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"Actually Changing Our Way of Being": Transformative Organizing and Implications for Critical Community-Engaged Scholarship

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Abstract: Because research alone cannot dismantle racial inequity, this article focuses on lessons for critical community-engaged scholarship (CCES) based on the Relationship-Centered Schools campaign of Californians for Justice (CFJ), an educational and racial justice youth organizing group. The campaign embraced transformative organizing—an approach to social change that encompasses reshaping oppressive institutions and healing trauma wounds wrought by injustice. I discuss findings and methodological implications for CCES, considering challenges in translating research to policy change for racial equity. This article situates the power and limitations of research within CFJ's broad array of transformative organizing strategies to create more caring and equitable schools. Strategies include youth-led action research, voter engagement, lobbying, youth sharing power with adults, and healing practices of slowing down and relationship building to rehumanize youth of color. I then discuss implications for CCES. First, research supported CFJ youth leaders' efforts to press institutions to value their full, emotionally complex humanity and legitimize their emotional knowledge. Yet because research is only one of many strategies for transformative change, fully participatory research is not always within organizing groups' capacity. Thus, researchers can act more expansively by lending our time, energy, and labor to power building. Second, care and healing practices embodied by CFJ can inspire researchers to center relationship building and care as praxis and translate these lessons to transform the academy into a more equitable place. Ultimately, transformative organizing shows how CCES can extend beyond equitable research practices to include more liberatory ways of being, feeling, and acting towards justice.

Keywords: critical community-engaged scholarship; youth organizing; transformative organizing; emotions; healing justice; racial justice; educational justice

1. Introduction

Critical community-engaged scholarship (CCES) outlines a framework for university–community partnerships that develop "critically conscious knowledge" to "make society more socially and racially just" (Gordon da Cruz 2017). Yet challenges persist in translating collaborative knowledge production into systemic changes for racial equity. For example, CCES and similar approaches, such as youth participatory action research (YPAR)[1], may produce policy change recommendations that do not materialize into fruition (Bertrand and Lozenski 2023). The crux of this disconnect is that research alone is insufficient to unweave power imbalances braided into the fabric of a systemically racist society (Haapanen and Christens 2021). This article builds on the argument that research should be coupled with youth and community organizing or other efforts building the power of those most impacted by oppression (Serrano et al. 2022). Yet research is merely one strategy of many deployed by organizing groups to dismantle power, which should push university researchers to think and act more expansively to support transformative change.

Thus, this article contextualizes research within a case study illustrating these multiple strategies. I draw from three interrelated methodologies of campaign-related research,

critical ethnography, and autoethnographic reflections to discuss how Californians for Justice (CFJ), a statewide racial and educational justice youth organizing group, practices a holistic approach to social change called transformative organizing (TO). TO builds on more commonly understood, outwardly oriented grassroots organizing—in CFJ's case, youth of color wage campaigns to transform educational policies and institutions. In addition, TO is inwardly oriented by embracing practices to heal "the interpersonal and individual effects of oppression and trauma in our lives" (Williams 2015).

The first section outlines examples of how CFJ used youth-led action research, advocacy, lobbying, voter outreach, relationship-building with school and district staff and administrators, and modeling youth leadership to transform racially inequitable educational institutions and practices. Research helped uplift young people's emotional knowledge that refused binaries of emotion and intellect and supported the launch of their campaign that rejected oppressive silencing and policing of their emotions. Yet research was only one strategy required to bring youth's visions to fruition. Second, I discuss how CFJ balanced systemic change with deeply individual, personally felt healing. As youth organizer "Rocío"[2] explained to youth during a weekly meeting, TO presses us to not only change institutions but ourselves. That is, transformative organizing is about "actually changing our ways of being and existing". Thus, CFJ practiced self-care as a rejection of systemic neglect and refused movement cultures that replicate oppression by slowing down and centering relationships and emotional support.

Drawing on autoethnographic reflections, I then discuss implications to further refine CCES and propose how researchers, too, can change our ways not just of researching, but being and existing. First, CFJ's campaign suggests that participatory research may not always be within an organizing group's capacities, given the vast assemblage of strategies needed to enact change. However, researchers can fulfill very specific needs and put boots on the ground to be there and support transformative organizing in other ways. Thus, university researchers practicing CCES should also ask whether we are practicing "strategic engagement" (Speer and Christens 2013) that explicitly supports power-building organizations. We should also ask: is participatory research the most important need, and/or are there other ways we can leverage resources, time, and energy to expand organizations' capacity? Second, I argue that CFJ's internal healing practices push researchers to slow down and center caring relationships with organizing partners to prefigure a more humanizing world. Such practices can be healing for scholars of color and shape how, in turn, we approach teaching and mentorship to make the academy more racially and intersectionally equitable. Thus, CCES should also ask: are we centering relationships and care as praxis for racial justice? Are we taking lessons learned from community partnerships to transform the academy? I conclude with recommendations to ameliorate how CCES and transformative organizing are structurally inhibited within academic structures that continue to fetishize traditional academic outputs and hyper-productivity. Ultimately, youth-led TO and the practices of care and transformation informed by queer and feminist of color frameworks show how researchers can practice different ways of being in expansive and liberatory ways.

2. Power Building in Research and Transformative Change: CCES, YPAR, and Youth Organizing

CCES and related frameworks, including youth participatory action research (YPAR), strive to upend power relations embedded in, and perpetuated by, traditional research (Anyon et al. 2018; Cammarota and Fine 2010; Gordon da Cruz 2017). Such paradigms center communities' expertise and agency in knowledge production and mobilize research to make policies, practices, and institutions more racially equitable (Caraballo et al. 2017; Serrano et al. 2021). For example, CCES outlines how research partnerships should "influence actual policies, laws, and/or cultural practices that impact the lives of nondominant community members" (Gordon da Cruz 2017, p. 365).

Yet considerable obstacles persist in realizing institutional changes proposed through engaged research. The "tenacity of powerful people and entities to maintain the status quo" (Bertrand and Lozenski 2023, p. 444) perpetuates intersecting racism, patriarchy, ageism, class inequality, and more. For example, youth of color have faced obstructions and backlash to projects addressing disparities in school discipline and racialized tracking (Bertrand 2014; Lac et al. 2022; Lac and Fine 2018; Oakes and Rogers 2006). Engaged scholars have concluded that research alone—no matter how rigorous or persuasive—cannot dismantle power imbalances undergirding inequities (Bertrand and Lozenski 2023; Haapanen and Christens 2021; Serrano et al. 2021; Speer and Christens 2013). As summarized by Haapanen and Christens (2021): "to assume that academic research has the power, on its own, to leverage transformative changes to the conditions in communities is an unfortunate underestimation of the broader social and political dynamics that shape those conditions" (p. 4).

Scholars in this camp conclude that, to be impactful, research must be strategically connected to power building and collective struggle. After all, YPAR approaches combined with advocacy or organizing are more likely to report an impact on their environment than approaches that only use education or awareness campaigns (Kennedy et al. 2019). Youth organizing groups, for example, use YPAR in campaigns where they bring the recommendations of their research to fruition through strategies, such as direct action and media pressure to target decisionmakers (Conner et al. 2013; Dolan et al. 2015; Noroña 2020; Serrano et al. 2022). Importantly, youth organizing groups are better situated than time-limited, discrete YPAR projects to wield power because they create a lasting structure rooted in a base of young leaders most impacted by injustice to engage in sustained, long-term movements (Bertrand and Lozenski 2023).

Yet less frequently discussed are potential disjunctures between other power building strategies and participatory research methods. I agree with ideals of alignment, but assumptions that power building necessitates more research involvement from organizing groups may operate from incomplete understandings of what it takes to confront power. Accordingly, this article situates research within power-building challenges and concomitant strategies used by organizing groups. It aligns with Speer and Christens (2013)'s discussion of "strategic engagement," wherein engaged researchers are attentive to broader power dynamics by intentionally engaging with community organizing and other power building groups.

