Schooled to the Streets? Exploring the Relationship between K-12 Educational Experiences and Early Careers in Activism

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SCHOoled to the streets?
EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN K-12 EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND EARLY CAREERS IN ACTIVISM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY
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CHICAGO, IL
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ABSTRACT

Since the late eighteenth century, organizing and activism have been part of the urban landscape, from the labor organizing of Eugene Debs in the early twentieth century to the community organizing work of Saul Alinsky during the 1950s and 1960s. The development of community organizers is strongly tied to local institutions such as factories, houses of worship, and schools. For many youths in Chicago, schools often become the sites of political and social awakening and lead to activism beyond the schoolhouse. For example, during the 1960s youth in Chicago led school walkouts in response to educational inequity for students of color. Within the current context of urban education scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and community organizers alike agree that the perspectives of youth are essential to education policy and practice. Yet youth and young adults are rarely engaged as creators of knowledge. This study engaged 14 young-adult activists/organizers in semi-structured interviews to explore the ways in which schooling and space impacted paths into early careers in activism.
CHAPTER ONE
SONS OF CHICAGO

This study is a response to several aspects of my life as a student, scholar, community organizer, and proud son of Chicago. Now at the age of 32, I find myself existing within drastically different worlds. For the last ten years, I have worked as a Community Organizer on the southwest side of Chicago, in a community area where my tia and cousins live. As a Community Organizer, I have worked on a wide range of education campaigns, from high-stakes standardized test opt-outs to after-school programming. While I hold sincere critiques of the nonprofit sector, community organizing has allowed me to define my life’s work in partnership with generations of young people and community elders.

For over a decade, I have worked at the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) as a Youth Organizer. I have worked with countless students and educators in this role, mostly throughout the southwest side of Chicago. In 2015, a young man I had gotten to know over the years was killed across the street from the elementary school he aged out of the previous summer. The term aging out is commonly used in Chicago for students who have not met the requirements needed to graduate elementary school. Once these students have reached the age of 15, they are effectively deemed too old to be with the general student body of an elementary school and are then transferred to their local high school. Just a few weeks into his high school career, this young man was killed only steps away from his former elementary school. The young man’s death was not the first I dealt with, both in my professional and personal
experiences; however, the fact that his death occurred across the street from his elementary school stirred in my very core. The reality was that this young man, also a son of Chicago, was not much different from many other young people in Chicago, including myself. His death pushed me to investigate the relationships between schools and society and the schooling experiences that influence students’ paths.

Many questions have loomed over my personal life, graduate studies, and the general theme of the current study. What are the experiences that push students out of schools? What are the experiences that encourage students to become civically engaged young adults? During my time within the academy, I have investigated how schools are race-making spaces and how policymakers have sought to dismantle centuries of inequity (Rich, 1996). Critical education scholars have noted that while schools can be spaces for family and community uplift, they have also served as sites of oppression (Watkins, 2001; Morris, 2005; Morris 2016). Schools are sites where poor and minority youth are oppressed, channeled into prisons, and hyper-surveilled (Giroux, 2006, 2013; Kupchik et al., 2009). They can also serve as settings where young people are encouraged to become civic actors in their communities (Ayers, 2003; Ginwright, 2008; Levinson, 1999, 2012). In these environments, educators encourage their students to be leaders in their communities. In my own experiences, as a Chicago Public School student and as a community organizer, I have been educated by and worked with educators who were active in social justice projects. Schools are not necessarily proverbial ladders out of poverty or oppressive deathscapes. They can simultaneously be sites of oppression and of opportunity for students to participate within the public sphere (Arendt, 2013). In an attempt to honor my work as a community organizer and my studies as a graduate student, this dissertation study explores how
educational experiences may influence youth to become active in civil society through activism and organizing.

**Problem Statement**

Over the last 30 years, urban and rural communities have unleashed market ideologies on schools and schooling, commonly referred to as neoliberal education reform. Under neoliberal education reform, educational operations (previously owned by local, state, and federal governments) are opened to private vendors and corporate philanthropists. From school management (charter and contract schools) to custodial and lunch services, neoliberal education reform has signaled the removal of public control of schooling toward privately managed companies (Reckhow, 2013; Trujillo, 2013; Wong, 2011; Viteritti, 2009; Karp, 2010). Neoliberal education reform was ushered in during a period in which the general public’s perception was that public education had failed in its mission to educate the nation’s future leaders (Woodside, 1989; Viteritti, 2009). Under perceptions of public-school failure, policymakers initiated sweeping reforms to schooling in the largest districts including Chicago (Carl, 2008), Boston (Knoester, 2011), New York (Rogers, 2009; Shiller, 2011), and Los Angeles (Peralta, 2015), with similar policies later taking root in rural and suburban areas as well. Scholars and activists have critiqued corporate-style education reform, explicitly questioning the impact on historically marginalized communities (Lipman, 2015; Morales-Doyle & Gutstein, 2019). Scholars have noted that neoliberal education reform has resulted in accumulation by disposition and the continuation of the educational opportunity gap for poor communities and communities of color (Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Buras, Randels, ya Salaam, 2010; Buras, 2011; Stovall, 2006; Ewing, 2018).
One of the most prominent strategies enacted under neoliberal education reform is private investment in public schools and their surrounding communities. Nationally, investments from outside providers have been in areas mostly available to middle-income families (Henig & Rich, 2004), leading many to question whether efforts to fix public education are intended to increase investment in marketable geographies that are only available to upper and middle-class families, while promoting disinvestment in poor communities (Cucchiara, 2013; Lipman, 2015). Lipman (2015) notes that “Divestment in African American communities and their schools has opened them up as multimillion-dollar investment opportunities for real estate developers and charter school operators … It is part of a strategy of state abandonment” (p. 61). Under neoliberal reform, the educational landscape within many urban areas has been reshaped by massive school closures in poor communities, disinvestment from teacher pension funds, the expansion of high-stakes testing, and no-excuse charter schools (Dishon & Goodman, 2017).

Moreover, within the context of neoliberal education reform, youth face a complex landscape. On one hand, urban youth are made responsible for their educational opportunities (Suspitsyna, 2010; Phillippo, 2019). On the other hand, youth are positioned as hyper-exploitable consumers (Rubin, 2012; Conner, 2016). Speaking to the constrained agency that youth face, Rosen (2019) notes: “For youth, neoliberalism simultaneously creates possibilities for consumer agency while constraining possibilities for democratic agency. The tension between different forms of agency and neoliberal subjectivities is a result of a neoliberal approach to governance” (p. 1036). The educational marketplace that youth must navigate too often misattributes failure to make the best choice to individuals rather than to systemic inequity. Despite the constrained agency under neoliberal education reform, youth (and communities) have taken on corporate
reform and won many battles to maintain public accountability for education policy and practice (Stovall, 2006; Pulido et al., 2013; Warren & Goodman, 2018).

Within the neoliberal landscape, poor minority youth are removed and alienated from decision-making spaces (Kirshner, 2007; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Gordon, 2009; Kirshner and Geil, 2010; York & Kirshner, 2015). Despite this, youth organizing efforts seek to insert youth voices into policy and practice. Kirshner (2007) notes that youth activism groups typically seek to build four characteristics: “collective problem solving, youth-adult interaction, exploration of alternative frames for identity, and bridges to academic and civic institutions” (p. 367). More recent youth organizing efforts seek to address a wide range of topics including access to public transportation (Conner & Zaino, 2014), school resources (Taines, 2012), curriculum (Cabrera et al., 2013; Conner, 2010, 2015), immigration reform (Corrunker, 2012; Nicholls, 2013), trans and queer rights (Elliott, 2016; Erlick, 2018), and school discipline (Bradley, 2015). A powerful example of youth organizing is UNIDOS (United Non-Discriminatory Individuals in Demanding Our Studies). UNIDOS is a group of students that fought to protect an ethnic studies course in Tucson, Arizona (Cabrera et al., 2013). The students fought to protect the course because it was one of the few spaces within the school that their cultural backgrounds were celebrated. UNIDOS exemplifies the significance and impact of contemporary youth organizing on the education landscape.

Youth organizing itself is not new to education and social landscapes; rather, the United States has a long history of youth activism (Haas, 2018). Fights for desegregation and bilingual education during the 1950s and 1960s had strong youth support (Van Dyke, 1998; Franklin, 2003; Franklin, 2014; Kinchen, 2016). Since the movements of the 1960s, youth organizing
efforts have changed along with the sociopolitical landscape. Scholars such as Fisher (2012) have recognized that throughout the 20th century, youth activism has pulled away from engagement with electoral politics (via political campaigns) and has shifted toward civic engagement through social justice issues such as gender and race equity. The distinction here is that contemporary youth activism tends to follow the progress of social justice issues rather than investment in political candidates, excluding perhaps the presidential campaign and election of former President Barack Obama.

Historically, youth organizing has roots within traditional community organizing models and social change movements (Coy, 2013; Taines, 2012; Almeida, 2019). Community organizing, defined through Alinsky (1989) and Chambers (2003), prioritizes building the leadership of community members towards collective action. According to the principles of community organizing, the collective action taken by activists should seek to improve the lived realities of the whole and include a diverse range of stakeholders (Kirshner, 2007; Kirshner and Geil, 2010; Kolers, 2016). Similarly, youth organizers typically seek to develop youth leaders who identify aspects of their educational (or lived) environments to work on improving collectively (Conner, 2015). Conner and Ziano (2014) note that defining features of youth organizing and activism include altering power relations between youth and school policy, addressing institutionalized racism, and promoting social justice. Unlike movements of the past, current youth organizing efforts operate in a distinct sociopolitical landscape.

The current sociopolitical landscape that complicates the development of youth organizers is the constrained agency described above. Three examples of ongoing youth organizing efforts help to demonstrate how youth, within the neoliberal landscape, have pushed
against constrained notions of agency toward social change. First, Teens Take Charge is a youth-led organization based in the Bronx, New York City. Teens Take Charge works to advocate for summer youth employment, race equity in education policy, and to provide advocacy toolkits through their online platform (Teens Take Charge, 2020). Halfway across the country, in Chicago, GoodKids MadCity (GKMC) works to reduce normalized gun violence in communities of color. GKMC recently expanded its work to include providing emergency relief funds for youth displaced by COVID-19 (Sherry, 2020). Finally, on an international level, high profile youth environmental justice advocates Greta Thunberg and Isra Hirsi are elbowing their way into international discussions of climate change (Rowlatt, 2020; Reiss, 2020). The aforementioned youth organizing efforts do not confine their power to bureaucratically sanctioned avenues for expression; rather, each group is organized around issues they self-identified. One of the consequences of youth deciding their advocacy issues and the modes of organizing is tension with decision makers who, through neoliberal adult-centered frames, seek to maintain control over how youth express their voices (Cameron, 2007; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Conner, 2016).

Recent iterations of youth activism led to several important reflections. While current youth organizing movements can locate themselves within historical struggles for social justice, they find themselves in a very different sociopolitical landscape. Within the context of neoliberal education reform, youth are positioned with constrained notions of agency. They are equipped with the ability to choose schools and subsequently bear the responsibility of making the wrong choice; simultaneously, they are alienated from formal decision-making spaces. The development of contemporary young adult activists is colored by the tension between neoliberal notions of youth agency and historical struggles for social justice. In an attempt to explore the
tension between neoliberal education reform and youth civic engagement, this study engaged young adult activists as producers of knowledge and experts of their lived environments.

**Present Study**

The present discussion is concerned with exploring the potential relationship between schooling experiences and the development of young adult activists. To orient my investigation, I review several bodies of existing literature relating to the central focus of youth, young adult activism, and schooling experiences. First, I review several bodies of literature including urban spaces, urban education, civic education, the history of youth activism, and identity projects. I conclude the following chapter by describing the Critical Youth Studies (CYS) conceptual framework my investigation utilized to center on the most knowledgeable stakeholders on the topic, young adult activists. My investigation utilized an interpretive phenomenological methodology to shape study design and focus on how young adult activists make meaning of their schooling experiences. I explore the possible relationship between schooling and activism through demographic surveys and in-depth interviews with 30 young adult activists from six community areas in Chicago.
CHAPTER TWO

SCHOOLING IN SPACE

This chapter surveys several bodies of literature that pertain to the topic of inquiry. Specifically, I consider the urban social conditions from which youth activists emerge. This literature brings forth critical discussions regarding the structural inequity and spatial isolation that characterize many metropolitan areas and the youth that live within them. Next, building on my analysis of urban spaces, I review the urban educational conditions of youth and consider how those conditions may inform the development of young adult activists. Next, I discuss two prominent visions of civic education. One vision contends that exposure to formal civics courses is the optimal space for youth to become active in civil society; the other advocates for all teachers (rather than civics courses exclusively) to encourage students to become active members of their communities.

