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A Different Take: Reflections on an intergenerational participatory research project on child poverty

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1   Introduction

Participatory research (PR) is an 'umbrella' term for 'participatory, collaborative or inclusive research methods' (Aldridge 2016: 7), distinguished by methodological approaches which challenge the traditional 'location of power' in research (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995: 1667-8, see also Beresford 2016). To this end, PR actively involves those traditionally conceived of as research subjects as co-researchers in the shaping, conducting and sharing of research; varying necessarily with practical and institutional considerations (Patrick 2019). Hence, it is best conceptualised as a continuum, focusing on '*principles* and *models*' as opposed to 'rules' (Aldridge 2016: 154, emphasis in original). Burns (2018: 874) argues that this non-prescriptive approach is vital to 'deepening and scaling' PR. Indeed, as evidenced by both the variety of methods employed across research projects and the evolving nature of research projects – such as the one this paper draws on – PR could be considered 'more a philosophy than a method' (Dahl 2014: 599). Similarly, Cornwall and Jewkes (1995: 1667) argue that 'the key element of participatory research lies not in the methods but in the attitudes of researchers.'

Participatory action research (PAR) fits within the PR umbrella, typified by the centrality afforded to 'social change outcomes for groups, organisations or communities through *action* research' (Aldridge 2016: 7, emphasis in original). The core principles of PAR are crystallised around 'participation, engagement, empowerment, mutual learning, capacity building and fulfilment of both research and action agendas' (Shamrova and Cummings 2017: 401). Epistemologically, PAR is to varying degrees disassociated with the positivist research paradigm which lays claim to meaningful knowledge production through positioning the researcher(s) as ''neutral', 'unbiased' and distanced' from its subject' (Beresford 2016: 229). Clearly, conducting research '*with* rather than *on*' (Patrick 2019: 2, emphasis in original) problematises this approach. As such, PAR has co-evolved with a growing emphasis on 'subjectivity in the human and social sciences' (Kidd and Kral 2005, cited in Dahl 2014: 599).

The epistemological shift towards valuing subjectivity mirrors the increasing inclusion of children and young people's perspectives in research; children, as well as adults, have valuable knowledge and perspectives. We do not (always) require adults to – in Beresford's terminology – 'authenticate' their experience (Main 2014; Beresford 2016: 233). There has been growing use of participatory methods with children and young people since the 1990s

(Aldridge 2016), and this literature spans a variety of subject areas including social policy (e.g. Torronen and Vornanen 2014; Rogers et al. 2018; Fern and Kristinsdottir 2011). This has been underpinned by two closely intertwined developments: legal recognition of children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC) and the 'new' sociology of childhood (O'Kane 2008: 125).[1] However, notably missing has been research involving children alongside adults in intergenerational P(A)R on poverty. Indeed, 'research with rather than on children remains relatively rare within poverty research' (Crivello et al. 2010: 256). To the best of our knowledge, only one PAR project with children focusing on poverty has been conducted in the UK (Farthing 2016), and we are not aware of any such research including children as participants in intergenerational research of this nature.

In Section 3, we provide a review of the literature and theoretical bases of the research. Our intention is to argue specifically for the inclusion of children and young people in poverty-focused PAR, and for the value of insights arising from intergenerational discussions. We promote a *plurality* of voices in poverty research, an intergenerational conversation to include marginalised voices – rather than to privilege certain actors over others. We maintain that participatory approaches complement rather than supersede traditional modes of research; giving experiential knowledge the status it deserves alongside alternative forms of knowledge acquired by researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. To do so, we underscore the similarity between the process- and outcomes-based arguments for PAR (see Lister and Beresford 2000) and for research including children alongside adult actors. We then describe the methodology of 'A Different Take' (ADT) in Section 4 and present some reflections on the outcomes of the research as they relate to intra- and inter-generational communication, theoretical and methodological developments, and policy and practice contributions.

2 Theory and literature

2.1 The new social studies of childhood

The paradigm shift in thinking about children and childhood within social research has been explored in depth elsewhere but is worth briefly recounting. Until recent decades, research methodology involved 'investigations *on* rather than *with* children' (Hill et al. 1996: 129, emphasis in original). Typically, this would be undertaken by developmental psychologists or sociologists who conceived psycho-social development as linear and unidirectional (James and James 2012). In other words, child development entails 'progress' or 'movement away from an undesired or lesser state' (Hart 2008: 3) and socialisation requires adults to be 'responsible for preparing and leading the child towards adult competence and maturity' (Hart and Tyrer 2006: 7). Thus, childhood was positioned as processual and children as incomplete adults, ostensibly legitimising – as a matter of course – the silencing of children's and young people's perspectives, and the denial of their capacity for valuable insights, in the production of knowledge about them (Christensen and James 2008).

It is only recently that research has moved away from this 'adultist' (Mason and Urquhart 2001) research agenda to take as its starting point that children and young people have valid knowledge about their relationships, cultures and lives in their own right (James and Prout

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[1] It might be noted that Alderson also argues the 'aftermath of the Gillick ruling in 1985 that children aged under 16 can give valid consent' and 'the well-publicized eloquence of young children, for example, on television', have also played a role in this development, at least in the UK context (Alderson 2008: 277).