Following this cue, youth organizing is distinct from youth engagement[3] in centering the agency of youth most impacted by oppression—especially low-income, queer, immigrant, and refugee youth of color—to "alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities" (Listen 2003). Youth organizing groups arose in the mid-1990s in response to a slew of attacks on immigrant and communities of color and increased criminalization of youth of color (HoSang 2010; Pastor 2018). Such groups build power through efforts, such as civic and leadership skill development, cultivating critical consciousness around root causes of issues youth face, holistic support through healing, academic support, and mentorship, and wielding collective power—for example, through youth devising, implementing, and realizing campaigns for systemic change (Ginwright 2010; Lin 2018; Rogers et al. 2012; Rogers and Terriquez 2013; Serrano et al. 2021; Terriquez 2017). Despite this large range of strategies necessary to dismantle power, youth organizing receives only one percent of the philanthropic funding directed towards youth development organizations (Shah 2020). Thus, this article aims to situate the power and limitations of research within this broader context.

2.1. Challenges Confronting Racialized Power

To understand strategies required to dismantle racism, it is critical to understand key challenges that perpetuate and entrench racism. First, institutional and individual actors throughout U.S. history and the present have vehemently guarded benefits associated with whiteness (Harris 1993). Even when racial justice movements win policy changes, white

communities have often fought to foreclose "racial progress"—for example, by blocking and refusing to comply with federal affordable housing laws and voting rights legislation, in the courts and in the streets, through legal, structural, and interpersonal physical violence (Anderson 2016; Coates 2017; Lipsitz 1998). Such dynamics are also at play when understanding how Black and Brown YPAR leaders may be viewed by school administrators as incapable of school leadership or decisions, or posing political threats by broaching racism (Bertrand 2014, 2018; Oakes and Rogers 2006). For example, Salisbury and colleagues argue that district leaders upheld privileges of whiteness by resisting and exploiting a program proposed by youth of color, deploying tactics, such as a lack of transparency and devaluing youth expertise (Salisbury et al. 2020). Meanwhile, Bertrand (2018) describes how teachers and administrators in one project undermined students' voices and leadership, while evading explicit discussions of race. Lac and Fine (2018) discuss how school administrators scuttled a YPAR project on racialized disproportionalities in discipline, citing fear that white donors would be offended. These examples show the need for creative ways of transforming institutions for racial equity.

Second, dominant discourses minimize people of color's emotions in response to injustice. Communities of color often face "racial gaslighting" for resisting racism: "the political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacy reality through pathologizing those who resist" (Davis and Ernst 2017). Oftentimes, these processes have been explicitly anti-Black. For example, diagnoses of schizophrenia pathologized Black Panthers' and other Black leftists' indictments of structural racism as "protest psychosis" (Metzl 2010). Such pathologies deploy intersections of race, gender, age, class, disability, and other social forces to script Black and other communities of color as overly emotional: for example, Black girls are often deemed aggressive, disrespectful, or unladylike when expressing certain emotions, such as frustration or fear (Evans-Winters and Equity 2017; Froyum 2010; Morris 2007). People of color in "white institutional" settings report being labeled "emotional" and facing other consequences, such as alienation, ostracism, sanctioning, and firing when they speak up about unjust treatment (Evans and Moore 2015). Another study found that Black and Mexican youth experienced "emotional silencing", including intensified regulation of their behavior compared to white peers and lack of emotional support despite experiencing trauma (Clonan-Roy et al. 2021).

Hence, this is another mechanism involved in the perpetuation of racism—to avoid being penalized as overly angry or emotional, people of color, especially Black communities, have often responded with emotional suppression. For example, Black parents train their children to not appear "defiant, angry, or uppity" in white settings (McLoyd et al. 2000). Adult staff at a non-profit organization taught young Black girls to suppress their feelings and reduce "unnecessary drama" as protections from punishment by white teachers and staff (Froyum 2010). Black college men have socialized each other to minimize and underplay their feelings, particularly anger—for example, by maintaining de-politicized, easy-going demeanors (Jackson and Wingfield 2013; Wingfield 2010). Black women faculty members must suppress frustration about being deemed intellectually inferior by exhibiting "professionalism", while abiding by gendered expectations of providing nurturing care to students (Harlow 2003). Such emotional suppression can foster "unpleasant emotional dissonance" in "emotionally laborious process[es]" (Ramos-Zayas 2011), take emotional tolls (Wingfield 2010), and discourage critical analyses and actions against racism (Evans and Moore 2015).

2.2. The Importance of Transformative Organizing

These converging challenges point to the importance of youth organizing groups to address structural and emotional dimensions of racialized injustice. Organizing groups validate the understandable emotions of youth of color and continue pressure on institutions to implement policy wins (Fernández and Watts 2023; Lin 2022; Lin and Patraporn 2022; Ortega-Williams et al. 2020). Yet activism can also compound the negative health impacts of racism, sexism, and ageism (Gorski 2018; Harris-Perry 2018; Hope et al. 2017). After all,

groups have not always been well equipped to support organizers through financial and emotional burdens—including backlash, police violence, and heightened surveillance especially targeting Black organizers (Austen 2017; Lowery and Stankiewicz 2016). Sometimes, racial justice organizations, like other social movement organizations, have exacerbated challenges by demanding selflessness and constant work (Rodgers 2010).

As a result, youth and community organizing groups have increasingly recognized that social change also requires healing from how oppression wreaks "psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical harm to individuals and communities" (Ginwright 2015, p. 6). While this article focuses on transformative organizing (TO), TO is also closely aligned with other paradigms, such as "healing justice", which argue for the importance of both outwardly oriented grassroots organizing for systemic change and inwardly focused strategies around healing and well-being (Carruthers 2019; Chavez-Diaz and Lee 2015; Lee 2014; Page 2013; Social Justice Leadership 2010). After all, social movements have not always contended with personally felt suffering, while individual approaches to well-being do not address systemic and root causes of depression or anxiety. Such frameworks build extend longstanding traditions of feminist and queer of color scholars and organizers who have advocated for marginalized communities practicing different ways of feeling and being together in the form of radical love, hope, and healing (Hooks 2001; Jacob 2013; Kelley 2002; Million 2013; Moore and Casper 2014; Nash 2011).

2.3. Potential Implications for CCES

This article concludes with the methodological implications of transformative organizing for CCES. I build off the following extant literatures about community-engaged scholarship. First, transformative organizing points to multiple strategies and labor involved in extinguishing oppression. As a result, organizations may lack the capacity or desire for fully participatory research—that is, to be involved in, let alone drive, all aspects of research (Haapanen and Christens 2021; London et al. 2020). Insistence on more engagement and a participatory model could even foster exploitation of "un or under compensated labor". (Haapanen and Christens 2021) This article further elucidates how and why participatory research is not always possible and other ways that researchers can support power building.

Second, this study aligns with growing scholarship on how researcher–community partnerships should also embody care, love, and emotional support, similar to transformative organizing frameworks (Campanella et al. 2022; Clarke et al. 2017; Jolivétte 2015; Lac et al. 2022; Lac and Fine 2018). Many critically engaged scholars have also pointed out that prioritizing relationships may conflict with and challenge academic norms. Lac and Antunes, for example, discuss scaling back research when students were overwhelmed by life and structural violence targeting their communities: centering well-being and safety of student collaborators rendered research secondary (Lac et al. 2022). Others have pointed out that authentic care in collaboration requires slowing down and rejecting the hyperspeed, hyper-productivity of academic timelines (Costas Batlle and Carr 2021; Mason 2021; Mountz et al. 2015; Wong 2021).