Following my discussion of civics education, I describe the history of youth activism and connect this history to more recent youth organizing efforts that promote a social justice agenda. The final section of this literature review considers scholarship on identity projects, and how study participants may have developed activist identity projects throughout the period of their K-12 education. I conclude this chapter by describing how my Critical Youth Studies (CYS) conceptual framework offers my investigation the opportunity to gain insight from the most knowledgeable stakeholders on the topic, young adult activists. CYS as a conceptual framework
focuses my attention on the ways in which youth make meaning of their experiences through an asset-based approach to youth culture.

**Literature Review**

**Urban Spaces and Geographies**

Reviewing scholarship that describes the social conditions of urban areas, (and, therefore, the social environments of urban youth), this section illustrates the spatial isolation and structural racism that may influence the lived experiences of youth in urban spaces. In this context, space is understood as both physical and metaphorical. Notions of space encompass both the physical composition of communities and the mental spaces that communities develop. Scholars have argued that space and geographies are relational, political, constructed, and changing (Dougherty, 2004; Sassen, 2004; Tate, 2008; DeLuca and Rosenblatt, 2011; Sugrue, 2014; Neumann, 2016; Austen & Gordon, 2018). Therefore, where youth and their communities exist spatially within the urban landscape influences their overall quality of life.

The spatial isolation of poor communities and communities of color has been documented extensively. Dans (2014) and Fernandez (2012) note that Black and brown communities’ educational and social experiences were connected and influenced by their locations within Chicago’s segregated housing landscape. Additionally, Tate (2008) uses the case studies of the Dallas and St. Louis metropolitan areas to illustrate how housing development and employment have further isolated poor communities and communities of color over the last half-century. Employment opportunities within urban areas greatly inform who has greater access to city space. As cities invest in luring new industries that require professional and advanced degrees, they simultaneously create avenues for upper-middle-class communities to
have a greater stake in dictating finite city resources through their ability to increase local tax bases. Similarly, as housing developments cater to upper- and middle-class residents, mixed-income housing plans are difficult for poor communities to navigate (Rosenblatt, 2011). The development of urban and rural spaces results in a geography of opportunity, one in which wealthy groups have greater access to employment, public transportation, and better-funded schools. Conversely, there is a geography of dis-opportunity in which historically marginalized communities are exposed to higher poverty rates, violence, housing insecurity, and educational inequity (Buendia et al., 2004; Massey, 2004; de Souza Briggs, 2005; Tate, 2008). The sociopolitical landscape that urban youth are born into, wealthy or under-resourced, often dictates the kinds of access they have to mental health resources, their level of housing insecurity, educational supports, and their exposure to trauma (Massy and Denton, 1993; Orfield et al., 1996; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Deluca and Rosenblatt, 2011).

The histories of urban spaces are far from a monolith. Yet, since the middle of the 20th century, many urban areas have been reshaped by post-war economic decline, urban renewal projects, and neoliberal education reform (Dougherty, 2007, 2012; Shiller, 2011; Sugrue, 2014; Phillips-Fein, 2017). Cities such as Philadelphia (Cucchiara, 2013), New York (Phillips-Fein, 2017), Chicago (Hirsch, 1983, Lipman, 2013, 2015), Detroit (Mirel, 1993; Rury & Cassell, 1993), Milwaukee (Levine and Zipp, 1993), Boston (Formisano, 1991; Mora & Christianakis, 2011), and Pittsburg (Neumann, 2016) initiated projects to revitalize their economies and remake their former industrial landscapes (Hirsch; 1983; Petty, 2013; Makris, 2015). Many cities developed joint ventures between local and federal policymakers, private businesses, and real estate developers to renew the urban landscape and lure middle-class residents. Neumann (2016)
refers to public-private partnerships as growth coalitions. In Pittsburgh, the Growth Coalition spent $103 million dollars to convert a former industrial corridor into a shopping center for affluent communities. The $103 million dollars was more than the city had spent on developing the surrounding impoverished communities in the previous 30 years combined (Neumann, 2016). Renewal projects include building highways, expanding universities and medical centers, and remaking cities into service sectors for multinational firms (Hirsch, 1983; Sassen, 2004; Tate, 2008; Fernandez, 2012). Pittsburgh’s investment in becoming a knowledge economy has resulted in the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center becoming the largest employer in the city.

The process of renewing the urban landscape has also resulted in debates surrounding these spaces and who has the right to the city. Right, within this context, refers to the level of accessibility residents (regardless of their socio-economic background) have to publicly funded development. Evoking the work of philosopher Henri Lefebvre, Lipman (2013) remarks that unleashing market logic on urban spaces warrants concern regarding who has the right to the renewed city. Many urban renewal projects have negatively impacted poor communities. Impoverished communities and communities of color have been relocated from one area that has been identified as marketable to another (Goering, 2005; Goetz et al., 2005; Fernandez, 2012; Lipman, 2013, 2015; Stern, 2018).

Perhaps one of the best examples of a city that has seen how urban renewal projects have negatively impacted poor communities of color is Chicago. Hirsch (1983), Fernandez (2012), and Austen & Gordan (2018) illustrate how Chicago’s highway construction, university expansion, and public housing projects allowed for business, political, and real estate brokers to spatially isolate poor African American and Latinx communities. Using the example of public
housing, Hirsch (1983) asserts that the level of collaboration between local, federal, business, and community elites was akin to creating a “second ghetto.” Unlike the “first ghetto,” which may have been engineered through low levels of collaboration between powerbrokers, the second ghetto was more extensive and geographically spread out throughout the city. Chicago’s post-World War II renewal was carefully planned to cement existing racial, ethnic, and class divisions into the city’s landscape (Hirsch, 1983; Fernandez, 2012). For urban youth from poor communities and communities of color, urban renewal projects have often left them reacting to policies that position them as the least desirable residents. Urban renewal projects have also included the reshaping of urban schooling, which I will explore in the following section that describes recent scholarship on urban education policy and practice.

Physical location within urban communities is not the only type of space youth occupy. Scholars such as Rosen (2019) and Emdin (2016) highlight how space can also be metaphysical. Rosen (2019) advances our understanding of space by remarking that notions of space should include both external factors and internal forces that create a person’s or group’s sense of location and attachment. For youth who experience social isolation in urban settings, the development of internal spaces can become transformative and offer a refuge from the inequity surrounding them. Rosen argues that the development of internal spaces “including the intellectual, emotional, social, and temporal are the interactional sites for various features of the youths’ identities” (p.1040). One example of metaphysical spaces is groups of young people that connect over a shared hobby such as video gaming. While the act of video gaming is physical, the connections and networks built between video game players extend beyond the tangible devices they are using to create the space. Additionally, Emdin (2016) notes that for youth in
segregated and under-resourced schools, creating emotional spaces allows them to move beyond the immediacy of their physical environments into areas ripe with possibilities of what their surroundings can be. The creation of emotional, or metaphysical, spaces may allow urban students to investigate their social conditions and imagine urban landscapes beyond histories of inequity.

**Urban Education Policy and Practice**

The education of urban youth is intertwined with urban policy, economic segregation, geographic isolation, and racism. The development of urban education is a story of contestation, inequity, and constant reform (Tyack, 1974; Kozol, 1991; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Rury, 1999; Danns, 2014). Schools do not exist in vacuums; rather, students’ formal educational experiences are linked to the sociopolitical environments that build and sustain them. Therefore, this section considers several key features of urban education policy and practice. First, I consider historical issues of inequity of both material and metaphysical resources. I then consider a common neoliberal remedy to inequitable schooling: school choice. I argue that school choice models position youth in high stakes and complex educational landscapes that are compounded by histories of inequity. Finally, I conclude this section by briefly considering two visions for civics education that seek to encourage students to become civically engaged young adults.

Education scholars have established differing and unequal schooling experiences for students of color. Educational inequity, which includes disparities in funding, policing, curricular offerings, and disinvestment, has a worse impact on Black, brown, and poor communities than their affluent and white counterparts (Daniel, 1980; Lareau, 2002; Watkins, 2001; Kozal, 1991, 2005; Stovall, 2006; Brantlinger, 1992; Morris, 2005; Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Milner, 2012;
Morris, 2016; Harper, 2015; Noguera, 2011; Strickland-Dixon, 2011; Robles, 2009). For example, Black and brown students are more likely to be punitively punished in schools and experience early incarceration; scholars have figuratively titled this phenomenon as the school-to-prison pipeline (Reyes, 2011; Gregory et al., 2011; Giroux, 2003; Saltman & Gabbard, 2010, Howard, 2013; Noguera, 2003, Irby, 2013, 2014, 2014a). Additionally, Black and brown youth often lack access to relational resources within schools. Relational resources include access to restorative justice staff, extracurricular activities, and customizable curricula, “which are less often recognized as valuable in comparison to material resources” (Irby, 2014, p. 784).

Interpersonal relationships within schools influence how students experience schooling and how they come to understand their location within society. Students who have positive relationships with school staff often feel more empowered to become active within the school environment and beyond (Suad et al., 2003).

The historical educational inequity experienced by Black and brown students is further compounded by complex neoliberal school policies. As cities have ushered in new coalitions to revitalize urban landscapes, market logic and neoliberal education reform have also reshaped school policy. Like urban housing, urban schooling is also a lucrative marketplace. Lipman (2013) remarks that “in the United States alone, K-12 education is a $650 billion dollar economic sector” (p. 61). Under the guise of choice, cities have opened schools to private ventures, philanthropy, charters, vouchers, and alternative accreditation teaching programs (Buras, 2011; Buras et al., 2010). Families in these cities are now expected to navigate complicated school choice models.
An integral part of urban renewal has been the ability to sell city schools to young, affluent professionals (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Cucchiara, 2013). Makris (2015) comments that under urban renewal projects, students who live in fiscally neglected neighborhoods can gain access to middle-class schools through mixed-income housing developments. However, many mixed-income housing plans require low-income families to agree to drug testing, curfews, and cleanliness rules that their affluent counterparts are not required to consent to, thereby creating spatial gaps (Makris, 2015). Remaking cities for young, affluent communities is a process commonly referred to as gentrification. Gentrification is “an economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners and renters reinvest in fiscally neglected neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversion, and the construction of new housing stock” (Makris, 2015, p. 8). Within Chicago, the Renaissance 2010 educational policy and the Plan for Transformation resulted in massive school closings and mixed-income housing to gentrify Chicago neighborhoods (Lipman 2013). In the process of gentrifying communities, schools have begun to mirror the priorities of affluent families (Squires et al., 2005; Cucchiara, 2013).

In the context of neoliberal education reform and market logic within schooling, urban students face compounded issues of historical inequity and newer forms of constrained agency masked by notions of choice. Many urban students in poor communities are increasingly positioned to make difficult decisions about their educational futures within complex school choice models; a popular neoliberal remedy for families located near failing schools. Within school choice models, youth and families are allowed to attend schools located outside of their local communities. Some argue that school choice will enable students and families to choose
schools that best suit the interests of students. Others argue that the school choice movement is merely one more manifestation of neoliberalism to move a public good (schooling) into the hands of private operators (Aggarwal, 2015). Within these models, students and families must often navigate a complicated set of options when exercising school choice. For youth, the pressure to choose the correct option informs the development of their self-worth, merit, and intellectual capacities (Phillippo, 2019). Burdick-Will (2017) notes,

> In lower-income neighborhoods, kids in search of better options dispersed to dozens of other schools, often commuting alone for miles … When the neighborhood median income dropped to less than $25,000, students dispersed to an average of 13 different schools … We clearly show that the belief that where one lives determines where one goes to school is not the reality in Chicago or an increasing number of U.S. cities … You have kids scattering everywhere … We think of children in poor neighborhoods as ‘stuck.’ But they’re not stuck in one geographic place … They are stuck navigating a complicated and far-flung school system. (p. 47)

Therefore, the use of urban schools as urban amenities and school choice models provide two examples of how youth and families are positioned within the urban landscape. While histories of inequity lay the foundation for current school failings, poor communities and communities of color are further spatially isolated by the implementation of neoliberal education reform and school choice models.

### Schooling for Democratic Practice

The experiences of young people within urban settings shape them as citizens. This section considers existing scholarship on the relationship between deliberate, curricular civic education and the development of civically engaged young adults. In the context of neoliberal education reform, public education is a complex terrain since school choice, and notions of collective community action, continue to be co-opted by venture capitalists and conservative policymakers (Apple & Oliver, 1998). The ongoing discussion is not directly concerned with
civics education, but rather the broader schooling experiences that influence youth to become civically engaged. Therefore, this section considers two specific themes within civics education; civics education to participate in the dominant society and civics education that addresses systemic inequity through everyday pedagogy. Ultimately, this section does not endorse either vision of civics education. This section intends to describe further the complex (and sometimes competing) visions for urban education and civically engaged youth and young adults.

