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Building Human Rights Consciousness in Postconflict Societies: Peruvian Adolescents' Understandings of Human Rights

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Abstract

During adolescence, individuals begin to form ideas about human rights as part of the development of a sense of self. The outcomes of these processes are influential in the stability and peace in postconflict societies. However, there remain many questions about how these youth construct ideas about human rights and how they become oriented toward promoting these in society through a developed human rights consciousness. This study investigates how adolescents in an underexplored area of postconflict societies—where past violence was not intimately experienced—understand human rights.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with 25 fifteen-year-olds across five schools in Tacna, Peru. These adolescents understand human rights as related to respect, protection, and needing personal advocacy, but they do not integrate ideas about human rights into concrete practice—the foundation of

human rights consciousness. While the majority of respondents assert that human rights must be understood and enacted in order to become reality, they do not connect these ideas to concrete issues in Peruvian society. This gap may have emerged from postconflict political developments in the Peruvian education system. For a group of female respondents, human rights are about identity, which may demonstrate the ways that local gender contexts and developmentally salient concerns shape these understandings. These findings could provide important empirical support for policies and programs fostering human rights consciousness in postconflict youth.

Keywords

adolescent development, human rights, human rights consciousness, postconflict, social development, identity issues, global/international issues

For postconflict countries, rebuilding peaceful, accountable, and democratic societies is a long-term undertaking that involves fostering stable bonds between citizens and their government (Davies, 2003; De Greiff & Duthie, 2009). As part of this focus on citizenship, postconflict countries often concentrate on building knowledge and respect for human rights (Holland & Martin, 2014; Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011). In particular, policy makers, researchers, and governments target postconflict youth and their behaviors. While active young citizens with robust support for human rights alone may not be sufficient for a new, peaceful society, they can be influential social actors (Leidner & Li, 2015; Quaynor, 2012; Schwartz, 2010).

Some scholars made strides toward understanding how to effectively promote human rights values in postconflict youth (see Quaynor, 2012; Rubin, 2016), but there is still a lack of theoretical frameworks to understand underlying psychological development of diverse youth in these contexts. Studies of human rights attitudes have been primarily based in the United States (McFarland, 2015), and postconflict work has mainly focused on education curriculum (Bajaj, 2011), youth protest and socialization (see Bekerman, Zembylas, & McGlynn, 2009; Reidy et al., 2015), and youth as agents of change (Schwartz, 2010). Furthermore, studies on human rights attitudes among youth are often based on the definition of human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR; see McFarland, 2015), but few have explored how they are conceived of from the ground up—that is, individuals' understandings of human rights (Bajaj, 2015; Bellino, 2015).

The current study adds to literature on how youth in postconflict countries form conceptions of human rights. The study utilizes developmental theory to investigate how adolescents in Tacna, Peru, understand human rights as part of their interpretation of and response to their social contexts. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 25 fifteen-year-olds across five schools in Tacna, Peru. The context of Tacna is an underexplored area of postconflict societies: regions that did not directly experience the violent political conflict marking the country's history, but that have strong identifications with the nation and its history. This study thus also highlights the heterogeneous social experiences of violence that are often collapsed in postconflict research and programs (Quaynor, 2012).

Literature Review

Citizenship and human rights are crucial elements in postconflict countries. If civic trust and engagement cannot be effectively reconstituted, memories of past violence can foster fears of renewed conflict and

mistrust of fellow citizens (Quaynor, 2012). Transitional justice processes—the measures implemented to address histories of conflict and human rights abuses—must thus effectively address past human rights abuses, rebuild faith in political institutions, and create spaces for involvement and reconciliation (see De Brito, Enríquez, & Aguilar, 2001; De Greiff & Duthie, 2009). Schools and their curricula are integrally related to these goals because they encompass official discourses about the nation, democracy, rights, and history (Davies, 2003). Furthermore, youth can be influential actors, whether as agents for change, stability, disillusionment, renewed conflict, or social justice (Bekerman et al., 2009; McEvoy-Levy, 2001; Schwartz, 2010).

While human rights education has been shown to be an effective support for youth civic engagement in postconflict countries (Davies, 2004; Holland & Martin, 2014; Zembylas, 2016), few studies have explored mechanisms and implications of how youth construct ideas about human rights. As one of the few examples, Bellino (2015) uses ethnographic study of Guatemalan youth to demonstrate that lived local experiences of violence and rights influence postconflict youth's understandings of human rights and citizenship. These Guatemalan youth express three responses based in awareness of the national history in relation to these issues, constructing narratives of denial, skepticism, or empowerment in their understandings of human rights. This approach extends beyond studying simply the development of support for human rights and focuses instead on the development of a critical understanding oriented toward action. The connection between ideas and actions is critical in forming this human rights consciousness, or "the ability of students to recognize the human rights dimensions of, and their relationship to, a given conflict- or problem-oriented exercise" (Tibbitts, 2002, p. 164). To this end, active engagement in human rights issues has been argued to be more consequential than simple awareness of these topics. This perspective has drawn on the work of Paolo Freire (1987) on critical consciousness, which he defined as an emergent awareness of one's capabilities and efficacy in relation to how oppression takes shape in society and how it can be counteracted. This framework has been adopted both in literature on civic development and human rights education (Hope & Spencer, 2017; Tibbitts, 2002). Connecting human rights to concrete contexts (i.e., national history and local context) may be especially difficult in regions removed from the conflict that inspired human rights reforms. Nevertheless, previous work has largely overlooked adolescents who live in these regions.

