Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0590-0

Resilience Beyond Risk: Youth Re-defining Resilience Through Collective Art-Making

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Abstract

There is a strong parallel between the discursive construction of youth and the definition of resilience, with shared characterizations of deficit, risk and adversity. The purpose of this study was to explore the possibility of redefining resilience by incorporating youth's own conceptualizations and experiences through collaborative art-making. Twenty-three youth (16–29 years old) participated in art-making workshops guided by six youth researchers, who also assisted with data collection. While youth participants were strongly impacted by external forces imposing a normative assumption of 'successful youthhood,' they actively sought out both unique subjectivity and solidarity to counter the negative forces threatening their well-being. The findings suggest that these young people perceive resilience as a crucial component of identity management. Acknowledging youth perceptions of resilience as an intersubjective process of identity negotiation, rather than a personality trait or a buildable capacity for coping, may provide valuable guidance to social work professionals.

Keywords Youth · Resilience · Risk · Arts-based research · Participatory action research

Critics have argued that an elaborated focus on risk throughout society is born out of the neoliberal mechanism of manufactured uncertainty (Giddens, 1994; Beck, 2005; Kelly, 2000). Manufactured uncertainty is the process of a societal occupation "with debating, preventing and managing risks that it itself has produced" (Beck, 2005, p. 332). Beck (2005) draws on a power analysis to describe manufactured uncertainty as the mechanism by which a society's most powerful actors exploit the distribution of risk so that those with least power live with the greatest risks of the progress.

Within the context of manufactured uncertainty, youth have emerged as the new "underclass" (Giroux, 2013), a distinctly underprivileged group defined only in terms of social inefficiency. In his considerations of the impact of neoliberal ideologies on societal structures such as education, Giroux (2013) has suggested that the rootlessness of the youth underclass is bolstered by three levels of war that are being waged against young people. The first level, soft war, refers to the process of commodification that engulfs youth with messages aimed at them through media that they are most valued as consumers. The next level, hard war, refers to the criminalization of youth, where the corrections/corrective system begins to supplant social support and education as a response to youth experiencing difficulties. The final level of war, surveillance war, is directly related to the risk narrative that has been applied to youth, so that many levels of surveillance and protection for society are installed into day to day life, through the use of cameras, bureaucratic record-keeping and watchful adults. The impacts of these 'wars against youth' are directly related to the socio-economic circumstances of the youth: the vulnerability wrought by socio-economic obstacles increases the impact of the war, regardless of whether the war is soft, hard, or surveillance (Giroux, 2013).

Amidst ever-expanding adult surveillance, young people as members of an at-risk underclass are held to an individualized account. Roche, Tucker, Flynn, and Thomson (2004) depict a "can-do" ethos that youth are faced with, an inscription that anybody can succeed if they just try hard enough. Perceived failure is attributed, then, to individual faults, and youth are held personally responsible for any difficulties that

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Published online: 17 December 2018

result from their eco-socio-political exclusions (Tyler, 2013; Welshman, 2013). Exclusions include any opportunities for skills, knowledge and employment (Devicienti & Poggi, 2011; Schweiger, 2014; Veenstra, 2007). The consequent despair is framed within the risk discourse, understood as a psychological fault line rather than a systemic injustice, which, in turn, evokes punitive and corrective responses (Finn, Nybell, & Shook, 2013; Tyler, 2013). The educational, social, health and financial structures that foster the predicaments that face youth are irrelevant to the narrative that holds youth fully accountable for the obstacles to opportunities that might provide security, self-efficacy and sustenance (Roche et al., 2004). Media, policy, health services (including social work), and program development are formed by, and forming of a youth narrative that is a life stage marked by risk and adversity (Chisholm, Kovacheva, & Merico, 2011), relative to adulthood in such a pivotal way as to portray youth primarily as the transition stage into adulthood. With a transitional conceptualization, successful transition into normative adulthood is emphasized, while the here-and-now experience of being young becomes marginalized (Chisholm et al., 2011; Roche et al., 2004; Wyn & White, 1996).

