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Transforming School Hallways Through Critical Inquiry: Multimodal Literacies for Civic Engagement

Tiffany DeJaynes, Christopher Curmi-Hall

Youth researchers used photography, collage, and videography to transform their school hallways into a space for critical conversations about race and gender.

Young people use multimodal resources such as video- and photo-editing tools and social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) in myriad ways to participate in civic life (Mirra & Garcia, 2017; Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). Given the ubiquity of digital tools for composing and circulating multimodal narratives, youths actively take up these resources to resist dehumanizing narratives and push the boundaries of civic engagement, online and offline. The curriculum that we describe in this article exemplifies our belief that young people are culturally and intellectually engaged global citizens, or cosmopolitan intellectuals (DeJaynes & Curmi, 2015), who ask critical questions about the social worlds they traverse in the increasingly interconnected and mediated spaces of their lives.

In this article, we—a university-based researcher (Tiffany) and a classroom teacher (Chris)—examine the research and activism of 10th graders (ages 15–16) involved in a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project. The youth researchers focused on the “lack of options for relatable characters for women of color” (classroom artifact, June 2017) in popular media and provoked critical conversations about race and gender in their school community. In a final hallway collage of words, photos, and a link to a film, the youth researchers juxtaposed media tropes with the multiple identities and experiences of young women of color in their school to visually narrate and celebrate their lived realities as scholars, media makers, and civic actors for an audience of peers, teachers, and school leaders.

Multimodal Literacies and Counterstories

Undergirding this work is a sociocultural view of literacies, whereby meaning-making practices are seen as diverse, multiple, situated, and ideological rather than autonomous or universal (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984). Following Jewitt (2005), we see literacies as always multimodal, increasingly drawing on multiple semiotic resources—visual, aural, gestural, and spatial—and traveling across mediated spaces online and offline (Kress, 2003; Siegel, 2012). The affordances and constraints of various digital tools and spaces have led to new cultural practices and exchanges and also calls for the design of “connected learning” opportunities (Ito et al., 2013), in which youths link their passions and personal interests “to academic achievement, career success or civic engagement” (p. 4).

Like countless other literacy educators, we have experimented with having youths communicate their ideas through multimodal texts such as collages, zines, blogs, and short films (Siegel, 2012). Thus, this course on

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qualitative research is one “where play, appropriation, collective intelligence, and transmedia navigation are valued dimensions of school literacy” (Jenkins, as cited by Siegel, 2012, p. 673). These new modes of communication are ripe with possibility for challenging prevailing cultural narratives and promoting engagement in “connected civics,” in which youths leverage their interests and passions for “civic voice and influence” (Ito et al., 2015, p. 11).

Multimodal texts ask youths to work across semiotic modes and often bring about “a different kind of meaning” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 225). In her study of multimedia storytelling with five African American boys, Vasudevan (2006) argued that “the intersections across counterstorytelling and the engagement of multiple modalities” are an opportunity to “author new selves” (p. 214). Counterstories offer alternative narratives for “exposing, analyzing, and challenging majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Multimodal counterstories are situated at the interstices of identity and subjectivity, making them valuable for performance and representation.

YPAR

Scholars and community actors engaging in critical YPAR regularly invite participants to collect, interpret, and share their research in multimodal ways, such as through the creation of poetry, slam books, dramatizations, and visual arts (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fox, 2015). Participatory action research attends to knowledges that have been historically marginalized and delegitimized by positioning those impacted by inequities as both researchers and participants who engage in an iterative process of data collection and analysis, coalition building, and transformational resistance (Fine, 2018; Torre, 2009).

Acknowledging the multigenerational nature of critical participatory action research, we use the term *youth participatory action research* here to emphasize how the projects in this study are the product of teams of youths collaborating with one another and locating allies in their school and beyond. YPAR cultivates space for youths to hone critical perspectives and engage in sustained inquiry, positioned as advocates, activists, doers, storytellers, and knowledge creators. Like Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott, and Morrell (2017), we take care “not to fetishize YPAR as a panacea for the vast inequities plaguing youth, in and outside of schools,” acknowledging that there are indeed “inherent tensions in positioning youth as knowledge creators” (p. 313). Additionally, we link conversations happening in class to those with elders at home and in communities.