Theoretical frameworks in developmental psychology could provide an effective basis for understanding how postconflict youth interpret, process, and respond to their contexts. Though it may be difficult to isolate the influence of a conflict's legacies, developmental theory can be utilized to investigate the internal processes occurring as youth think about human rights and citizenship. Adolescence deserves attention because during this time, individuals begin to define roles in their societies as they construct more cohesive senses of self (Erikson, 1968). In these years, individuals increasingly interact with the broader society and begin to define their roles within social systems. Youth interpret and process factors in their social environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Spencer, 2006; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). While these developmental frameworks have been applied to the study of citizenship, they are lacking in research on the development of human rights consciousness.

Theoretical Framework

Individual's developmental outcomes are inherently linked to societal trajectories, particularly in postconflict societies. Youth's identities and relationships to society can influence the success of attempts to promote stability, peace, and human rights through a range of outcomes from participation

in democracy and communities to engaging in violent rebellion (Levine & Bishai, 2010; McEvoy-Levy, 2011; Rubin, 2016). While scholars have explored this relationship between youth, human rights, and societal trajectories through contextual factors (e.g., how schools teach human rights), the current study builds on recent work that focuses on how youth make meaning within their social contexts by constructing ideas about human rights in relation to their experiences (Bellino, 2015). This approach is fruitful for human rights research because rather than imposing official ideas and definitions, it emphasizes localized meanings and the formation of human rights consciousness (Bajaj, 2015).

Spencer's Phenomenological Variant on Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is used in the current study to frame how adolescents make meaning of human rights. PVEST draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory by situating individual development within various levels of context. That is, the individual interacts directly with family, friends, and others in their settings in their immediate environment, but these people and systems are also influenced by broader developments like national histories, policy changes, and cultural shifts. PVEST extends this model by asserting that environmental factors must be understood as experienced by youth. The same context—for example, being taught the same human rights curriculum—may be interpreted differentially by youth as challenges or supports for their emerging concepts of themselves. In this way, levels of vulnerability are based on how youth understand and process what they experience, are exposed to, and are taught. They then respond with emergent coping strategies through how they think about themselves, their societies, and their roles in them. Identities emerge through a reiterative response and interpretation, with these behaviors and ideas becoming internalized as elements of a sense of self (Spencer, 2006; Spencer et al., 1997).

These theories have been used in studying the formation of critical civic consciousness (Hope & Spencer, 2017) and to study the development of civic ideas and identities (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2013). The current study extends literature on human rights consciousness by utilizing PVEST to frame how youth make meaning of human rights as part of this interpretation and response to context. The formation of human rights consciousness has been shown to be a dynamic process of social construction (Grabe & Dutt, 2015; Leidner & Li, 2015). PVEST provides a developmental framework that adds a critical component: how individuals form emerging ideas that develop into elements of their identities. To this end, the study explores how historical and local contexts relate to the development of ideas about human rights in postconflict youth in Tacna, Peru, by studying how adolescents understand human rights.

The Peruvian Context

Fifteen years have passed since Peru officially transitioned to peace, but its politics and society are still imbued with legacies of the previous conflict, particularly in relation to citizenship and human rights issues (Carrión, Zárate, & Seligson, 2011; Theidon, 2013). During the 1980s, Peru was mired in an internal conflict involving two revolutionary guerilla groups—the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)—and an authoritarian state. When Fujimori became president in 1990, he immediately began to combat the two guerilla groups with violent repression, torture, and murder, while also cultivating authoritarianism and militarization in the national government. By the end of the 1990s, Fujimori had succeeded in almost entirely eliminating the Shining Path and MRTA. Nevertheless, amid allegations of corruption and voting irregularities, he resigned in 2000. Following Fujimori's resignation, the new government moved swiftly to investigate and address the human rights

abuses that had occurred. This movement was supported by the general populace, who also pushed for justice and demanded greater respect for representative democracy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) ran from 2001 to 2003 and stated in its widely embraced final report that the conflict was caused by racist attitudes, prejudice, and structural injustices like the state's lack of concern for marginalized citizens (Isla, 2008). The report advocated for the development of explicit K-12 curricula that taught about the conflict and human rights (Paulson, 2010a).

By the late 2000s, however, political winds had shifted and general interest in reconciliation and reparation had waned (Paulson, 2010a). The country began to focus instead on corruption and illiteracy. Educational materials about the conflict were challenged by rhetoric that equated discussion of the Shining Path and MRTA with support for terrorism (Paulson, 2010a). The only successful reform during this time was that human rights became a required part of citizenship education.

This recent history has led to diverse scholarship on Peruvian transitional justice in relation to history, human rights, and the education system (e.g., Paulson, 2010a, 2010b). This work has demonstrated that changing political priorities have led human rights to be mandated in school curriculum, but not as connected to current or past issues in Peru. Government guidelines for civics curriculum simply mandate that students should know about human rights, promote them, and understand how democracy contributes to their defense (Ministerio de Educación, 2014).