With the strong link between opportunity and risk comes a distribution of risk, where inequitable opportunities are created through a risk discourse of youth, through clinical conceptualizations of a life stage marked by risk and adversity, and through influential responses that focus on individualized risk, adversity and the dangerous citizen. Such characterizations require that youth receive expert and professional guidance (Chisholm et al., 2011). Critical analyses of the ways in which youth are defined explore the ways in which definitions of youth can support a risk discourse about youth, or diminish the full experience of youth by containing the identity to a transitional stage of becoming (Harlan, 2016; Seaton, 2012). In such ways, youth are deactivated and incomplete human beings. By conceptualizing youth as simply in the position of "becoming," youth as rightful people in the present can be overlooked (Harlan, 2016). With a risk-based construction of youth, social controls become a legitimate means to correct the deficits (Gilchrist, Jeffs, Spence, & Walker, 2009). Policies are developed that consider the timing of events that might interfere with successful transitioning, focusing again on risk and adversity (Chisholm et al., 2011; Roche et al., 2004). Ungar (2008) points out how a complete account of a youth's experience is lost when professional experts are understood to be in a better position than youth to assert what are healthy and normal outcomes for youth. Likewise, Kelly (2000), in his exploration of the risk discourse that regulates youth experience and identity, describes how with the establishment of a risk as "truth" comes a response now necessitated by that "truth." For Kelly (2000), the response stems from Foucauldian governmentality, where a wide array of experts, corrective services and consequences are activated as a focused and specific response to youth. Scholars such as Finn (2013) have looked specifically to social work where these regulatory responses and policies can be found in practice.

In parallel with the risk discourse, resilience becomes contextualized as the personal capacity within youth to successfully respond to and navigate adversity. An abundance of youth resilience services have emerged over the past few decades, targeting young people who have been deemed at risk of developing psychosocial difficulties (Aranda, Zeeman, Scholes, & Morales, 2012). Current understandings of resilience came out of the field of developmental psychology and child psychology theory with a prominent consideration of the personality structure that can support resilience and prevent problematic coping mechanisms (Aranda et al., 2012). Being associated with personality elements, the concept of resilience, as the flip side of risk, becomes individualized. Resilience-supporting personality constructs are listed as self-esteem, confidence, hope, autonomy, self-direction, ability to cope with stress, sociability, ability to accommodate a range of affects, and optimism as a response to problem-solving (Fisher, 2008). The quality of personal attachments, personality structures and the support for self-actualizing behaviors are considered to be paramount to one's capacity to respond with resilience to adverse and traumatic events (Fisher, 2008).

According to Foster and Spencer (2011), the recent surge of interest in resilience reflects a paradigm shift within public health policy and research from fixing social problems to preventing the problems from occurring. Many resilience-supporting descriptors are operationalized and statistically synthesized to identify factors that help individuals deemed to be "at-risk" avoid the negative outcomes normally associated with them. For example, in his study on resilience in discharged foster youth, Jones (2012) applied a social work lens to identify factors of employment, schooling, stable housing, non-criminal lifestyles and capacity for independent living as measurable outcomes that demonstrate resilience. Foster and Spencer (2011) contend that while driven by an impetus toward more sympathetic approach to youth, the vocabulary of resilience is "not much less stigmatizing or normative than labeling some young people 'problems,' 'hoodlums,' or 'delinquents'" (p. 28). Rather, what many resilience interventions promote is what Fisher (2008) coins a "blueprint for good citizenship" (p. 592), a normative image of a desirable citizen who successfully circumvents risks to make meaningful contributions to society. Within such a discursive framework where positive and negative outcomes, desirable and undesirable futures are predetermined, youth are easily discounted, held suspect by tenacious, widely-held perceptions of a life stage marked by distress, incompleteness and at risk of failure. Resilience

is conceptualized and used in ways that can subordinate the experience of youth.

One alternative definition of youth suggests a concept of generation, whereby youth are defined as being in a generation that is different from the preceding generation. Youth represent a new beginning, where a new generation brings rupture, change and growth to a society, by way of being the new generation (Henze, 2015). Another way in which youth have been critically defined is with the term "guerrilla self" (Howie & Campbell, 2016, p. 906). The authors suggest an alternative identity that acknowledges the capacities, creativity and innovation of youth within the oppressive neoliberal regime: the guerrilla self. This is the self that is resistant to the system, and finds within it flaws, abandoned sites and opportunities to thrive. The guerrilla self is active, has agency, and has a resistance that is admirable and strength-focused, and alters the definition of success and resilience (Howie & Campbell, 2016).