This study extends these literatures by considering less discussed implications for healing for scholars of color, concluding with structural and practice changes needed. After all, scholars of color may be especially motivated to conduct community-engaged research to better their communities (Bell and Lewis 2023; Brunsma et al. 2017). And faculty and graduate students of color, like organizers, experience the oppression in the ivory tower that may compound racism and sexism both in their everyday lives and the outside world (McCallum et al. 2022). Although engaged research might be healing, tensions may also arise from the overall devaluing of time, relationships, and products involved in engaged research (Gordon da Cruz 2017).

Thus, bringing together the literature on youth organizing, CCES, and transformative organizing, this study asks: how does research fit into broader power building strategies and transformative organizing frameworks used by a youth organizing group? How do

organizations heal wounds caused by oppression? What are the implications for researchers of color and CCES?

3. Methodology

I answer these questions by drawing on three intertwined sources of data through a collaborative partnership with Californians for Justice from 2014–2019. CFJ is a statewide youth-led racial and educational justice organization with local chapters in Fresno, Long Beach, Oakland, and San Jose. Since 1996, youth-led campaigns have included educational reforms to support high school graduation and postsecondary educational enrollment (e.g., Ethnic Studies classes, supporting completion of college requirements) and winning more equitable public-school funding. The organization is explicitly cross-racial, with mostly Latinx, Black, and Southeast Asian youth leaders and staff, and attentive to intersectional understandings of racial justice. The data sources discussed in the paper are as follows: (1) Research conducted for CFJ campaign purposes; (2) critical ethnography including participant observation and interviews; (3) autoethnographic reflection. Table 1 summarizes the research discussed in this article, including different levels of involvement of CFJ youth leaders and staff.

Table 1. Research conducted and/or discussed in this study.

Research Product/Project	Summary	Animating Research Questions	Roles of Research Fellow (Author) and Youth/Staff	Role in Campaign
Action research sparking the RCS campaign	Surveys of students, focus groups with students, convenings with youth and school/district staff and administrators, interviews with educators, and literature review	What key resources do California students, especially low-income youth of color, need to prepare them for 21st century college and careers?	Research fellow was only minimally involved; youth and staff led data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings	To identify a new campaign rooted in California's student of color needs. Research findings regularly referenced throughout campaign/power building strategies
RCS actions and services deck	Cards identifying best practices of RCS solutions and research evidence of efficacy	What are the existing best practices and examples of key ways to invest in staff, value student voice, and create a space for relationship building? If applicable, what are the consequences?	Staff members provided general guidance. Researcher found and drafted most practices, which were then edited by staff	Supported local demands and guided youth and adult visioning in implementing RCS in various schools and districts
Oakland teacher retention report	Highlighted broader systemic issues behind teacher of color recruitment, hiring, and retention, including literature review and solutions as aligned with RCS	What are some key challenges that impact the recruitment and retention of Oakland Unified teachers? What are the broader structural contexts? How could investing in staff and supporting relationship building bolster racial equity for both students and teachers?	Oakland student leaders, guided by adult staff, led survey collection on teacher retention with 84 teachers, interviews with 5 principals and education policymakers, and focus groups with 8 teachers and 60 students. Research fellow drafted analysis and report of findings, with guidance/feedback from staff	Part of CFJ Oakland's campaign to invest in teachers, including advocating for programs that would reduce class sizes, train new teachers, and provide teacher collaboration time. CFJ Oakland also worked to foreground student voice in development/implementation of strategies

Table 1. *Cont.*

Research Product/Project	Summary	Animating Research Questions	Roles of Research Fellow (Author) and Youth/Staff	Role in Campaign
Race and relationships brief	Outlined connection between racial equity and relationships as grounded in evidence from multiple issues and bodies of scholarship	What does existing research say about why relationships matter in addressing racial injustice? How does racial inequity manifest in schools? Why do relationships matter?	CFJ staff provided main points of guidance and literatures to pursue and collected youth stories to include. Research fellow conducted and drafted the literature review based on guidance and feedback	Supported the relaunch of CFJ'S RCS campaign with a greater focus on racial justice during CFJ's statewide action in Sacramento in May of 2018. Aimed towards education policy makers, allies, and other key influencers, CFJ youth used the report during meetings with legislators in Sacramento
LGB and trans/gender non-conforming students report	Report about intersecting challenges and specific RCS solutions for queer, trans, and gender non-conforming youth, especially youth of color	What specific challenges do LGB/TGNC students face? Why and how are relationships in schools especially important for LGB/TGNC students?	With CFJ staff guidance, a research fellow conducted a literature review and a focus group that highlighted students' experiences alienation compounded by a lack of strong relationships with teachers. CFJ staff provided other youth stories. Long Beach CFJ leaders provided feedback on recommendations they wanted prioritized in the brief	Part of efforts to uplift RCS solutions in relationship to intersectionality and specific student populations (I also worked on an English Language Learner report that was never released)
Book/dissertation project on CFJ and other youth organizing group's campaigns and healing justice	Based on participant observation, interviews, and content analysis around how CFJ and other youth organizations use emotions for healing and intersectional justice	How do organizations experience and bridge paradoxes between political change and personal well-being? How do they frame race given broader contexts evading discussions of racism? How do they build across difference?	Conducted and drafted by research fellow due to lack of capacity of CFJ staff. However, CFJ staff approve of research design, implementation, and findings	Provided a way for the researcher to "be there" and put boots on the ground to support organizing

3.1. Engaged Research for CFJ Campaign Needs: The RCS Toolkit

As a paid CFJ research fellow, I helped produce a toolkit supporting CFJ's relationship-centered schools (RCS) Campaign. The RCS campaign was sparked by youth-led action research in 2015 to answer: "What key resources do California students, especially low-income youth of color, need to prepare them for 21st century college & careers?" They found that students saw caring teachers as the most important resource for their success. I helped translate youth-led research into specific demands to support institutional transformations in three main "buckets": investing in staff, creating a space for relationship-building, and valuing student voice. Table 1 shows the range of youth and staff involvement in these products, from youth-led data collection to projects where youth and staff led data

collection and I as a research fellow drafted analyses and findings, to cases where I drafted much of the findings under the guidance of some key collaborating staff. For example, I often researched and summarized models of best practices to shape their campaign asks, such as existing models where students led teacher hiring and training how such models might support the retention of teachers, especially teachers of color.

3.2. Dissertation/Book Project: Ethnography

The second stream of data collection draws from ethnography conducted for my dissertation, especially a subset of 300 h of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 5 staff and 15 distinct youth, focusing on the Long Beach region and some statewide actions from 2016–2019. I was embedded in CFJ as an ethnographer for an average of 5 h a week from fall 2016–2019, documenting and participating in a range of programming.[4] My observations were driven by questions around how groups reframed racial justice and conceptualized and practiced healing on both structural and individual levels. Semi-structured interview questions with CFJ "core members"[5] addressed questions, such as reflections on campaign challenges, successes, and changes in strategies, as well as intentions behind and practices of transformative organizing. Findings reported in this study arise from reading field notes and interview transcripts multiple times, line by line, using multiple cycles of coding to first identify emerging categories and concepts, then second cycle coding to refine definitions and parameters (Emerson et al. 2011). I also regularly wrote memos to make sense of these themes. This process surprised me, for example, by highlighting the prominence of emotions in all aspects of CFJ. Thus, specific examples and quotes reported here represent the broader themes arising from coding, memos, and analysis, such as consistent recurring themes of young people's emotional frustrations with schools and administrators' responses and different dimensions of healing[6]. This research is IRB-approved. In this article, pseudonyms are used for quotes from individual youth and staff from interviews and participant observation. Real names are used when quotes come from publicly available documents, such as articles and reports.