This study adds to the previous focus on the educational system by contributing empirical understandings of how youth make meaning of human rights in a specific region: Tacna, Peru. Currently in Tacna, civics and history curriculum follow national guidelines; schools offer no official narrative or discussion on Peru's history of human rights and conflict. Tacna's dominant historical narrative is not marked by the conflict, but instead by local history. Following the War of the Pacific in the late 19th century, Tacna was controlled by Chile for 50 years before returning to Peruvian control. Tacna's citizens avidly celebrate the anniversary of this reincorporation and maintain many patriotic displays as a result of this past. Tacna is also referred to as "the Heroic City" because of its fervent patriotism and many heroes from the war with Chile. While the historical focus in Tacna does not involve the conflict of the 1990s, its local civic culture is nationalistic and embedded in a sense of shared identity with the rest of the country.

Tacna offers new insights as it represents an experience that is often obscured in postconflict discourses. In addressing the legacies of past conflict, many transitional processes involve the creation of singular official histories that encompass only certain stories and groups involved in the conflict (Hamber & Wilson, 2002). Tacna, like many regions in postconflict countries, was not directly touched by the internal conflict but has a local civic culture that is deeply rooted in a national identity and history. Postconflict literature lacks a rich understanding of how such regions and their citizens are impacted by the legacies and reverberations of this past (Quaynor, 2012). Tacna was thus chosen because it represents an overlooked region of postconflict countries where societal institutions still face critical questions of how to understand and promote human rights in relation to the troubled national past.

Rationale and Research Questions

Drawing on PVEST, the study investigates how youth understand human rights as part of a meaning-making process linking the discourses and realities in their local and national contexts with their outcomes as citizens. This approach does not deny the importance of socialization (i.e., how human

rights are taught and experienced in schools, homes, and communities), but rather prioritizes the internal processing as a demonstration of psychological impacts of these contexts.

The research questions are applied to this PVEST framework to explore how youth in Tacna, Peru, understand human rights as part of their processing of social environments. This work is intended as a case study for descriptive and exploratory analysis (Gerring, 2004) that may offer insights for effective civic and human rights education in transitional justice and to open up further research in these understudied regions of postconflict countries. To these ends, the study addresses the following questions and then analyzes how the results can contribute to attempts to promote human rights consciousness in postconflict youth: How do youth in the historical and social context of Tacna, Peru, understand human rights conceptually and in practice? How do these understandings demonstrate human rights consciousness or possible obstacles to the formation of this orientation toward human rights?

Method

Participants

A multistage purposeful design was used in this study. This process involves choosing a region, sites, and then finally subject, and can be an effective method for gathering information from specific groups (see Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006). It was used to target a range of participants across socioeconomic status, location in the city, and gender within a particular geographic context of interest. First, Tacna was chosen as the city. While it is physically far from both Peru's capital and the regions where much of the conflict occurred, it is also marked by fervent nationalism. The city has about 340,000 inhabitants, with 16% living below the official poverty line (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2015). Second, five schools were chosen to cover a diverse range of youth. In Tacna, 26,000 students (49% female) attend the city's 130 secondary schools. About 18% of these students study in private institutions, which is a marker of higher-class status (Dirección de Gestión Institucional, 2015). Since school administrators in Tacna do not maintain student body demographics, school location and status was used as a proxy to achieve diversity (Liu, Van Damme, Gielen, & Van Den Noortgate, 2014). The schools were intentionally chosen—after discussing the possibilities with multiple Peruvian educators—to cover a range of geography, class, and length of time in Tacna. These schools are located in five of the city's eight districts, with varying levels of resources and dates of incorporation. After selecting the schools, the researcher worked with administrators to select a range (in terms of academics and school involvement) of students in their third year of secondary studies.

The final sample included five schools and 25 students with a range of experiences in the city, as well as academic achievement and extracurricular involvement. The first school, San Xavier,¹ was a private, all-boys, Catholic school that is considered one of the city's best and serves families with economic resources and prestige. The students interviewed ($n = 7$) come from varying degrees of wealth and political prestige in the city, but all have privileged access to economic resources. The second school, Los Heroes, was a large public school with a military focus. Its student population mainly comes from neighboring military and police bases, which have a significant presence in Tacna because of its history of occupation and location on the border with Chile. These respondents ($n = 5$) could draw on social resources and prestige because of military and police connections in their families. The third school, San Rafael, was a smaller public school on the outskirts of the city that serves low-income families. The

respondents ($n = 4$) mirrored the population of this neighborhood in that their families had been in Tacna for one or two generations, and their parents were generally lower middle class with semistable incomes. The fourth school, Prado, was a large public school in the center of the city whose mission was specifically to serve the marginalized and poor. It has a broader range of students, though the majority, like the respondents ($n = 4$), do not have access to economic or social capital in the city. The last school, Corazon, was a newer parochial school in one of the poorest neighborhoods. This area had just recently been incorporated into Tacna, and the respondents ($n = 5$) came from families who had moved within the last two decades to the city and belonged to the sizable working poor in the city.

Overall, participants were an average of 15 years old, with a range of 14 to 16. This age was chosen because questions of “who am I” and “what is my role in society”—which are connected to civic identity development and integration of human rights into ideas of self (Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011)—become prevalent in middle adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Spencer et al., 1997).