The Current Project

Inspired by Ungar's (2004, 2008) provocative question "resilience for whom?" we turn, in this study, to youth with a hope that they could emancipate the word resilience from an individualized, adult-oriented framework. The aim of this study was to foreground the voice of youth by utilizing collaborative art-making as a method of self-expression and a tool for sparking collaborative discussions about resilience and well-being. By asking what resilience might mean to youth, we explored a youth-led account of resilience that is meaningfully representative of their perceptions, capacities, and lived experiences. A participatory action and arts-based approach was employed to access a youth-centred exploration of resilience and to accentuate the active and strength-focused position that youth embody. Given the scarcity of scholarly efforts to ascertain how youth themselves define the concept of resilience, this study provides an initial insight into young people's perceptions that could help guide future research on this topic. Recognizing the potential gap between institutional definitions of resilience and young people's own understandings may help service providers better support young clients in need.

Methods

This study was inspired by the principles of participatory action research (PAR), an emergent research method that simultaneously strives for equitable research relations and demands that research makes societal change (Borda, 2006; MacDonald, 2012; McTaggart, 1991). PAR was developed out of a concern about unequal power dynamics between researchers and the subjects of research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2008). The PAR response to inherent injustices in research is to shift the researcher–subject relationships, so that those being researched become collaboratively involved in a research project and mobilize the emerging knowledge to bring positive changes to their lives (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2008). Within PAR, the power/knowledge dynamic is unsettled, as the individuals being researched (traditionally, the least powerful in research relations) participate in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and then use that knowledge creation to make change. This re-validates knowledge to create social space that is inclusive and open to equitable change.

A collective art-making method was chosen as a main vehicle of knowledge production and mobilization. Arts-based methodologies center the subjective experience of research participants, in this case youth, by forefronting how participants express themselves through arts and dialogues among them (Huss, 2011; Martinez, 2014). Within an arts-based research project, the art-making process, the artwork (the final product), and its interpretation all belong to the participants and their community (Huss, 2011), which potentially redresses power imbalance embedded in traditional research process. For instance, in their arts-based inquiry with indigenous youth across Canada, Flicker et al. (2014) call art a "transformative medium" that not only makes visible previously silenced aspects of youth's identities, but also reveals power structure, cultural values, and participants' strengths, in a way that assists with decolonizing research process. A growing body of literature is exploring how arts-based approaches are relevant to disciplines such as social work that are committed to bringing social justice into their research activities. Social justice goals are met in arts-based approaches through shifting relations between researchers and research participants (Foster, 2007; Osei-Kofi, 2013), through empowering processes (Foster, 2007; Packard, Ellison, & Sequenzia, 2004; Zenkov & Harmon, 2009), and through an acknowledgement of diverse ways of knowing, thereby disrupting norms that sustain structures of inequity (Bresler, 2006; O'Neill, 2008; Stiell, Tang, Bennett, & Price, 2006; Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013). For example, one interdisciplinary team (social work, nursing, and international development), explored how arts-based research with marginalized populations has the potential to meet the goals of change and empowerment as identified by the marginalized individuals they were engaged in a research project with (Walsh et al., 2013).

Project Design

This project emerged out of an ongoing relationship between local youth and the first author at a community space that had been created with and for youth. Local youth had

previously worked with the first author in her role as adult ally to successfully apply for several grants that had allowed them to create safe social spaces in a community that offered few of these types of opportunities for youth. The youth-led projects that came out of these grants focused on art-making, music, spoken word, as well as community building through youth enterprise and youth-organized community events. Much of the dialogue with the youth at the community space focused on the needs of the involved youth for safe spaces and opportunities for expression through the arts and through ongoing conversations. The dialogue also focused on the ways in which the youth felt misunderstood and underappreciated by the larger community. Together, the youth and the first author envisioned some of the possibilities for well-being and community, and some ideas about using art, dialogue and participatory methods of exploration were exchanged. With these conversations in mind, the first author sketched out an arts-based, participatory research project and presented it to her institutional review board.