The first vision for civic education aims to equip students with knowledge of governmental processes and the ability to operate in mainstream society. The following quote exemplifies this vision: “Civic knowledge is clearly and directly correlated with higher levels of political participation, expression of democratic values including toleration, stable political attitudes, and adoption of ‘enlightened self-interest’” (Levinson, 2012, p. 33). Others, such as Raia (2012), Jamieson (2013), and Journell (2015), offer similar arguments that encourage civics courses as part of the mandated curriculum, partnerships between political scientists and schools, and measured participation in nonprofit or governmental organizations. The crux of the arguments presented by these scholars and others is that one of the most important goals for mandated civics courses is teaching youth how to code-switch from their community norms into what society accepts as respectable discourse. An example of code-switching is encouraging youth to dress and speak in ways that the dominant white and adult culture deems acceptable, such as changing their usual vernacular to language deemed more appropriate by adults. When educators teach youth that their elected officials will only respect them if they use respectable language, it places an undue burden on them, rather than holding the elected official accountable to be a better representative of their youth constituents. The folly of teaching youth from
historically marginalized communities to code-switch is that it prioritizes silencing community knowledge and norms for dominant society and respectability politics. That is, when educators encourage students to prioritize the dominant culture, historically marginalized communities are asked to silence their non-credentialed norms for state-sanctioned modes of civic engagement. This process results in the continued marginalization for groups that do not fit the dominant society and the reproduction of spatial isolation.

The second vision for civics education emphasizes democratic practices in everyday pedagogy. One example is Ayers (2003), who argues for building civic engagement into all courses regardless of the specific content area; noting, “I think that’s more powerful … to have a well-educated American population to challenge, to make democracy real, to teach kids that they can make a change happen, that they can be decision-makers, that they can make their communities better” (p. 23). Similarly, the works of Emdin (2016) and Vilson (2014) help draw out the distinctions between the two visions for civic education. Emdin (2016) is a science teacher who infuses community cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) into his curriculum to bridge the space between schools and historically marginalized communities. One example of Emdin’s infusion of community cultural capital into his course content is the creation of science-based hip-hop rap battles to connect with his students. Similarly, Vilson (2016) uses his personal experiences, being of Afro-Latino descent, to enrich his math courses and to connect with his New York City students, many of whom share a racial and ethnic background. Vilson encourages educators to co-create classroom norms with students to create “classroom homes.” Vilson and Emdin’s efforts address the second vision for civics education as they focus on altering daily normed practices with youth rather than teaching them to perform within the
dominant society. Emdin’s hip-hop science rap battles and Vilson’s push for classroom homes each communicate to their students that hip-hop and urban slang do not have to exist in different realms. Instead, they model to students that the public sphere (of classrooms and schools) can be altered by community knowledge and action. Ultimately, whether through formal civics courses or some other series of experiences, the current discussion is interested in exploring how each may contribute to the development of young adult activists.

Agents of Change

Whether through schools, nonprofits, community centers, or churches, youth-based activism remains an important avenue for entering civil society. Most youth organizing efforts must navigate a dominant society which undervalues their contributions and culture and fosters taken for granted assumptions of young people (Franklin, 2014). York and Kirshner (2015) note that youth activists often become exhausted, having to dispel deficit-based myths about youth before being considered mature enough to engage in conversations with adults. Other deficit-based myths revolve around notions of youth not understanding bureaucratic structures, youth being self-absorbed, or perceptions that poor minority youth are especially risk-prone (Epstein, 2007; Giroux, 2013). Despite ageist assumptions of young people, youth organizing efforts have contributed to historic fights for social justice.

The participation of youth activists in fights for social justice in the United States is largely understudied and underappreciated (Giroux, 1996; Franklin, 2014; Kinchen, 2016; Haas, 2018). As part of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Black youth mobilized to oppose race discrimination on college campuses, within the economic sector, and in public policy (Noguera & Ginwright 2006; Kinchen, 2016; Franklin, 2014; Van Dyke,
Examples of youth organizing efforts during this period include Black Pride Day in York, Pennsylvania (Wright, 2003), Freedom Day in Chicago (Danns, 2014), school walkouts in California (Cabrera et al., 2013; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012), and college student protests in Memphis (Kinchen, 2016). Similarly, within the Latinx community in the 1960s, Alanis (2010) notes, Mexican youth engaged in student activism, fighting for bilingual education. A common theme of youth organizing efforts during the 1950s and beyond is the struggle for social justice, desegregation, and educational equity. Unfortunately, on a national level, racial segregation is worse today than it was in the period before the landmark Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education (Reed et al., 2004; Kozol, 2005; Rury & Darby, 2016). Inequity persists through unequal funding, school choice, and the disenfranchisement of community control of schools (Lipman, 2013; Dumas, 2014).

Within a neoliberal education landscape, youth are forced to take responsibility for their educational opportunities (Suspitsyna, 2010) but are left out of discussions on education policy and practice. Similarly, youth activism is complicated by competing visions for youth leadership and activism (Porfilio & Carr, 2010; Conner & Pope, 2013). Youth leadership (within the neoliberal landscape) is constrained to fit deficit notions of young people. Youth leaders are encouraged to take part in service-learning projects and programming rather than substantive policy work (Conner et al., 2015). When youth are elevated into adult-led decision-making spaces, they are more likely to be from wealthier backgrounds (Youniss & Levine, 2009). The work of York and Kirshner (2015) and Gordon (2008) highlight the impact of teacher positionality and perceptions of race and gender on perceived leadership capacities. York and Kirshner (2015) and Gordon (2008) found that female students and students of color were more
likely to be perceived as lacking in leadership ability. Notwithstanding adult perceptions, young people of color and women continue to be active agents of change within schools and beyond. Young women and students of color lead each of the nationally prominent youth organizations I mentioned earlier in this chapter (Teens Take Charge, GKMC, and environmental activism).

Identity Projects

As indicated in the previous chapter and the above sections, this study’s primary area of interest is exploring the factors (schooling and beyond) that led young adult activists/organizers into early careers in activism. This study, on the experiences that facilitated participants choosing the identity project of activists/organizers into early adulthood, is enriched by scholars within this field. Therefore, to further situate the current study, the final section of this literature review considers scholarship on identity projects. First, I review the foundations of research on identity projects. Next, I draw direct connections between recent scholarship on identity projects and the current investigation. Informed by scholarship, this study considers how study participants may have developed and maintain activist/organizer identity projects during their K-12 schooling and spatial experiences.

Scholarship on the role and impact of identity projects for youth is rooted within the work of Erikson (1968) and Mead (1934), who name identity formation as both a social process and the period of life commonly referred to as adolescence as one in which young people wrestle and resolve uncertainty with identity. Since then, sociologists have continued to investigate how internal and external forces influence the formation and re-formation of identity from youth through adulthood. Formal and informal institutions, familial/peer social groups, and
mainstream/subcultural involvement all have an impact on how youth develop a sense of identity into adulthood and are shaped by a range of embodied and performed identities (Best, 2011).

This study utilizes the work of Deluca and Clampet-Lundquist (2016) to define identity project as “a source of meaning that provides a strong sense of self and is linked to concrete activities to which youth commit themselves” (p. 66). Schools, one of the most prominent institutions in the lives of young people, offer a powerful beginning point of investigation when engaging young adults. Anderson (1999) and Rosenblatt et al. (2015) offer this study insight into how, within the context of urban environments, identity projects offer youth navigational resources into an array of formal and informal, physical and metaphysical spaces. With regard to scholarship on activism as an identity project for youth, the work of Gordon (2009) offers insight into how youth’s sense of identity was developed by a wide range of factors, including race, socioeconomic status (SES), and gender performance. Specifically, Gordon explored the ways in which two youth organizations, differing in their racial and SES make-up, struggled to gain access to institutional leadership and how they interacted with their adult counterparts. Gordon’s work differs from the current project due to his study’s ethnographic nature and the period in which he engaged participants. Namely, Gordon’s work focused on working with youth (that have identified activism as an identity project) during their K-12 careers, while this study sought to explore the K-12 schooling and spatial experiences that have led young adults to choose activism/organizing as identity projects as they transition into adulthood.

Literature Review Summary

The preceding literature review spans significant bodies of scholarship. From the literature on urban spaces, I have demonstrated that the inherited spaces occupied by young
people are deeply inequitable while recognizing how, through the creation of metaphysic spaces, youth maintain agency within the context of social isolation (Emdin, 2016). The spatial isolation that many youths live within can become a catalyzing factor into civic engagement as youth become aware of structural inequity and choose to take action. Second, from the literature on the educational conditions that youth are schooled within, we have learned that neoliberal education reform has created an educational landscape that advances constrained youth agency through choice models.

Within civic education, I described how school spaces may influence youth to become civically engaged within and beyond the dominant society. The first vision contends that exposure to civics courses is a powerful tool for youth to become active in civil society. More radical approaches contrast with the first vision by encouraging educators to teach beyond civics courses to help students become active members of their communities. I further described a history of youth activism and connected it to more recent youth organizing efforts that promote a social justice agenda. From the research on youth activism, we know that youth are not merely receivers of policy; they have demonstrated their potential to be co-creators, actors, and shapers of policy and practice. We also know that their experiences in schools and within city spaces are varied and deeply nuanced by issues of race, class, gender and sexuality. Finally, to further ground my study, I reviewed scholarship on identity projects to acknowledge the possibility of education experiences serving as an activist identity project.

Critical urban education scholars, civic educators, and youth organizing literature help to orient my investigation, yet there exists a gap within research on the broader schooling experiences that lead to long-term civic engagement. Not enough of the existing scholarship has
explored the broader set of experiences that may contribute to the development of young adult activists. Existing literature prioritizes how teacher (or adult) created spaces influence civically engaged youth or discusses youth organizing efforts mostly after they have developed. This study is informed by this literature and seeks to build upon it by exploring the broader educational and spatial experiences that may contribute to the development of young adult activists. In light of the reviewed scholarship, this study addresses a gap within the literature discussed, by addressing the long-term impact of youth activism and the lack of youth voices in the production of research. Few studies on youth activism have explored the long-term impacts of youth activism (Conner, 2011; Kirshner, 2007, Taines, 2012). Similarly, Kirshner and Ginwright (2012) have noted,

> Currently, many of the studies rely on measures of future intentions, such as the intention to vote or be active in community politics, rather than examining people’s behavior as they transition into adulthood. Such research could describe developmental processes of political engagement and age-related differences more precisely…. (p. 298)

A Critical Youth Studies conceptual framework focuses my attention on youth activism as a response to the gap in the existing literature.

**Conceptual Framework**

A sound investigation of the possible relationship between schooling and young adult activism requires insight from those most knowledgeable on the topic, young adult activists. Within education policy and practice, youth are too often removed from decision-making spaces, yet are required actors in almost every education policy created. Through a Critical Youth Studies (CYS) conceptual framework, this study sought to upend adult-centered understandings of youth experiences by centering the ways in which young adult activists interacted with (and continue to make meaning of) the experiences that led them to become civic leaders. This section
considers three of CYS’s core commitments and identifies two that most directly informed this study. Within this section, I also contend that a CYS conceptual framework focuses my attention on how young adult activists make meaning of their schooling experiences and, ultimately, whether there is a relationship between their schooling experiences and activism.

Over the last several decades, as critical youth scholarship has grown, CYS scholars have remained focused on several core commitments. Three of the core commitments of CYS include exploring how youth interact with dominant society (Hagerman, 2017), how youth create and maintain agency and develop subcultures (Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977; Fine, 1991; Cammarota, 2017), and understanding youthhood beyond deficit perspectives (Fordham, 1996; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001); of these three, two most directly inform this study. The first is exploring how youth understand (and make sense of) their experiences within the dominant society (schooling). CYS scholars argue that youth development processes are a collective response to the social marginalization of young people, that young people are agents of change (not simple subjects to change), and that notions of youthhood are informed by specific economic, political, and social conditions (Noguera, 2006; Fox et al., 2016; James & James, 2017). The current inquiry used this commitment to explore how young adult activists navigated (and make meaning of) their schooling and spatial existence, and how that may have contributed to the development of their activism.