Procedure and Measures

The primary methodology was semistructured interviews. Following consent procedures approved by the author’s Institutional Review Board, letters describing the study were sent home for parental permission. When signed letters were returned, each interviewee was removed from class, completed a letter of informed consent, and was interviewed in Spanish in a private space in the school. The researcher did not know the students personally before the interview but had spent multiple hours in the schools talking with administrators and observing social studies classes. He had also presented himself to the secondary classrooms before the interviews were conducted. This approach was used in order to build familiarity of the school setting, conduct the research in collaboration from school administrators and teachers, and help develop respondent comfort with the researcher prior to the interviews.

The interview protocol was developed to address how youth understand citizenship and human rights. In this sense, it was constructed using PVEST as a theoretical guide: to explore where youth drew their information from, how they developed attitudes and ideas in relation to these discourses and their own experiences, and what meaning they then made about general citizenship, views on Peru as a nation, and human rights. In the latter section, prompts were developed to target this study’s research questions. These included, “What do human rights mean to you?” “What are some examples of human rights?” and “Where have you learned about human rights?” Prior to data collection, the interview protocol was tested with three Peruvian adolescents, who were asked to read it, confirm the translation, and provide feedback. It was then updated to reflect their input.

The interview data were analyzed based on an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each interview was transcribed in Spanish and coded by the author to identify units of meaning within the participants responses. Initial codes were first reviewed by a Peruvian collaborator, with over 85% agreement. The codes were analyzed inductively and grouped into larger categories. Following on an adaption of thematic analysis employed by Arnett and Jensen (2015), no thematic map was created due to the nature of the data and the categories that emerged were compared by gender and school group with a more quantitative approach (i.e., comparing numbers of respondents describing each theme) to test for differences. Then, the categories and connected excerpts from the text were interpreted for underlying meaning (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The themes that emerged were analyzed in relation to the developmental and geographical contexts of these participants; in line with PVEST, these themes

were interpreted within the salient identity challenges of middle adolescence as well as the sociopolitical history and current moment in Tacna. PVEST was not employed to develop specific codes in order to allow the respondents' words to drive the units of meaning and construction of broader themes, but it was used to frame the research questions and subsequent analysis of themes (see McGee & Spencer, 2015; Youngblood & Spencer, 2002). Excerpts used in this article were translated by the author after data analysis and then verified by a Peruvian collaborator.

Results

All interviewees recognized the concept of human rights and were able to provide concrete examples and sources of their information. The surface-level categories of these responses are listed in Table 1. Following Arnett and Jensen (2015), these categories were analyzed for differences by subgroup (including school type), but none were found. The thematic analysis of the related excerpts, however, identified four key themes in how these respondents made meaning of human rights: human rights as based in respect for all, as protection from human nature, as requiring knowledge and advocacy, and as related to identity. These themes are not mutually exclusive, but rather are overlapping and interconnected ideas that these youth draw on in processing discourses and experiences in their surroundings. Importantly, the fourth theme on identity, however, contrasts with the other three in that it was only expressed by female respondents from lower socioeconomic status schools. Nevertheless, throughout the four themes, human rights were described largely as distant and abstract; these youth do not directly connect them with their local contexts or with possible avenues for them to take action, which are both critical for human rights consciousness.

Table 1. Human Rights Ideas, Examples, and Sources: Categories.

What are human rights?	
Defense/protection	13
Better society	13
Respect	11
Duties	8
Individuality/identity	5
Basic values	3
Norms	2
Dignity	2
Democracy	2
What are examples of human rights in practice?	
Life	11
Self-expression	6
Liberty	6
Family	3
Food	3
Children	3
Religion	3
Where do you hear and learn about human rights?	
School	17
TV/news	8
Family	5

Note. Responses with *n* of 1 were excluded from list. In some cases, responses touched on more than one of the themes.

Human Rights as Based in Respect for All

The majority of these youth focused on respect in describing human rights. As opposed to the emphasis in the UDHR and much of human rights literature on state obligations and accords, this conception of human rights is based in interpersonal relations. People have the right to be treated with dignity by others and in turn should treat others in this way. The basic requirement is that each individual can live with a sense of security and is tolerated by others. From this perspective, respectful interpersonal treatment lays a necessary foundation for human society to function effectively and coherently. Human rights are more than universal entitlements as humans. They are a requirement for social harmony.

One male from San Xavier outlined this conception of human rights by directly invoking respect and then detailing the importance of interpersonal treatment as connected to psychological security. When asked to define what human rights were, he described them as a support that guides how people treat each other: “[Human rights] are something that help each person to be respected. Something like that. Other people must respect each person and that those people don’t have to worry about getting along with people they don’t know.” He describes respect not as requiring a common purpose or unity among people, but rather as allowing for a sense of inner calm by eliminating concern about others’ actions.

These youth also connect universal respect between people to how groups of individuals function. The same male respondent ended his definition of human rights by explicitly relating interpersonal respect to broader societal dynamics: “[human rights] are like the foundation of a good society in which people respect and tolerate each other.” Human rights promote respect and better treatment in the interactions between individuals, which not only filter down to allow greater inner calm, but also build upward to the a broader level. This respondent begins his line of reasoning in the individual, and thus indicates that the construction of a harmonious society depends on the concrete ways that each person treats others. The individual is ultimately responsible for enacting human rights, rather than states or societies being required to operate as a guarantor of rights or being held accountable for their implementation.