After receiving ethics approval, this project began with the development of two youth research teams (YRTs). Members of the first YRT were recruited at a youth social service centre in the downtown of a middle-sized city in Southern Ontario, Canada, and the second YRT consisted of young adults in rural communities around the same area, through the community space where relationships between the first author and local youth had already been established. The YRTs were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that participant demographics indicate sufficient diversity in terms of geographic location, educational background, and experience in workshop facilitation. Each YRT consisted of three members aged 18–29 years (three females, three males); three of them had post-secondary education, while the other three had completed their high-school education Most of them had been actively involved in their communities as youth leaders. A youth policy environmental scan looked at the different services and policies in Canada, to see how the age span of youth was being defined. They found that many services and policies have extended the age range, to as far as the early 1930s, as a recognition of the cultural, economic and social factors that are impacting the capacity of youth to be independent and actively involved in employment, communities, politics, parenthood, etc. (Doucette, 2010). For this study, we considered it optimal to recruit participants aged 16–29 years, as this age range would allow us acknowledge the ways in which culture and societal structures are negotiated by the youth in their community.

The six youth researchers were then trained in PAR methodologies, arts-based workshop facilitation, and data collection (field note taking). The PAR training included a description of qualitative research, a consideration of research relations, the potential of research to harm, meaningful participation, empowering methods of inquiry, the role of the researcher, and the ways in which action can be identified and then woven into the investigation process. Arts-based workshop facilitation training focused on non-directive, collaborative, and non-intrusive facilitation techniques. In terms of data collection, the youth researchers were encouraged to consider the ways in which close observation can occur and then be documented.

Throughout the study, the YRT members acted closely with the first author as co-researchers and led participant recruitment and data collection. The YRT members recruited a total of 23 participants for arts-based workshop using a snowball sampling method. To be included in this study, participants had to be the ages of 16–29 years, had provided written informed consent, and had used the services of youth-based programming in their respective regions at least once in the year prior to the study. The participants were diverse in terms of gender, sexuality, educational standing, race, ethnicity and the reasons why they had used social services for youth. For some participants, homelessness and food insecurity created the needs for which they had sought services; for other participants, there was involvement with child welfare, police and mental health services; yet some other participants utilized academic, employment and physical health services targeting youth. Two groups were formed; 11 youth attended Group 1 and 12 attended the Group 2.

In collaboration with the first author, the YRT members developed and facilitated two 3-hour art-making workshops for each group. Each group was given a supplies budget to purchase materials and professional art instruction based on the group's preference. Group 1 selected to use various art materials (clay, glaze, oil paints, brushes and canvases, drawing supplies and graffiti materials). Group 2 selected specific instruction from two visual artists (a photographer and a painter), and a spoken word artist (a poet) along with the art supplies related to those art forms. During all the workshops, YRT members facilitated discussions, documented each participant's description of their artwork, and took field notes with the first author.

In the first workshop, both groups were asked to collaboratively explore what they would think essential to understand the concept of resilience. While some youth said they had never heard of the term, the majority of the workshop participants were aware of it, particularly because it had been applied to them by service providers. The first author and YRT members encouraged participants to freely explore how resilience could be defined through their own lens rather than by adults/professionals. The Group 1 chose to sit in a circle to talk about resilience while individually making clay objects. The participants shared their experiences of being misunderstood and being taken into directions they did not want to, while playing with clay to create their own pieces. Clay objects

Fig. 1 Menagerie of clay figures, displayed together as per group's request

were baked after the first workshop to be painted during the second workshop. In the second workshop, Group 1 collectively decided to place clay sculptures together to make a menagerie (Fig. 1). Group 1 also decided to create a large graffiti wall depicting the galaxy with planets, evoking planetary connection and differentiation that takes place within a galactic unity.

Group 2 started the workshop by taking art lessons from artists to learn about specific techniques. Using these techniques, each participant created a series of images (drawings, sketches, and paintings) depicting their perceptions of youth resilience and the ways their well-being had been compromised and diminished. With the assistance of the trained artists, all participants created finished pieces by the end of the second workshop. At the end of the second workshop, each participant was invited to describe their completed art to the entire group (see Fig. 2 for some examples), which was followed by a group discussion.