The second CYS commitment that pertains to my topic of inquiry is understanding youthhood beyond deficit. Recent CYS scholarship has argued that resistance theory, as argued by Ogbu (1987), does not fully address the ways youth act within society. Ogbu (1987) presented youth activity as mostly reacting to dominant society, leaving out the proactive aspects of youth
cultures. The work of Emdin (2016) demonstrates how recent CYS scholarship explores the ways in which youth proactively create space. Emdin (2016) notes that youth of color create metaphysical spaces as a way of proactively shaping their environments for communal growth. Furthermore, the recent work of GoodKids MadCity in Chicago demonstrates how young people can use their individual and collective agency to create an organization that addresses normalized gun violence and resource inequity.

My current inquiry, of the potential relationship between schooling and the development of activists, is enriched by the CYS core commitment of centering on proactive youth action beyond deficit perspectives of youth culture. My current investigation seeks to add to the growing body of CYS-informed scholarship. CYS allows me to center on the ways in which young adult activists make meaning of their schooling experiences. Additionally, CYS’s core commitments offer a powerful theoretical lens to explore the potential relationship between youth’s social and educational conditions and the development of their activism.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODS

Previous chapters describe the rationale and relevant scholarship for the current investigation. Building on the rationale and literature review, this chapter addresses my study’s methodology. Subsections of this chapter include primary research questions, study design and data analysis. Due to my professional background in youth and education organizing, I take considerable efforts to describe my insider/outsider role within the city of Chicago and the community organizing landscape.

Research Questions

Scholars such as Rosen (2019) have sought to explore how youth activism within a neoliberal sociopolitical context contributes to identity formation. Still, little research has explored the potential relationship between schooling experiences and the development of urban activists. In light of my discussion’s prioritization of the experiences in schools that may lead to young adult activism, the primary research questions are:

1. What kinds of relationships, if any, exist between schooling and the development of young adult activists?
2. In what ways do young adult activists make meaning of their schooling and spatial experiences?
Methodology

The development of a study’s methodology should align with its conceptual framework and research questions. Therefore, in concert with my CYS conceptual framework, my discussion employs a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, through rigorous analysis and philosophically sound orientations, offers valuable insight into collecting experiential knowledge. Peters (2009) notes, “Phenomenology studies the structure of consciousness as it is experienced from the first-person perspective, focusing on the central characteristic of intentionality” (p. 1). Phenomenology aligns with my research questions and the CYS conceptual framework by focusing attention on the schooling experiences of young adult activists.

This study utilizes interpretive phenomenology to investigate the educational experiences of young adult activists. Interpretive phenomenology (IP) is rooted in Heideggerian thought and focuses on the interpretation of phenomena to uncover hidden meaning (Priest, 2004). Rather than describing the essence of the phenomenon of interest, IP prioritizes humans’ subjective nature as they experience their surroundings. Interpretive phenomenology allowed study participants to stay true to “… hermeneutics [in which] pre-existing personal experiences, pre-judgments or prejudices should not be eliminated or suspended, but rather acknowledged as exerting a profound influence on the understanding of phenomena; therefore, they are important to the interpretation” (Peters, 2009, p. 6). Rather than suspending subjectivities, the study encouraged young adult activists to interpret their schooling experiences and draw out how those experiences may have led them into careers in activism (Duarte, 2012).
Recruitment of Study Participants and Sampling Strategy

This section describes the procedures for participant sampling, recruitment, and rationale. The study employed a non-probability convenience and snowball sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is “[a] nonprobability sampling method in which elements are selected for a purpose, usually because of their unique position” (Schutt, 2015, p. 171). Due to the highly subjective nature of purposive sampling, and to increase study generalizability, this study enrolled young adult activists from six communities throughout Chicago. The six target communities included Albany Park on Chicago’s northwest side, Uptown on Chicago’s northeast side, Little Village/Pilsen on the city’s west side, Logan Square on the near west side, and Washington Park/Woodlawn and North Kenwood/Oakland on the southeast side.

As noted in Chapter Two, Chicago is composed of communities with hyper-local racial, ethnic, and class distinctions (Seligman, 2005; Sampson, 2013; Ewing, 2018). Table 1 captures basic demographic information of the targeted areas of this study. Urban spaces are far from fixed or static. As such, three major criteria informed my decision to sample from the six chosen communities. First, I sought to include community areas with ethno-racial populations that mirror Chicago’s population. Second, informed by the literature on urban spaces and urban renewal projects, I included community areas experiencing varying degrees of gentrification. Finally, I considered whether the community areas experienced school closures during the period of 2010-2013. By sampling from the six communities chosen, I gained perspective into some of Chicago’s major residential areas, thereby offering this study greater generalizability.
Table 1. Target Community Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Predominant ethno-racial populations (as of 2018*)</th>
<th>Gentrification level(^2)</th>
<th>School closings 2010-2013 (Impacted by school closings or received students from closings)(^3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany Park</td>
<td>Hispanic- 52.8%, White- 27.7% Asian – 12.2%, Black- 4.7%</td>
<td>Ongoing/early- Advanced Gentrification</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>White- 44.9%, Black- 28% Hispanic- 12.9%, Asian – 11.5%</td>
<td>Ongoing/early Gentrification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>Hispanic- 57.4%, White- 32.4% Black- 6%, Asian – 2.4%</td>
<td>Advanced Gentrification</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kenwood (NK)/Oakland (O)</td>
<td>Black NK- 84.5%, O-92.8% White NK-8.2%, O-2.25% Hispanic NK- 1.4%, O-2.7% Asian NK- 3.3%, O- 1.5%</td>
<td>Advanced Gentrification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilsen (P)/Little Village (LV)</td>
<td>Hispanic LV-81.9%, P- 70.7% White LV-3.6%, P-18.9% Black LV-13.7%, P-6.2% Asian LV-0.4%, P-2.6%</td>
<td>Ongoing/early Gentrification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodlawn (W)/Washington Park (WP)</td>
<td>Black W-78.8, WP- 95.3% White W-12.1%, WP-0.4% Hispanic W-2.8%, WP- 0.9% Asian W-4.5%, WP-0.1%</td>
<td>Advanced Gentrification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1 Data on community racial/ethnic population: https://statisticalatlas.com/metro-area/Illinois/Chicago/Overview
2 Data on gentrification levels: https://www.urbandisplacement.org/chicago/chicago-gentrification-and-displacement
3 Data on community of school closings: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?msa=0&mid=1Eo8LRsznJkcZZhzyRDrpU0eqYBU&ll=41.83450338876064%2C-87.61007716107657&z=11
Participant Recruitment Plan

I sought access to study participants through two primary methods. First, I engaged in outreach to my personal and professional connections within each of the target communities. I believed this method would yield a fair number of initial participants for several reasons. As a lifelong resident of Chicago and current community organizer, I have worked directly (and lived) in the Albany Park, Uptown, and Gage Park/Chicago Lawn communities. I have maintained relationships with residents and community organizers in these communities. While I did not have the same direct personal relationships in the Pilsen/Little Village, Washington Park/Woodlawn, and North Kenwood/Oakland communities, I entered the recruitment process confident that my professional networks would yield an initial pool of prospective study participants. I then planned to begin a process of snowball sampling via currently enrolled participants to enlist additional participants until I reached a level of saturation.

Inclusion criteria for participants were all of the following: (1) self-identification as an activist or organizer, (2) educated within city of Chicago limits for no less than five years during their K-12 education, (3) were within the range of 18-25 years of age, (4) having residence or working within one of the prioritized communities, (5) a willingness to complete a demographic survey, and (6) a willingness to participate in two 45-minute interviews. My sampling criteria intentionally did not: (1) prioritize specific types of activist work (meaning study participants did not need to be involved in education organizing), (2) limit the number of participants who identify with a particular gender, identify as nonbinary, or identify as trans, (3) limit the number of Black, Latinx, white, or other ethnic/race self-identified participants, (4) prioritize Chicago
Public School students, (5) prioritize students with GED or High School diplomas, or 6) prioritize for young adult activists employed by 501(c)(3) organizations.

Considering Chicago’s large public-school population, vibrant nonprofit sector, and visible education organizing scene, I anticipated some representation of education organizers, public school students, and current 501(c)(3) employed staff (in addition to the other non-restrictive criteria listed above). However, based on my research and knowledge of Chicago’s education and activism landscapes, I ultimately decided to cast a wider net for potential study participants. Chicago’s education landscape includes more than public school students. For example, Chicago has one of the oldest and most racially/ethnically diverse Catholic school networks in the nation (Brinig & Garnett, 2012) and is home to many long-standing private school and alternative school options (Sander, 2006; Alternative Schools, n.d.). Similarly, Chicago’s organizing, and activism history allowed for a wide range of community-led organizations and groups to come into existence, including but not limited to, 501(c)(3) organizations, movement organizations, and ad hoc neighborhood-based groups. The above-mentioned non-restrictive criteria were added in an attempt to recruit and include a range of schooling and activism experiences.

**Description of Recruitment Process**

The previous section described how I planned to enlist study participants. This section describes, in detail, the steps taken to enroll the 14 participants who contributed to study results. Through a description of my outreach efforts to personal networks, a social media campaign, local nonprofits and community leaders, and snowball recommendations, I hope to provide a clear and concise picture of all efforts taken to enlist participants. Due to my history as a
community organizer, I first sought study participants through existing personal and professional networks. Much of my organizing work has taken place within the southwest side communities of Chicago Lawn and Gage Park, neither of which were targeted populations for this study. I secured an initial pool of study participants from the Albany Park, Uptown, Logan Square, and Little Village/Pilsen communities through organizing colleagues within those areas. Next, to cast a wider net of prospective participants, I initiated a social media campaign on two major social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram. My personal and professional networking efforts and the social media campaign occurred simultaneously. Using an IRB-approved flyer detailing my study's focus and participation requirements, I posted the flyer online with a link to a Google form for prospective participants to complete. In addition to their name and general contact information, prospective participants were asked to confirm their age and the area in which they engage in activism/organizing. In addition to my initial posts, I asked several of my social media followers to share the flyer and link on their respective pages to increase the study's visibility. The social media campaign led to an increase of three participants from the Pilsen, Logan Square, and Washington Park community areas.

Following my social media campaign, I began cold contacting nonprofit organizations within my target communities. The cold contacting strategy consisted of web searches for organizations and community groups. Community groups contacted during this stage of recruitment included Asian Americans for Progress, Northwest Community Organization, Communities Together, Juntos, Southeast Side United, Gwendolyn’s Daughters, Roses from Concrete, Southeast Development, Chicago Public Schools teachers and administrators, and
Grow Your Educators. Ultimately, this cold contact strategy yielded no additional study participants and proved to be the least effective for participant recruitment.

I continued recruitment by engaging in a snowball recruitment strategy in which I revisited my initial pool of participants for peers who may be interested in joining the study. Over the span of four months, I contacted my initial bank of nine participants approximately 3-4 times each for referrals. Snowball referrals resulted in an additional five participants joining the study. These additional participants included two from Uptown, two from Logan Square, and one from North Kenwood/Oakland. Finally, it would be folly not to acknowledge that many organizers around the city have been engaged in immediate and continued relief efforts to support communities impacted by COVID-19. The current pandemic may have been a contributing factor to the lower than anticipated number of study participants.

I concluded recruitment efforts after I began to review collected data and felt as though I had reached a satisfactory degree of saturation pertaining to my interview protocol and focus of study. In total, the study engaged 14 young adult activists/organizers on the possible relationships between their schooling and entrance into early careers in activism. Table 2 provides basic profiles of study participants including name, age, community of organizing/activism, gender, self-identified racial/ethnic background, frequency of participation in organizing/activism, and the number of years involved in activism and organizing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Community of organizing/activism</th>
<th>Gender (Self-identified)</th>
<th>Racial/ethnic Background</th>
<th>How often do you participate in organizing/activism events?</th>
<th>Number of years involved in organizing/activism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Woodlawn/Washington Park</td>
<td>Fluid</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Little Village/Pilsen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Whenever something interests me</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey Daniels</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Albany Park</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>6-7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa Latifah</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Albany Park</td>
<td>She/her/they</td>
<td>African American/Palestinian</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Villa</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Little Village/Pilsen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paru</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>North Kenwood/Oakland</td>
<td>He/him (Cis-hetero)</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>Woman (She/her/hers)</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Little Village/Pilsen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lidia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Logan Square</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Whenever something interests me</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Little Village/Pilsen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Whenever something interests me</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Albany Park</td>
<td>Transgender woman</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia Gonzalez</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Logan Square</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emcee</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistani and German</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Johnson</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Uptown</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Whenever something interests me</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Tools

Demographic Survey

The first tool used to collect data is a demographic survey informed by the work of Kvale (1996) and Olrich (1978) on survey creation. Participants were asked to complete the demographic survey with questions falling within three core themes of basic demographic information, schooling history, and activism work. The survey helped to map spatial distinctions. Additionally, due to the study’s broadly operationalized use of the terms, activist/organizer, the survey assisted me in mapping participant responses across community areas. The second theme, schooling history, allowed for the collection of information regarding where and for how long participants were schooled throughout their K-12 careers. The final theme of organizing work asked participants to describe past and current activism work. (Appendix A provides the full survey protocol.)