Using activist, liberation pedagogies within institutional spaces designed to maintain rather than challenge dominant power structures further poses practical and epistemological challenges. Caraballo et al. (2017) identified four dominant entry points to YPAR, all of which, to varying degrees, inform the curriculum we describe here: (1) academic learning and literacies, (2) cultural and critical epistemologies, (3) youth development, and (4) youth organizing and civic engagement. In schools, YPAR projects risk being schoolified, its aims of inquiry and action transformed into mere graded assignments (Rubin, Ayala, & Zaal, 2017). Brion-Meisels and Alter (2018) noted that the “context, relationship, and urgency within schools can make it difficult to center the critical, participatory, and transformational aspects of YPAR” (p. 447). As with these scholars, we search for ways to honor the liberatory aims of YPAR within institutional confines that often reproduce existing structural relationships, while also navigating the complex, sometimes fraught, politics of a school setting.

Overview of Context, Researcher Positionalities, and Curriculum

The YPAR project analyzed here is rooted in the second semester of a required Qualitative Research course at a small, research-focused public school in New York City, New York. The course is, according to one administrator, “the space for unpacking ‘Black Lives Matter’ and racism,” not by institutional mandate but because we see research as an opportunity to examine social inequities. Tiffany taught the course from 2012 to 2014 and is now a university-based researcher and mentor; she is cisgender, straight, white, middle class, and originally from the U.S. Midwest. Chris is an experienced English language arts teacher who has taught the course since 2015; he is cisgender, grew up in New York City, and is a first-generation Maltese American. Chris’s coteacher in the year of the study (2016–2017) identifies as Latina and participated in the youth researchers’ project as both interviewee and critical friend. In class, we openly interrogated our positionalities or our limited social and political perspectives and invited youths to also interrogate the intersections of their raced, gendered, and classed positions. Conversations about white fragility and color blindness emerged as youths acquired language to describe what they already understood as the avoidance of many white people to talk about race (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018).

Pedagogically, the course strives to be culturally sustaining, promoting youths’ personal and cultural knowledge and agency (Paris & Alim, 2014), and collegial,

acknowledging the mentorship that adult collaborators offer in media production and research practice (Soep & Chávez, 2010). Class time involves training in qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, observations, focus groups, survey design) and youths collectively working together: analyzing complex theoretical texts (e.g., *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* by Patricia Hill Collins), writing emails to set up interviews with scholars and practitioners, and analyzing primary data, videos, and social media memes. Because the class is largely student driven, we spend class time on apprenticing students, offering data collection and analytic ideas, and connecting youths to readings, organizations, and people who might help them further their research.

The small public school was founded in the last decade and serves grades 9–12. It is located in an affluent neighborhood and shares the building with three older, more established public schools. School segregation in New York City is widespread, complicated by a complex high school selection process. This school has markers of diversity and privilege; it is a selective-admission school, enrolling students based on their middle school performance on standardized tests, grades, and attendance. One draw of the school is the research program, which includes a Quantitative Research course (grade 9), the Qualitative Research course discussed here (grade 10), and upper house research courses, such as Sociology and Epidemiology.

In Table 1, we provide the school's racial, socioeconomic, and dis/ability demographics and include county and citywide averages for comparison. The school is notably whiter and more economically advantaged than the county and citywide averages, something that is visible and creates palpable (and often discussed) tension within the wider school building about the privilege of youths in the school.

An array of home languages are spoken at the school, including Albanian, Igbo, Farsi, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Russian, Vietnamese, and Spanish. Exploring the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of youths of the school community was built into the Qualitative Research course in an earlier autoethnographic film project called "Where I'm From" (see DeJaynes, 2018).