3.3. Autoethnography

The third data source is autoethnographic reflections, including notes on feelings, experiences, and reactions that I wrote on a bi-weekly basis while in the field, and semi-occasionally while analyzing data. CCES, as informed by critical race theory, values reflections on positionality and "the centrality of experiential knowledge" (Solorzano et al. 2000). I align myself with Lac and colleagues in recognizing that "as women and women of color in academia, we occupy spaces of both power and dispossession" (Lac et al. 2022), which can also help us "uncover relations of domination in the 'ordinary' fabric of educational contexts" (Chávez 2012, p. 339). I am especially cognizant of my relative privilege as an East Asian American researcher from an upper middle class background.East Asians have often been actively complicit in perpetuating oppression against Southeast Asian, South Asian/North African, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities (Kim 1999). This understanding informs my desire to use my research role to practice "thick solidarity" that leverages the resources involved in my privilege (Liu and Shange 2018) to not just research, but to act in ways that embody solidarity. Yet I am also acutely aware of how I experience injustice as a queer Asian American woman in the academy. As such, autoethnography has value by highlighting both what is needed and missing to support researchers, especially early career faculty, in conducting CCES.

3.4. Intersections and Tensions between Methodologies

These streams of data collection were both intertwined and in tension. For example, Table 1 shows the different types of research questions involved in my dissertation data collection and CFJ's RCS toolkit. Questions animating the latter were not deemed sufficiently theoretical, nor did they require extensive methodologies in line with the norms of a Sociology PhD program. I was continually pushed by my program to ensure that I was not

"just" conducting an evaluation, and to be grounded instead in novel theoretical contributions to the academic literature. In contrast, CFJ recognized the value of evaluations—for example, one staff member told me that by showing how seemingly small-scale changes were impactful, they could make the case for broadening the decision-making power of youth of color in schools. Furthermore, whereas CFJ's research questions could be answered through advanced Googling and a limited number of interviews and focus groups, a dissertation required hundreds of hours of participant observation and many interviews. While ultimately none of this research seems fully participatory, the following findings section explains why.

Yet my different roles also enabled me to participate in the organizing and the research in ways that fueled and strengthened each other. In addition to my ethnographic research for my dissertation, I spent an additional day at the CFJ office working on the RCS toolkit, which also helped me develop deeper relationships critical to the partnership. Whereas merely answering the research questions for the RCS toolkit would not have required in-depth ethnographic observation, the latter allowed me to both contribute to RCS campaign efforts on the ground and grow a deeper understanding that improved my ability to conduct research for CFJ.

3.5. Study Limitations

This study does not claim to be generalizable. Findings from youth members and organizers reflect a high degree of self-selection in alignment with CFJ's stated values. For example, youth who were uncomfortable critiquing police on campus may not have been attracted to CFJ or felt pushed out because they disagreed with others. When CFJ turned to transformative organizing, it is possible that staff who disagreed with this approach left. As CFJ staff have written: "We are candid with prospective staff about what our current organizational culture is *really* like to make sure our organizers are committed to taking on this approach with us." (Corpuz and Bell 2021). And, of course, autoethnographic reflections are limited by my own perspectives deeply shaped by my positionality. Yet the main point of this article is to argue for an expansion of, and flexibility in how researchers can support power building. Other organizations may have more or less capacity to engage in research, especially participatory research. Yet, since the main point is to argue for an expansion of how university researchers could engage, I believe the implications are still relevant.

4. Context: The Need for Transformative Organizing and the Relationship-Centered Schools Campaign

This section briefly explains how and why CFJ embraced transformative organizing in light of stubborn adherences to policies, programs, and practices perpetuating racialized, intersectional inequities. As former staff Saa'un Bell and Geordee Cruz reflected, "The policies changed, but practices within our schools and classrooms did not" (Corpuz and Bell 2021). CFJ consistently butted up against resistance on school and district levels in implementing their policy wins—again, a reflection of historical and contemporary instances of feet-dragging on racial equity wins documented in prior scholarship (Anderson 2016; Lac and Fine 2018). CFJ staff often reported in early stages of the campaign (2015–2016) that teachers and administrators viewed their efforts as hostile and antagonistic. Furthermore, CFJ youth leaders asserted that they experienced racial inequality in their schools as a deeply felt phenomenon—one that dehumanized students, especially students of color. For example, students consistently spoke to the heavy presence of school police as an example of how they were criminalized rather than treated as students, let alone leaders. As one illustrative example, CFJ youth leader "Sara" stated in a weekly CFJ workshop that police "make [students] feel like they're just at school to get in trouble. When there's police there, it makes you not want to go to school". Sara's point was echoed by many other CFJ leaders and illustrates that young people frequently described challenges of school in terms that were not about quantification but a deeply emotionally impactful atmosphere of hostility.

In this case, they pointed to how the school to prison pipeline, as Carla Shedd argues, "makes [youth] feel imprisoned" (Shedd 2015, p. 99).

Young people shared abundant examples of feeling neglected, criminalized, or invisibilized at school, such as a dearth of personal connections to other students and teachers, to occasionally being stung by outbursts from frustrated teachers. Yet young people often stated that they experienced a denigration of their feelings and experiences of racialized, intersectional injustice. For example, as youth leader "Karly" told me in an interview: "school doesn't care about how you think or feel". They felt that adults often diminished their feelings and relegated their mental health challenges or emotions from racism as requiring a "mind over matter" approach. Furthermore, they often felt denigrated by adults and peers for bringing up racial inequity—again, closely intertwined with the racialized emotional silencing identified by other scholars (Clonan-Roy et al. 2021; Evans and Moore 2015).

These interwoven challenges prompted CFJ to approach their organizing differently by adopting TO. First, TO has involved enlisting key champions on a school, district, and statewide levels to shift school culture and build caring relationships towards racial equity. As then-executive director Taryn Ishida pointed out in an interview with a foundation director, this was an active shift in contrast with prevailing assumptions of CFJ's antagonism towards teachers. Ishida asserted that this practice embodies the relationships that CFJ staff and youth cultivate with each other and that they hope to see in schools:

"Even if we have 30 min with somebody in the legislature, we use a third of that time or more to build relationship and connection. . . to get past the typical, "what can you do for me? what can I do for you?" to form a foundation of humanizing each other, exploring each other's stories, each other's motivations" (Quirin 2021).

Second, CFJ's embrace of TO reflected changes in the youth organizing field generally to take healing and socio-emotional support more seriously, given the mental health tolls both of experiencing and battling oppression. As Corpuz and Bell pointed out, this includes more intentional practices of "purpose, spaciousness, and joy", such as more paid time off for staff and embodied healing and cultural practices such as Forward Stance. Third, transformative organizing involves shifting perceptions of youth of color, such as experimenting with new ways to "move adults to share power with students of color" (Corpuz and Bell 2021). The RCS campaign includes students of color facilitating professional developments on topics, such as racial bias and white supremacy and school site retreats or serving on hiring committees and other leadership and school site committees. Thus, CFJ's embrace of TO in this campaign illustrates how organizing moves beyond putting pressure on decisionmakers.

5. Findings: Research as Contextualized within Power Building Strategies for "Outward" Dimensions of Transformative Organizing

This section discusses examples of CFJ's "outward" dimensions of transformative organizing as a window into the large assemblage of strategies needed to dismantle power. Research both supported and was one of many power-building strategies- where youth leaders mobilized lived experiences and felt knowledge to push back against the silencing of their emotions, instead fightingfor solutions centering their well-being as crucial to their academic success.

5.1. Youth-Led Action Research and Storytelling

Youth-led action research laid the foundation for RCS as a new campaign, one authentically rooted in young people's felt and intellectual critiques of educational institutions and desires for school as a more abundantly caring and joyful space. For example, youth leaders surfaced a data point from the California Healthy Kids Survey that became a rallying point for the campaign: "1 in 3 students can't name a single caring adult at their school". Youth also rectified limitations of existing school climate surveys by designing their own research. For example, a project asked 175 students to observe their interactions with teachers throughout one day. They found that nearly one out of five students did

not have a single teacher or staff member make eye contact or greet them by name. Thus, youth-led research wielded numbers to show that CFJ youth leaders did not just espouse a niche complaint but, rather, helped to legitimize students of color's feelings of racialized, gendered, and ageist dehumanization at school.

