Rebel Researchers: Young Ethnic Minority Women Research Youth Political Involvement

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Do youth care about politics? How about young people from neighbourhoods where poverty is commonplace?

As a researcher from a prestigious university, it can be difficult to get honest answers to questions like these. Rys Farthing, Barnett Research Fellow at the University of Oxford's Department of Social Policy and Intervention, has found an elegant solution to this problem. Want to know what youth think about politics? Ask their friends.

The "Rebel Researchers" is a project between Oxford University and Toynbee Hall, in which 12 young women from ethnic minority backgrounds are being trained as social researchers. The 15 to 18 year old girls live in Tower Hamlets, a highly deprived borough in East London, and have been conducting focus groups since last October.

"As a researcher, it's gold dust," says Farthing. "We've been speaking to some of the most interesting young people from a researcher's perspective. These are not the voices you usually hear and not the voices when young people talk about politics."

Farthing and three of the Rebel Researchers will be presenting their findings at IAFOR's European Conference on Politics, Economics and Law, being held from July 3 to 6, 2014, in Brighton, UK.

"Isn't it what old, rich, white guys do?" says one youth what asked what politics are. The youth are defining politics and political spaces for themselves. They are questioning whether it's possible to become involved in politics or even express their own ideologies.

"These are quite genuine discussions about why it is that young people feel that politics are not for them," says Farthing. "These are descriptions from incredibly marginalized young people about what the barriers to political participation are."

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