Method

In the 2016–2017 school year, students' initial research interests (across all course sections) touched on four broad themes: body image (26%), stereotyping (20%), rape culture (19%), and racism (16%). We focus our analysis in this article on the women of color in media research team because they found an intersection of those

Table 1
School Demographics (in Percentages) for the 2016–2017 School Year

Student enrollment demographic	School	County (K–12)	Citywide (K–12)
American Indian or Alaska native	1	1	1
Black or African American	23	36	24
Hispanic or Latino	25	28	41
Asian or Pacific Islander	9	17	17
White	34	17	16
Multiracial/categories not represented	8	1	1
Students with disabilities	13	19	22
Economically disadvantaged	42	73	71
English learner	0	14	15

Note. Data from New York State Education Department (n.d.).

themes. Like many research teams, this team's final product was replete with multimodal counterstories, yet theirs was in the form of a collage, which created layers of multimodal counterstories to analyze in one installation. Finally, participation in the study was voluntary, and these students were willing to share their insights with us.

This article draws on Tiffany's weekly classroom observations, Chris's teacher journal, two multimodal focus groups, transcripts of two academic conference conversations with focal participants, six semistructured interviews of approximately 45 minutes each (one with each volunteer participant), and artifacts (e.g., curriculum, student self-reflections, photographs of the creative installation). We often compared our classroom observations, analyzed student work together, and invited youths into conversation about how they were making sense of their work in class.

We developed a protocol for multimodal focus groups that involved collaborative seeing (Luttrell, 2013) or collectively reseeing multimodal artifacts (e.g., photos, videos, collage) with participants. Two questions guided our conversation:

1. What affordances did youths draw on to foster critical conversation about race in their school hallways?
2. In what ways do the youths' multimodal counterstories both work against and within the constraints of schooling?

Together, we analyzed aesthetic and documentary elements, what was intentionally included and excluded (and why), and meanings that emerged from surprising visual juxtapositions or audience responses.

Codes from the research teams' YPAR study complemented and complicated our collective reflection on their representational choices. We then applied codes that emerged in these conversations with youths to our written class reflections and field notes, looking closely at moments of connection, disconnection, resistance, silence, anger, hope, coalition building, and intersections of race and gender identities and politics.

The Representation of Women of Color in Media Research Team

Here, we offer short biographies of the women of color in media research team, drawn from our classroom conversations and earlier coursework.

Kai identifies as African American; she aspires to be a filmmaker and participated in a filmmaking program offered by a local nonprofit. She has a diverse group of friends, largely made up of her teammates from the school's step team. (Step is a percussive dance deeply ingrained in African American culture.)

Jessica identifies as Vietnamese American and is part of Kai's group of friends. A self-professed "perfectionist," Jessica's "Where I'm From" film played with her attention to detail and organizational skills, winning her class's "Steve Jobs award" for creativity and technical skill.

Lara is interested in comic books, fashion, and media making; she participates in the same filmmaking program as Kai. Lara saw her work on this project as an apprenticeship for her future work in film. Her "Where I'm From" film won her class's "Basquiat award" for her innovative framing of visuals. She identifies as Latina.

Andrea also identifies as Latina and is particularly interested in old movies. She is an especially strong writer and sees a possible future in writing for film. She is closely connected to her family in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Michael is a member of the school's social justice club and an interschool committee of students and parents concerned about equity in the multischool building. He

identifies as a white Jewish male; he often attends political protests.

One other teammate chose not to participate in further study.

Overview of the Team's Research

This team of young people critically examined women of color in media and investigated their peers' beliefs on the intersections of race, culture, and media. The team's research question was "How does watching Film/TV shows that incorporate Women of Color [WOC] influence New York City teenagers' (13–19) perception of WOC in New York City?" (classroom artifact, June 2017). The team's collaboratively written literature review included subheadings on colorism, sexualization, body image, stereotypes, superheroes, and princesses. In their primary data collection, they conducted two focus groups, a survey, and nine interviews with teachers and peers, family members, and media professionals. They also analyzed "a variety of comics, movies, and television shows to get a feel for how Hollywood tends to portray women of color" (classroom artifact, June 2017). In their written report, the research team called for media stories that offered a "full range of human experience and depth" rather than the "stereotypes, objectification, and fetishization of women of color" that they too often see on their screens (classroom artifact, June 2017).

