and a mission to educate for privilege and power where preparing boys to thrive in competitive, capitalistic environments may necessitate becoming comfortable with social aggression. At the interpersonal level, bullying for students was an expression of masculinity that conveyed power, established hierarchy, and at the same time was often connected with friendship and camaraderie. The homophobic ("you're so gay") and sexist ("you're a girl") ridicule could at the same time define normality, create a moment of bonding among friends, and establish a hierarchy of who's in and who's out.

In practice, this tended to represent what Cudd (2006) suggested are the foundations to oppression and what Harvey (1999) described as civilized oppression. As both recipients and representatives of their institution, bullying was often used by students and sometimes faculty to police the "acceptable" hegemonic boundaries of Rockport (and the larger culture) in ways that potentially reproduced, made invisible, normalized and justified structural privileges. For example, Greg (FR) explained:

> I mean it sounds not like a revelation and all but I guess to me
> initially it was. I guess someplace early on you have to dispel the
> notion that bullying is just physical. Because I think if we asked
> anybody 9 out of 10 people are going to say there is no bullying.
> I've never seen anybody pushed out into the Avenue…because the
> subtleness here and it's so intrinsic in our culture here that people
> say they don't recognize it as bullying. I didn't until we started
> having this conversation but yeah it is.

Bullying was not a break in the culture of Rockport but an expression of
it; emerging out of and then also contributing back to a strong local
hegemonic institutional community, a larger hegemonic culture, and
ultimately the continuing reproduction of oppressive structures. This
made the study of bullying at Rockport an important topic to pursue in
the name of social justice.

   Denaturalizing the Presence of Civilized Oppression: To name or
contest bullying as a practice of privilege was risky within Rockport.
The faculty researchers strongly agreed that "speaking out against the
school or against whatever wrong has been done to you is such a risk on
so many different levels." Mary (FR) admitted, "We are really prevented
from speaking to each other" to the point where "we totally give up."
The system can shrink its community members into isolated spaces such
as with Sara (FR) who explained, "Basically I just focus on what is
going on in my classroom now….The only way I get involved in school
issues any more is if I'm doing something like this study." The
institution tends to reproduce status quo unless the considerable barriers
that exist among students and faculty to voice concerns and act upon
those concerns are lifted or opened.

   Opportunities throughout our work to awaken a sense of injustice at
Rockport occurred in fragile, protected spaces – from the very framing
of the project, to co-creating the survey instrument and interview
protocol, to collecting and analyzing the data, to writing reports and
presenting in front of local audiences. PAR, working within the confines
of the institution, opened up new avenues to talk about under-spoken
issues and bridge the desires of community members who wished to
effect needed change.

Our collaborative research also challenged community members to confront and develop further their common, sometimes mistaken, often buried assumptions in ways that were meaningful. Take for example, the dialogue below of the youth researchers using the data to discuss the way race was present at their school:

> Dave (FR): Actually the thing that was real interesting about that - I don't know if it is bad to say or something - I interviewed an African-American kid and he didn't label himself as African-American and I thought that was really weird. It's like such a small group of kids at Rockport that are that.
> Brett: I think that is an interesting point because especially as White people we assume that the label [is always salient] –
> John (SR): I also think from the standard that we don't get much [from the data] that there's race involved. Not too many stories of race being a big issue.
> Brett: I felt that there were a lot of race issues that surprised me. Race where it was joking around…where it was calling someone "midnight" [referencing a quote from the data].
> Paul (SR): Yeah
> Steve (SR): And also the jokes further confirm that it is acceptable.

In these participatory spaces, the student researchers confronted those pieces of the data that conflicted with their own standpoints. In the discourse above, Dave (SR) thought it was unusual that a student of color did not self identify as African American. John (SR) was not sure we were receiving important data on race. This created a moment to pry open race, as students were closing up the issue; the research also created an opportunity to engage with some of the assumptions they were holding about White invisibility or Whiteness as the assumed standard.