Semi-structured Interviews

The second data collection tool employed for this study was a semi-structured qualitative interview. Each participant was asked to participate in two 45-minute interviews that were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The interview protocol followed the guidelines of Stake (1995) and Seidman (1998), who recommend that interview protocols grant the researcher the ability to pivot follow up questions based on participant responses. Seidman (1998) notes that the use of interviews as a data generation method is a valuable tool for qualitative researchers. As such, responsive semi-structured interview protocols were used for this study. Semi-structured interviews operate with a limited pre-established interview protocol, which allowed me to shift follow-up questions based on the responses of participants. Similar to the development of survey
protocol, the interview protocol was guided by the research questions and included three distinct sections of space, schooling history, and organizing work. Questions grouped within the space theme explored the ways in which participants understood their spatial existence within their communities and Chicago’s landscape. Questions grouped within schooling history asked participants to describe their schooling experiences and any activism work they took part in. Lastly, questions grouped within organizing work addressed the participant’s current and past activism work (This study’s interview protocols can be found in Appendices B and C).

Data Analysis

As with all research studies, this study’s analysis plan sought to uncover the nuances of lived experiences and complicate grand narratives through rigorous analysis of the data collected (Merriam, 1998; Schutt, 2015). This section describes how my CYS framework and interpretative phenomenology methodology informed my analysis plan.

Survey Data

This section describes how demographic survey data was analyzed using pre-established and emergent codes. First cycle coding of survey data collected identified demographic data including age, race/ethnicity, gender, and employment status. Basic demographic information assisted me in building participant and community profiles. Next, I organized participant responses regarding K-12 schooling, such as the number of schools attended and school name. K-12 schooling information assisted in identifying where participants attended school and exploring the possible relationship between activism work and the communities in which a participant attended school. Lastly, from the demographic survey I collected types of activism work (i.e., education, immigration, housing, police, social justice, etc.), mode (volunteer or
employed), and the duration/frequency of participant activism work. The information from the demographic survey assisted in exploring the histories and ways in which participants exist within and beyond the target communities. The participant and community profiles constructed from survey data contributed to how I was able to analyze interview data and assisted in subgroups comparisons (including north and south sides, gender identification, Latinx/Black, types of organizing, etc.).

**Interview Data**

This section describes the process by which I analyzed interview data. Through a series of readings and re-readings, the development of integrative memos, and open coding, I seek to communicate a clear picture of how interview data was analyzed. Once all interview data was collected, I began a series of preliminary steps before coding individual interview transcripts. To familiarize myself with the collective data, I read each of the interview transcripts in their entirety approximately four times, with and without annotations. Next, I randomly organized Interviews 1 and 2 into groups of four with one group of two. For each group I developed an integrative memo, largely informed by the work of Emerson et al. (2011), that captured reflective notes and annotations I made as I re-read each interview. A full description of this process, including all integrative memos, can be found within the appendices.

I began interview data analysis with three pre-established structural codes informed by my CYS framework and literature review. In the first cycle of analysis of interview data, I coded for moments in which participants gave insight into any of the three pre-established codes of space, schooling experiences, and activism work. The first code, *space*, noted any pieces of data that explicitly or implicitly informed how socio-geographic space impacted the development of
young adult activists (YAA) and how YAA may have created their own spaces. I made
distinctions between physical and metaphysical space within my second cycle of coding. The
second code, schooling, noted any pieces of data that explicitly addressed K-12 schooling
experiences. The final pre-established code was activism, which collected any pieces of data that
explicitly or implicitly informed me on the activism work of YAA. Table 3 lists each pre-
established code, its corresponding definition, and rationale.

Table 3. Pre-established Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-established code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Any pieces of data that explicitly or implicitly informed me on how socio-geographic space has impacted the development of young adult activists (YAA) and how YAA may have created their own spaces.</td>
<td>Informed by literature on urban spaces, Critical Youth Studies framework, and research questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td>Any pieces of data that explicitly or implicitly addressed how K-12 schooling experiences may have influenced the development of YAA and how YAA make meaning of their experiences.</td>
<td>Informed by literature on urban schooling, history of education, the sociology of education, and research questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism</td>
<td>Any pieces of data that explicitly or implicitly informed me on the activism work of YAA.</td>
<td>Informed by literature on civic education, Critical Youth Studies framework, and primary research questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second cycle of open coding, I reviewed the collected data for emergent themes
and inductive analysis within participant responses. Informed by the work of Hatch (2002) and
Mayan (2009) I utilized inductive analysis in order to be receptive to emergent themes within the
collected data. Analytic induction is "… [a] research strategy that directs investigators to pay
close attention to evidence that challenges or disconfirms whatever images that are developing
from their evidence” (Ragin & Amorosa, 2011, p. 124). Ultimately, while my current inquiry was interested in the possible relationships between schooling and activism, the data analysis plan remained receptive to other relationships that may have existed between and beyond schooling, space, and activism. Where the first cycle of coding targeted the primary investigation of schooling and the development of activism, the second sought to explore whether other factors and aspects of urban life informed the development of participant activism.

Next, I used my integrative memos to guide the development of new codes to add to the pre-established ones. From the integrative memos and re-coded interview transcripts, I developed a list of approximately 30 new codes (see Table 4). I then reviewed and reflected on the new list of codes through the lens of my primary research questions (1. What kinds of relationships, if any, exist between schooling and the development of young adult activists? and 2. In what ways do young adult activists make meaning of their schooling and spatial experiences?) and narrowed the list to approximately 20 (see Table 5). Finally, I reflected on the ways in which the refined code list addressed my research inquiry and how they could be bucketed together, which is described below. The following subsection describes how coded survey and interview data facilitated the development of themes and study findings.
Table 4. Codes and Definitions Developed During Open Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants expressed exhaustion and or frustration with organizing/activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants expressed working on issues pertaining to mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining organizing and activism</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants defined similarities and differences between organizing and activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid and unpaid work</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being paid or unpaid for organizing and activism work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of issue areas</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described the areas or types of organizing/activism they were and are involved in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved in housing organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved in education organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant experiences</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described school experiences as immigrant or newly arrived during K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools and community organizations</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described community organizations operating in one form or another within their schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher activists</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described having teachers who were involved with Chicago Teachers Union organizing or social justice projects within and around the school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack access to relational resources within schools</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described a lack of access to relationships with staff teachers or administrators within schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described their commute to and from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth organizing efforts</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved in youth organizing efforts during their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice/civic engagement</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved in social justice and civic engagement during their K-12 education but without formal civics courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive policy work</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved in policy advocacy (including legislative and school level) throughout their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic education</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described been enrolled in formal civics courses or social justice clubs/courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School closings</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described having been impacted (either directly or indirectly) by school closings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling experiences and organizing</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants named specific schooling experiences that influenced their entrance into organizing or activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning making</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants processed schools in experiences during interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with schools based on history</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described their relationship with schools/schooling being influenced by local histories of education activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to resources</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described having access to school-based resources including clubs, teams, mentors, and internships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparities in funding and curricular offerings</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described having lost or fought over course offerings/programming within their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described school-based policing (via staff and/or police officers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious sites</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved in religious institutions during the period of their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved in local park districts during the period of their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizations</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described being involved with local community groups including nonprofits and 501(c)(3) organizations during the period of their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and identity</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described their gender and identities having influenced their understanding of space during the period of their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentrification/housing</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described housing or gentrification as having influenced their sense of location within the metropolitan area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North and south sides</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants referenced distinctions and differences between the north and south sides of Chicago</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 5. Refined Codes and Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>Expressions of exhaustion, fatigue, disillusionment, or resentment with community work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining organizing and activism</td>
<td>The ways in which study participants defined the terms organizing and activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid and unpaid organizing and activism work</td>
<td>Captures moments in which study participants addressed organizing/activism through paid and unpaid time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of organizing and activism</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their current or past organizing/activism work including housing, education, and immigration organizing/activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizations</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their community work connected to community organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant experiences</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described schooling and/or community experiences relating to immigration status, ELL programming in schools, familial experiences relating to documentation, organizing work, and experiences that study participants felt were influenced by their immigrant status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools and community organizations</td>
<td>Captures moments in which community nonprofits and local groups interacted with schooling (school staff, school buildings, school grounds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and school staff (formerly teacher activists)</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described interactions and experiences with school staff (regarding topics such as activism, caring, elevating youth voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described commuting to and from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth organizing</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described participating in youth organizing efforts (either led by nonprofits, local groups, or youth) during their K-12 education and/or within their current roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic education</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described participating in formal civic courses, social justice curriculum within school or after-school programming, and/or civic programs (such as Mikva Challenge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School closings</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described being impacted (either directly or indirectly) by school closings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline (formerly policing)</td>
<td>Captures moments in which participants described school-based policing (via staff and/or police officers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic struggles for education</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their schooling experiences being influenced by historic community struggles for education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their access or lack of access to school funding, policing, curriculum offerings, extra-curricular activities, community, financial, relational, or cultural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the north and south sides of Chicago</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their experiences or perceptions of south and north side communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious institutions</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their community work connected to religious sites (churches, mosques, bible study, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park spaces</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their community work connected to local parks or play spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities (formerly gender and identity)</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described their community work being influenced by their racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to the city (formerly gentrification/housing)</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described schooling or organizing/activism experiences relating to gentrification, displacement, and/or relocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described specific community members as having influenced their sense of location throughout the period of their K-12 education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family histories in community</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described family history in areas as an informative aspect of their location in space and activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults in youth-led spaces</td>
<td>Moments in which study participants described adults who were present in youth-led organizing/activism spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Engaging the Coded Data

This section describes how I engaged coded data to develop prominent themes and findings. Using my integrated memos, refined interview codes, and participant profiles informed by survey data, I began to compare coded data along a range of subgroups and spatial distinctions. Below, I describe four of the subgroup comparisons I made and how these comparisons helped lead me to the development of prominent themes and findings.

The first comparison I made was based on geographic location within Chicago. One way in which I compared participant profiles and data was organizing codes by “south side” and “north side” participants (using Madison Avenue as a defining line between north and south sides of the city) and types of schooling experiences. From this comparison, I was able to identify how participants from both the north and the south sides of the city shared negative experiences that were attributable to their status as newly arrived/immigrant citizens. I was also able to recognize that north and south side distinctions did not indicate a higher likelihood of one group being more likely to have commuted from their community of residence to elementary or high school. Finally, this comparison did not indicate that students from the south or north sides were more likely to have experienced negative community or schooling experiences (such as punitive discipline or exposure to gang violence). While such experiences did emerge generally within the coded data, they were not skewed toward either north or south side participants.

Next, I organized participant data along different types of organizing work (i.e., education, immigration, housing, police reform, social justice education, environmental justice, art activism, and schooling experiences). In this comparison, several important recognitions emerged. For some participants, such as Nairobi and Jess, there was a direct connection between
schooling experiences and their early and current organizing work. Others, such as Vanessa and Star, did not explicitly describe a connection between the types of organizing work in which they have been engaged and their schooling experiences. While participants described a wide range of schooling experiences, an explicit connection between these experiences and types of organizing did not emerge as a prominent feature within all coded data.

The next comparison between subgroups that I reflected on was whether participants were paid to engage in organizing and activism work and the community areas in which they were paid (or not) to lead organizing work. While I anticipated north side organizations having more funding available to pay participants, this did not prove to be accurate among the data. Almost all (12 of 14) participants were paid or received a stipend to engage in community activism/organizing for some period during and/or after their high school careers. I also compared the types of organizing participants were engaged in and the communities in which they engaged in those activities. Neither north side nor south side participants were more likely to engage in any particular type of organizing. While participants did engage in the aforementioned types of organizing, the north side/south side distinction did not prove to be prominent.

The last comparison between subgroups reflected on whether negative or positive experiences in schools were a driving feature of entrance into public life for study participants. Within this comparison, participants expressed a wide range of factors that contributed to their entrance into organizing and activism. Positive and negative experiences emerged as having played a crucial role in the school experiences of participants. However, whether positive or negative experiences, neither were singularly attributable to whether a participant decided to
engage in organizing and activism. Through comparing in each of the subgroups described above, I was able to engage with the coded data along several different axes. Ultimately, the comparisons between subgroups allowed for several prominent themes to emerge among participant data; the development of these themes is described below.