Findings

In 2017, Chris proposed using the hallway space for youth researchers to share their research with the school community who were participants in the research. Then, in several lessons designed to support students in sharing their findings in creative and multimodal ways, he asked students to consider two questions: "(1) How do we make the findings of academic research appeal to a broad audience? (2) How do we create engaging and transformative art based on research?" Using exemplars of activist and critical art, Chris and his students explored how art can expose oppression and foster critical conversations.

Chris planned activities to move young people from the important work of consciousness-raising, naming and understanding the systemic and historical nature of social inequities (Freire, 1970), to action. To prompt idea generation, he taught a "Translating Research Into Art" lesson, in which he shared examples of an interactive art exhibition, graphics, zines, podcasts, flash fiction, photojournalism, documentary, film, protest art, and so forth. Then, he asked each research team (of four

to six members) to collectively brainstorm how to share the findings of their research in ways that would move their peers, teachers, and school personnel to rethink a key idea or be moved to action. Brainstorming questions included these:

- Which specific findings or aspects of your research do you think would be most translatable into art?
- What aspects of your research might the [school] community find most interesting or compelling?
- What aspects of your research might be difficult to communicate to the [school] community? Why?

To share their research with their school community in a creative and impactful way, the women of color in media research team took over a bulletin board in the school hallway (see Figure 1). They covered the bulletin board in green paper with a scalloped paisley border from Chris's collection. On the bulletin board,

they communicated their findings through a constellation of portraits, self-portraits, media images, text they crafted, a YouTube video remix (linked to a QR code), and quotations from well-known women of color. The "Representation in the Media" bulletin board was encircled by 17 images of scenes from television and film that represent the stereotypical roles critiqued in the center. Michael noted that their collage "all came together like puzzle pieces."

The youth researchers' faces center the bulletin board—some photoshopped, some in costume, and some everyday portraits. Their own likenesses as visual resources situated amid small media images made the research personal and rooted it in their community. The team was eager to talk about racism, identity, and representation within their school community but also hesitant to do so, given the complexities of discussing race in a multiracial context with largely white educators. Young people of color in the school regularly joked

Figure 1
"Representation in the Media" Collage

Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

about race with peers, but they were also aware, especially in 2017, of the political diversity of the school and talked about how they did not discuss systemic inequities evenly across school classes.

Taking up the space of the school hallway was a way of challenging dominant systems of representation (Hall, 1997). The creative installation did more than just replace existing stories; it shifted the ways in which institutional space was used, and this shifted the ways that students and teachers engaged with each other. The hallways became a civic space shaped by collective youth resistance, multimodal counterstories, and negotiated civic engagement.

Collective Youth Resistance

The team's hands, voices, faces, and creative impulses interwove in organic ways as they collaborated and published in multiple modes. Linked to the QR code in the middle of their installation was a remix-style YouTube video in which Jessica, Kai, and Andrea paired their words, spoken in unison, with videos of women of color in media speaking about the paucity of nuanced roles available to them. In their opening line, the three girls ask, "Why does our race and femininity determine our value?" Their collective voices, unflinching in tone, lead into a nine-minute remix of short films that opens with Oscar winner Viola Davis saying, "The only thing that separates women of color from anyone else is opportunity. You cannot win an Emmy for roles that are simply not there."

The rest of the film contextualizes stereotypical representations that the team identified in their literature review and their analysis of films and television (e.g., "the angry black woman" trope, hypersexualized Latina women, quiet Asian female characters). Their film, posted across their social media accounts, makes visible what often goes unnoticed. Lara reflected, "When you actually call it out, people see it more." Jessica wrote that her peers and teachers "may recognize the stereotypes but they might not realize that it is an issue until they look at our creative installation's information." Kai articulated their goal of consciousness-raising (Freire, 1970) in media terms: "Raise attention, use your platform, speak on the issue. Start making it a trend."