PAR in privileged contexts can become a lesson in civics, of democracy, of social responsibility, and reform. It can create a space to help us engage with the unspoken, speak what is off limits, make room for unresolved conflict, criticize the standard, and re-imagine social consciousness. PAR can do this but will not inherently do this without a firm grounding in a social justice ethic. The youth we partnered with

hold a substantial, inherited stake in the racialized, classed, and gendered structures of power and knowledge production. Economic and social structures have been set up for them to win. Their schools do not suffer from under funding as many public schools do. As a result, I worried about colluding with and reproducing privilege to the extent I was unsuccessful at: setting an expectation that we would talk about race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual identity (among others); drawing connections between or encouraging further discussion around these issues even when they did not emerge organically; pushing against the tendency of our conversations to reduce the importance of these issues; and even "teaching" them at necessary times about some of these issues. In other words, it is important for PAR researchers studying privilege to, "find ways to retain a critical, counterhegemonic presence in the research" (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997, p. 309-310).

Shifting the Gaze towards Systemic Injustice: The advantages gained from private schooling, class, and other institutional privileges (e.g. gender, race, sexual identity) can be masked by a false sense of merit; a sense of earned and therefore justified (expected) success linked to one's personal attributes without recognizing how ones' institutionalized advantages are linked with others' disadvantages. Mary (FR) observed false merit, elitism, and entitlement among students at Rockport, "They always put down community college…It is so elitist. Our boys are so unaware of the fact that the reason they have all these amazing choices is that they have been handed so many advantages. If we were judging on merit they'd be damn lucky to be at community college." Sara (FR) also observed the elitism of students in comparison to public schools, "They believe they are so much higher up than the public schools or anybody around here that they feel like the [college] competition for them are these kids in their classes."

 As a business, the Rockport markets itself in relationship to other schools; competing private schools but also with public schools. Private schools gain privilege by distinguishing themselves from the "less superior" education of the masses. Mike (AD) explained some of the differences, for example, the type of confidence a private school education cultivates in students:

> One of the things I once heard an employer say, he said like he could always tell independent schools - not college - but independent school kids from public school kids because at 24 years old they are hired and they are participating in meetings. Not because they're arrogant but because it's confidence. There is an expectation that you want to hear my voice you want to hear my opinions you want to hear what I have to say.

From Mike's (AD) perspective, the differences drawn between what is cultivated in private schools as compared to, for example, urban public schools are not just a matter of better education but also differing values, "I wouldn't go teach in the inner city for long term…because I wouldn't be comfortable in it. It would be a constant social battle with me trying to take values which I think are important and most likely work with those kids who generally come from different backgrounds."

The research created dialogue within the research group and then more broadly among students, faculty, and administrators about the normalized dominant institutional assumptions, about the embodiment of relational power and hierarchy, about intersectional identities and about the importance of context. The longitudinal and intensive nature of this work created spaces for the co-researchers (students and faculty) to gain a critical awareness of their systemic relationship to Rockport and the ways they were not only victims but also observers and contributors to it; developing (even if short lived) a sense of responsibility and systemic connectedness.

John (SR) made reference to the elitism cultivated at Rockport as compared "to like public school;" however, through our research he began to contest a sense of distorted values:

> On a basic level I think it is sort of that we - the Rockport School - is set at an elevation of high moral standards and it belongs to that idea that these aren't like special people with high moral standards they are just everyday people like doing what everybody else does. It is the same exact type of people …to like public school.

The pervasiveness of bullying at Rockport made John (SR) question the privileged distinction so often made between pubic school and private school students. PAR created reflective spaces that helped John (SR) challenge the dominant institutional assumptions he and his peers were taught. What he concluded was, "these aren't like special people with high moral standards they are just everyday people like doing what everybody else does. It is the same exact type of people." Though only a moment, one hopes that John's (SR) "scope of justice" expanded because of our collaborative work. The student researchers began with bullying lifted from the interpersonal dynamics and it took them to an understanding of structures, ideological practices, and unintended damage within and beyond Rockport.