**Development of Themes**

Through a process of creating memos, coding and re-coding, and subgroup comparisons, I began to reflect on the ways in which the collected data could be organized into larger themes. Within this section I hope to create a clear and concise description of how I moved from coded data to prominent themes and study findings. At several points throughout data analysis, I practiced a technique commonly referred to as *letting the data breathe*. This technique became instrumental in the process of moving my coded data into themes. Specifically, after I re-coded my interview and survey data, I implemented a practice of giving myself a break (between 2-5 days) to reflect on several questions I developed to center on my primary research questions and focus of study. The questions I used to reflect are listed below:

1. What do you think you are seeing in the data?
   a. Where are you seeing it?
   b. How often does it come up?
   c. Are there moments that disconfirm this?

2. What is the data telling you about how participants made meaning of their schooling experiences?

3. Am I making assumptions that aren’t supported by data?
4. In what ways is physical and metaphysical space showing up (or being communicated) within the data?

5. Where are you seeing possible connections between codes?

Through reflections and conversations with participants and colleagues, I began to consider what ways my codes could be organized into larger themes. When reviewing individual and subgroup data, several broad themes emerged across participants. I developed five major themes and began to organize (bucket) many of my codes accordingly. Some codes such as burnout and defining organizing activism were not included into the five main themes due to their relevance to this study’s focus and/or frequency within participant responses. Table 6 lists each theme, bucketed codes, and the frequency in which they emerged within survey and interview data.

The five prominent themes that emerged from the collected data are relationships with teachers, marginalizing schooling experiences, youth activism, commuting, and community-based fights for social justice and education equity. First, interview data showed that educators emerged as an important feature in the trajectories of participants. Second, across study participants, formal and informal schooling experiences surfaced as influential in their paths toward public life. Third, within and beyond the walls of schoolhouses, many participants shared that during their K-12 careers they became involved in youth organizing work that aided in their decisions to pursue early careers in activism. Fourth, the role of commuting to and from school impacted the ways in which study participants learned to appreciate their positions within Chicago. Finally, several participants identified current and historic community-based organizing and fights for education equity as having played an instrumental role in their sense of location.
and their pursuit of careers and activism. Ultimately, the development of the aforementioned themes allowed me to reflect on the ways in which participants made meaning of their schooling, spatial experiences, the connections between schooling, space, and activism/organizing, and facilitated the development of study findings.

**From Themes to Findings: Emerging Constellations**

Once I developed themes that felt accurate to the data, and were confirmed by participants, I then reflected on what I thought the themes told me about my primary research questions and focus of study. Initially, and aligned with my earlier discussion of formal and informal curriculum, I conceptualized each of the themes as part of a kind of civics course that Chicago pushed and pulled students into by way of their positionalities within the city. While elements of this early conceptualization held true, insofar as some students were thrust into activism/organizing via their identities from marginalized communities, the experiences shared by participants were dynamic and co-constructed in ways that traditional notions of curriculum could not capture. Participants expressed powerful experiences of agency in which they were active in creating the paths that led them into activism/organizing. Furthermore, while the major themes did capture the breadth of participants’ responses, each theme informed participant trajectories in activism/organizing to varying degrees.

Moving away from the notion of a Chicago civics curriculum, I then reflected on the nonlinearity of participants’ paths into activism organizing. What emerged after my initial reflections on curriculum were the various ways in which each of the major themes served as a kind of co-created compass and guiding constellation into activism/organizing. I came to realize that, rather than a linear or prescriptive path from schools to streets, participants communicated a
range of ways in which each theme helped lead them into activism/organizing. I then began to conceptualize each of the themes as elements within constellations that participants co-construct in their paths into activism/organizing. Like a night sky filled with stars, each of the themes became possible connections for participants to connect into the constellation of experiences that led them into activism/organizing.

Table 6. Themes and Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with teachers</td>
<td>Teachers and school staff (formerly teacher activists), resources</td>
<td>Anna, Nairobi, Honey, Liz, Clarissa, Lidia, Emcee, Sandra, Esperanza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalizing school experiences</td>
<td>Immigrant experiences, discipline, resources, identities (formerly gender and identity)</td>
<td>Liz, Paru, Sophia, Honey, Jess, Emcee, Sandra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth activism</td>
<td>Community organizations, schools and community organizations, youth organizing, Civic education, adults in youth led spaces</td>
<td>Nairobi, Paru, Honey, Clarissa, Star, Lidia, Jess, Sophia, Emcee, Sandra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>Commuting, perceptions of the north and south sides of Chicago, right to the city (formerly gentrification/housing)</td>
<td>Nairobi, Anna, Vanessa, Honey, Star, Lidia, Sandra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based fights for social justice and education equity</td>
<td>School closings, historic struggles for education, religious Institutions, park spaces, community members, family histories in community areas</td>
<td>Anna, Paru, Liz, Nairobi, Clarissa, Star, Lidia, Nairobi, Vanessa, Esperanza, Jess, Honey, Sophia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Codes labeled burnout, defining organizing and activism, paid and unpaid work organizing and activism work, and types of organizing and activism were not included in final themes due to their relevance to this study’s focus and/or lack of frequency (<28%) across participants.*
Positionality Statement

As with all research, the personal histories of researchers are always relevant. I have spent my entire life as a resident of Chicago. My personal and professional history as a Chicago Public School alum and current community organizer is intimately tied to the current investigation on the possible relationship between schooling and activism. This section describes my personal and professional histories as they relate to the current investigation. First, I briefly discuss my personal history in Chicago and Chicago Public Schools. Next, I describe my professional history as a Youth and Community Organizer at a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization on Chicago's southwest side. This section concludes with considerations of how my personal and professional background informs my current inquiry.

Born to a single mother with six siblings, I spent much of my early life moving between apartment buildings and relatives' homes. From Gage Park and Tri-Taylor to Humboldt Park and Rogers Park, I became familiar with many of Chicago’s hyper-segregated communities through my mother’s expansive network of friends and loved ones. The first years of my education career included attending four elementary schools on the near west, north, and northwest sides of the city. In 1998, my mother moved my siblings and I from our grandmother's home (on the near west side) to Albany Park (on the northwest side of the city), where I would complete elementary and high school. I attended Hamilton elementary from 6th-8th grade and Lake View for my high school career. During high school, I became involved in a wide variety of school clubs and activities.

From debate to math club, I became involved in much of Lake View High School's school community. During my senior year of high school, several peers and I had become aware
of a citywide school walkout in solidarity with undocumented residents. In the days building toward the walkout, several teachers and administrators confronted my peers, hoping to dissuade us from leading the action. Nevertheless, we persisted and led many of our peers to the rally at the Daley Center. The student walkout was the first time I took part in student activism and was certainly not the last. After high school, I enrolled at Loyola Chicago with the hopes of one day becoming a lawyer. Unfortunately, due to the cost of attending the university, I dropped out and began taking community college courses. This derailment of my plans for becoming a lawyer would have an enormous impact on my life trajectory.

While completing my associate degree courses, I began to spend more time with my family throughout the city, including Gage Park, where my tia currently lives. Eventually, I learned of a local nonprofit interested in hiring a debate coach for their after-school program. Since 2010 (excluding a three-year period in which I helped lead an education merger in Chicago's Gold Coast and Cabrini Green communities), I have worked in the community as an activist and organizer, focusing mostly on youth development and social justice education. Over the last 10 years, I have maintained close relationships with dozens of youths, and families in the Gage Park/Chicago Lawn communities. Additionally, I have built relationships with activists and organizers within several of this study's target communities, including Albany Park and Uptown. Many of the relationships I maintain have moved beyond any one organization or organizing campaign, as I have attempted to create an expansive network of loved ones similar to my mother’s.

In my current investigation, I am under no illusions about being guided by objectivity, rather I acknowledge that my various positionalities may inform aspects of my study design. As
a Chicago Public Schools alum, Chicago resident, former student organizer, and current youth advocate, I understand how each of these identities may inform how study participants read and responded to me as a researcher and how I analyzed collected data. To ensure that my positionalities were engaged and did not dominate (or hinder) the production of my scholarship, I attempted to analyze the collected data in search of the disconfirmation of the relationship between schooling and activism, and in search of emergent relationships. Additionally, to address my bias on the topic of inquiry, I discussed emergent findings/themes with many study participants during and after data collection and analysis. I also engaged peer researchers/colleagues with more experience in qualitative research to review emergent codes, findings, and samples of collected data. As noted in the introductory section, it is difficult to pinpoint where the idea of the current investigation began. Whether in my early experiences moving from community to community or in my later experiences within the youth development field, both informed my exploration into schooling, space, and activism. The following chapter describes participant constellations of civic engagement and the ways in which each constellation aided participants on their paths into activism/organizing.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONSTELLATIONS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

I entered the data collection and analysis process with a reasonable hunch. Considering the immense contributions of scholars from within the field of urban education, I suspected that participants would describe a wide range of schooling experiences as factors that influenced them to become organizers and activists. What emerged was a complicated series of experiences surrounding how schooling is intertwined with urban life and public policy. Through survey and interview data with 14 current young adult activists/organizers, this chapter describes major trends that emerged regarding the relationships between schooling, space, and early careers in activism.

The responses and excerpts from interviews featured below represent trends within the collected data. They are presented in this chapter to illustrate the powerful insights that participants offered. The central finding is that for participants, the connections between schooling, space, and entrance into activism/organizing are best understood as a series of co-created constellations, what I have titled Constellations of Civic Engagement, that served as navigational tools into activism/organizing. This chapter seeks to accomplish several goals pertaining to major trends within participant responses. First, I describe the conceptual formulation of the Constellations of Civic Engagement (henceforth constellations), paying attention to the dynamic nature of space as both physical and metaphysical. Then, I describe five of the most prominent spaces (or stars) that emerged across study participants. The spaces
described include commutes to and from school, K-12 youth activism, experiences within school buildings, and community-based fights for equity. This chapter concludes with considerations of the dimmer stars, or less prominent features, that emerged within participant responses.

**Constellations of Civic Engagement**

This study’s research questions are, first, what kinds of relationships, if any, exist between schooling and the development of young adult activists? Second, in what ways do young adult activists create meaning from their schooling and spatial experiences in and around schools? As noted in earlier chapters, scholars within the fields of education, urban education, civics education, and the history of education have noted how schools are much more than simply sites of academic and curricular learning. From the data collected, I noted how, for many participants, their entrances into activism/organizing were complicated and colored by a wide range of experiences. From supportive teachers and nonprofits to feelings of alienation based on identities, participants’ paths into early careers in activism were shaped by the universe of places, people, policy, and practice within and beyond schools. In its simplest form, the answer to my primary research questions is that entrances into activism for study participants were informed by schooling, locations in the city, and youth space creation. In addition to other aspects of city life, all participants shared how at least one feature of schooling informed their sense of location and pushed them to become civically involved.

The leading finding from this study is that, during their K-12 careers, participants charted their paths into activism/organizing by creating a constellation composed of different spaces and experiences. These constellations served as navigational tools in which young people learned of their positions within (and beyond) school walls and created meaning with elders and peers. I use
the imagery of constellations for several reasons. First, constellations are created based on someone's positionality and their subjective interpretations of the arrangements of stars. As this chapter will later demonstrate, the five subsections described were the most prominent to emerge from data collection across participant responses. However, there was significant variation in how each of the spaces/experiences informed each participant, meaning that the impact of any one of the spaces varied from participant to participant.

Additionally, the spaces described throughout this chapter should not be understood as a linear process, nor a set of prerequisite spaces that led participants into activism/organizing. For example, some participants created their constellation by connecting their relationships with community-based organizations and their experiences commuting to school, which exposed them to the city’s-built inequity, making no mention of marginalizing schooling experiences or positive relationships with teachers. Meanwhile, other participants created their constellation based on negative schooling experiences due to their immigration status and their involvement in K-12 youth organizing. Secondly, like a tool for ships navigating an open sea, participant constellations offered them both a navigational tool and solace in charting their paths throughout and after their K-12 careers.

To create greater transparency with study findings, Table 7 illustrates the frequency with which study participants identified various stars within their constellations. Perhaps one of the most critical aspects is the non-linear, nuanced, and subjective nature of space within each participant's constellation. For some, the constellation that led them to public life was positive schooling and community experiences that encouraged them to begin (or continue) youth organizing work. For others, stars emerged via negative schooling experiences attributable to
their identities as youth from marginalized backgrounds. Considering those who identified these negative experiences, Chicago is fortunate that these young people chose to include this star in their constellations. These experiences ultimately helped them reach positions as leaders of organizing efforts around the city; however, it is important to note that many of these participants were exposed to harsh and traumatic experiences at young ages. In this sense, Constellations of Civic Engagement is a dynamic and co-constructed concept. Participants played an active role in connecting the stars within their constellations, thereby offering guidance, solace, and ownership in the spaces they inherited and occupied, leading them into organizing and activism.