The workshops resulted in a 1-week art show at a public gallery in a mid-sized city in Southwestern Ontario, where community members were invited to reflect upon youth-defined resilience, social constructions of youth, and art as research. The art in the show included paintings, drawings, sculpture, film, and graffiti. This was an opportunity for the youth to showcase their artistic expressions. It was also an opportunity for the wider community to encounter the ways in which youth described their experiences of resilience, and to consider the significance of exploring youth-centered definitions of resilience.

Fig. 2 The participant's painting titled "One"

Data Analysis

When the workshops were complete, considerable art had been made, and a rich set of qualitative data was collected. The data analysis was performed by the two authors using the method of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data included: the research memos kept by YRT members and the first author during the arts-based workshops, the documentation of the explanations that youth offered about their art work, and the documentation of the discussions that occurred during the workshops. The artwork itself was not analyzed by the researchers, instead, we documented the ways in which the youth discussed and explained their work and used that documentation as data. The first author read through all data independently several times and inductively identified recurrent themes. The second author, who was not part of the workshops, also independently conducted inductive coding of all data, while recording topics relevant to the concept of resilience. Both researchers took analytic memos as they read the data and drew on their knowledge of resilience literature, social services for youth and research questions. Themes developed by the two authors were then compared and contrasted until agreement was achieved.

The YRT members were invited to take part in the analysis of this data. However, because of the many transitory goals of the YRT youth researchers, such as post-secondary education, employment, travel plans, and other interests, the members chose to complete their involvement in the project before the full analysis work was complete. Enduring rates of participation are a significant challenge faced by participatory action researchers (Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow, & Brown, 2005). The length and level of participation by the YRT members and the workshop participants was high, considering participant engagement challenges of many participatory research projects and the transitory stage of life that all of the participant youth were in (e.g., Fava et al., 2016; Rutman et al., 2005).

Results

Through collaborative art-making and group dialogues, the participating youth described what resilience meant to them. An important aspect of their exchange of ideas about what resilience could be was identifying what might foster or threaten a sense of resilience and well-being. Workshops were facilitated in a casual yet engaged manner, in order to, as one YRT member described, “go organically, very sensitive to participants’ needs, no pushing.” There were no formal instructions, so that the dialogue could remain open to participants bringing their ideas forward. Although the workshops were conducted with youth from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds and different tastes in arts, themes identified in our analysis were similar. In what follows, we describe the major themes emerging across the data as participants engaged in artmaking and dialogue about their ways of understanding resilience. The three themes describe the ways in which youth felt supported, sustained and threatened: (1) belonging and connections, (2) personal strengths and uniqueness, and (3) external forces and pressures. Within these themes, we can begin to gain an understanding about what a youth-focused definition might look like, and, importantly, what supports and ways of seeing youth might be most positive for youth.

Belonging/Connections

During the group dialogues, several youth identified that belonging to a group of caring individuals was significant for their resilience. When describing the individual art pieces they created (e.g. clay sculptures or paintings) to the group, many participants noted a desire for “harmony,” “a sense of belonging (that) helps us feel able and valued,” and “having a welcoming environment, to allow connection making,” as key components of their resilience. At the beginning of the first workshops, both YRTs and the first author noticed initial discomfort among workshop participants as many of them did not know one another. However, the story exchange that occurred after an initial discomfort became the first act of community-building.

The participants began to share stories related to struggles, to coping, to art-making and to strategies they had utilized when their life circumstances were particularly difficult. With their stories, the workshop participants began to build connections one another. The shared storytelling created a rapport among the participants from where the collective art-making began. YRT members noted a gradual relaxation in the participant body postures and a smoothing of discussion flow after the story exchange. In their post-workshop reflections, YRT members in both groups noted that the story exchange was very conducive to the collective explorations about struggle and wellness. A workshop participant also described the positive impact of the story exchange:

> It clicked that this is the point, being together, creating together, sharing something meaningful, feeling that listening was happening ... everyone is listening and wanting to know. Equal, mutual...