What we heard from both student and faculty researchers was an increased awareness of not just others' experiences but also their own experiences. That they are within a pervasive culture of bullying at Rockport but also contribute to that culture. The line between victim, victimizer, and witness grew blurry as the role of the bystander morphed into collusion and the ways they enacted bullying became clearer. What seemed like "just a joke" was recast as unjust. For example, Steve (SR) conveyed, "I think the fact that most people recognize misbehavior amongst their peers is surprising and it seems like it has deeply affected them at some point or another in their high school career. I know like obviously this is how I am teasing." And, after many hours of examining data suggesting that faculty and administrators both bullied students and also contributed to reproducing the hegemonic environment – the faculty researchers acknowledged that bullying was not only a student issue but it was everyone's issue.

> Jill (FR): Right, it's a whole school thing.
> Sara (FR): It's a whole school culture thing.
> Jill (FR): From headmaster on down... it is systemic.

The move from student level (and the deficit oriented assumptions that often are linked) to multiple levels of interwoven relationships supported within an institutional culture is an important counter-hegemonic step; a step that started with the research design and the con-

ceptualization of bullying. It avoids reifying what has been status quo as well as resting the burden entirely on the backs of the least powerful individuals of the institution to either change or make change. The study awakened a sense of systemic injustice by working to prevent allowing community members to feel off the hook, to assume that it is someone else's problem; it facilitated the acknowledgment of one's contribution to the system.

Acknowledging Uncomfortable Emotions: Shifting the analysis from bad boys to school culture and structural injustice can facilitate the acknowledgment of one's contribution to the system. However, moving to systemic explanations where community members each share responsibility in the reproduction of, for example, school bullying can be emotionally distressing. Emotions like shame, distress, anger, and empathy can contribute powerfully to institutional change but also can sidetrack change and facilitate the reproduction of institutional privilege. In PAR within privileged settings, it is important to recognize and manage the awakening of uncomfortable emotions that will emerge as a result of personal and institutional reflection.

In the same sequence where faculty researchers agreed that bullying is "a whole school culture thing," Mary (FR) came to the conclusion that Rockport was a bad place - "this place is rotten" - founded on many bad values:

> My daughter watched her cousins go through here and her thesis
> about this was that the place is completely rotten. The people -that
> there are a bunch of rich drug addicts who are mean to each other
> and are completely rotten and I'm not sure she is entirely wrong. I
> love the school, I love the students but I remember when I first
> started teaching here in Lower School thinking this place was built
> on so many rotten assumptions about race and religion and class
> that I don't know that you can clean it up. It's like a toxic waste
> dump.

The task of taking on a systemic issue within an institution can be daunting, particularly when the co-researchers' main professional concerns and energies lie elsewhere (e.g. teachers are concerned with teaching; students are concerned with getting into college). The

uncomfortable feelings that arise from sharing the weight of responsibility - particularly for those students whose privileged advantages may have kept them unaware of their connections to other's disadvantages - can generate a mending of, avoidance from, or reaction against their sense of culpability. In addition, dispersing culpability throughout the institution can outline a web of damage that appears too large and comprehensive for any small group of students and faculty to mend. Each of these, paradoxically, can work against motivation for counter-hegemonic change.

When dialogue forces individuals to critically confront their own values and assumptions, Callan (2004) argued they will experience moral distress and necessarily so if citizens in a democracy are to be successfully educated. Boler (1999) would agree and further add that the "rules of emotional conduct and expression function to uphold the dominant culture's hierarchies and values" not necessarily in forceful or violent ways "but by engineering our 'consent' to this control" (p. xvii). She warned educators to be weary of a false sense of passive empathy and to embrace a "pedagogy of the discomfort" because emotional uneasiness, moral ambiguity, positional conflicts, and other forms of distress that are too quickly resolved (as is the tendency) can inhibit those very moments when personal moral insights and a sense of active empathy are most likely to develop. The engaged and supportive spaces created in participatory research collectives are able to draw attention to and facilitate a critical discussion around moral distress; a process, if successful, that avoids flattening the politics of emotion while also a sense that change is both a responsibility and a possibility.

Developing a Responsibility for Community Change: Conducting participatory action research in a closed institution provided an opportunity for the research process to collect important information while exposing or disrupting common assumptions held throughout the community. We heard from a male faculty member who for example said, "I probably spent more time thinking about this issue [bullying] in the last five days than I have in the whole time I've been here. I'm already thinking what can I do in my classroom, how can I add this to the things that I wish to impart to my students."