Portraits and Self-Portraits as Multimodal Counterstories

The collage was marked by fluency in social media literacies (e.g., Instagram, Twitter) and the potential of visuals

and moving image to reframe raced and gendered representations. The team used tropes from #blacklivesmatter debates on Twitter, created new visual narratives to sit alongside (rather than simply replace) dominant narratives, and reflected deeply on representation and identity, drawing on what they learned in reading popular culture through a critical lens.

The top three images on the installation, the faces with bar codes covering the eyes, used self-portraits for multimodal counterstorytelling. All of the bar code photos are headshots of women of color on the research team with the bright green and yellow walls of the school hallway in the faded background. In her portrait (see Figure 2), Jessica is wearing her straight dark hair long with a side part and has a neutral expression, lips closed. She wears small gold hoops and a black shirt. In a black, handwriting-style font, Asian stereotypes are printed, including "Martial Arts," "Straight A's," "Anti-Social," "Dragon Lady," "Small Eyes," "Glasses," "Chinese," and "Strong Accent." A bar code is placed over her eyes.

As Jessica explained, her portrait was

inspired by an Instagram post that I came across. It basically showed this girl who had a bunch of words on her face, like it was kind of photoshopped onto her face and they're basically words that described the stereotypes associated with her.

From their data (rooted in surveys, interviews, and focus groups with their peers, as well as media analysis), the team gathered Asian American stereotypes to inscribe on her likeness. Jessica noted that being regularly read as Chinese, rather than Vietnamese, was of particular frustration to her.

Figure 2
Jessica's Portrait with Bar Code and Racial Epithets

Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

Tiffany asked Jessica what it was like to have her face on the installation in the hallway with all of the inflammatory words on it:

Jessica: I thought it was pretty cool being able to have my face on the board, especially about a topic that we're able to connect to personally.... When I was younger, some of these words that were on my face and around me were used as kind of insults and stuff. And so, I don't know, being able to showcase that on the board and show it to other people and show, "Hey, just because these words are typically associated with your race doesn't mean you have to conform to them, doesn't mean that it has to be what defines you."

Tiffany: It sounds like in many ways you were able to speak back.

Jessica: Yeah sort of like fight back.

As educators, we saw Jessica's putting her face on the wall as an act of bravery, a creative, intellectual, and personal risk. Jessica countered that she had not felt hesitant about it. For her, it was emboldening to "fight back," to work with her anger and begin to account for the transgressions she experienced in middle school and on-screen. In many ways, she felt that she was able to control her narrative by controlling her image, largely for an audience of non-Asian peers, whom she hoped would see her a bit more clearly through her critique.

The bar codes over the eyes and graffiti of reductive stereotypes mark fluency in social media literacies (e.g., Instagram, Twitter) and visual counterstorytelling. Michael offered that they placed the bar codes over the eyes to connote "branding," a nod to capitalism's flattening of personhood, and to directly reflect on the ways in which our eyes humanize us. He said,

I think when you take away the eyes of someone, it really takes away a lot of their personality, and a lot of what makes someone them is their eyes. You can see a lot of emotion, a lot of personality, a lot of everything in expressions.

Michael expressed his understanding of visual culture by exploring how people are read, what humanizes and dehumanizes. He sees eyes as humanizing and covered them with bar codes, yet the eyes of others can also dehumanize, as illustrated by Jessica's portrait and her descriptions of how others have seen and read her. We read the juxtaposition of text and varying images in the multimodal collage as affording the possibility that

both Jessica's and Michael's ideas can be held together visually.

Social media is often used to hold personal images in conversation with derogatory images used in mass media (Mirra & Garcia, 2017). Remixing ideas, memes, and other visuals enables young people to critique and resist dominant, visual narratives (Luttrell, 2013). Additionally, youths across research teams spoke about how the social issues they decided to study were ones that they had been considering through personal Instagram posts, the microblogging site Tumblr, or articles on entertainment websites such as BuzzFeed or Upworthy.