Another young person stated:

> Feeling valued seems necessary to feeling and being successful. This gives us something to do, to become a part of, something to share in.

A desire for connection was further demonstrated by the speed and adeptness with which a sense of community was created within the workshops. When describing resilience, participants acknowledged the connections they had built as: “What is resilience? Take a picture of us!” “We are ‘it’ together,” and “If we are trying to get an accurate picture (of resilience), it would have to be a combination of all the art.” In these responses, the participants expressed how connection to other workshop participants and facilitators (YRTs) helped them to feel capable and worthwhile.

The following quote from one participant eloquently delineates how solidarity was achieved through the process of art-making:

> Making the art as a group, socializing differently - as it moved to doing the art rather than “thinking” - seemed to make everyone more confident, more comfortable. Comparing our work to others’ then as we continued to create, we became less self-conscious by the end of it. After making art together, we gained a sense of knowing one another well, which facilitated an open group discussion. Not being judged, the activity of creating something was valued, helped everyone feel less self-consciousabout their creations.

Both participants and YRT members identified the creation of a safe and inclusive space as a prerequisite to developing the sense of belonging and connections. Participants actively built a safe and inclusive community space where mutual socializing could occur. For one YRT member, witnessing the workshop was an experience of “observing what people who are not used to being given space do with that space.” This YRT member took a special note on how a collective and mutual process of art-making and dialogue encouraged youth participants to express their thoughts.

Personal Strengths and Uniqueness

Several youth participants discussed in depth their personal strengths and uniqueness as essential in coping with adversity and overcoming life challenges. Some of the dialogues generated through story exchanges suggested how these young people tried to remain resilient by embracing their uniqueness and capacity to learn from the past, often negative experiences. One participant noted "learning from things that happened and how to do it better" contributed to his resilience. Personal strengths increase resilience, said another, by "not going back to where you don't want to go." These young people generally believed that resilience and well-being were closely related to one's unique ability to persevere, in the words of one participant: "success is subjective, and is typified by the beliefs of each individual."

While the participants described personal strengths as a contributing factor to increased resilience, they also described resilience as something that could feed their confidence and sustain their self-determination: one participant stated that being resilient "helps us find our own things to do, helps us to create our own lives, and understand ourselves," which was echoed by a fellow participant that how resilience "awakens our ability to be self-reliant." Another young person agreed and added that "making our own decisions and creating our own stuff is a big part in becoming self-reliant." Some of the art that was created and then explained during the workshops portrayed this sense of resilience as autonomy, self-determination, and independence, for example, with a large thickly painted gold "One" (Fig. 2) or with a lone wolf howling into a spacious sky up at the moon.

External Forces

In describing their perception of resilience, several young participants also shared the episodes when their autonomy and well-being were threatened by external forces such as law enforcement officials, family members, and service providers. Participants described these outside forces as being "volcanic," "containing," and "imposed" upon them, negatively impacting their sense of self-worth. Many expressed their discomfort with these outside forces, including social services supposedly designed to enhance resilience in youth: One young person noted: "a narrow scope of success is imposed on us through the programs we are a part of," and another echoed:

> Don't label us with a word that does not have meaning for us - if you ask a lot of kids what resilience is, they would not know.

The artwork portrayed how the participating youth's perception of external disturbances posting a threat to their autonomy. One of the graffiti walls created by the rural group depicted a background full of strong bold colours. On top of this overwhelming background were small stencils of skeletons, figures falling, one gas mask, and mushrooms, depicting relationships between a strong outside force, and vulnerable figures who either succumbed (falling, skeletal) or remained protected (gas mask, mushrooms depicting health and nutrition). The discussion inspired by this image was about how the small stenciled forms would be able to withstand the enormity of the force of their environment and to thrive despite the adversity.