Sharing data collected from the student survey served as an intervention even when the results were not that surprising. When faced with the data revealing high percentages of hazing and fighting in sports related contexts, the athletic director replied:

> The locker room is probably the most secluded and private area. It's almost their sanctuary… The athletic teams doesn't surprise me, it truly doesn't surprise me for various reasons because that's more the good ole boys network and also because it's an off campus type of thing. It's tough…but those statistics tell me we need to be more aware of what is going on in the locker.

Data can make important contributions to exposing the "silent" habits of an institution, even if only small, like increased locker-room awareness.

The faculty researchers in particular seemed to articulate that the project, in both the process and outcomes, was a worthwhile learning experience. Mary (FR) reminded the group, "And faculty said, 'I could be the bully and not even know it.'" Later in the discussion, Greg (FR) described the interview process "as a valuable experience in itself." Sara (FR) also later concluded, "I really think the fact of me just doing this study has made me so much more aware of what I say, how I say it."

Faculty researchers such as Sara (FR) were able to transfer lessons from this work into their daily practices. Sara (FR) described her awakening to the subtle ways students bullied each other in her class, "I thought, this is exactly what this study is all about and it is happening right in front of me. I mean it was just amazing." And yet, "It also made me feel guilty because…I know that there is stuff that happens like that all the time but I'm just grading papers, I'm filtering and I'm ignoring." Learning from the research and then applying it in the classroom illustrates the potential of PAR to organically change the institution by re-imagining ways to interact within the community.

While these learning experiences in a closed institution like Rockport were themselves a type of counter-hegemonic action, both the student and faculty researchers gained a sense of responsibility to share their research with the rest of Rockport. For example, Sara (FR) thought they should be "presenting what comes out of this study either at the beginning of faculty meetings next year or something. Just to show

people listen, this is what kids have said that we are doing as faculty. [And] this is what our faculty had said about ourselves."

The project first helped the researchers and then the community members at large begin envisioning ways to interrupt some of the destructive practices the study uncovered across the school. "The Rockport Peer Interaction Study: Eat or Be Eaten" and "The White Noise of Teasing at Rockport School" were the titles of two presentations, one given by student researchers and the other by faculty researchers that summarized the year's work. In these presentations, they imagined alternatives and outlined possibilities for intervention. Student researchers suggested such initiatives as "developing awareness and emotional intelligence in students" and a "town hall meeting" since "our data suggests that teasing/ridiculing is something that all of us have experienced or participated in to varying degrees." They also reminded adults that "demeaning comments do in fact come from the teachers themselves from time to time" and asked "teachers to be more aware when teasing/ridiculing goes too far."

Faculty researchers also imagined alternatives and outlined possibilities for intervention. Faculty researchers coauthored a letter in response to the student researchers, which they read aloud as part of a presentation. Their letter promised to begin identifying and utilizing the complimentary institutional spaces already set up "such as Peer Leadership Counseling, Town Meetings, and our Upper School Advisory Program." They agreed "to intervene through various initiatives within our community" including raising "the issue publicly in order to make students and faculty aware of the debate" and developing "methods of sensitizing the Rockport School community regarding this issue."

The process of PAR at Rockport was not without critique (Stoudt, 2007, 2008). However, over the course of a year, the student and faculty researchers collected compelling data of local consequence and in doing so, built institutional momentum that has since become a school-wide and longitudinal initiative to address bullying. Additional presentations were made internally at Rockport and at other conferences nationally and internationally. New faculty and students joined the Upper School project, while the Lower and Middle Schools developed research teams of their own to begin examining bullying. New threads of institutional

conversation – such as critical dialogue about bullying, privilege, and masculinity - have become legitimate avenues for inquiry among students, faculty, and administrators at Rockport.

The Pursuit of Counter - Hegemonic Action in a Elite School

The Good: I have used PAR to work with several elite private single-sex and co-ed schools in addition to Rockport. The details, concerns, and challenges vary but it has become increasingly clear that it *is* possible to conduct counter-hegemonic, school-oriented research *with* students and faculty within such institutions. While there are certainly necessary and important advantages to understanding structural privilege from the critical perspective of those most negatively effected by it, this article offers evidence that there are also important gains had by collecting data to understand privileged statuses on their own terms as lived identities and functional institutions. The work I discuss in this article represents the potential for rather then the realization of successful research inside elite private schools; potential that, to me, rests firmly on an epistemological approach committed to partnering with the community in research.