1990). This has been termed the child rights approach to research (Mason and Urquhart 2001), or the new sociology of childhood. The central tennet of this paradigm is that children are social actors who exercise (constrained) autonomy in their lives (Mayall 2002). This challenges the perspective that children are passive (Hart and Tyrer 2006), or of interest primarily because of their status as future adults. Rather, they contribute to shaping their own lives and the lives of those around them (Mayall 2002). This epistemological position is now well established in multiple research areas; there is consensus within sociological studies of childhood that children possess unique insights into their own lives (Bessell et al. 2020: 11). In the field of poverty and social exclusion research, building on Ridge's (2002) path-breaking research, children and young people have increasingly been *informants* in research on the impacts of poverty (see Attree 2006; Ridge 2011; Mahony and Pople 2018; Main and Mahony 2018). Findings indicate that children directly experience poverty, interpret its effects, and can articulate its impacts on their lives. Moreover, it evidences the importance of directly ascertaining children's experiential knowledge, rather than using adults (e.g. parents or teachers) as proxies. Research suggests that parent(s) hold imperfect information on their children's lives, and may have diverging perspectives on what children need and therefore, by extension, what child deprivation looks like (Main 2013); and differ from their children in their assessments of children's well-being or social relations (Ben-Arieh 2008: 7).

2.2 Participatory action research and poverty

Having established that children are valuable informants on their lives, including experiences of child poverty, we move to examples of greater levels of inclusion: children being involved as *participants* or *co-researchers* in poverty and social exclusion research (see Lomax 2018; O'Sullivan et al. 2017; Wager et al. 2007). Farthing's (2016) research with 11 to 21-year olds in five areas of the UK with a high prevalence of child poverty involved not only gathering data on what young people perceive to be the 'problems' of life on a low income (and in a low-income area) area but also involving participants in authoring policy proposals and actively engaging with local and national policymakers to deliver these. This example of what Mason and Urquhart (2001) term 'children's movement' research – which goes beyond participation to foster greater control over the research agenda and in identifying and working towards political objectives – is rare (Farthing 2016). In other words, children and young people have been less integrated into research as agents of *action* – and, to our knowledge, not at all in intergenerational research, as actors alongside members of older generations, situated as equal partners in the generation of knowledge.

The marginalisation of children's voices owing to their status as children (Mayall 2002) intersects with socioeconomic status: the knowledge of people living in poverty is also often marginalised in research, as well as in politics and the media (Beresford and Croft 1995; Redmond 2009). Further, inclusion has often been to 'illustrate' poverty as understood by actors with greater access to publishing opportunities, policy platforms and media outlets; that is, people living in poverty – similarly to children - rarely have the opportunity to dictate the terms of their representation (Beresford et al. 1999). As a result, people with lived experience of poverty are often 'othered', misrepresented, demonised and objectified in popular, policy and academic discourse (Lister and Beresford 2000; Jenson 2014; Crossley 2017; Patrick 2019). In an effort to tackle the longstanding exclusion of people living in poverty, inclusive research methodology proponents frequently draw on a rights-based argument: people living in poverty have a 'right to participate in analysing their own situation and how to tackle it' (Bennett and Roberts 2004, see also Reason and Bradbury 2006; Beresford 2016; Patrick 2019). This position on the rights of people living in poverty echoes Article 12 of the 1989

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which accords children the right to be heard and taken seriously in decisions affecting their lives (UNCRC, 1989). Thus there is an important parallel, and it is likely that children living in poverty face a double barrier to being heard.

In response to this, the participation in research of children with lived experience of poverty - as equals alongside adults - is both an end in itself and instrumental in theorising and addressing poverty (Lister and Beresford 2000). Novak (1995) argues that the predominant focus on quantifying poverty – a trend also observed in child poverty research (Bessell et al. 2020: 11) – has come at the expense of adequately understanding and defining it. This can only result in less than optimal measurements, subverting the aims of quantification in the first place. It is especially pertinent for child poverty research because the most influential existing theories of poverty, such as relative deprivation and capabilities theory, are adult-centric. They emphasise 'control' over resources which is usually operationalised in forms – such as control over income, or access to freedoms associated with adulthood – that are often unavailable to children (Main 2019). Whilst recent research illuminates children's agency in managing life in poverty (Ridge 2002; Redmond 2009; Main and Mahoney 2018), this agency is constrained in ways which are fundamentally different to the agency constraints experienced by adults. Thus, a theory of child poverty must recognise both children and young people's agency and autonomy, and the constraints on these. A necessary condition in moving towards a theory of poverty which holistically captures child poverty is therefore children's experiential knowledge (Bessell et al. 2020: 5).

With respect to addressing (as well as theorising) child poverty, PAR can contribute to improving outcomes (Beresford and Lister 2000: 289). PAR goes beyond merely 'asking [people] about the effects of poverty on them personally' (Beresford and Lister 2000: 301). Instead, it invites them to use their experience to propose solutions to the problems most important to them. By conducting research and developing policy recommendations with intergenerational groups including children and young people as well as adults, more democratic, informed and efficacious policy decisions can be made. In their recent review, Shamrova and Cummings (2017) find that almost a quarter of PAR projects included children in developing recommendations and action plans (more commonly, they were involved in data collection and dissemination). This is a positive development, but careful attention must be paid to claims to participatory knowledge in policy production: previously, participatory labels have been shown to have been applied superficially and used to shore up, rather than challenge, existing policy paradigms (Leal 2010; Cornwall and Brock 2005). This raises ethical issues regarding the potential for 'disillusionment' in the event that desired changes do not take place (Sime 2008). Nevertheless, Farthing (2016) provides examples of successful uptake of participatory research recommendations relating to children's policies.