Additionally, the campaign interwove youth storytelling with action research in multiple settings to bely parameters of respectability and unabashedly center young people's emotional needs as valid. As one example, the race and relationships report uplifted the story of East San Jose youth leader, Hector, who explained the toll of the Trump administration's ramping up of deportations and stoking of fear within immigrant communities:

"When a Latino student goes to school, their family goes... When parents are afraid to drop their kids off to school, entire communities are impacted. Since the election, many immigrant students are living in fear- wondering if today is the day that my parents- or the people that I love- will be taken away. This constant fear impacts them on a social, emotional, and academic level."

Hector's story is just one example of how CFJ embraced youth perspectives that pushed back on racial gaslighting and emotional suppression. Instead, they showed that the climate of hostility that permeated Latinx immigrant communities with fear had grave emotional tolls intertwined with obstacles to their academic success. Wielding the power of both quantification and humanization of data, young people legitimized and gave collective shape to their feeling and understandings of school to embody their power.

Youth-led research challenged not just school and district staff, but CFJ staff's assumptions about what is necessary for racial justice in schools. At a Long Beach teacher training in 2018, Taryn Ishida reflected:

"[When] students told me the #1 resource [in school] was relationships, I was like 'Ooooh, what??' I thought we were gonna go after school funding, some kind of cool school policy. It was on me to have the courage as a leader to say; 'You know what, you're right, I think you're right, I have to trust you on this.'"

Ishida's comment could be interpreted as representing the "old guard" of community organizing that regarded social change more narrowly, whether purposefully or unintentionally ignoring psychic wounds of oppression. Instead, as part of this gradual adoption of TO, youth pushed adults to see that their emotional experiences at school were foundational rather than ancillary to their success. Taryn's admission butted up against stifling notions that equated young people's feelings with a lack of knowledge. Instead, Ishida pointed out that youth's unapologetically stated needs for schools that radiated love, care, and support precipitated a broader cultural shift within educational policy, as concerns about socio-emotional learning, mental health, and "whole child" that recognize the need for holistically supporting students have become more mainstream.

While youth-led action research continued to play a part in the campaign, there were also many instances in which research for the RCS toolkit was not participatory. For example, CFJ Oakland youth and staff led survey and focus group data collection as integral to their campaign, building solidarity with teachers and focusing on the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Their research identified how teachers, too, were being crushed under the weight of survival in an increasingly unsurvivable context that also plagued students and their families. In this case, I conducted a significant portion of the analysis, summary, and drafting of the report with the consistent guidance of staff members.

To explain how and why CFJ did not always have capacity for participatory research, I provide a few examples of broader power building strategies, which are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of power building strategies used by CFJ in the relationship-centered schools campaign.

Power Building Strategy	Description and Examples
Action research	Youth-led and designed surveys, focus groups, convenings, interviews, and a literature review to provide grounding and evidence for the importance of the campaign and how demands could be implemented; for example, who the issue impacts, why and how relationships matter for addressing racial equity, and possible practices that schools and districts can implement.
Co-governance between youth and adults	Building on a foundation of relationships with key school, district, and statewide champions and allies, the RCS campaign has involved youth leaders and adults co-designing and implementing RCS at their own schools and districts.
Leadership development	Leadership programs develop young people's skills to enact systemic change. For example, young people learn, practice, and hone skills, such as public speaking, storytelling, event planning, voter outreach, and persuading others. Tiered programs encourage young people to stay and continue developing their skills. For example, after being a regular core member in weekly programs, youth can apply for paid leadership positions as interns. Roles can include facilitating weekly meetings and serving on statewide strategy teams.
Narrative change/storytelling	CFJ also aims to change narratives about students and youth of color to support systemic change. They do this through multimedia (e.g., videos), social media, op-eds, training and supporting young people to tell their powerful stories throughout different events, and research reports.
Political education	Youth leaders attend workshops and retreats where they learn about "isms" involved in systemic oppression, such as racism, patriarchy, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, and anti-immigrant conditions. They learn to critique these systems and understand how these influence their own lives and experiences, connecting the personal to the political. Political education also helps them understand how and why the RCS campaign requires institutional changes.
Statewide and local advocacy	Students and staff consistently mobilize to Sacramento and local boards of education to testify at public hearings and meet with decisionmakers to shape polices. For example, they have mobilized to Sacramento to win more state funding in support of positive school climates and student/parent engagement. Local advocacy has often revolved around district and school budgets.
Voter education and engagement	As part of broader strategy to garner more resources and support statewide/local policies related to CFJ's work, youth leaders register young voters of color, phonebank, door-knock, and table to educate them about relevant ballot initiatives, such as those related to garnering more school funding, and lead and plan events related to voter education, such as candidate forums.

5.2. Voter Outreach

Research could align with the "race-conscious" and "critically conscious" dimensions of CCES by situating eroding relationships between teachers and students within the racialized decline of public funding in California. Yet research alone cannot change this landscape. Change, instead, requires the amassing of the political power of California's youth and communities of color. CFJ has long engaged in voter outreach in these communi-

ties to garner more resources for public education. In 2020, for example, CFJ was part of a massive coalitional effort to win a ballot initiative that would have generated $12 billion a year for public education and local government services by closing a loophole that has allowed corporations to shirk. Pre-pandemic, young people and adult allies crisscrossed the streets of their communities, speaking to their neighbors and helping to qualify the measure with 1.7 million signatures. Then, in the thick of quarantine in fall 2020, CFJ was part of a virtual phonebanking effort involving 25,000 volunteers. After already long, draining days of school via Zoom, CFJ students logged onto their computers and called voter after voter to educate them about the implications of the proposition, oftentimes fielding hostile callers. Organizers often phonebanked for much longer, while continually boosting morale and build community despite the starkly isolating times. Voter outreach was not the only strategy involved in this attempt to reverse decades of disinvestment, but it illustrates the time and labor involved in winning systemic change beyond research.

5.3. Building Relationships with Adult Champions and Youth and Adult Co-Governance

Similarly, although research activities and briefs could illustrate how and why Relationship-centered Schools required more investment in teachers of color, research alone could not build solidarity. As part of the TO approach of building relationships with school and district allies, CFJ youth and staff nurtured relationships and engaged in outreach, events, and solidarity actions—whether by collecting postcards to uplift exemplary caring teachers, holding teacher appreciation events, or consistently showing up to support striking teachers on picket lines. Their labor eventually bore fruit when some schools and districts agreed to share power with students within "design teams" leading the implementation of RCS. Furthermore, Long Beach agreed to host district-wide retreats and training led by CFJ youth on certain topics, such as addressing white supremacy. During such training sessions, students modeled what RCS could look and feel like, a stark contrast to the bodily choreography and emotional climate of schooling that they critiqued. Youth leaders, for example, led professional development by earnestly sharing their own personal stories and encouraging faculty, as stated in a learning day in Spring 2018, "to practice what it means to be in relationship with one another, to listen, to celebrate, and reflect on how far we have come as a school community and where we can continue to gro". Such retreats, then, sought to model TO and youth leadership by supporting the design of systemic change, learning from existing best practices and research on the importance of social emotional learning, but also building in significant time for relationship building and connections between attendees.