In a block of text next to her photo in Figure 3, Lara explains,

I am *Latina* but I don't always dress like [arrow pointing to her largest photo]. While I will admit, I think this outfit is quite *cute*, it doesn't represent how I always dress and look like. My interpretation of Latinas based on how they're portrayed in film, is that we pretty much *always* wear *tight clothes* and *red lipstick* with *big hoops* and *long straight hair*...and that's it. I like *hoops* and *red lipstick* (occasionally) but that's not *all* I am. I have *crazy curly hair*, I'm a *nerd*, I'm into *sports*, I love *Disney* and *superheroes*, and I love *fashion*.

We added the italics in this quote to mark Lara's use of creative fonts, including bright colors and cursive.

For her photo collage on the right, Lara simply writes, "I'm much more than my stereotype, but I don't often get to see that reflected in film." Her collage offers photos from her personal collection: her making a scary face next to Taskmaster, a Marvel Comics bad guy; smiling with her curly hair in a Stitch T-shirt; wearing a disaffected expression in shorts, a backward baseball cap, and a "MEEP MEEP" sleeveless T-shirt of Beaker from The Muppets; and her in a martial arts pose next to a Jackie Chan wax figure.

The self-portrait in which she dressed herself and put on makeup as a representation of Latina stereotypes was painful to create in ways that surprised her:

Something that really stuck with me was taking the stereotypical picture. [It] was almost mentally damaging in a way because I didn't feel like myself, and yet I saw myself as film shows that I am, if that makes sense. Like I see Hispanic women in film with the red lipstick and the big jewelry and showing off a lot of skin, and that's how I'm supposed to think I am, but in reality, I'm not. So, actually putting all that on, it was like I was accepting this stereotype and agreeing with it. It was not a great feeling.

Lara's pain in crafting an image in which she saw herself through the eyes of others is an invocation of

Figure 3
Lara's Collage of Her Multiple Identities

Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

double consciousness, seeing herself through the eyes of white racist society, a sensation which Du Bois (1903) described as "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 2).

The smaller collage, her everyday life, showcased instead Lara's intellect and creativity. Like many of her peers, she positioned herself as a "nerd," highlighting her intellect and drawing attention to how her academic

identities intersect with her raced and gendered identities. In a separate conversation, she reflected on these intersections and the joy she found in making her multiplicity visible:

Actually stapling those pictures, those embarrassing pictures of myself on that board kind of, it made me feel better about who I am and how film doesn't necessarily represent me. And if I do want a career in the film industry, I don't necessarily subscribe to those stereotypes, and I'd fight against them. Me being myself kind of made me feel better about that.

Lara, Jessica, and their teammates offered their personal portraits as counterstories, as opportunities to speak back to harmful dominant narratives, collectively face their double consciousness, and celebrate their multiplicity. In reflecting on what they hoped their creative installations would achieve, Andrea offered,

It is a topic that us teenagers, especially teenagers of color, think about and may not even realize that they think about until they see our board. It will make them realize that they are not alone and that it is an actual valid issue that we hope to draw more attention to through this project.

Focusing on race in mainstream media enabled this team to critique their school and explore what it means to be a young person of color in the school. The team regularly started statements with "Because this is a white school" as a way of explaining their thinking for particular rhetorical or visual choices. Demographically, the student body is 34% white; yet, similar to national data, most of the teachers are white women. From these reflections, we see that the ideological whiteness of the school shapes conversations about race and constrains what students sometimes say, especially in multiracial groups. By critiquing the outside entity of media rather than their school community itself, youths opened dialogue with less personal risk and less potential for inflaming white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018). Yet, these students also wrote themselves into the stories. They said, "This is about me."