Other respondents emphasized the same progression from the individual to the broader society. A female from San Rafael outlined the progression from mutual respect to social cohesion: “[Human rights] are what each person should demand. That they are respected. Also, they should respect others like they demand respect from others. [Human rights] help us all live in harmony—one could say something like that.” She conveys a belief that respect is not inherent to human relations but is necessary for social cohesion. Therefore, it must be invoked and demanded. In this sense, human rights are necessary for the broader society but must be enacted through individual advocacy. Across the interviews, this perspective also stands on its own (as the third theme), though this participant’s response demonstrates the interconnection and overlap of the salient themes.

Importantly, the theme of respect crossed school and gender categories (as well as their intersections); adolescents from different backgrounds invoked respect as mutual and critical for maintaining social fabric. The prevalence of this theme across subgroups may be related to developmental trajectories: Whereas older adolescents have demonstrated more attention to social structures and abstract ideals

like human rights (Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998), in middle adolescence, social cognitive development is grounded in greater concerns about interpersonal relations (Smetana & Villalobos, 2009).

Human Rights as Protection From Human Nature

As a second theme, many youth defined human rights as involving protection from inequities, including exploitation and discrimination. Underlying this conception of human rights, these youth detailed a view of human nature as fundamentally based in competition, struggle, and injustice. They described hearing stories (both from personal relatives and through the media) of how people are exploited, taken advantage of, and treated poorly by others, and these experiences shaped an understanding of human rights as a necessary protector.

In line with theory on human rights, these youth believed that equality of treatment is a desired goal for society (Donnelly, 2013). Human rights are meant to promote equality and address injustices in society by protecting those who would be vulnerable or treated unfairly. This female from Los Heroes invoked discrimination as both a cause of unjust treatment and a target of human rights: “[Human rights] are something that each person has. They have the same rights as others and they cannot be discriminated against just because of their color, race, or words.” Rights in this case are universal—all people have them—but are also particularly purposeful to protect those who are marginalized in society.

More specifically, these youth described human rights as promoting greater equality through requiring respect for other members of society that would otherwise be absent. Human rights as based in respect were thus integral to being a protection from inherent human nature. Inequalities and inequities were discussed as existing and inherent in human society. Human rights then serve as important protections from this reality of social interaction by requiring respect, no matter the social or political power structures in place. Importantly, human rights create protections beyond laws and the power of the state to regulate behavior; they provide the needed basis for people to demand an equality of treatment. As respect, this conception of human rights identifies each individual as responsible for fulfilling this protective capacity.

The respondents who defined human rights in this way cut across the different school groups. For example, a female from Prado asserted that human rights “[are] a defense mechanism—human rights. And it’s a responsibility of each citizen to know them.” Similarly, a male from Los Heroes based the power of human rights in how individuals could prevent exploitation:

[Human rights] are very important for our life because if we didn’t have rights, I think that no one could make everyone respect each other. We all would be—no one would demand their rights, no? And the people who have more power would abuse the poor people and would not respect them.

He also stated that respect can only be generated through human rights. Otherwise, the power dynamics that exist between different groups of people would lead to exploitation and abuse. He did not mention the state either as a provider of this protection or a guarantor of human rights but instead described rights as allowing for individuals to advocate for themselves.

Another young male from San Xavier similarly discussed human rights as important precisely because of this protective potential. This respondent additionally emphasized that these human rights are not

inherently present but necessary to prevent domination and exploitation. In his reflection, he asserted that “[Human rights are] something serious for a person. That all people should have. It’s like, if people don’t have these, then everything would be chaos because one person could dominate another and basically get everything from them.” From the need for human rights as a protection, this young male went further to explicitly state that the lack of these rights would cause human society to fall apart. Therefore, human rights are involved in protecting individuals but within collective contexts. These ideas imply a perspective on human nature in which individuals would compete and stand as rivals to each other without concrete protections that can be invoked.

These respondents situated their ideas about human rights in local experiences and discourses in the media and at home. When prompted to explain how they know that people would treat each other in these ways without human rights, they delved into further detail to describe theft, robberies, and resulting distrust that they have experienced in their own city and heard about in the news. These connections were not specifically learned about in school—where respondents described being taught what human rights were—but instead were drawn from these adolescents’ interpretations of Peruvian society as dangerous and plagued by crime. They also stated that they did not know how they could concretely take action to promote human rights as a protection from these dangers within national or local contexts. Linking this to PVEST, these respondents demonstrate that their lived experiences and understandings of Peruvian society shape the meaning that they are making. That is, based on these perspectives, they develop a coping response that defines human rights as a protection from the inherent dangers of human societies.

Human Rights as Requiring Knowledge and Advocacy

In general, these respondents struggled to concretely detail ways that they could enact human rights—the key aspect in human rights understandings becoming human rights consciousness—though they emphasized the need for individuals to advocate for these rights. As in their descriptions of human rights as a protection, many respondents placed the onus for building a society where human rights were respected on the individual members of society. That is, rights need to be understood and demanded by people in order to become realities. This perspective still maintains that human rights are universal—that is, that all humans are worthy of these protections and equal treatment—but also asserts that individual advocacy is a necessary element for practical application.