5.4. Advocacy and Lobbying

Finally, while research could lend backing to young people's claims that school climate matters, research alone could not push schools and districts to care about school climate. For example, in 2015, the state board of education did not initially include school climate as a measure for assessing school success. CFJ then worked with a coalition of organizations to mobilize over 400 students, parents, and advocates to State Board of Education meetings, imploring them to include measures of "school climate" in these assessments. Doing so, they pointed out, would push schools and districts to invest in improving school climate. During such actions, students and staff converged from afar, in some cases taking long bus rides or days off school to fly in. Young people gave heartfelt testimonies speaking to their experiences of criminalization as young Black and Latinx men, and carefully planned creative events that visualized their messaging that "school climate is the heart of our education system". This is just one example of many in which CFJ prepared and mobilized students and staff to show up at state and district boards of education, as well as meeting regularly in delegation meetings with decisionmakers, to influence and shape funding priorities and policies in support of equity.

As broader examples to show that research is just one of many strategies involved in power building, each case skims only the surface of the labor and transformation

involved. For example, a central strategy for developing young people's understanding of the campaign was situating their feelings within a structural critique. While CFJ offered a safe space for young people to voice their understandable frustrations with teachers, organizers also pointed out how structural conditions made it difficult for teachers to care. Both in formal political education workshops and informal conversations, organizers refused to demonize teachers and instead pointed to how care is inhibited by teachers' exploitation and alienating structures.

Furthermore, every youth testimony, speech, or emcee role is the product of extensive preparation to refine students' messages and support their confidence and public speaking. For example, youth and staff collaboratively developed drafts and practiced extensively. Furthermore, such events require months of planning and significant resources. For example, staff from other regions would travel to support them with meticulous planning and managing immense logistics—including developing and implementing media strategies, outreaching, securing co-sponsors, co-developing programming with district staff, and much more. Thus, by centering youth organizing efforts to dismantle challenges including institutional recalcitrance to change, we can see how organizing groups may understandably prioritize other strategies over participatory involvement in research.

6. "Inward" Dimensions of Transformative Organizing

Oftentimes, the pressures of outwardly oriented organizing aimed at dramatically reshaping conditions at the root of racism have pressured social movement organizations to work harder, longer, and faster (Gorski and Chen 2015; Maslach and Gomes 2006). Yet, as embodied by transformative organizing, CFJ recognized that movements should not compound already the extant stresses and trauma of trying to survive injustice. Here, I highlight four themes of CFJ's internal practices of transformative organizing to address challenges, such as emotional suppression of youth of color.

6.1. Balancing Self-Care and Individual Well-Being with Movement Longevity

CFJ recognized the need to carve out time for collective and self-care in addition to externally oriented strategies described above. Staff often pointed out that self-care was not about individualistic palliatives, but part of a delicate balance linking individual and organizational longevity. For example, in a blog post for Mental Health Day, staff members Hannah Esqueda and Maria Gamboa wrote that although winning social justice battles is critical, "it's also important to ensure that each of us is mentally and emotionally safe, so that we may continue the fight for as long as it takes. . .When we make time to honor ourselves, we're also setting a good example for the next generation of leaders who will pick up the fight where we leave of". Thus, discourses evinced a clear connection between the individual and collective, between attending to individual well-being and shaping systemic conditions supporting well-being for all. Similarly, as one lead organizer, "Kay", stated:

"It's something that we just take more seriously now, the holistic well-being of our young people. . . we do more grounding exercises and from a centered place. Hold space for one another. I've been here a long time. We did not always do that, and I feel [that] being more expansive and. . . having that like, the humanity part. Because that's such a big part of the transforming, transformative organizing. Remembering that we're organizers, but we have full lives, right? We're affected. We do that with our young people more too".

As "Kay" pointed out, CFJ had grown to recognize that traditional ways of building power that demanded self-sacrifice were unsustainable. By embracing TO, they prioritized youth members and staffs' full, complex humanity to embody the type of caring that CFJ endeavored so heartily to bring into existence.

6.2. Taking Time and Slowing Down

Key to this balance was slowing down and making time for healing activities, despite the constant urgency and emergency imposed by the challenges of power building. Staff often discussed the need to refuse "white supremacy culture" that has showed up as "a

constant sense of urgency" (Corpuz and Bell 2021). For example, young people pushed organizations to make more time for relaxation and free time during retreats, which were much beloved respites where organizations transported young people to the mountains, oftentimes for campaign development, community building across regions, and political education. Yet youth pointed out it was also an invaluable opportunity to take in the expansive skies, verdant landscape, and novelty of fresh falling snow in contrast to the suffocating feel of crowded homes within concrete landscapes. I observed that CFJ took this feedback into account: the second time I attended their annual statewide retreat, I noticed more structured and unstructured time for relaxation and wellness in both structured and unstructured time. In 2017, workshops focused on more traditionally understood civic skills, such as base building and public speaking; in the second year, a new set of workshops revolved around "self-care", with activities, such as creating a visioning board, spoken word, cumbia, and a transformative organizing workshop. The retreat also included more free and unstructured time in response to young people's needs.

6.3. Healing through Talking Circles and Embodied Practice

Activities that received new prioritization supported young people to heal from the physical and psychological tolls of oppression. For example, CFJ held talking/healing circles, derived from Indigenous traditions. Youth formed a circle and were instructed to speak from the heart and listen actively in response to prompts. Topics included everyday school stresses and responses to overt incidences of violence including the murders of Black people, mass school shootings, like Parkland, and/or the Pulse Club massacres. In interviews and informal conversations after healing circles, young people often explained that they found these practices therapeutic and emotionally validating. For example, youth leader "Leah" told me in an interview that healing circles allowed her to vent her feelings that were otherwise suppressed. She found this especially important after Trump was elected:

"Honestly, I've never felt such love from an organization like CF. I feel like I'm in a family. After the Trump election it was just an emotional blow for everyone there, so I feel like that healing circle was well-timed. It healed my heart... It eased my thoughts because I was anxious about how... he was going to be our president. During the healing circle they were like it's okay, we'll move past this and we'll do more to actively combat his dictatorship".

Similarly, youth leader "Laura" stated in an interview: "'That's a really good form of therapeutic self-care because you're able to talk to a lot of people and you're able to relate and feel all these people care about you". Young people often stated that circles, which allowed them to express emotions without feeling pressured to have a fully formed thought of political analysis, were a stark contrast to the suppression of emotions they often felt in school and otherwise.

CFJ also engaged in embodied practices, drawing from ancestral and cultural knowledges, to present an antidote to how racism worms its way under the skin. For example, staff often prompted youth to create embodied group "sculptures" to illustrate certain concepts, such as internalized, interpersonal, and institutional racism. As the facilitating organizer Tin pointed out during one such session at a winter 2018 statewide retreat: "All the body work we did today reminds us that racism hurts us physically, it hurts us emotionally, and mentally... And we really want to vision a future without racism—so if we wanna do that, it's important to think about our bodies". Similarly, in other activities, young people would reflect on how oppression or other aspects of everyday life impact how they feel, and where and how they hold this in their bodies. Meanwhile, organizers would infuse everyday programming with physical forms of healing, such as sound bathing, breathing, tai chi, and forward stance. These aspects of transformative organizing, then, provide another layer in addition to research and organizing that tends to focus on the mind. Such practices further showed that young people's visceral experiences of injustice were not

only real, but that they could choreograph and orient their bodies differently as a form of healing.

6.4. Centering Relationships, Support, and Care

Finally, CFJ staff centered care, love, and respect: an embodiment of relationship building and authentic care that they also wanted to enact in schools. One example involved community agreements: guidelines that young people developed collaboratively to shape expectations of interactions at CFJ. A sample agreement was to "throw glitter, not shade", which CFJ organizer "Rocío" described as proactively "encourag[ing] and appreciat[ing] other people". Permeating all aspects of leadership development, for example, were prolific praise laced with constructive, gentle feedback. Whether staff were responding to young people's skits or practicing speeches, we always began and ended with affirmation of young people's talents. Students stated that such emotional dimensions of care encouraged them to try out new skills and to confront authority. For example, youth leader "Leah" pointed out that before and after delegation meetings with school decisionmakers, the lead organizer "gives out constructive criticism... really nicely, in a supportive way. It makes me feel happy low-key. I'm always kind of hard on myself, but she helps me cope with that". Similarly, youth leader "Camila" stated that this broader atmosphere helped them internalize a sense of self love: "I feel like I'm more open to liking or loving myself because of the messages that the organizers and the kids here say". These examples highlight how CFJ's development was not just about civic and leadership skills, but also about foregrounding support and care.

