Using Research to Contribute to Equitable Social Change

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How might research be undertaken and mobilized as part of a process of equitable social change?
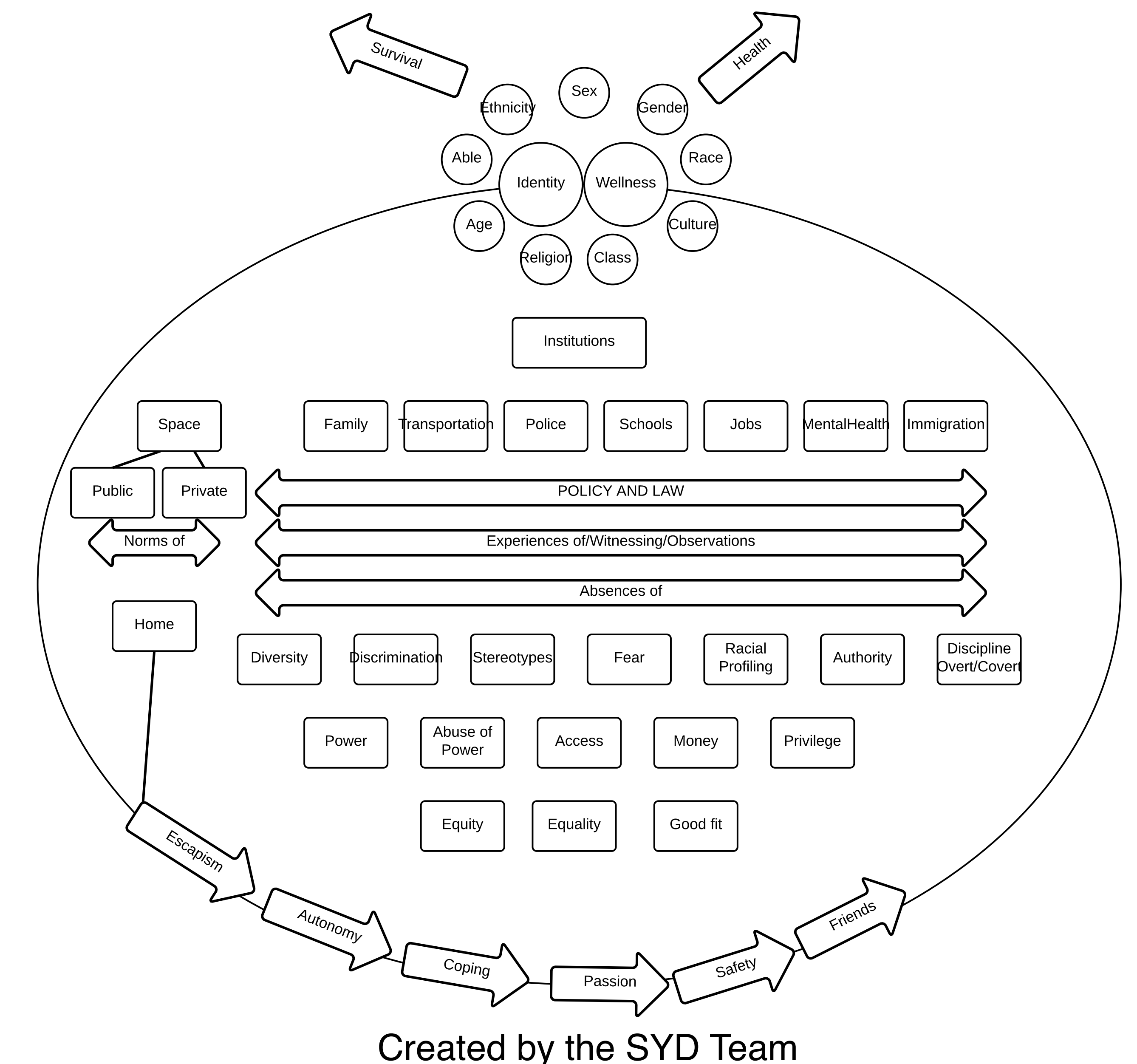
Explored through the ongoing project:

Sampling Youth Development (SYD) is a collaboration between McGill University & Maison des Jeunes Côtes des Neiges. Myself and a team of other young Montrealers and graduate students, guided by Dr. Naomi Nichols and Dr. Jessica Ruglis, conduct research into how youth's experiences in and access to intersecting public spaces and institutions shape what it's like to live in Montréal.

Institutional ethnography

- SYD is a participatory mixed-methods institutional ethnography
- Institutional ethnography (IE) is a method of inquiry and practice of feminist sociology developed by Dorothy E. Smith
- IE focuses on institutions and systems that people interact with, rather than individual people themselves
- In IE, patterns of social organization are examined from a standpoint in the everyday world
- IE starts with people's individual experiences but turns to textual analysis to look at broader patterns and relations beyond what can be seen by the individual
- SYD collects data through street interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus groups with youth in Montrèal
- In analysis, SYD starts with the experiences of individual youth collected through interviews and looks for broader institutions patterns

Interview data mapping

Created in May 2017 based off of interview data from late 2016 and early 2017, this map guided the creation of the interview Codebook which was developed in July 2017 and was used to code all of our data.

Created by the SYD Team

Research questions

- How do young people experience inclusion/exclusion in public institutions and public spaces, and how do these experiences produce the contexts and outcomes of youth development?
- What social and institutional relations shape the outcomes of their participation in public institutions, their movement through the city, and their engagements with others?
- How do race, class, gender, sex, culture, (dis)ability and language intersect in young people's lives, and how are these intersections shaped by their experiences with public sector institutions – health, housing, education and policing?
- What social and institutional barriers/enablers to health development and community solidarity do young people experience?

Interview recruitment

Created by the SYD Team

Findings & closing thoughts

- Feedback and analysis limitations make it incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to know whether research is contributing to equitable social change, is making things worse, or is making no difference at all
- IE is a promising guide for researchers looking to do socially just work, but following an institutional ethnographic approach does not guarantee that research will contribute to equitable social change
- IE does not on its own address the hierarchal power and knowledge relations present in community-based academic research, and using participatory methods is important for addressing this type of inequality
- SYD is an ongoing project with the analysis period just beginning, but some key themes which stand out from the data are explored in our podcast *Sampling Youth Development: The Podcast*

Check out our podcast
Sampling Youth Development: The Podcast to hear more about our team and our findings!

Selected bibliography

Campbell, Marie and Frances Gregor. *Mapping Social Relations: A Primer in Doing Institutional Ethnography*. Garamond Press, 2002.
Nichols, Naomi. *Youth Work: An Institutional Ethnography of Youth Homelessness.* University of Toronto Press, 2014.

Special thank you to