Gaventa and Cornwall (2006) argued that, "Countering power involves using and producing knowledge in a way that affects popular awareness and consciousnesses of the issues which affect their lives" (p. 72). Our initiative to study bullying emerged locally from my ongoing research with Rockport faculty on issues relevant to students, faculty and administrators. Had our work not been conducted inside the institution with community members from the institution on a topic that was institutionally interesting, it is doubtful whether such intimate access would have been granted or our work well received. Nor was it likely had I not established a close relationship with the school offering both sincere interest and honest critique of their institutional experiences. In other words, opportunities for counter-hegemonic action cannot easily exist without cultivating the necessary relationships within on topics of institutional import.

Rockport was a strongly political environment that seemed to have increasingly shrinking spaces to voice concerns and initiate needed change. The practice of our methods, at least temporarily, re-opened or

established new spaces from where voices could be heard. We approached our work assuming that knowledge was socio-historically contextual; heavily dependent on the cultural methods researchers used and the social interactions in which they engaged. As a result, our collaborative approach to methodology was not an afterthought or only a means to an outcome. Instead, our work was a series of deliberate and co-constructed tools that helped us create ongoing formal and informal spaces to uncover knowledge. We incorporated multiple methods from multiple standpoints from multiple institutional levels so as to provide opportunities to appreciate the school as systemic, heterogeneous and political. By partnering with students and faculty, the process of our research was used as a way to collect important information while also offering relevant occasions for vertical and lateral dialogue that could be both critical and potentially contribute to socially conscious action.

Arthur & Davison (2000) argued that a critical citizenship education, "not only enables individuals to develop the knowledge, understanding and behaviors necessary for participation in democracy, but which also empowers individuals by developing in them levels of criticality in order that they might question, critique, debate and even take a leadership role in proposing alternative models of the structures and process of democracy" (p. 11). The co-researchers and I attempted to actively model democratic relationships in which we provided spaces to listen, engage in dialogue, and respect the intersectional importance of heterogeneous identities within the institution. Through heterogeneous identities within the institution. Through the data I heard from my co-researchers a sense of common and shared experience they had with the participants in the study; a recognition of common standpoint and possibly even a sense of solidarity with others. Conducting PAR facilitated a type of "civic friendship"; a "a public way of relating to one another as citizens, where we are not only civil in our discourse but we worked positively to overcome mutual suspicion and hostility by bothering to try to understand something of our own and our fellow citizen's deepest moral motivations" (Blacker, 2003, p. 249).

Lapayese (2003) suggested, "Critical global citizenship education expects teachers and students to challenge dominant ideologies, disassemble hierarchies of power, and question curricula and pedagogy"

(p. 500). Our collaborative approach to research allowed us to facilitate dialogue locally with relevance globally among students, faculty and administrators about the normalized dominant institutional assumptions, about the embodiment of relational power and hierarchy, about intersectional identities and about the importance of context. Although our work at Rockport attempted to establish egalitarian spaces for "civic friendships," they were not absent of interpersonal and emotional tension. The relationship cultivated between the co-researchers and I helped us to navigate these experiences in ways that might have been closed if more mainstream and detached approaches had been used.

   Partnering with community members of elite schools like Rockport to research their institution is a version of critical citizenship education. PAR is a radical type of pedagogy; an opportunity to perform critical citizenship locally towards goals greater than oneself or even one's institution. Using PAR to co-conduct research with an elite school like Rockport can contribute to social justice by helping promote social responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. The research process created spaces to interrogate and challenge their own institutional and personal practices. The work provided a forum to co-construct a more complicated understanding of privilege, gender politics, school violence, race relationships and other critical topics that has the potential to inform future internal policy, curriculum or programmatic change. Although it is uncertain whether PAR will lead to further long-term sustainable action at Rockport, the actual process of conducting PAR over time, in and of itself, was an effective version of counter-hegemonic action.