Meaningful multigenerational conversations about race and representation were a significant outcome for the research team. These included interviews with a media studies faculty member at a local university and two female teachers of color who shared poignant raced and gendered professional experiences. Kai described a "memorable encounter" outside their creative installation with a younger student of color:

She came up to me and said how she felt this issue really needed to be talked about here at [school name]. She said that

this has impacted her a lot because you have people who try to make jokes to her, about what they see online. Because she's Hispanic, they'll make fun of her and say, "Oh, do you wear wedding dresses and soccer shoes when you go to the laundromat?" And it's kind of like, "That's not me. That's not at all my life. Stop saying that." She really talked to me about how this reflected her, and what she wants to see in the world.

The team's research created moments of solidarity and reimagining.

Yet, four out of the five youth researchers expressed regret that the voices of their classmates and teachers (from focus groups and interviews) were invisible on their creative installation. It was safer to critique larger cultural narratives than what is happening in their own school space, and this tension became palpable as they built their hallway installation and had conversations about it. Andrea wrote,

I do believe the reason we incorporated mainly our opinions, celebrities' opinions, and images and clips from the media, was to really draw awareness to the social issue because it tends to be a topic that us teens in our school don't really talk about/are uncomfortable talking about.

We read the collage as a collective, multimodal counterstory designed to confront the damage done by stereotypical representations of women of color in media, as well as a relatively safe way to prompt conversation about race in the multiracial school community.

Implications for Teachers and Researchers

Drawing on young people's multimedia literacies through YPAR opens space for new kinds of stories, including counterstories, to emerge. Multimodal counterstories were the representational choice for many research teams, partly because the hallway space was both public and fleeting, ripe for easily digested visuals, pithy quotes, and QR codes. Youths told us about powerful conversations they had about their creative installations with peers and adults. Chris had conversations with administrators and teachers about the boundaries being pushed. In the future, we would create more space for robust audience response and dialogue.

YPAR opens up the school space to difficult conversations and prepares youths with critical frameworks and an understanding of their own epistemic privilege. Although it is important for classrooms and hallways to be places of civic critique, it is also predictable that young people downplayed some data (e.g., about raced and gendered microaggressions in their school) and used quotes from media figures instead of incisive ones

TAKE ACTION!

1. Engage in tough conversations about power and privilege with family, friends, and colleagues to become comfortable with facilitating difficult conversations with youths.
2. Examine inequities that young people identify by exploring historical and systemic roots of injustices.
3. Invite youths to analyze inequities represented in photography, film, and other mediated communication.
4. Ask students to speak back or fight back with multimodal counterstories of their own.
5. Create spaces where youths and teachers can discuss the inequities that they identify and how they manifest themselves in the school and in young people's lives.

from peers. Some of this can be attributed to their shifting understandings of the value of their own stories, but it is also self-protection, an awareness that their critiques of the dominant whiteness within their building might be too close for some of their interlocutors. Longer term, multiyear, and multisited projects might create more space for critique and a greater sense of how youths might use the power of their stories for change. Schools, like most institutions, resist change yet have the potential to be sites of disruption and liberation.

Leveraging institutional spaces for civic discourses engaged youths and their school community in a public dialogue about systems of oppression. We yearn for more spaces and worthy audiences for youth research—for remaking hallways and other school spaces into political art space where youths and teachers come to see one another differently. In juxtaposing the academic and personal, the social and political, youth researchers harnessed their facility with social media and image making to invite multigenerational conversations. Their colorful, frank collage asked viewers to resee and reimagine the desires, hopes, and dreams of the young women of color who walk the halls.

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MORE TO EXPLORE

- Smith, J.N., Van Deven, M., & Huppuch, M. (2011). *Hey, shorty! A guide to combating sexual harassment and violence in public schools and on the streets*. New York, NY: Feminist. (This book describes a multimodal participatory action research project with young women.)
- Smith, K. (2008). *How to be an explorer of the world: Portable life museum*. New York, NY: Penguin. (This book offers ideas for engaging multimodal literacies and the arts.)
- The DIY (Development Impact & You) Toolkit website houses useful research tools: <https://diytoolkit.org/>.
- The Public Science Project website describes several multigenerational participatory action research projects: <http://publicscienceproject.org/>.
- The University of Kansas's Community Toolbox website offers resources on community organizing: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>.