Whilst improving policy outcomes requires experiential knowledge, achieving policy change is a complex and inherently political process. The current policy paradigm cannot be attributed *only* to a lack of knowledge: substantial knowledge exists of how poverty is experienced by children and young people (e.g. Ridge 2002; Main 2013; Main and Mahony 2018), and the deleterious impacts it has throughout the life course (e.g. Griggs and Walker 2008; Bradshaw 2016). Moreover, framing the findings of research with experts by experience is an important consideration; for example, Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010) argue that some of the perceptible impacts of poverty on individuals, such as low self-esteem, may be (mis)used to shore up individualised theories of poverty and reproduce 'othering'. Similarly, people with experiential knowledge may reproduce stigmatising narratives by

distancing themselves from the 'undeserving' poor, whose behaviours are presented as explaining their economic situation (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin 2010). This has been evidenced in existing research: Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) found that people living in poverty did not identify as such, opting instead to describe their situation in ways that emphasised a sense of pride in their agency of 'getting by' (as per Lister 2004), whilst discursively constructing an undeserving 'other' 'upon whom the stigma of poverty was cast' (Shildrick and MacDonald 2013: 291). The authors posit that these constructions reflect dominant narratives, exacerbated in the post-2010 period of welfare state retrenchment (see Patrick 2019; McArthur and Reeves 2019). Hence, an individualised framing of poverty is found across socioeconomic strata. This could be termed a hegemonic discourse; an ideological framing of poverty which has become naturalised as 'common sense' and renders positive representation of individuals in poverty 'unthinkable' in order to maintain a status quo favourable to the socioeconomically privileged classes it serves (see Bøås and McNeill 2004). However, as we will go on to discuss in the reflections on our study, PAR projects can provide a space for developing 'critical consciousness'; that is, ascertaining collectively the shared basis of (seemingly) individual problems (see Kabeer 1999: 441).

On a related note, Lister (2004: 178) highlights the need to pay more attention to the 'positive exercise of agency' by people in poverty whilst attending to the ways in which this agency is constrained by structural injustices. Bhaskar (1989: 72-3) proposes a 'transformational model of human activity' in which the necessity of human agency in reproducing social structures provides an opening for individual or collective agents to change them: social structures are malleable, not monolithic. From this perspective, PAR as a methodology has several advantages. First, it acknowledges that people living in poverty can engage in the positive exercise of agency. Second, it affirms subjectivity and experience in knowledge construction (Shamrova and Cummings 2017), encouraging participant-led interrogation of individual (or group) position in relation to social structures. PAR can naturally encourage what Crossley (2017: 113) describes as 'studying up', where the spotlight is on structures, institutions, and the powerful agents (politicians, journalists etc) who shape them. Third, and crucially, it seeks to affect the 'change that they [participants] desire' (Kindon 2005: 208). In seeking change, PAR thus affirms children's agency in co-creating their social and political environment, affirming Wyness' (2014) challenge to the 'public vs private' distinction which relegates children to the private realm of family and home. In sharp contrast, this approach positions them as social actors with agency; but also draws attention to the complexity of participation and citizenship, whereby the former does not engender the latter, 'a social, political and therefore legal identity that is only conferred upon adults' (James and James 2012: 28).[2]

The changes achieved through PAR can relate not only to external changes in environments, but to positive internal changes. Shamrova and Cummings (2017) argue that PAR projects led to an increase in participants' knowledge on specific topics and social justice more broadly; self-confidence and active leadership; positive relationships with adults; community connections and sense of belonging; and active participation in change-making. By meaningfully including people living in poverty in the research process, PAR diverges from research which may 'reinforce a process of exclusion' and instead seeks to 'challenge it' (Lister and Beresford 2000: 286-7). Indeed, participatory research can be a 'transformative and empowering' experience, posing an 'active challenge to the exclusion, marginalisation

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[2] A complexity also acknowledged in regard to the UNCRC: 'we must reflect on the extent to which we can talk realistically of children's rights if children are not citizens' (James and James 2012: 28).

and stigmatisation' associated with poverty (Patrick 2019). This is equally important for children who experience poverty as for adults (see Ridge 2011). Whilst previous research has noted the attempts by those (objectively defined as) living in poverty to distance themselves from the 'p word' (Lister and Beresford 1991; see also Shildrick and MacDonald 2013), we will go on to discuss how PAR can foster its reclamation. In this way, PAR can actively counter the individual stigma associated with living in poverty, whilst problematising and resisting the societal structures which reproduce it. Similarly, it can be used to challenge traditional assumptions about age and competence through the inclusion of intergenerational participants with valid, if different, experiences and perspectives.

3 Methods and data

3.1 Overview of the study

'A Different Take' (ADT) emerged from the findings of 'Fair Shares and Families'[3] – a mixed-methods research project conceived by researchers at the University of Leeds and professionals at Leeds City Council (LCC) and The Children's Society – which investigated family resource sharing from children's perspectives. Key findings included that children are active participants in negotiating how household and family resources are shared; that differences in styles of intra-family sharing are not related to the family's economic situation; and that children are active in the acquisition as well as the consumption of resources (Main and Mahony 2018). Both children and parents from low income families reported feeling stigmatised by media and policy rhetoric around poverty; and it was also evident that children's active involvement in managing life on a low income is often invisible in how poverty is understood, communicated, measured, and addressed. ADT therefore sought to provide an opportunity for families living in poverty – including children, young people and parents – to have their say on the challenges facing them; share their ideas about what should be done to improve life for people on a low income; and develop a narrative more reflective of their experiences than those which dominate policy and media representations of poverty. To reach this wider objective, the project had three key aims:

- To bring together 'experts by experience' (children, young people and parents with lived experience of poverty), researchers, policy makers and practitioners, to co-create knowledge about and strategies for addressing causes and consequences of poverty.