While deeply frustrated by outside forces, many participants described the ways they cope with the disturbances. They described "withstanding," "dealing with a lot of shit," "plowing through," and "rising above" the expectations that were "thrust upon" them with the concept of resilience. One participant said that "sometimes, you just gotta say f*** it, and do what you feel is better." Another participant described raising "a fist, with smaller fists behind, all the fists are different colours, some dirty, some clean," placing her response in the context of the painting she made. These descriptions expressed how hard the participants were working to sustain their own sense of wellness, strength and resilience. Some of these young people found art-making helpful in persevering through challenges. One participant shared his sketchbook and explained how he has used his art to manage anger and cope with difficult situations. He noted that he always had pencil and sketchbook with him as a security blanket.

Discussion

Our study explored the possibility of an emancipatory understanding of resilience from the perspective of youth, by incorporating the conceptualizations and experiences of youth themselves. Through collaborative art-making and dialogues with peers, the participating youth demonstrated subjective experiences, the impact of external forces that diminished subjectivity, and the importance of collective experiences. The youth began to deconstruct and reconstruct the concept of resilience in a way that it would meaningfully reflect their perceptions, capacities and lived experiences. By using the method of arts-based PAR, we also strived to unsettle power dynamics inherent to research and facilitate a positive space wherein the young participants could freely explore their own understandings of resilience and well-being.

The majority of young people who participated in this study emphasized the importance of having a sense of belonging and connectedness. The workshop dialogues suggest that for this group of youth, connection and solidarity are crucial aspects of their well-being. Through

meaningful participation, the youth found ways of being with, and empowered by, one another. They built a community, developed art-making skills, and created an art project that was displayed in a public space for the larger community. The artworks and dialogues that emanated from the workshops demonstrated the young people's capacities and desire to create a safe space that allowed for socializing, skill development, and creation. The positive, welcoming, and engaging atmosphere the YRTs created might also have contributed to the participants' sense of safety and connectedness. This finding corroborates with previous research that indicates positive impacts of open, welcoming spaces on youth (Diouf, 2003; Malone, 2002; Social Planning Toronto, 2011). In her PAR with Papua New Guinean youth, Vaughan (2014) reports that the research supported the creation of a safe, dialogical space where youth could develop skills and capacities and exercise critical thinking through leadership opportunities and community building activities. However, Vaughan (2014) contends that the development of critical consciousness did not automatically result in critically informed action. As discussed in the "Limitations" section below, her critique held true to our study, too.

Alongside the significance of belonging and connections, the youth participants also described the importance of retaining unique experience and identity. Within the discussions about uniqueness were references to their inner strengths drawn upon to respond to challenges. The participants also referred to the strengths they developed through their challenges that could be applied to further growth and development. Intriguingly, well-being and resilience were described simultaneously as the capacity for being themselves and for being with others. Here, resilience is conceptualized as an intersubjective process, an ongoing, fluid negotiation between the individual and peers who could share experiences. Einstein and Shildrick (2009), in reference to the work of Luce Irigaray, described the self/other relationship as a "between-subjects" event that generates intersubjective identity. Subjectivity is constantly interplaying with the outside world, with reciprocal influence, described as intersubjectivity (McNay, 2008). For the workshop participants, resilience is a part of this "between-subjects" negotiation through the celebration of both difference and shared experience.

Finally, the participating youth described outside forces that threatened their sense of self-worth. Participants' reflection indicated that some resilience-oriented social services, albeit well-intentioned, could infringe their autonomy and choice-making. These young people vocally expressed frustration with "a narrow scope of success" imposed upon them by these institutions. Being used in a manner that is fundamentally unreflective of the youth's visions, hopes, and experiences, the word resilience becomes foreign to them. This suggests the concept of resilience can be used in a hegemonic manner to construct certain youth as "at-risk," vulnerable, and in need of intervention, while leaving unquestioned the normative assumptions about successful youthhood (Kelly, 2000; Foster and Spencer, 2011).