This theme can also be connected to these youth’s lived experiences. The Peruvian state has long been absent from many areas of the country, while issues of corruption and unfulfilled promises are central parts of the national discourse about how the state functions (Laplante & Theidon, 2007). Even within Tacna, a fervently patriotic city, these same messages proliferate in media and in civil society. The state is often seen as primarily acting in the interest of its citizens only when civic action and protest force it to (Alcalde, 2010; Theidon, 2013). This discourse may have been internalized and applied to the context of human rights as these respondents asserted a need to know and demand one’s rights in order to actually experience them.

At the same time, respondents still struggled to then detail how to practically support the enactment of human rights. They mentioned that doing so is important, but this emphasis remained abstract or connected to distant scenarios, rather than in their local contexts. Since the role of individual agency in building human rights is foundational for human rights consciousness, the lack of concrete application can thus be seen as a limiting factor in the development of this active orientation toward human rights.

One female respondent from Corazon exemplified this theme when she drew on the issue of modern slavery in other parts of the world to describe examples of human rights. She began with the right to liberty and then detailed how slaves continue to live without this right because of a lack of knowledge:

Right to—to liberty because there are many problems still in the world—there are still slaves. And these people—that is, these slaves—don't know their rights. And if someone, let's say, thinks about telling them, "you have this right," then they will probably say, "I don't have this right." It's because they don't know. They think they don't have the right and continue being a slave. And this happens. But if we say—if we insist and we tell them they have rights. It could change and they might stop. They can say to the person who made them a slave they have a right to be free.

Advocacy and understanding are critical elements in turning the protective nature of human rights into a concrete reality for these slaves. The responsibility in this case falls on those who know about human rights to educate others. Therefore, these youth emphasized the possibility of individual agency in relation to human rights but with personal engagement or strategies about how to do this themselves. As with the descriptions of respect and of protection, this conception of human rights emphasizes the roles of individuals in human rights becoming a reality.

Other respondents did not draw on specific cases like slavery but affirmed a similar need for human rights to be actively demanded by informed individuals. These respondents acknowledged that human rights existed always as a concept but asserted that people had to know about and advocate for these rights to turn them into concrete realities. This respondent invokes a collective sense of responsibility that places himself among a group that has this responsibility:

Sometimes people don't think about them much. They don't think about what human rights imply because when there are rights, there are duties. And so, we should be more cognizant that human rights for us are things that we have, that help us progress in our lives, and that defend us, but they aren't there to be wrongly interpreted and used in other ways. (Male, Los Heroes)

His rhetoric does not imply using human rights for oneself only as an individual, but rather emphasizes how this potential is collectively shared by individuals (as opposed to by the state). Others also stated advocacy was not just an individual responsibility of each person for him or herself, but rather for all people to push for as part of a sense of shared humanity. These respondents, who included males and females from different schools, asserted that they were part of a group who had the responsibility to educate and empower others:

It's important that we always uphold human rights, that we uphold not only those of people we see here or who we know, but also people we don't see and who are far from the capital of the country and it's important to keep them in mind. We must know that these people also are like us and have rights. And we must respect and should be respected by others. (Male, San Xavier)

From this perspective, human rights can be separated between the abstract idea (with everyone deserving of these protections) and the enactment (that only occurred through knowledge, advocacy and action). Without knowledge and maintenance, people cannot depend on these rights in their daily lives. In this way, adolescents do not describe conceiving of rights as universally true, but in need of

application and attention to exist. This understanding connects back to the element of critical consciousness in the formation of human rights consciousness; in order to become a reality, human rights must be understood, violations must be acknowledged, and one's own agency in counteracting these abuses must be recognized.

Human Rights as Related to Identity

A fourth theme emerged from analyses of responses by gender and school type. For a group of females—all from the higher needs schools—identity and individuality were salient aspects of how they described human rights conceptually. They described the rights to self-expression and liberty as especially important because they provided space for people to define for themselves who they are and what they can do. In contrast to other respondents who emphasized the requirement to enact human rights, these respondents demonstrated an understanding of liberty as integral to each person's self and thus inherently present no matter the context, knowledge, or actualization.

These respondents particularly saw human rights as linked to how humans understood themselves. This perspective situates the core of human rights in negative rights, as it involves an intrinsic liberty of self-expression. A female from Corazon explicitly invoked identity as a universal freedom:

[Human rights] are the rights that all people have—that all people deserve. Some person can't say to you, "you have to do this because"—that is wrong. And, you have your rights and it is like—so that you feel like you have an identity.

Like others, she situated human rights as based in interpersonal relations (i.e., how others treat who you are and your liberty). She then, however, described the value of these rights as internal (i.e., providing for a sense of personally constructed identity). Other respondents did not use "identity" specifically but similarly conveyed an understanding of human rights as based in what individuals can do and the right they have to being who they are: "I think that human rights are related to what an individual can do. Like, the ways to show that one is a human being and to prevent others from threatening who you are" (Female, Prado).

In providing examples of human rights, these female respondents referred specifically to self-expression, which was absent from most of the other adolescents' responses. When asked to explain in greater depth what self-expression referred to, these females focused on the right to vocalize thoughts and ideas (as opposed to self-expression as connected to style of dress or sexuality). One female from Corazon asserted clearly and concisely that it meant, "No one can force us to shut our mouths." Another from San Rafael more subtly conveyed a similar meaning by defining self-expression in reference to voicing views: "That you can be yourself. You have the right to express your opinion and everyone should respect it. Of course, some may disagree with you, but you have the right to be heard." Individuality and identity are linked to being valued for one's thoughts and ideas, as well as having the space to voice these opinions.