- To help experts by experience to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence to act as ambassadors within and for their communities in highlighting the effects of poverty and promoting social change.

- To help organisations to develop long-term strategies for hearing experts by experience and integrating their knowledge into their work and processes.

We next discuss the methods we employed to achieve these aims.

3.2 Methods

The research was based around panels comprising experts by experience, policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. Two panels were formed: one in the north of England, in Leeds, and one in the south, in London. These cities were chosen for the high poverty rates

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that each have and because of extant relationships with partner organisations. We were also interested to explore similarities and differences between experiences of the groups in these two locations. Partner organisations were selected on the basis of having agendas aligned with those of the research; these organisations not only helped to promote the opportunity to participate among their clientele, but also had the desire and ability to engage in the longer term with children, young people and parents with lived experiences of poverty. Experts by experience were recruited with the partner organisations, drawing on their existing links with local communities and organisations. For these participants, having lived experience of poverty was the main recruitment criteria as well as feeling comfortable to share these experiences with the wider panel during eight meetings which spanned five months. We sought participants with diverse characteristics in terms of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, genders, ages and (dis)abilities. All panel members (experts by experience, practitioners, policy makers, and academics) were made aware that training in PAR and in media communication was part of the project, and that they could use these to generate research data to complement panel sessions throughout the project, and to promote the findings, reports, and recommendations as these emerged. The value of the experts by experience's participation was acknowledged through payment in vouchers for each panel meeting they attended. The research team and colleagues at partner organisations were remunerated as part of their jobs.

Early panel meetings were designed by researchers, but we moved towards a model of coproduction with all members contributing in the activities and topics of discussion. Our aim was that each panel included up to nine people with lived experience of poverty: three children under the age of 16, three young people aged 16-25, and three parents; up to two researchers from the University of Leeds; and representatives from the partner organisations in practitioner or policy maker roles. The London group was slightly smaller with (at its smallest – attendance varied over the course of the project) two parents, one younger person and four children, alongside academics and partner organisations. Whilst six panel meetings were initially planned, both panels agreed they wanted an extra two meetings, totalling eight meetings per group, over six months (January-June 2019). The first meeting introduced the research and explored opportunities to engage with the project as well as a brief introduction to the PAR tools. The second meeting provided further training in the use of various PAR tools including life maps, local area maps, and other activities which the research team elaborated on according to panel members' preferences (activities were selected from a training manual provided by 3ps Community Participation Consultants). Participants were then supported to use these tools outside of panel meetings and bring their findings and reflections for discussion to the panel. Panels then conducted collective analysis of the data, and developed approaches to dissemination. Panel meetings began with very broad themes and areas of discussion based on the findings from Fair Shares and Families (Main and Mahony 2018) but as noted above, this progressed towards increasingly co-designed sessions in the later stages of the project as the panels' priorities emerged and evolved along with ideas generated through the PAR tools. In the final meetings, panel members received training in media and communication skills, and held discussions on whether and how they wished to continue their work. Both panels were eager to continue developing ways to challenge dominant narratives on poverty.

This flexibility in approach speaks to an important ethical challenge when undertaking PAR: developing methods which can be clearly explained to participants, but which also retain sufficient flexibility to accommodate the needs, preferences and ideas of diverse people. In

contrast with 'traditional' research projects, anonymity and confidentiality were not a clear-cut aim, since we were seeking to generate co-produced outputs and support experts by experience to become ambassadors within and for their communities. We therefore devoted a substantial amount of time throughout to discussing how, when, whether and why participants wished to have their contributions publicly acknowledged. An example of this is the naming of participants on final project reports and appearances in videos: some participants chose to include a pseudonym, some to use just their first name, and others to include their full name; some were happy to appear in videos whilst others only wanted their voice recorded, and yet others preferred not to appear at all. Throughout, we found that the issues we spent most time on were informed consent – and how to establish this in a context of imperfect information and power imbalances – a topic we return to below. Indeed, the process of negotiating the identification of participants represented a microcosm of many of the issues addressed in the research – in relation to exploring the meaning and weight given to different kinds of knowledge (for example researcher, parent, and child perceptions of the risks and rewards involved in being a named author); the power exerted overtly and covertly by structural societal forces (for example in relation to changing perspectives on the potential for being named to result in shaming and stigma – see later for more discussion); and intergenerational dynamics (for example the potential for parents and children to take very different views on the most important considerations in being named – and for both parties to assert the superiority of their perspective on this). In light of this, we maintained an open-ended discussion of the process throughout, including reflecting on our practices among ourselves, with project partners, and with the whole panel. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Leeds Ethics Committee.

4 Findings

As referenced in the section above, both the Leeds and London panels utilised the PAR tools within and outside of the panel meetings to generate data around the main challenges brought about through living in poverty, alongside various solutions to address these issues. There was a wealth of data, the majority of which aligned with and supported existing well-established themes and issues associated with poverty in academia, policy and practice. These findings are reported in depth in the project reports (ADT Leeds Panel 2019; ATD London Panel 2019). Here, we focus on the intergenerational and cross-sector panel as both a challenge and an opportunity in conducting PAR on poverty. We focus on how different participants related to the process and to one another, and the ways in which this shaped what we did – and did not – hear through this project. We provide critical discussion and illustrations of three key points of learning:

- Intergenerational power relationships and communications between experts by experience

- Negotiating the role of the researcher in complex intergenerational and organisational settings

- Drawing on intergenerational exchanges to challenge dominant narratives on poverty

The following subsections will address these three considerations in that order. In the concluding section, we provide more information on the impact of the project for experts by experience and partner organisations, and discuss its implications for academic study.