Table 7. Frequency of Stars within Participant Constellations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Commuting</th>
<th>Youth activism</th>
<th>Marginalizing school experiences</th>
<th>Positive relationships with teachers</th>
<th>Community-based fights for social justice and education equity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey Daniels</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa Latifah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emcee</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Villa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paru</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lidia</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandra Johnson</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia Gonzales</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, as noted in Chapter Two, space can be both the physical make-up of one's surroundings as well as the metaphysical environments that groups and people create. In both regards, participants named several ways in which they occupied, invested in, and created spaces for their early and continued community work within and surrounding schools. From parks and street corners to connections with community members and CBOs, all participants shared powerful insight into the ways they co-created constellations. Ultimately, these constellations demonstrate the ability and power of young people to transcend, form bonds, build community, and create space across a city built to isolate them. Figure 1 illustrates the physical spaces in which participants attended school, resided, and engaged in activism/organizing. Among several other reflections, participants demonstrated how their ability to build spaces transcends Chicago’s infamous segregated past. Participants built and sustained their connections and relationships from Gage Park to Albany Park, Washington Park to Uptown, Ashburn to Hyde Park, and Belmont-Cragin to Pilsen.

The remainder of this chapter is composed of five main stars (or subsections):

*Commuting to School*, *Marginalizing School Experiences*, *Involvement in Youth Activism*, *Relationships with Teachers*, and *Connections to Community-based Fights for Social Justice and Education Equity*. Each of the stars that comprise the participants’ constellations are interconnected, differentially arranged, and powerfully linked to the paths that led participants into their current work as activists/organizers.
Figure 1. Areas of schooling, residence, and activism
Commuting to School

Half of the study’s participants expressed that their commutes to and from school informed their sense of location and contributed to their constellation. As noted in Chapter Two, one result of Chicago’s school choice model is high school students being more likely to travel outside of their local communities to attend school (Burdick-Will, 2017). Of the fourteen study participants, only three reported being residents and activist/organizers within the same community in which they were educated from middle through high school. Figure 2 identifies all participants in the areas in which they are engaged in activism/organizing and the three...
participants who reported being residents and activists within the same community from middle through high school; they are colored in orange, maroon, and pink. Of those three study participants, only Esperanza reported being a resident, activist/organizer, and schooled K-12 within the same one community. This star (subsection) explores the ways in which study participants described their commutes to and from school, their perception of how their commutes impacted their schooling, sense of location, and understanding of disparities between communities.

Several participants mentioned how their commute to and from school served as a formative experience that influenced how they related to schools and their city. For example, Vanessa and Nairobi noted that their commutes to school exposed them to a wide range of city life. Both participants noted how in addition to positive relationships with teachers and nonprofit organizations, their constellation’s included commutes to school. For Vanessa, traveling from her home in Humboldt Park to Lake View and Lincoln Park gave her first-hand experience of the city’s-built inequity. When asked about the types of experiences related to commuting to and from school, Vanessa stated the following:

I'd see, like, just changing scenery because you're coming from a pretty ghetto neighborhood where the infrastructure is just, like, not all there. Then you're entering these more affluent neighborhoods that have more money and more resources. It’s like, Oh, this is still the same city, right? Like, these are great neighborhoods and they're really nice, no one's going to get shot around here, you don't have to be super careful about watching your back or making sure that you're safe. Because once you hit a certain street or past a certain stoplight, you have to kind of be a little bit more aware of your surroundings. I feel like that's just always how I've kind of lived my life, being super hyper-aware whenever I come into a different neighborhood.

Within the excerpt above, Vanessa describes how her commute through different communities gave her insight into investment, safety, and the differing possibilities available
based on location within the city. Similar to Vanessa’s experience, for Nairobi, traveling from Hazel Crest, IL to the Kenwood and Ashburn neighborhoods gave her perhaps all of the education she may have needed to understand inequity and push her into activism work. The excerpt below illustrates how traveling for school also informed how she understood neighborhood safety, investment, and even capitalism.

Figure 2. Participants who were residents, activist/organizers, and educated within same community middle-high school

As noted by Nairobi below, the exposure to communities via commutes exposed the connections between race, class, and investment. In a direct sense, commutes across the city gave
participants a clear understanding of the history, location, and who has right to the city (Lipman, 2013). Nairobi stated:

You could just see the decline, what the government cares about and what the government does not care about. I learned that at a very young age – why are there only these empty lots here? Why is it here and why is it not there? And why are there only Black and Brown people here? I just noticed the whole thing very early and how the structure was set up inherently racist and classist. I would look out the bus window and think, I hate capitalism, because it's-- I can't even-- I cannot escape it at all.

Nairobi’s frustration with the inequity exposed during her commute highlights how school policy interacts with urban geographies and contributed to participant constellations. Specifically, attending schools outside of their community of residence not only gave participants exposure to different school programming but also highlighted the unequal opportunities available based on location within the city.

Other participants described their commutes as less prominent, but still present, within their constellations. For example, Anna noted that her travels from her community of residence, Archer Heights, to Pilsen (for elementary school) and West Town (for middle and high school) were largely uneventful. She described waking up early as “annoying” and used the early commutes as opportunities to catch up on sleep. She described traveling from communities filled with family members (Archer Heights) and culture (Pilsen) to one that felt empty (West Town). Similarly, for Honey, traveling 24 miles to and from school each day gave her copious opportunities to read, work on homework, or interact with other passengers on public transportation. Honey mentioned how she could identify recent releasees from Cook County Jail as she passed 26th and California St. by “the pink paper in their hands.” Other times she conversed with passengers who often probed why she, a Latina, stayed on the Red Line past the 55th street stop.
For both, commutes to school emerged as dimmer stars within their constellations, meaning important to their sense of location but not the leading features of their entrance into activism/organizing. The emergence of commutes as a shared star across participant constellations indicates that Chicago’s high percentage of students commuting out of their areas of residence, may also contribute to entrance into organizing/activism. The following section explores another prominent star within participant responses, involvement in youth activism during K-12 schooling.

**K-12 Youth-Led Activism and Organizing**

Integral to exploring the connections between K-12 schooling and activism is honoring the power of youth-led organizing efforts. 70% (10 out of 14) of participants described being active within formal or informal youth-led activism spaces during their K-12 careers. For example, participants such as Paru, Jess, Clarissa, Star, Emcee, and Sandra, named specific programs administered by nonprofits within their schools as contributory to their growth as activists. Clarissa, Paru, and Jess each communicated that their work with Bringing Our Own Mic (BOOM) was formative and youth-led because many of their collective social actions were planned and facilitated by youth. This was also true for Star, Emcee, and Sandra, whose work with Seven Generations and Asian Americans For Progress (AAFP) was led and planned by youth with adults either offering the training, funding, or support to complete projects. Finally, Liz, Nairobi, and Esperanza identified school sponsored leadership opportunities as contributing to their development as activists/organizers. The following three subsections describe each of

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4 All community organizations and collaborations that participants mentioned are given pseudonyms.
these youth activism/leadership spaces and the ways in which participants identified their involvement as an important feature within their constellation.

**Bringing Our Own Mic (BOOM).** Bringing Our Own Mic (BOOM) is a coalition of youth throughout Chicago working on education and racial justice projects. Created in the mid-2000s, the BOOM coalition has led several legislative and school policy campaigns. Some BOOM accomplishments include the passage of SB100, which "end[ed] zero tolerance at all publicly funded schools in Illinois,” and the Rethinking Safety initiative, which “will allow school districts to expand resources for mental and behavioral health, restorative justice, and other trauma-informed support for youth”. Throughout Chicago, BOOM chapters are hosted by community-based organizations that aid youth in logistical planning, adult support, and access to meeting spaces.

Three participants, representing different areas of the city named their involvement with BOOM during their high school years as instrumental on their path to organizing. For example, Clarissa learned about the BOOM program hosted by a local nonprofit, The Southwest Racial Justice Initiative (SRJI). Clarissa's involvement with BOOM during high school gave her first-hand experience with local organizing efforts, political advocacy, and co-authoring legislation. Additionally, Clarissa and two other study participants were members of the BOOM cohort that won the passage of SB100 in the state legislature. Across the city, Paru's involvement in BOOM was informed by a much different context from Clarissa’s. During his middle school career, Paru became involved with the Southeast Side United (SSU) organization through a school-based male mentoring program. As an active member of SSU, Paru began to work more closely with the organization’s education work and BOOM program during his high school career. He fought
to save his high school from closure in the “Fight to Save Heights High School.” On the City's northwest Side, Jess recounted how she became involved with BOOM through a local nonprofit, Communities Together (C.T.). C.T. is a nonprofit anchored in the Albany Park community that established a programming partnership with Jess's high school during her time as a student.

When asked how she became involved in organizing work, Jess noted the following:

What really started me was, I had a conversation with my family members, and most of my family members, from my dad's side, are undocumented. I remember one of my aunts telling me, “You are our voice because we're too scared to speak up and say something,” and I was like Oh snap. It really took me back in time to see my dad incarcerated and then, shortly after, deported.

For Jess, one of the contributing factors toward her entrance into activism/organizing was learning of her family’s status, their fear, and witnessing her father being deported. Shortly after her conversations with family members, Jess described how she sought out the resources offered by C.T. and began taking leadership roles by conducting Know Your Rights trainings and supporting with DACA applications in her high school. As exampled in the excerpt below, taking on leadership roles allowed Jess to construct a constellation based on familial experiences and youth power:

That's when I saw the true beauty of what organizing really means. We have a lot of resources that folks don't know about. It's our mission to help one another; also [to] shed light and have healing processes during these hard conversations. I think doing the Know Your Rights trainings when I was just a sophomore and a junior in high school was really eye opening.

Jess highlights how access to youth programming offered by C.T. gave her an outlet to take action. Having recognized the different positionality, she held relative to her undocumented family members, Jess used the resources offered by C.U. and began her involvement with youth-led organizing.
Asian Americans For Progress. Emcee and Sandra identified youth organizing efforts led by the Uptown community group Asian Americans For Progress (AAFP) as instrumental in their growth and the construction of their constellations. Emcee and Sandra named partnerships between their ESL teachers and AAFP organizers as their entry point into activism. As immigrant students at two different schools on the city's north and northwest sides, Sandra and Emcee spoke of their teachers' partnerships with AAFP organizers. For Emcee, newly arrived from Germany, the relationships between teachers and organizers allowed her to get a sense of the connections that can exist between schooling and social justice work. Emcee also shared how through AAFP’s Youth Power program, she and other youth were offered a space to process and take action of their frustration with bilingual education. When asked to describe how Youth Power organized their work around bilingual education, Emcee stated the following:

We kind of brainstorm different things that we thought were wrong or felt uncomfortable about. Most of us don't have English as our first language and we struggled with that personally, going into school having to learn English; and having to learn this other language like Spanish or French. It invalidated our own language. When a school, an authoritative figure, is saying that, you take that to heart, without kind of knowing it. It affects you, knowing that my language isn't enough.

In the above excerpt, Emcee demonstrates how involvement in K-12 activism/organizing gave participants an important star to add to their constellations. AAFP’s focus on supporting immigrant youth and families allowed adult and youth organizers the opportunity to build connections via their identities and develop campaigns that would address their everyday lives. Students connected their experiences with invalidating school curriculum with the organizing opportunities offered by Youth Power. The result of this powerful connection is exampled in the quote from Emcee below:
We did this survey to grade our schools. We saw that like 42 CPS policies were never implemented in the curriculum for bilingual and ESL students. So, we made that survey for students, collected all that data, and then presented it at Springfield with our Alderman. It was amazing to see that we as students got something like that together. And it was amazing because the policy actually passed. As a result, now students that come in as ESL students in CPS don't have to take another language; English is counted as their second language requirement.

The networks built by teachers and youth organizers allowed Emcee to appreciate fights for education equity, gain an appreciation of Chicago as a large urban area composed of smaller worlds, and connect her with Youth Power to improve the learning environments of other ESL students around the city. Less than four miles away, another Youth Power youth activist, Sandra, shared Emcee's sentiments regarding the connections between teachers, organizers, and youth-led work to support ESL students and families. When asked if she ever felt like her organizing work was connected to her schooling Sandra responded the following:

Yes, I would tell my teachers about how we're trying to get translators for schools, because when there's a meeting between the school administrators and parents, a kid has to be removed from class to translate. These kids are put into these situations where the parents are also vulnerable. It was one of those things where it's like we were helping the teachers be more.