This theme directly connects developmentally salient challenges for adolescents. Young people may struggle to feel heard, valued, and to be able to make their own decisions in their families, communities, and societies (Smetana & Villalobos, 2009). Minority youth, or those belonging to marginalized groups, express particular desires of being heard and valued as citizens (Hope & Spencer, 2017). In Peruvian culture generally, gender roles have long been tied to male domination of public spaces and civic discourse (Alcalde, 2010). Tacna's history, however, contrasts with the broader political marginalization

of women in Peru as *la mujer tacneña* (the Tacna woman) is lauded as the guardian of national identity and a paradigm of the Peruvian citizen. During the period of Chilean rule, these women upheld Peruvian traditions, secretly taught the national anthem to young children, and illegally kept Peruvian flags (García & Guardia, 2002). This history is not only openly discussed and taught in schools but also maintained in present rituals. For example, only local women hold the large Peruvian flag that is the focal point of the parade celebrating the city's reincorporation into Peru. These adolescent girls may therefore have focused on human rights in connection to identity because they were asserting both a developmental desire as well as a historically supported, gender-based call for a greater voice in their societies. Importantly, this theme was found in responses from girls in all three of the schools in lower resource areas of the city, including with respondents who were not born in Tacna. Local civic contexts citizenship may therefore be particularly salient in forming ideas about human rights.

Discussion

This study investigated how youth in Tacna, Peru, construct understandings of human rights. PVEST was used to explore these adolescents' conceptual and practical understandings of human rights by focusing on individual meaning making. These respondents distinguished between how they defined human rights and how they discussed these rights in practice: While rights are protections for all humanity because people inherently exploit and discriminate against each other, the actual enactment of these rights requires greater awareness and advocacy. In making rights a reality, respondents emphasized individual action and awareness. Their understandings of human rights also focused on social rights—as opposed to political or economic ones—which may be linked to the developmental salience of interpersonal relations.

Drawing on PVEST, local contexts can be understood as contributing to these adolescents' ideas about human rights. Contextual factors (e.g., cultural legacies, experiences of inequality) are first interpreted by individuals in their formulation of understandings and coping responses. In this study, a small group of female respondents explicitly linked identity to rights and respect in society. They made a connection between who they are, how society treats them, and what human rights are. These assertions may be understood as coping responses to issues in their local context; human rights, which include gender equality, would be especially important for young women developing and forming emergent identities in a society with deep gender inequality and where official political and civic roles have been male-dominated (Alcalde, 2010; Theidon, 2013). In addition, these young women may draw from local context where the historical role of women in Tacna can support their right to a voice in society. In a similar finding, Grabe and Dutt (2015) show how women in Nicaragua draw on local cultural histories, but then appeal to and appropriate the universality of human rights discourses in their movements for greater recognition and power within their communities. Focusing on postconflict youth, this finding demonstrates the potential of considering local context and history in promoting human rights consciousness. While adolescents in Tacna may not have direct connections with the past conflict, they draw on local histories and discourses that may be used to effectively promote efficacy, a critical element of human rights consciousness.

A developmental framework may help further explain the salient themes about human rights in these adolescents' responses. While these respondents did not specifically discuss respect within the classroom context or local community as a concrete example of human rights, this interpersonal focus can be a reflection of the emerging importance of social roles, relationships, and positions during this

time in the life course. In middle adolescence, individuals increasingly interact with and are aware of the broader society as begin to form senses of self in relation to these social systems and structures (Erikson, 1968; Meeus, 2011). Applying PVEST, these developmental contexts influence how youth make meaning of societal systems and ideals (Spencer, 2006), which may include human rights. This process could underlie why these adolescents describe human rights as connected to social cohesion and as involving a need for greater awareness and advocacy. It may also shape the particular content of their descriptions, like the prevalence of rights to self-expression and liberty.

Further contextualizing the results, it is possible that the emphasis on individual responsibility emerged from the lack of concrete connection between human rights and daily experiences or local contexts. Human rights in practice were primarily described in relation to other settings not connected to the respondents' daily lives. These descriptions drew from international situations like child slavery in African countries or discussed rights in general terms like the right to water. None of the respondents invoked specific cases or talked about human rights activism, despite the fact that these are salient topics in Peru and in Tacna (e.g., Kemp, Bond, Franks, & Cote, 2010; Theidon, 2013).