   The Grey: More democratic avenues of participation that can contribute to a repositioned sense of expertise and new knowledge can be beneficial; it can also however, be a highly lucrative and deceivingly controlling enterprise (Cooke & Korhari, 2006). It is not surprising then that some corporate and educational pursuits have begun to capitalize on larger historical trends of "participation" and as a result, I worry that PAR is fast becoming distorted in unfortunate ways. Sankaran (2005) warned us that, "developmentalists, experts, academicians and entrepreneurs have recently gone on a rampage to co-opt P(A)R." (p. 32). reviewing the prominent action research literature of 2004-2006, Dick (2006) wondered how much of the "proliferation of labels for processes

which resemble action research" are "consultants and academics establishing a brand" (p. 452). Critiques have emerged suggesting that international development work using PAR sponsored by powerful organizations like the World Bank are just advanced forms of colonization and tyranny (Cooke & Korhari, 2006). As a method, the main tenants of PAR have a lot going for them. Inclusive collaboration in the process of systematic inquiry can lead to useful information that improves decision-making, problem-solving, and future action. But, to what aim: to make money, increase productivity, improve management application? PAR can just as easily collude with hegemony as expose it. I believe it is in the assumptions, desires and philosophies that lie in discourse with "participation", "action" and "research" where a worthwhile framework to examine privilege towards counter-hegemonic action can be built.

The seduction of normalcy that masks the culturally damaging consequences of structural privileges and the ease with which the privileges are hidden, create spaces of very subtle reproduction (Harding, 2004a). Meritocracy myths, discourses of privilege, peer disciplining, and institutional ideologies are just some of the many subtle forces that help to socialize as "normal" the unequal distribution of cultural and economic resources (Harvey, 1999). Because these unearned advantages are easily explained away or invisible (forgotten/ hidden/avoidable) and all involved have a vested interest in its continuation, conducting research in and with privileged educational institutions can be disorienting and distorting.

As a white, middle class, heterosexual male from suburban United States, I also have been socialized to find difficulty in recognizing privilege (my own and others'). It is easy to be seduced, for example, by the seemingly unproblematic context of a well funded private school like Rockport. The teachers are highly qualified, often paid above average and have a great deal of pedagogical freedom.

The students generally take their education very seriously and appear strongly connected with their peers and teachers. There is a certain public politeness that is often performed; what Ottley (2007) has a "culture of friendliness" which stands in contrast to the more ambiguous, less obvious "culture of cruelty" our research evidence uncovered. The campuses are often aesthetically pleasing with extensive

libraries. There are small student-teacher ratios per classroom. Some of the parents and alumni are well known and/or powerful. Many parents are active in their child's education. All parents seem to be focused intently on scholarship. On the surface at least, privileged schools and their students, faculty and administration, can appear to represent the best of educational practices; the type of learning experiences we would like to offer all children. These observations are not entirely illusions; private schools like Rockport and those who occupy them have much in their favor.

   Of course when asked, the students, faculty, and administration can identify many areas at school they find frustrating, would like change, or are concerned about. Many of these involve ways they feel the school could be better, ways in which they feel victimized, or are treated unfairly. But, from the standpoint of people and institutions of privilege, "better" "victim" and "unfair" are value judgments unlikely to take into account larger questions of inequality, social injustice, and their relationship to it. Most of the boys are unaware of their privileges; they often do not identify themselves as white, or heterosexual, or male or even wealthy as much they identify as human (average, normal), particularly in a very homogenous single sexed environment where major differences are seldom confronted. As adolescents in high school they, like many of their faculty and administrators, have a strong interest in themselves and their institution; focused on the immediacy of their/its success.

   PAR is often cited as solving contextually relevant problems; the collaborative pursuit of evidence based, emancipatory action (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). But when using PAR to study with privilege one must ask, "relevant" or "emancipatory" for whom? Not all research is research worth taking and not all action is action worth taking. In schools like Rockport, working to co-identify "problems" in quest of making the school "better" can lead to developing initiatives that do little more than reproduce or even enhance the students' and institution's already abundant privileges. For example, what if I collaborated with Rockport, using PAR to inform programs designed to improve the academic success of "struggling" student? The students at Rockport already have a great deal of access to academic assistance and will have access to higher education despite their academic performances (100% of the senior students during this study were accepted to at least one

college). All students deserve a great education, but it is difficult to argue that social scientists should conduct work and devote resources to privileged institutions if this is the type of research and action likely to emerge.