4.1 Intergenerational power relationships and communications

Poverty has direct effects on the lives of children, young people and adults – as Townsend (1979) notes, its impacts can be felt by individuals, families, and broader societal groups. Qualitative research highlights the ways in which poverty can engender both conflict and closeness (Redmond, 2009; Ridge, 2011), with both parents and children going to efforts to disguise its impacts in order to protect other family members (Main and Mahony, 2018). However, research on the experiences of poverty including participants from across generations remains scant. Therefore, ADT sought to foster intergenerational dialogue on the everyday realities of managing on a low income in order to further our understanding of these processes, and to create shared knowledge *between* participants. Indeed, Main (2019) shows that greater awareness of, and influence over, how family resources are used are associated with higher child and parent subjective well-being. The intergenerational approach also intended to challenge social norms – both within and beyond families – about the value of children and young people's knowledge. Nevertheless, power relations inevitably arise in a setting with different ages and statuses. Therefore, meetings included both separate discussions amongst children, young people, and parents respectively, and intergenerational discussions to allow for the sharing of knowledge across generations.

The power dynamics in relationships between participants varied between groups and over time within groups. In earlier meetings, we frequently saw reproductions of normative power relationships based on age. The following illustration from the Leeds panel demonstrates two parents and two young people challenging a child when they wrote 'rags' in an exercise designed to facilitate consideration of what poverty looks like for them.

> YP1: *Why have you put rags?*
> C1: *Cos you have to wear old clothes innit?*
> YP1: *That's not rags*
> C1: *Same thing*
> P1: *What did you say?*
> P2: *Living in poverty yeah so what?*
> C1: *Yeah people who are poor have to wear old dirty clothes*
> YP1: *Not necessarily*
> P1: *No they don't*
> YP1: *Some people it might be a choice*
> YP2: *Yeah or the person wearing it might be a builder or something*
> YP1: *Builders get good money*
> C1: *Yeah they wear dirty clothes when they're working*
> YP1: *So what's that got to do with living in poverty?*
> C1: *Nothing*

In this interaction, the parents and young people directly challenge the child's association of poverty with wearing 'rags'. Rather than exploring *why* the child made this association, the older participants simply state that they are incorrect: they argue that dirty clothes can be associated with professions and hence signify work or income and, importantly, a choice, rather than the absence of these things. By the end of this short interaction, the child acquiesces that their initial claim has 'nothing' to do with living in poverty. The lack of space given by older group members for the child to explain and explore their own perspective may indicate that this reversal was performative – and intended to shut down the discussion – rather than a genuine change of mind. Hence, on this occasion the power relations resulted in the perpetuation of social norms about whose knowledge is relevant and valued. Our role as facilitators in interactions of this nature is taken up again later.

In contrast, and increasingly over time, we saw instances when older participants were greatly encouraging of younger participants' contributions. In the following extract from a London meeting, a young person discusses the importance of children being heard:

> YP1: *I think it [a solution] has to do with young people's voices*
> P1: *[Applauds]*
> YP1: *and there are a lot of organisations these days that are working to amplify children's voices so some councils have youth boards and even organisations like the TfL [Transport for London], they recognise the role that children and young people have in shaping their future. In regard to the issue of knife crime, young people are being negatively affected by it and it's damaging their faith in the government and public relations cos they're getting a bad press of it. I think young people, as a collective body want to show who we are. Cos whilst you have these people that do these things, you have these other people who do these amazing things so yeah just amplifying and recognising young people's voices from across the spectrum from university or young people doing an apprenticeship about what they enjoy about living in the UK, what they enjoy doing. I think it's important to show that knife crime doesn't necessarily have any correlation to all young people and explore the barriers and issues that they are facing.*

In this example, the parent's paralinguistic input seems to signify appreciation of the young person's contribution, to recognise the importance of including children and young people's perspectives in society and to encourage elaboration. Our observation was that this type of interaction in the London panel increased and became more extensive and discursive over the course of the project. An illustration of this development from a later discussion on knife crime saw a parent accepting their child's contradiction of their idea that money should be put into youth groups to reduce crime, based on personal knowledge and experience:

> C1: *It's not an issue of money, it all comes down to social pressure because like youth groups you'll find youth groups are where they start… you get talking to people, you're constantly in touch with these people and when you're too old where do you go you go on the streets and in gangs and that's gonna... yeah sports…*

The parent and child then agreed that sports could be a solution to this problem by keeping children and young people occupied. The parent acknowledged that she had been able to send her three children to sports clubs before money became a problem. It was clear that this parent-child pair had not discussed these issues before participation in the project, and that the child's input helped the parent to develop a more nuanced understanding.

Interestingly, interactions which shut down younger participants were more common in the Leeds panel who had prior relationships (discussed below). However, they did also decrease over time. For example, during the fourth panel meeting in Leeds – which saw the panel test out the PAR tools with members of their community centre to generate discussion around what is needed for a good quality of life and what the barriers to this might be – there were some interesting intergenerational discussions not only between panel members but including wider members of the local community. For example, the sub-group of parents decided that for them one of the main things needed for a good life was having an equal and diverse society. They wanted to test this idea with children and young people, and entered into discussion with two girls (children) on this topic. The ensuing discussion was lengthy and impassioned, with the two girls highlighting a belief that gender norms from their cultural background actually inhibited their access to resources and ability to achieve good outcomes, compared to boys from the same cultural background. In later panel discussions it was evident that this had helped to shape and develop the ways that the parents considered this issue, demonstrating that they had learned from the children they spoke to.