Implications

The arts-based PAR project provided participants with a unique opportunity to emancipate the term resilience from the pre-determined normative conceptualization. The collaborative art-making process facilitated intersubjective experience, was deeply participatory, and occurred in a shared space that the youth developed into a supportive community of solidarity. These young people described through their arts and dialogue what it would mean to them to be resilient, and demonstrated the significance of responses that honour and highlight their lived experiences. Within this context, we can begin to examine resilience as a component of a youth-led process of identity management. Considering what resilience means to them may enable these young people to engage in the negotiation between their unique experience and socially structured experience. The negotiation is between the subjectivity of the youth and the subjectedness that is constructed in multiple ways by social structures and attendant social locations (Jonson-Reid, Drake, & Kohl, 2009; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004; Lavergne, Dufour, Trocmé, & Larrivée, 2008). From this perspective, youth can be conceptualized as responding with agency in their continuous negotiations with their environments. Providing a safe, open space where youth can experiment with diverse modes of self-expression and nurture solidarity with peers would further the deconstruction and reconstruction of the otherwise conservative nature of youth resilience discourse. Within such open spaces, the grip of a risk and adversity-focused definition of resilience is loosened, and it becomes possible to encounter youth from outside of the neoliberal mechanism of manufactured uncertainty and its focus on risk. The experience of resilience, then, becomes an issue that draws upon a broad range of responses, and the strengths and capacities of youth become central to how youth are conceptualized. Youth studies, support services, and social policies that aim to better understand both the place and the well-being of youth will be enhanced by meaningfully participatory methods of development, as well as a critical redevelopment of foundational conceptualizations of youth that have served to deactivate and decontextualize.

There are implications that are specific to social work practice with youth. Finn (2013) presents a compelling ethnohistorical study that critiques the certainty about youth that has informed much social work practice with youth. The certainty is about the role of society in the lives of youth, the necessity of state intervention, and an

individualized account of youth as being valued only for their potential futures as positive citizens. Such certainties, Finn (2013) asserts, shape social work practice to be punitive and risk-focused in its responses to youth. She asks of social workers: "What responsibility do we have to challenge the certainties behind these practices and support the place, power, and possibility of children and youth as critical thinkers and actors with a right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives?" (p. 1173).

Limitations

The study has certain limitations that should be documented. First, this study did not include an exploration of the impact of the public art display on the youth, though many of the participants exhibited their art in the show. We also did not collect information about how the artworks were perceived by community members who attended the art exhibition. Given that arts-based PAR is meant to be transformative and action-oriented (Flicker et al., 2014), it is worth exploring in a future study the impact of public exhibition on participant youth and audience, as well as whether the public display would facilitate wider discussions with the community about the issues youth are facing. This may also open up a potential of making youth-led arts-based research more actionable and sustainable. Vaughan (2014), in her critique of the missing link between the creation of safe social spaces via PAR and the development of transformative action in context, encourages community agencies to create "in-between spaces" to motivate powerful stakeholders to support transformative efforts. As implied in this study, a need exists for more effort in stimulating transformative actions through PAR.

Second, the self-selection bias should be taken into consideration. Only those interested in art (or arts-based research) signed up to take part in our study. Some youth may not be as engaged as others with the collaborative artmaking process. Future research may benefit from recruiting youth from more diverse backgrounds. Lastly, due to the exploratory nature of this project, further research is required to examine more thoroughly the subjective meaning of resilience. We agree strongly with Ungar's (2008) proposition that resiliency research needs to continually question resilience for whom and for what purpose. Our arts-based approach did generate practical, actionable knowledge with respect to young people's perception of resilience. Acknowledging resilience as an intersubjective process of identity negotiation—rather than an innate attribute or a buildable capacity for coping—may provide valuable guidance to social service providers and policymakers.

Conclusions

The youth who participated in this arts-based project provided, through their artmaking and dialogue, an exploratory image of resilience that is informed by and informing of their identity experience. As an identity experience, such an image also conveys a direct connection to the constructions of youth that are imposed by societal structures. With such an approach to understanding what it can mean to be, to support and to remain resilient, critical perspectives about youth become particularly relevant. When youth are critically considered as more than a stage of development bound by chronological age, valued only for its passage to adulthood, and dissociated from historical, social and cultural influences, new possibilities for identity and wellness emerge. Youth become active, transformative/transforming and valuable members of a larger community. What the youth participants in this project suggest with their collective artmaking is that belonging and connections, personal strengths and uniqueness, as well as external forces and pressures may be the experiences that are to be integral to our considerations of what it means to be a youth, and how it is that ongoing wellness and resilience can be pursued.

Funding This project was funded by the Doris and Ross Dixon Foundation [15-2900].

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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