In contrast to school environments that undermined connections between young people, CFJ sought to cultivate and repair relationships through spending significant time on community building and team development. As a result, young people stated that they developed genuine friendships. For example, "Caitlyn" reflected: "I'm not really that type of person to make a lot of friends, but CFJ has helped me with relationship building, with making friendships, so I have a lot more people who care for me than I ever did before I was in CFJ. It makes me happy". Similarly, "Skyler" shared that his friends in CFJ buoyed him with the courage to try new things. He explained that he was terrified of going to the statewide leadership retreat, but that "Imani eased me into it. She was like, just stick with me, stick with me and Lisa... I felt the love. And I was a lot more excited to go to SLR". Furthermore, young people who became interns and leaders within the organization did their part to also learn how to identify and proactively reach out to other young people with support, particularly through leading one-on-ones.

Another dimension of care manifested through the staff's holistic, one-on-one support for young people. Key to this practice were regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings between staff and youth, as well as CFJ staff proactively checking in on young people to support them with any needs. As youth leader Sara stated, staff often articulated that "If you ever need anything, just tell us and we'll always be there to help you". For example, Camila reflected on an instance when a staff member mitigated her stress by giving her a canvas needed for a class final. She stated: "Even just supplies or something, talking to people, that really does help. And getting inspired; I remember one time I was talking to Rocío about being stressed about what college I wanted to go to at the time". Similarly, PJ reflected that Rocío helped them when they were experiencing challenges: "they taught me to open up and to know that it's okay to be vulnerable, that it's okay to break down... Whenever I'm angry, same thing, that I shouldn't really hold in any emotions, that it's okay to let go". These glimpses underscore how CFJ alleviated both the material and emotional tolls of structural violence. Hence, the multi-dimensional aspect of transformative organizing was demonstrated: staff members' emotional and holistic support also provided immediate relief in lieu of a lacking safety net for youth, even as their campaigns also worked to repair that safety net.

Altogether, transformative organizing shows how organizers grapple with the daunting challenges of dismantling institutional resistance to racial equity and rectifying emo-

tional suppression and the tolls of injustice. That is, organizing groups are not only dismantling power and constructing worlds anew, but they are helping to repair souls rent by trauma. These power building strategies map onto daily lived experiences of labor, undergirding why Haapanen and Christens argue that demanding participatory research may lead to an exploitation of labor. For example, an organizer's day might be chock-full: conducting the initial planning for a youth leadership workshop, mapping out logistics for a professional learning day, going to a school to support youth leaders with a chapter-based lunch meeting, preparing for a meeting with a school principal, picking students up after school, working with young people to develop leadership curriculum, conducting one-on-ones with young people and providing emotional support while strategizing material support needed, getting on a team meeting to discuss a fundraiser, and more. Meanwhile, a youth leader might be starting their day early helping to open their family member's shop, then going to a full day of school followed by several hours at CFJ, then returning home to assist a younger sibling with homework and dinner, followed by a late night with their own homework. In the following section, I draw upon autoethnographic reflections to discuss potential implications.

7. Implications for CCES

7.1. How Can Researchers Support Power Building Organizations and Efforts? Is Participatory Research Most Needed?

These contexts, I argue, should propose some additional questions for CCES to consider, namely: Is participatory research most needed or within the capacity of organizations at this point? Would my partnership help expand or drain capacity, especially amidst efforts to build power? How could I act and think more expansively to support power-building efforts?

Being embedded in CFJ's work showed me how and why my research questions, informed by the need to create theoretical contributions, were not necessarily their priority. I could foresee how a more participatory approach to my dissertation, despite offering the possibility to CFJ, would drain support from already overstretched staff. For example, the TO approach informs how and why organizers are intentional about not overburdening each other and youth. This includes, for example, being firm about boundaries, saying no when something is beyond the capacity of organizers and the organization, and equitably distributing and supporting different types of leadership roles among youth leaders. Recruiting youth researchers, even if I led training and collaborative data collection, would have entailed more staff labor, such as coordinating which days I would meet with youth and organizing transportation.

Yet as an ethnographer, I realized that even if my dissertation research did not embody destabilized power relations through participatory methods, I could put boots on the ground and contribute to power building. As others have noted, engaged scholarship involves showing up, being there and present and with community members, and supporting them in emotional ways (Clarke et al. 2017; Lac et al. 2022). I felt it especially important to contribute to these efforts, due to my desire to leverage my racial positioning and class privilege to support young people especially impacted by anti-Blackness and oppression targeting Latinx communities. I strove to be there as another caring adult to guide and encourage youth, whether by accompanying them while door-knocking, giving feedback and helping to shape speeches, supporting with chapter clubs, or helping to facilitate small group discussions during political education workshops. As an educator, I found the last piece especially important—with only 2 organizers and up to 15 students per meeting, more directed guidance helped young people develop critical analyses about complex topics rarely broached in school. I also assisted with logistics at events, such as note-taking or serving food. I suggest this shows how researchers can actively contribute to and think about leveraging others' time, energy, and labor to bolster on-the-ground work involved in dismantling power.

7.2. Healing and Transforming Ourselves and the Academy

The healing, care, and relationship-centered aspects of CFJ disrupted norms of academic research, which should push CCES to include questions, such as the following: Are we valuing and taking time to build authentic, and genuine relationships—not just for research outcomes, but as praxis of a radically loving world that is cognizant of shared humanity? And are we translating lessons learned from community organizing groups to transform our own practices in the academy? As others have noted—how are we, as researchers, being there and for our community organizing partners, beyond research (Clarke et al. 2017; Lac and Fine 2018; Lac et al. 2022)?

After all, I benefited and learned from CFJ's healing activities as a portal to an alternative way of being. My PhD program pushed me to adhere to strict academic timelines, but building an authentic relationship with CFJ required slowing down and moving at the speed of trust: including spending several years volunteering and conducting research for CFJ's campaign purposes before my dissertation research. Unlike my department where I had seen mental health challenges and weakness weaponized, CFJ's caring space made it not only possible but necessary as practice of mutual vulnerability to share my own trauma and pain with youth, while listening to and holding space for the pain they felt. Like other graduate students, I felt mental and emotional health tolls from converging forces including personal and collective grief: the death of my only sibling and the fear evoked by the Trump administration. Both led me to question the point of a career focused on publishing abstract theories trapped behind paywalls.

As I endeavored to provide emotional labor for staff and youth, they also provided emotional labor and care for me. I experienced the joy of genuine relationships with staff and youth, including supporting and witnessing young people's life milestones and friendships with staff outside of the office. Students and I commiserated about parallels of racism we saw in their schools and in my department, which has expelled a racially disproportionate number of Black and Latinx students. Students' bravery in speaking up for themselves encouraged me to be brave and advocate with other students to address the rampant systemic racism in my program. Staff and youth consistently reminded me to take time for self-care and supported me, by, for example, dedicating a youth meeting for me to practice a teaching demonstration for a campus visit and get feedback.