In another illustration from the same panel meeting, the group were discussing priorities and solutions. One of the young people asserted that they felt that 'attention' was needed for a good life:

> YP1: *Attention: meaning that you don't always need money, and if you are kid, your parents might not be around. They might work every day with long shifts, and you don't get to see them and you don't get that attention at home and you might seek it from somewhere else, so you can be more vulnerable.*

Earlier the parents had seemed confused by this idea of 'attention' but their verbal and non-verbal responses to this explanation by the young person indicated that this had been an important point of learning for them. This reaction helped to provide validation for the young person, enabling continued discussion on the importance of parental attention and how poverty may pose a challenge to this. This is not to claim that parents were not already aware of this challenge, but it is interesting to consider how the intergenerational group created the space for younger people's knowledge and experiences to be incorporated into this awareness. Indeed, some adult participants across both panels reflected at the end of the project that they had discussed many issues with the panel which they would not previously have discussed in front of children; and one parent from the Leeds panel indicated that hearing directly from children and young people about their experiences was one of the most informative and valuable aspects of the project for her.

In this section we have examined how intergenerational power relationships can serve both to stifle and to promote communication between a greater diversity of generational perspectives than is often heard. We have also described changes in this over time, and would highlight the need for ongoing, trusting relationships between all parties to facilitate these types of change in how children and young people can be heard and valued. As a parent from the London panel said, family members may feel internal conflicts about whether and how to discuss poverty with one another, and participation in the project provided a space to develop new ways of communicating. The careful negotiation of such issues is an important ethical responsibility for researchers, which we turn to next.

4.2 Negotiating the roles of researchers and partners in intergenerational PAR

PAR aims to raise collective consciousness of shared experience and analyse societal structures which (re)produce – in this case – poverty; and to change them in collectively agreed upon ways. As such, our aim was to challenge traditional power imbalances based on both poverty status and age. We wished to acknowledge the value of multiple types of expertise, and to combine these to produce more powerful and holistic knowledge. This approach had implications for us as researchers; for partner organisations and the individuals from them who joined the panels; and for experts by experience. Here, we focus on how the remits and foci of different actors – especially partner organisations – contributed to shaping the project including processes and outputs.

We should note first that the selection of partner organisations was based on both pragmatic and theoretical considerations. As the project was relatively short-term and low-budget, we drew on established, strong relationships with organisations already committed to the goals of the research. Theoretically, we wanted to explore how different types of organisation might engage with the process. Therefore we partnered with one organisation which plays a part in shaping local structural inequalities (a local authority in the north of England), which offered the opportunity to integrate experts by experience into local decision making processes; and one which campaigns to change structural inequalities (a national charity based in the south of

England) and hence offered the opportunity to integrate lived experience into campaigning. Both organisations include highly trained, qualified and committed staff who helped to design and shape the project; and both are strongly committed to the same values of challenging inequitable power structures and providing platforms for underrepresented perspectives to be heard that we, as researchers, brought to the project. Both organisations provided invaluable support with recruitment of experts by experience, but with interesting differences in the final panel composition. We now turn to the ways in which these differences posed challenges and opportunities for us as researchers, and helped to shape both processes and outcomes for the two groups.

In Leeds, the panel was recruited from a single community group, based in a deprived area of the city. The Council partner panel member was also a member of this group. As a result, the relationships within the panel were multi-layered and complex – with the exception of the researchers, who only knew the Council partner prior to the start of the project. Some members were related, some friendships spanned years, and some members held positions of authority and responsibility within their community centre, adding an extra layer to these relationships and nuances to potential power imbalances. In contrast the London panel was a newly formed group with participants coming from different parts of the city. There were two family groups (parents and children) among the panel, one pair of friends (two of the children) and one member (one of the parents who had contact with CPAG before), who had existing relationships. Outside of these relationships, panel members were largely unknown to each other – including the participants from the partner organisation and the researcher. These differences in relationships changed the dynamics of the sessions throughout, and especially in the early stages of the project.

Engaging with the pre-formed group in Leeds, in a location that was personal to experts by experience, impacted the establishment ground rules for the research; most members expressed a preference for adhering to the normal rules of the Centre rather than agreeing a new set of rules. While there were advantages to this, these rules were not designed with research activities in mind. This approach also had the effect of confirming the position of the researchers as 'outsiders' who were less familiar with rules and expectations than other group members. Conversely, in the London group the establishment of clear expectations for all group members formed a substantial part of early meetings, and the enforcement of these rules was largely left to the researchers. The context of the Leeds group may have helped to address some aspects of power imbalance relating to poverty status; experts by experience had more familiarity with the rules and expectations of the Centre and so could take a lead in explaining and enforcing these. However, this sometimes came at the cost of challenging some of the practices the researchers were inclined to follow. An illustration of this was when one group member, a young person, arrived late; as researchers we were inclined to admit him to the later parts of the discussion, but other panel members strongly objected to this, asserting that he had arrived late just so that he could collect the voucher for participation, rather than because of a commitment to the project. While this process of groups adopting a shared (rather than researcher-led) approach to policing the groups' agreements was more evident in the Leeds group, we began to see elements of this later on in the London group, with one parent in particular gradually taking a subtle role in rule enforcement, for example through monitoring the timings of group sessions and activities herself.

