‘WE JUST HAVE TO FIGURE IT OUT’: ENGAGING MARGINALIZED YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC POLICY MAKING

Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health
LOOKING BACK, THINKING AHEAD:
Using Research to Improve Policy and Practice in Women’s Health
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“The promise of youth civic engagement lies in enhanced wellness for participating youth, for their interpersonal connections, and for the community at large. The perils lie in accentuating the virtues of participation at the expense of changing structural inequalities and power differentials…” (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2005).

“Policies respond to [social toxins] by blaming youth themselves or simply by writing them off as a threat to civil society…[evoking] public policy that conceptualizes young people as the root causes of their own problems” (Ginwright & James, 2002, p. 29).
OUTLINE

• Who are ‘Marginalized’ ‘Young’ ‘Women’?
• What is the Foundation of Civic Engagement with Marginalized Young Women?
• Framework: ‘Democratized Research for Democratized Policy-Making’ (DRDP)
• Poverty-Reduction in New Brunswick – The Early Experience
• Conclusion
PURPOSE

• To outline ‘democratized research for democratized policy-making’ (DRDP) as a framework for enabling the participation of marginalized young women in public policy-making processes

• To discuss the early experience of applying DRDP components to poverty-reduction in New Brunswick

• To suggest studying DRDP projects as population health interventions
WHAT DO WE KNOW?

ABOUT THE DARK SIDE OF BEING A YOUNG WOMAN IN CANADA? YOUNG WOMEN:

- Are 30-50% of homeless youth
- Are disproportionately violated by sexual harassment and family violence
- Are made marginal by gender inequities
- Experience dual discourses of ‘crisis’ and ‘power’
- Who are single-mothers are 3x as likely to live in poverty, and poverty is a cause of the causes of poor health

ABOUT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING? THERE ARE:

- Individual Benefits
  - Sense of identity
  - Adjustment
  - Improved learning
- Relational Benefits
  - Social capital and social support
- Collective Benefits
  - Community empowerment
  - More policy emphasis on health
WHO ARE ‘MARGINALIZED’ ‘YOUNG’ ‘WOMEN’?

• Did not used to be considered citizens
• Are responsible for reproduction, production, and consumption
• Have political, cultural, generational, and social contexts
• Have agency
• Do not experience identity in the same way (intersectionality)
• Do not necessarily universalize ‘man’ and ‘woman’
Framework of Democratized Research for Democratized Policy-Making

- Mobilizing Interest
- Claim-Making
- Knowledge-Acquisition
- Spanning and Bridging
- Convening and Deliberating
- Community Capacity Building
- Analysis and Synthesis
- Feedback
- Transparency and Iteration

Dimensions of Democratized Research

1. Greeting, Rhetoric, and Storytelling (Young, 1997)
2. Dialogue and Conversation (CPRN, GNB)
3. Hands-On Experiences and Exposure to History (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003)
4. Popular Culture (Ginwright & James, 2002)
5. Direct Community Engagement (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003)
7. Web 2.0 Technologies (Bennett, 2008)
8. Media Analysis of Portrayal of Own Identity (Velez et al., 2008)
9. Self-Assessment

Dimensions of Citizen Involvement in Policy-Making

- Centering Identity and Gender
- Accounting for Intersectionality
- Honoring Voice and Creating a Way for All Voices to be Heard
- Exploring Representation
- Reflexivity and Critical Thinking
- Honoring Many Forms of Action
- Legitimizing a Range of Leadership Styles
- Creating Norms of Difference and Respectful Disagreement
- Honoring Knowledge
- Explicitly Considering Power

On-Going Iteration
DESIRABLE ENDS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES

A. Collective Action
B. Increased Influence of Marginalized People
C. Strengthening Citizen Voice in Governance
D. Accountability of Government to Differentiated and Unequal Public
E. Substantive Parameters - Justice Outcomes Based on UN Conventions
F. Systemic Social Change
G. Personal, Relational, and Collective Well-Being
H. Equity
WHY DEMOCRATIZED RESEARCH FOR DEMOCRATIZED POLICY-MAKING?

- To invite the voices of marginalized young women in policy
- To understand the mechanisms of civic engagement processes that are intentional about including marginalized young women
- To respond to the ‘opinion-research-politics’ challenge
- To offer a new attempt at complex social problem-solving (specifically, civic engagement as a population health intervention)
Premier’s Announcement to Develop a Poverty-Reduction Plan for New Brunswick

**Based on Phase I Inputs**

- **Launch**
  - Public Dialogue Sessions
  - Complementary Dialogue Sessions
  - Written Submissions
  - What Was Said Document**
  - Expert Roundtables
  - Options Document
  - Final Forum

**What Was Said Document**

- **Phase I**
- **Phase II**
- **Phase III**
- **Outcome**

- Citizens
- Voluntary Sector
- Private Sector
- Labour
- Post-Secondary Education
- Governments – Multiple Departments

**Based on Phase I Inputs**
EARLY EXPERIENCES WITH APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK IN NEW BRUNSWICK

‘WINS’:  

• Inclusion and training of facilitators (*honouring voice*)  
• Unique complementary dialogues with marginalized young women (*exploring representation; legitimizing leadership*)  
• Analysis between Phase I and Phase II (*honouring knowledge; explicit consideration of power*)

CHALLENGES:  

• Unpredictable time required for relationship building  
• Trust (*‘hopeful skepticism’*)  
• Dialogue skills  
• Temporal location in political cycle
COMPLEMENTARY DIALOGUE EXAMPLE

- Hosted by transition house for 16-19 year old women
- Facilitated primarily by an undergraduate student
- 6, 2-hour sessions
  - A representation of me
  - ‘My identities; My places’
  - Killing me softly 3
- Underlying focus on identity and gender
- Serves as relationship building component of future DRDP project
CONCLUSION

• There are links between civic engagement and well-being; these links are under-explored in the lives of marginalized young women

• Marginalized young women are insufficiently conceptualized in civic engagement and policy-making

• Civic engagement with marginalized young women is possible through ‘democratized research for democratized policy-making’ (DRDP) projects (possible ≠ probable)

• The early experience with New Brunswick’s poverty-reduction planning initiative has been mixed

• Will to collaborate inter-departmentally and inter-sectorally have been inspirational
KEY REFERENCES


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