Altogether, these experiences immeasurably shaped my own approaches as an educator: CFJ inspired me to approach teaching as a practice of care (Love 2019) rooted in relationships. When CFJ they took time out to breathe, I did too. When youth giggled through silly icebreakers, I did too. CFJ taught me that the tone deafness of enacting the same "rigors" of academic expectations and grading schema was blaringly wrong. Whereas previously I had approached teaching with the same models I experienced (strictness, not sharing much of myself due to fears of appearing vulnerable), I grew to realize how a certain degree of sharing my personal story and prioritizing care, kindness, and generosity helped to transform the classroom. For example, being embedded in CFJ showed me specific practices that I continue to bring into the classroom, such as community agreements, healing circles, and somatic practices. I believe my personal experience suggests broader possibilities of how researchers can learn from TO to shape our own work as educators.

8. Conclusions

This article argues for researchers to take seriously the idea behind TO that we need to change our way of being and existing, and to think and act more expansively in supporting and learning from youth and community organizing. Yet many of these conclusions are structurally inhibited by academic incentive structures and policies. Thus, I finish with recommendations for interpersonal and structural changes to support these approaches.

8.1. Changing RTP Policies and Acting to Support Graduate Students Engaged in CCES

Major changes in the academic job market and RTP (retention, tenure, and promotion) policies are needed to fully incentivize and support scholars engaged in forms of CCES

that value expansive support for power building and authentic relationships. Already, rigid RTP timelines do not accommodate time needed to build trust and relationships in community partnerships (Costas Batlle and Carr 2021; Mountz et al. 2015). RTP policies also often do not value engaged research products—let alone activities not directly related to research. Such barriers can especially negatively impact scholars of color, who both are more desiring of community-engaged research and yet also face extant challenges to hiring, retention, and promotion in tenure track positions. Thus, championing and organizing for RTP policies that recognize engaged research and service and accompanying timelines would help support such approaches. In the meantime, mentors of PhD students, graduate program directors, and others can still advocate for and protect students engaged in CCES by, for example, recognizing relationship development with organizations as significant "outcomes" of research and protecting longer timelines that may be needed.

8.2. Redistributing Resources to Build the Capacity of Movements and Scholars from the Most Impacted Communities

I agree with the ultimate vision that research should be rooted in and led by communities most impacted by structural violence (Serrano et al. 2022), despite challenges to this ideal discussed in the paper. After all, being relatively well resourced by my university and my own socioeconomic privilege allowed me to take the time needed to build trust and engage in power-building activities even if not directly related to research output. Furthermore, CFJ had the capacity and resources to compensate me as a research fellow. Although the consultant model made sense because my skills and deep relationship with CFJ allowed me to quickly execute their research needs without being a drain of capacity, I agree with organizers who have stated the need for supporting research pathways for those who come from movements and communities most impacted by racial injustice. Ultimately, even if research projects, like those named in the project, are not participatory, I believe that a CFJ alum should be resourced to conduct the type of research that I performed in support of CFJ. Programs could include paid research fellowships in college to develop research skills for alumni of youth organizing groups, who can then return to their organizations and/or local racial justice movements. Furthermore, more fellowships and resources, especially for CCES, would support other early career faculty in building and deepening relationships with organizing groups.

8.3. Prioritize Power Building Organizations and Efforts

This article highlights the challenges of, and needs involved in, organizing groups that confront power imbalances undergirding inequities. Despite the daunting tasks ahead of them, groups, like CFJ, tend to receive less funding than those oriented towards direct services (Shah 2020). As Speer and Christens (2013) describe in their idea of "strategic engagement", researchers should consider which spaces are devoted to building power and consider how their labor and resources could be used to support those broader efforts.

8.4. Match Researchers with Specific Organizational Research Needs

This article shows very specific ways that research can support power building and campaign needs. Each project may require different approaches on a spectrum of participatory methods depending on needs, interests, and capacities of both organizing groups and researchers (London et al. 2020). In light of limited capacity, a "Science Shop" model could involve staff linking specific research questions of organizations to researchers; staff would help navigate logistics and support researchers in their design, while relieving the time and labor needed from organizing groups to coordinate such research partnerships (Andrade et al. 2018). I have served in such a capacity as a research fellow for CFJ and in my postdoctoral position by helping to coordinate between organization's research needs and student projects. There are also challenges involved because a lack of context or deep understanding may inhibit the completion of discrete research projects; nevertheless, this may still be a possibility worth exploring.

8.5. Leverage Resources to Support Organizational Power Building Needs beyond Research

This study also argues that researchers can contribute to the power-building efforts of organizing in more expansive and creative ways. Many of us are not just researchers, but educators, and people of color with personal stakes in the movements for racial justice. Drawing upon our multiple roles, other forms of support could involve grassroots and philanthropic fundraising, and/or finding and providing paid internships for students to get involved in organizing. After all, youth organizing groups, like CFJ, have expressed desires to develop pathways for young people past high school to continue or begin organizing.

8.6. Bring Lessons of Care, Relationship Building, and Support to Transform the Academy

I also argue that engaging in, supporting, documenting, and being a part of organizing can be healing and transformative for scholars, especially scholars of color and those from intersectionally marginalized communities. Furthermore, organizing spaces invested in transformative organizing can provide models for researchers to apply in their teaching, research, and service. In addition to incentivizing and supportive structures, professional development spaces and communities could support more reflection and time needed to intertwine these lessons in the intersections of community-engaged research, teaching, and service (perhaps more relevant in institutions that place more equal weight on those three elements).

Ultimately, CFJ's practice of transformative organizing (TO) can push researchers to stretch our CCES practices in forging a new world that truly values the lives of people of color. In this article, I have argued that recognizing broader challenges to dismantling power, such as institutional foot-dragging and emotional suppression of people and youth of color illustrate the importance of TO. By centering CFJ's approach to TO in its Relationship-centered Schools campaign, we see how research is both powerful yet limited. Yet this is meant not to be confining, but rather to push university researchers to consider how we can disrupt systemic violence and its replications in academia as elsewhere. As such, these lessons should stretch our intellectual, academic, and political understandings of what it means to employ critical CES towards justice: including feeling, acting, and being with each other in more liberatory, loving, and generative ways.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of Southern California (UP-17-00224, approved on 19 April 2017).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is unavailable due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1]   YPAR "provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems" (Cammarota and Fine 2010).

[2]   CFJ staff and youth quoted from author's interviews and participant observation are referred to with pseudonyms. Those quoted from public events or reports are referred to with real names.

[3]   One way to think about these differences is in whether and how youth engagement approaches engage in systemic change. For example, FCYO proposed a youth engagement continuum from intervention (youth services, which provides services addressing individual problems) to systemic change (youth organizing). In the middle are other approaches, such as youth leadership and civic engagement, as forms of "collective empowerment".

4   Including weekly "core leader" meetings where regularly involved students converged from multiple schools; meetings with youth interns who helped to plan weekly programming; "chapter" meetings at high schools; statewide retreats and actions at the State Capitol; local events and planning sessions, such as retreats with school administrators and actions held at the school board of education.

5   Young people who regularly showed up to the weekly core meetings at the CFJ office for at least one full year.

6   The findings section of this article reflects this coding process. For example, I was surprised by how much CFJ youth members discussed emotions and feelings about school as their main critique of school. Recognizing this theme helped me delve deeper into the significance and challenges involved in this process. While there are multiple quotes and examples that support the broader points made here, I chose a select few that I found representative of broader sentiments. Coding revealed themes, such as "self-care in relationship to academic stress", "collective care", "stressing commonality over difference", "emotional well-being", and "transformative justice". As categories and themes emerged, I modified the coding schema, revising, expanding, or combining different categories, and developing structures of meaning (Emerson et al. 2011; Glaser and Strauss 1967). For example, I regrouped and restructured certain themes, such as "community agreements" and "embodied support" under a "parent theme" of "prefigurative racialized resistance," as well as the expressions of different types of emotions into a parent theme of "managing emotions". I also wrote ongoing memos according to emerging themes, questions, and patterns, addressing my original questions and patterns that may not neatly fit into my original set of questions.

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