An important point to note in both cases is that the enforcement of rules remained predominantly with the adult members of the panel. In one example from the London group, a parent who was interrupted by a child participant who was the daughter of another parent

raised this issue as a breach of the rules with the whole group, rather than with the child herself – but there were no examples of child or young people raising issues of rule breaking. Although as researchers we are adults, it was often a delicate process deciding how to use our role as facilitators to intervene. In the interaction detailed above, for example, in which parents and young people overrode the perspectives of a child panel member, we were left feeling conflicted over whether, when, and how to intervene – and in this instance did not as the conversation moved on quickly. However, this did alert us to the importance of lending our influence to amplifying the voices of children in particular, when older panel members might override these. Attending to the complexity of group dynamics – both as facilitators of a new group, and as newcomers to an established group – remained one of the most interesting and complex aspects of our part in the groups. In relation to intergenerational relationships and communication, we were aware of our responsibility both to promote and amplify the perspectives of children as those facing a double barrier to participation; and to avoid doing harm by disrupting relationships which we were both new to and relatively short-term participants in.

Differences in group dynamics are also reflected in research outputs. Both panels decided to produce a video about the project. In Leeds, a collaborative short documentary focused on the process was filmed with and by participants and included all 'types' of participant, with young people and children taking a lead in creating content. The London video was shorter and more 'professionally' produced; it involved experts by experience (but not other panel members) presenting issues explored in the project rather than the process itself. This video closed by asking what those with decision-making political powers would do about the issues affecting those on a low income. These different foci perhaps represent the different stages of development of the two panels, as well as the different aims of partner organisations. In Leeds, the voices of panel members have been integrated into the work of the local authority: experts by experience have attended Council meetings and events in which project outputs were shared with practitioners and those with decision-making powers. In London, children and young people have written blogs reflecting on their experiences of their participation in the project and some have expressed an interest in continuing to engage in campaigning efforts. A key difference is that the Leeds panel has focused more on integrating change into the practices of the partner organisation, while the London panel has focused more on acting as advocates for a wider political campaign. Outputs from both panels drew on the ways in which the issue of poverty was discussed within the meetings, which we turn to next.

4.3 Intergenerational learning as promoting a stronger challenge to dominant narratives

The term 'poverty' conveys different things to different people, both within and beyond academia (Spicker et al 2007; Lister 2004). One universal aspect, though, is its association with feelings of shame and stigma (Walker 2014). This makes the language of poverty salient in research and everyday settings. In recruiting participants, we used the language of 'managing on a low income' to emphasise capability, rather than the deficit which potential panel members may have associated with the term 'poverty'. Nonetheless, we observed changes over the course of the project in how both panels thought and spoke about poverty. These related firstly to the extent to which participants identified their own experiences with the term; and secondly the language that participants used to discuss poverty as a societal problem. Both of these were influenced not only by the opportunity to talk about poverty, but by the active involvement of people from different generational positions in the discussions. Here, we illustrate this process with two examples. The first follows one participant through

her process of reclaiming the term 'poverty' as something which applied to herself. This process was mirrored in several panel members. Secondly, drawing on interactions between a parent and child about education, we illustrate the ways in which multiple experiences, perspectives and forms of knowledge can help to identify and challenge individualising and stigmatising narratives.

Evolving understandings of poverty, and participants' position in relation to it, could be seen in the language used at different stages of the project. In the first meeting, participants were eager to express a distance between themselves and poverty, highlighting their identities as 'hard working' people who were 'struggling', and contrasting this with the 'laziness' they associated with the diagnosis of poverty. This demonstrated a clear psychological distinction between 'us' and 'them' in early discussions. However, during the third meeting of the London panel we noticed a shift in these discussions: some participants began to question the notion that people living in poverty are 'undeserving' and challenged this assumption:

> P1: *It's sad it's like if you're rich you get loads of help and if you're poor you get loads of help but nothing in between*
> P2: *I don't even know if those who are really poor do get all the help cos where we're in hostels with loads of women who… But more and more there are families there and they're like working families and they're just left there along with those who aren't working and single mums are the main clientele*
> P1: *Some of those on benefits, I mean I've seen the programmes and I know it's a bit…but you see the disgusting damp and those people are paying to live there and those conditions aren't fit for the rats*

Here, P2 questions P1's assertion that 'if you're poor you get loads of help', drawing on her family's experience in a hostel where it is implicit that support is not forthcoming where it is perceived to be evidently needed. While there is still 'othering' in this discussion, the dichotomies of poor/non-poor or deserving/undeserving have become increasingly destabilised. While P2 still invokes a difference between those who are working and those who are not, P1 revises her initial position, arguing that whether or not someone is on benefits, they should have access to decent housing.

This shift continues to develop in the fourth meeting. In a discussion about recent changes to the UK benefits system by which claimants were paid four-weekly rather than weekly, one participant described the challenges involved in managing this. She noted that claimants are often judged harshly and offered little support. While she starts by describing how 'they' cannot be expected to 'have the discipline' to manage money effectively over a four week period, she then goes on to say 'I put myself in that bracket'. Thus while she is still 'othering' (her use of 'they'), and locating the responsibility ('discipline' in her words) for managing on a low income within the individual claimant, she is also identifying herself as one of 'them'. There is also evidence of thinking more structurally: she says 'people just don't understand if they haven't lived that life', indicating that the design of the system, rather than the people using it, may be flawed.