   I interpret the practice of PAR as an epistemology with strong social justice values; a way of systematically asking what is knowledge, where does knowledge lie, and how can it be used to make more just communities? However, my experience around private schools has suggested a tendency towards PAR as a methodology ("participation" "action" "research") generally absent of its radical ethical standpoints. This poses a particular dilemma for PAR researchers interested in counter-hegemonic research in elite schools. PAR strives toward an inclusive, democratic practice of research where spaces are created to enhance the voices of community members and power dynamics are repositioned to lessen hierarchy. But, democratic research pursuits in elite private schools without also liberal values anchoring those pursuits (critical values that will not necessarily emerge organically within the context) are in jeopardy of colluding with rather then resisting oppressive structures. A group discussion with boys at an elite Midwestern United States private school once again confirmed this very common possibility; White students very cerebrally making points of "working harder", "reverse racism" "not seeing race" and "athletic scholarships for students of color" in response to an African American sharing his feeling of isolation and freshman year experiences with racism. Nell Noddings admitted that "people may converge on a conclusion that affirms their mutual caring but is morally deplorable when the interests of others are considered" (Callan, 2004, p. 205). Mouffe (2000) calls this the "democratic paradox" and points out that while democratic pursuits strive for participation, majority rule and equality; liberal pursuits strive for human rights, liberty, and principles. She argues that this is a necessary and irreducible tension; a paradox to work from rather than to fix.

   Some might suggest this tension is reducible through "objective" research. At a recent conference, a headmaster who is heavily engaged in teacher research was asked a controversial question about gender from the audience. He responded by saying that it is not a question that he and his teachers need to answer in advance because it will be born

out of the research. For this headmaster of a southern boarding school with whom I've worked, answers to potentially divisive questions that are seen as emerging out of the research have political use to him and his school because backlash from parents, alumni and donors is less likely. While it is certainly true that many answers can emerge from research, not all answers can and finding where the distinction lies is important to PAR.

In the pursuit of objectivity, social scientists have mistakenly used research to make claims about what is normal, who deserves rights, and how limited resources should be allocated. In so doing they hide their values inside the data points; values that have tended to benefit those with privilege. The pre World War II "mental hygiene" movement made norms of "healthy" habits through scientific justification. These unacknowledged values were rooted in cultural privileges which ultimately served to pathologize, blame, and condemn the behaviors of marginalized and oppressed communities (Boler, 1999; Joyce, 1995). And years later, Martin Luther King similarly critiqued psychologists, arguing that their standards for psychological health and well-being too often meant adjusting to or coping with a faulty and unjust society (Turiel, 2002, p. 283). More recently, researchers advocating for gay rights have attempted to illustrate that, for example, the adopted children and committed relationships of gay individuals are no different than "others;" but this line of research helps to reify "others" as normal or culturally desirable:

> There are costs to using psychological claims in support of human rights. Most fundamentally, they treat absolute and inalienable human rights as if they were contingent on the psychological experiences and capacities of an oppressed group (As assessed by experts who present evidence on its behalf). Because experts disagree, public and legal discourse about human rights issues then degenerates into arguments about sampling methodologies, testing procedures, and control groups, all of which are irrelevant to the rights issue at stake….Arguments about similarity and difference, or about psychological health or harm, obfuscate the key ethical principle of equal human rights for all (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004, p. 188).

Social justice discourse is a philosophical argument about what we rightfully deserve as humans to live with dignity and health; it assumes a current state of disadvantage, social and economic inequality, or unequal access to privileges for some (or most). Human rights exist as benchmarks to social justice; they are value judgments of what "should" and "should not" be. They cannot be falsified or justified through social scientific research but are present whenever research is undertaken.