The understanding of human rights as enacted by individuals parallels Doise, Spini, and Clémence (1999) finding that youth in countries with greater human rights issues were more likely to view discrimination and injustice as inevitable, while feeling that states were ineffective in upholding human rights in practice. This perspective on human rights deviates from the philosophical argument that these rights are fundamental freedoms that exist universally and are responsibilities of the state to enforce (Spini & Doise, 2005). It also complicates theoretical separation of positive rights (those that require action and/or the provision of a service) and negative rights (that require others to not interfere in one's actions) because these respondents define human rights by interweaving these two ideas (Donnelly, 2013). In other words, their responses indicate a perspective that human rights protect one from discrimination and injustice (a negative right), but only if individual action demands that these are enforced or provided for actively (a positive right). The divide between negative and positive rights is reframed as an inseparable connection in which the protective power of human rights must be enacted by individuals' demanding these rights be upheld.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The current finding extends the meaning making detailed by the previous literature to a postconflict country. In these settings, such a perspective on human rights among youth may be especially problematic in the context of government initiatives to promote human rights and build trust in the state's capacity to serve its citizens. The Peruvian CVR's call for greater respect for and education about human rights is a common theme in transitional justice processes as countries seek to address the roots and legacies of the past conflict. Within contexts where discrimination and injustice proliferate, however, youth may become disillusioned that rights are not realized, rather than bolstered by the idea that rights are for all and based in inherent human dignity (Holland & Martin, 2014). These young citizens describe individual agency as a critical element in enacting human rights, but they may also ascribe fault to citizens themselves for not advocating for or for being ignorant of human rights. If the path to overall societal well-being is through promoting greater human rights consciousness among its youth, then a greater connection between human rights and concrete, local realities is needed (Bellino, 2015). These adolescents asserted that individuals must be active in supporting human rights but could not provide clear frameworks for how they themselves could do this or the historical development of

human rights in Peru. Few respondents connected human rights to Peru's history or to state–citizen relations, and none mentioned any of the intended reforms (e.g., lessons in school curricula on terrorism and human rights abuses). Most likely, these youth lack any consistent narrative because Peruvian society and its education system have no clear way to talk about the past, and particularly human rights issues.

Transitional justice reforms have created spaces for these Tacna adolescents to learn about human rights in school, but the lack of integration with history and present reality in Peru may limit the development of deeper human rights consciousness. This integration is not currently supported since there is neither an explicit mandate nor part of the national curriculum that teaches about human rights abuses in Peru or the past conflict (Ministerio de Educación, 2014; Paulson, 2010a, 2010b). In Tacna, historical narratives about the conflict are not present in the broader civil society because the impact was never directly felt in the city. While youth in conflict-affected areas may encounter and process narratives about it (Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy, & Longman, 2008), in regions like Tacna, direct connections to human rights abuses in the past and their continuing legacies may be a necessary part of supporting the development of human rights consciousness.

Situating human rights instruction and socialization in local sociohistorical realities could help support the development of human rights consciousness. Specifically, it may support an orientation toward human rights in relation to concrete issues that these nascent citizens could take action to change. Schools offer one area to integrate concepts of human rights into local contexts and understandings of Peru's history. More explicit curriculum and service-learning programs could provide adolescents with spaces to take action, while teachers could serve as gatekeepers to linking the content of human rights education to the lives of the students (Thornton, 1991). This possibility is bolstered by these adolescents' assertions that human rights must be advocated for and actively promoted; they see a need to enact human rights but are not provided with concrete and localized spaces for action.

A final implication for the democratic stability of postconflict societies is the connection between understanding human rights and thinking about citizenship. Though these adolescents do not directly talk about this role of citizenship, there is evidence that ideas about human rights and citizenship, including within the Peruvian context, are connected (see Torney-Purta & Barber, 2011; Velez, 2017). Within a perspective on human societies as plagued by injustice and discrimination, fostering civic participation is even more vital. If human rights have to be enacted, then citizens must be active and believe that they have the ability to act in this way. Postconflict schools and civil society could thus engage and involve youth as active members of their communities to promote positive civic outcomes and encourage the formation of human rights consciousness.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study investigated a new context within postconflict societies in order to extend work on the development of human rights consciousness in youth. The findings, however, should be honed through more research at this intersection. For example, the sample was chosen using a purposeful design, which limits generalization. A comparative approach across multiple cities within Peru could lead to a richer understanding. The sample size was also chosen for the purpose of an exploratory study about beliefs and attitudes (see Arnett & Jensen, 2015), but subsequent investigations could follow similar procedures with a broader sample.

Future work could also continue to build a contextualized framework for relating human rights and citizenship development in postconflict settings. This study focused on the internal psychological processes as youth develop concepts of human rights, but this approach is limited in that factors in schools, homes, and the local community are studied indirectly. A next step would be to explore actions and beliefs of parents, teachers, and other socializing agents to help develop transgenerational explanations. Similarly, human rights instruction in these schools could be more deeply studied in order to compare students' perspectives with the messages in educational settings. Studying these actors and influences would complement both the current findings and work on Peru's education system and national curriculum (Paulson, 2010b).

Conclusion

While there is no guiding psychological theory on the development of support for human rights (McFarland, 2015), the current study offers empirical support for the possibility of employing developmental understandings to literature on human rights consciousness in youth. Spencer's PVEST focuses on how young people in postconflict settings form ideas about human rights not simply through socialization in the home and school, but rather by interpretation and response as part of developmentally salient challenges. This study also indicates that knowledge of rights alone may not be sufficient to build human rights consciousness. Rights concerning identity and liberty are salient issues that could be leveraged, but currently in Peru, these are not integrated with the history of conflict or present human rights issues. For youth in areas of postconflict societies removed from the past conflict this challenge may be even greater since direct legacies and personal memories of the past human rights issues may not be as locally salient. While postconflict societies often seek to (re)build stable democracies that are oriented toward promoting human rights, the current study suggests that if the path is through youth, then situating human rights in development and in context could be necessary for programming to support the formation of human rights consciousness.

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