Finally, in meeting five there is a clear move towards 'owning' rather than 'othering' poverty:

> P1: *Cos I think that people think poverty is only when you're down and out and got six kids in one room and can't cope, but I consider myself living in poverty*

In this final excerpt, the panel member not only 'owns' her experience of poverty, but also demonstrates an awareness of the damage that 'othering' can do – in this case, by leading to

people underestimating the prevalence of poverty through very minimalist and stereotypical understandings of what a 'normal' family and a decent standard of living looks like.

Perhaps the most powerful evidence for this journey across multiple panel members was the decision taken by the majority of group members in both panels to be named with their real names on co-produced project reports. This decision was given lots of time and attention, and participants were given the option to be entirely anonymous, to use a pseudonym, or to use their own name. Reflecting the content of the journey detailed above, in the London group participants using their real name discussed how this for them provided a means to 'name and shame' poverty as a structural issue with a human face, rather than feeling shamed themselves by poverty.

While this example shows the process of changes in thinking relating to poverty, we would also emphasise the role of intergenerational discussions in unpacking the complex ways in which individualised understandings of poverty can be incorporated into our overall thinking. This is illustrated in the excerpt below, of a discussion about education between a child and parent (not related) in the Leeds group. Initially the parent is dismissive of the child's perspective that education is more difficult for people in poverty, contrasting 'free' education in the UK with her perception of the education system in Pakistan. However, the child participant continues to challenge this with examples based on her own experience, resulting in the parent reflecting on her own school experiences and conceding that poverty is a barrier to better educational outcomes.

> C1: *Lack of education so like they won't know how to read and write and stuff.*
> P1: *But education in England is free so they won't charge…*
> C1: *No but still…*
> P1: *But it's up to the child to go and make the most of it. Cos if you were living in a third world country like Pakistan, education there's no free, you have to pay for it.*
> C1: *But it's hard to learn and some teachers don't understand so like my school, at my school we all have the same brain.*
> P1: *Nobody's got the same brain, all our ability is different and we work on different levels.*
> F1: *So do you think that children who live on a low income find it harder?*
> C1: *Yeah!*
> P1: *They don't get recognised… I found that myself cos when I was at school the girls who came from wealthy backgrounds and you know their parents had good jobs, you know, they had careers made for them. They got that extra moral support whereas they knew that my dad was quite poorly at the time and I never missed school though but I had the ability and I wanted to achieve.*

5   Discussion and concluding remarks

The purpose of this article has been to highlight the utility of employing an intergenerational Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology with children, young people and adults to understand the challenges and potential solutions to child and family poverty, according to those with direct lived experience of this, in two large cities in the UK. Our focus has been on the process of conducting the research. In particular, intergenerational power relationships and their role in structuring participants' communication about poverty, as well as shifting thinking about the causes and experiences of poverty; and how the researchers navigated the complex generational and situational power relationships throughout. In this section we discuss the implications for experts by experience, practitioners and policymakers, and researchers.

5.1 Implications for experts by experience

Given that ADT was specifically an *action* research project, our aim was that children, young people and parents should directly benefit from their participation, and in the longer term contribute to wider benefits for their communities. This can be seen in the ways that participants chose to represent themselves in the project outputs, suggesting a shift towards a non-shameful identification with poverty as a social condition. This is a powerful outcome given the findings of previous research which highlight the strength of individuals' social distancing (e.g. Shildrick and MacDonald 2013). The benefits are further manifest in the ways that those involved continue to leverage participation – for example, through continuing to participate in activities to change anti-poverty policy within our local government partner, and through contributing to the campaigning activities of our charity partner. This project is a very early effort, so findings are still very much in progress and evolving – but we tentatively posit that the changes that have resulted from this process thus far demonstrate the 'transformatory model of social action' in practice (Bhaskar 1982: 72). That is, taking as given and analysing pre-existing social structures, participants have taken steps to change these at a local and potentially a national level. As Bennett and Roberts (2004) note, 'scaling up' is a 'major challenge' but the cumulative impact of local successes complemented by nationally-focused PAR projects is promising.

5.2 Implications for practitioners and policy makers

ADT was designed to have impact beyond academia. It was hoped that the projects' collaborative approach would enable findings to be disseminated across the different stakeholder groups with whom the project partners are engaged and, in turn, place the voices experts by experience at the heart of their work. In Leeds, project outputs have been used as a workshop activity for a number of Council-run Child Friendly City and Child Poverty events. Feedback from these events highlights that framing the conversation in this way has supported both the panel members and stakeholder groups, including teachers, school leaders and other practitioners working with children and young people throughout the city, to engage in conversations around child and family poverty in a safe and constructive way. Such a reaction implies that such practitioners have, in the past, struggled to know how to open up this dialogue and that more activities like this would be useful for practitioners to better understand the issues around poverty and how to support the children and young people in their care.

5.3 Implications for researchers

As noted in the introduction, participatory work on poverty has rarely included children and young people, or intergenerational groups (Crivello et al. 2010). Whilst not without challenges, ADT indicates some clear advantages of an approach which facilitates more intergenerational and cross-sectoral dialogue. Drawing on the new social studies of childhood and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, we would encourage researchers of poverty to adopt a much more inclusive approach, acknowledging the expertise of children and young people with lived experience as equal to that of other forms of expertise. This is necessary for addressing the 'epistemic injustice' of the marginalisation of people living in poverty, children and young people, and those at the intersection of these two conditions (Beresford 2016: 232). This is one ingredient in developing a holistic understanding of the nature of poverty, and the characteristics of good remedies for it and its effects (Lister and Beresford 2000). What is clear is that children, young people and parents have valuable knowledge which should be tapped, in return for appropriate compensation, in order to develop effective anti-poverty policy and practice.

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