   "If, in interest of objectivity, we ignore the political implications of our work, we are certain to legitimate and reproduce the prejudices of the social contexts in which our research takes place." (Cole & Steward, 2001, p. 304). PAR, like every other approach to research, is not value neutral. However, unlike most mainstream approaches, many PAR researchers for social justice not only embrace their values but considers them necessary; working towards what Donna Haraway calls "strong objectivity" (Harding, 1995). Researching privilege or privileged contexts in ways that avoid contributing to larger inequality requires an approach that makes explicit the political "values in play" and devotes time to examining the assumptions behind words such as "problem", "victim", and "better." Although it is always implicitly present, traditional research can often avoid explicitly asking larger questions about what it means to live in a just world. PAR researchers are not afforded the same "luxury" because social action, reform, or change are foundational to PAR and inseparable from ideas of justice. As Wersch (1998) explained, "the telos may be dimly held or vaguely apprehended but they nonetheless provide the grounds on which to advocate different forms of education, different forms of therapeutic intervention, different forms of inquiry, different forms of government" (p. 36-37).

   PAR is best suited for studying privilege when ideas of social justice are clear, underlying values and assumptions are explicit, and illusions of contextual neutrality are resisted by paying close attention to power and politics. I believe the study of intersecting privileges - defined broadly (e.g. gender, race, class, sexual orientation, country, religion, name a few) - and the institutions that help reproduce structural privileges are vital pieces of a larger social justice movement. But, there is an odd marriage between social justice research and working *in* and *with* elite private schools. As one headmaster told me, "We as administrators are trying to encourage a revolution, which is an odd

thing to do!" Another Headmaster wondered, "Are we asking students to change for a system that won't." The work in this article, even though it was situated inside an elite American school, was positioned, like Harding (2004a) suggested, to begin "from the everyday lives of oppressed groups, rather than from the conceptual frameworks of the dominant social institutions" (p. 68). It was in the interest of the marginalized, oppressed and exploited this work was undertaken, and it was they I wished to hold the work and myself accountable to. As the facilitator of PAR at Rockport, had my values been different so would have been the research.

   The lack of critical awareness, invisibility of problems, or the appearance of normalcy is a part of the private school's privilege. The standpoints and convictions I carry with me into Rockport served as an important counter hegemonic field guide. They helped me navigate through the "normal" fog to see toward what I considered were "acceptable" ends. In the framework of PAR they can be flexible and accommodating, but only so far. It was my job to create spaces ripe for safe dialogue, I needed to remain open and responsive to new knowledge, but it was also my job to represent critical voices and alternative perspectives that might otherwise not emerged organically.

   PAR in privileged contexts can gather important community centered data that facilitates greater institutional awareness. For the student co-researchers it can also become a lesson in civics, of democracy, of social responsibility, and reform. For students, faculty, and administrators it can create a space to help us engage with the unspoken, speak what is off limits, make room for unresolved conflict, criticize the standard, and re-imagine social consciousness. PAR *can* do this, but I do not think it will inherently do this without a firm grounding in its tradition of radical ethics for social justice.

Conclusion

The collaborative research spaces -- anchored by the voices of other students, teachers, and administrators; of cultural processes and institutional ideologies; of mission statements and parental hopes -- provided the ingredients for a new, more critical awareness of self and context. The use of PAR attempted to develop what Deutsch (2006) referred to as "awaking a sense of injustice." Over the course of a year, the student and faculty researchers at Rockport collected compelling data of local consequence and in doing so, built institutional momentum that has since become a school-wide and ongoing initiative to address bullying.

Our methods at Rockport created participatory spaces that developed relationships and critical discussions across hierarchical school membership; they opened new, viable outlets to communicate and voice concerns about issues rarely discussed. At its worst, our work has been resisted, overlooked, or co-opted in ways that maintained or improved the institution's overall privilege. At our best, we examined ideas of justice, diversity, and cosmopolitism; we held a curiosity, appreciation, and humbleness for the institution's complexities and gained a critical, self-reflective, systemic awareness of our own relationship to the institution's cultural reproduction. Our participatory research had, in depth and breath, "participatory reach." We heard from the voices of a large percentage of the Rockport community (students, faculty, and administration) in ways that ranged from short conversations to deep ongoing dialogue. As a result, this work conducted inside a closed institution like Rockport – though fleeting - was a form of counter- hegemonic action.

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