In addition to sharing some of the same sentiments as other participants regarding the connection between teachers and community work, Sandra offered a slightly different view. Sandra recounted educating her teachers about the experiences of ESL students as "helping the teachers be more," thereby positioning herself and her peers as partners in building better learning environments for students. For Jess, Emcee, and Sandra, involvement in organizing efforts during their K-12 careers gave them an opportunity to address several key features regarding how schools interact with communities. First, organizing with BOOM allowed Jess to become an educator in her school space, via offering Know Your Rights trainings for students
and community members. Second, the work of Emcee and Sandra highlights some of the ways in which immigrant parents and youth experience schooling, and the power youth have in policy creation. With this star in their constellation, study participants found early access and gained experience with what would become their future careers in activism/organizing.

**School Sponsored Leadership Opportunities.** In addition to youth-led programs offered by local nonprofits, schools often create opportunities and partnerships with larger national organizations to promote civic engagement and leadership. This was the case for several study participants, including Nairobi, Esperanza, and Liz. Nairobi spoke of various moments in which her high school administrators and teachers sought her out to mediate minor peer conflicts, speak at assemblies, or create after-school clubs. Similarly, in the beginning of our interviews, Esperanza noted how during her high school career she was nominated by school staff to join a university-funded research project because of her perceived potential for leadership. Participants used these opportunities to make meaning of their experiences within schools and communities. For example, Nairobi noted how she used the trust adults had in her to create an environmental club and teach her classmates on Latino Anti-blackness within peer mediation spaces. Further, Liz noted that in addition to her community's everyday organizing work, her school offered access to Harold’s Challenge programming during her high school career.

I remember doing campaigning hours for President Barack Obama and I went to a trip to his second inauguration. So I was in Washington DC, in that area where they get inaugurated. I remember feeling like, *Damn, like, I am American,* like that has been probably one of the only times that I have felt American. That was thanks to Harold’s Challenge. I think it was the most powerful thing to this day, is being in spaces that I’m not meant to be. So, I think that’s what really allowed me to grow, to be able to see myself in spaces where I shouldn't be or where I usually don't see people of color.
In the passage above, Liz described her experiences as generally positive and impactful. In one sense, Harold’s Challenge facilitated a rare moment in which Liz, an undocumented resident, felt *American*. In another sense, Liz also understood that many of the places Harold’s Challenge brought her, whether Marquette University or Washington D.C., were places she was "not meant to be.” Further, Liz made it abundantly clear that much of her current community work derives from generations of Little Village community members fighting for their space in the city. Her constellation, like that of many study participants, therefore included both historic community-based struggles for equity in Chicago and leadership opportunities available within her schooling.

**School Experiences**

As noted within Chapter 1, school spaces are contested. Schools are neither exclusively spaces of social-economic mobility or oppressive deathscapes – they have the potential to be both/and. This was confirmed within participant interviews, wherein nearly 80% of this study’s participants (11 out of 14) identified a range of experiences within schools as contributing to their entrance into activism/organizing and aiding in the creation of their constellation. This subsection describes three types of school-based experiences that participants named as influential in their development as activists/organizers. Specifically, I address the impact of school discipline, being a student from a historically marginalized community, and positive relationships with educators.

**School Discipline.** As noted within previous chapters, school discipline can drastically shape the life paths of students, too often resulting in entry into the justice system. Several study participants described how their experiences with school disciplinary practices encouraged them
to take action against perceived injustices within and beyond schools. For example, Honey and Sophia gave powerful insight into how school disciplinary practices pushed them toward social advocacy. After noting the frustration, she had with her high school security officers and their approach to students from the south side, Honey further described an earlier practice she observed in her elementary school,

I did notice that the school itself needed a lot of work, because most of the time whenever there was a troubled kid, those kids weren't asked as to why they would be in trouble or what the problem was. They were just trying to discipline, they would be putting [students] in special-ed classes or even put them in a bilingual class; that was considered a punishment.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to address the appalling school practice that Honey observed, it should suffice to note that such school disciplinary practices pushed Honey onto a path toward social activism. Honey's observations are complemented by Sophia's experiences in Joliet, IL. After her family moved from Brighton Park on the southwest side of Chicago to Joliet, Sophia (an organizer in Logan Square) found herself facing similar disciplinary practices as those she had experienced in the city. Her experiences with school discipline in Joliet were formative and she credited them with introducing her to social activism:

A lot of my friends and I were just noticing that our school was like much more policed, much more surveilled than other schools around us. My friends and I continued to call this stuff out. We got into a lot of trouble for it. That was the reason that this extra surveillance was on me and my friends, because we were talking about these things. I think that's the first time that I really was like these things are existing, and me and my community are doing things to name that.

In the excerpt above, Sophia describes several important features of schooling that are relevant to this study. First, she notes that low SES students often find themselves in over-policed and punitive schools, a recognition that this star can emerge in constellations regardless of urban and suburban settings. Second, Sophia's description of being targeted with “extra
surveillance” for calling out unfair school disciplinary practices gives further insight into the risks youth take when becoming involved in activism/organizing. When youth in adult-centered institutions dissent from normed practices, they are often vulnerable to retaliation by adults who do not support the criticism being raised. Finally, Sophia and her peers’ decision to continue their resistance to punitive disciplinary practices emphasizes the space creation (or world-building) that youth engage in within and beyond schools. The following subsection explores how other school practices experienced by students from historically marginalized communities informed their constellations and entrance into activism/organizing.

**Schooling at The Intersections of Identities.** Perhaps one of the most powerful findings to emerge was how marginalizing school experiences connected to student identities formed important aspects of participant constellations. In particular, the schooling experiences of students with documented learning disabilities, trans students, and immigrant youth arose as important features of entrance into activism/organizing. Jess, an organizer from Albany Park and Belmont Cragin, spoke powerfully about her experiences with Chicago Public Schools and the ways in which this star in her constellation was one that shone too bright to ignore. In the following excerpt, Jess gives insight into the complex experience of being a trans student with learning disabilities:

> Once I started coming out as trans is really when everything went downhill, because then I got kicked out of my house for coming out as trans. And the school gave me one bathroom all the way [up on] the third floor. I remember I felt I didn't have a place there, I was just like, *Oh, I’m such an inconvenience for my school,* in a time where I wanted school to feel safe because I wasn't feeling safe at home; I wasn’t feeling safe at school, either. That's when I really was like, *Okay, you gotta stand up and say something,* and I got the courage, and just went to the girls restroom, because I was like, *I'm a girl, I'm with the girls,* and they couldn't tell me anything.
From the excerpt above we see that Jess's identity as a trans person positioned her in a difficult choice. Jess had to choose between either accepting the schooling practices that made her feel as if she were a burden or use the skills she was learning with BOOM and take action. Ultimately, she used this star in her constellation to connect with others from marginalized backgrounds and continue her organizing work. Jess’s experiences also highlight two important aspects regarding youth activism spaces described by her and her peers as it relates to the Constellations of Civic Engagement. First, C.T.’s partnership to host BOOM in her school allowed Jess to become civically engaged locally and at the state level. Second, in addition to being Latinx and having a learning disability, Jess's position(s) within Chicago of being trans and of an undocumented family speaks to the vast array of realities that exist concurrently within urban landscapes and the people located within them. The stars that make up any one participant’s Constellation of Civic Engagement are both built by young people (via programs such as BOOM) and thrust upon them (and their communities) through the displacement, repressive immigration practices, heteronormativity, and ableism that runs throughout the veins of the city and country.

Similarly, the experiences of participants who identified with immigrant status demonstrates how marginalized schooling experiences influence relationships with schooling and activism. Immigrant study participants Liz, Emcee, and Sandra each expressed how their experiences as newly arrived students in the United States pushed them to reflect on their positions within their schools and communities. When asked if she felt any of her schooling experiences led to her current community work, Liz identified moments of getting bullied for her English-language learner status. In addition to the push created by the bullying she received for
her command of the English language, Liz also reflected on how her immigration status impacted her:

In elementary school, the environment was a little bit hostile. I tried to think of the way that schools welcome immigrant kids, and it's not very wellness-centered. It's like, you throw a kid to school and expect them to learn, and of course they learn, but I feel like the experience was a little harsh. It was all very lonely. I kind of took on this school system by myself, without having a hand to lead me.

Liz's experience of being othered for her English-language learner status pushed her to become "introspective" and "enojada." This contributed to her choice to transform her experiences into community work, to offer the "hand" she wished she had throughout her K-12 education and as she navigated life in the United States. The perception that ESL (English as a Second Language) students are not given support in schools was also expressed by another participant, Lidia. Lidia's time as a public-school student ended abruptly when her parents felt she was not getting the appropriate support as an English-language learner. Frustrated by their experiences with school counselors and administration, Lidia’s parents optioned to enroll her into private Catholic schools from kindergarten until the end of her high school career.

On the city's north side, Sandra, who immigrated from Ghana, shared how her experiences shaped her schooling and youth organizing experiences. Sandra expressed her frustrations as she learned that she was tracked into ESL courses without the support necessary for her to understand how being an ESL student would impact her education throughout the years:

I didn't know I was an ESL student. I knew I was taking tests and everything, but I thought it was one of those standardized tests. So, I really didn't pay much attention to it up until I got into high school, and they put me in an ESL class. I was so bothered by that because I wanted to take French in high school my freshman year. Then I was told I couldn't by my advisor because I was in ESL. They wouldn't accept the fact that I'm an English learner trying to learn a different language besides English.
Sandra's experiences as an ESL student were complex. On one hand, she noted a deep frustration with her lack of knowledge of Chicago's school system and an inability to remove herself from ESL courses. On the other hand, she now connects those experiences to her entrance into Chicago's activism community and considers them an important part of her constellation. For Sandra, similar to other participants, having marginalizing school experiences based on her identities thrust a star into her constellation. In this sense, the various stars within participant constellations encompassed environments in which young people had little control and those in which they found they had a significant amount of control, such as community of residence, school policies, youth-led activism spaces, and the agency to resist perceived injustices. The following subsection will explore the ways in which positive relationships with educators contributed to the development of participant constellations.

**Positive Relationships with Teachers**

Over half (8 out of 14) of the participants identified having influential teachers shape their perceptions of schooling and social justice work. This subsection describes responses from three study participants and the impact of having positive teacher relationships in the development of their constellations. For Honey, Clarissa, and Nairobi, teachers' classrooms often existed as safe spaces for open dialogue and the free flow of ideas regarding politics, philosophy, spirituality, and environmentalism. Youth-led, these experiences were defined less by the products or planning that were produced in the classroom and more about who led and guided conversation. Adults (often teachers) in these spaces played a secondary role, adding insight or resources only when youth sought them out.
Nairobi, an organizer with Roses From Concrete in Washington Park on the city’s south side, linked her path to social activism to her high school teachers. Nairobi identified Ms. Boston (a self-proclaimed bruja\(^5\) woman) as someone who played a crucial role in her political advocacy work. Nairobi described Ms. Boston as someone who offered an outlet for open dialogue, social justice curriculum, and an example of a "postmodern" educator. When asked about the early stages of her community work, Nairobi quickly identified Ms. Boston. Ms. Boston's impact on Nairobi was such a prominent feature of her path toward becoming an organizer that Nairobi's reflections of Ms. Boston continued into our second interview:

I did want to accentuate the fact that a Mexican bruja woman, this amazing chemistry teacher, shaped who I was my freshman year because she was the first teacher of color that I've had. It had a really big impact on my life. I just kind of looked up to her, because of who she was and how she carried herself, and how she made her way into education was like equity, postmodernism, and including everybody. I really looked up to that.

In addition to exposing students to "political things," Ms. Boston's existence and identity as a "Mexican bruja woman" who rejected "toxic machismo" allowed Nairobi to see herself as an agent of change and to push herself onto a path toward becoming a teacher. The opportunities opened by Ms. Boston encouraged Nairobi to build relationships with other teachers and school administration. Ultimately this aspect of Nairobi’s constellation proved to be an important lifeline (literally and figuratively) as she faced police repression in the streets of downtown Chicago. As an activist during the uprisings following the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, Nairobi tapped into her relationships with educators to coordinate immediate relief for herself and others.

\(^5\) Bruja is Spanish for witch.
Clarissa spent three years organizing in the southwest side neighborhood of Gage Park during her high school career, and three years organizing in the northwest side neighborhood of Albany Park following high school. Clarissa's high school civics teacher, Mr. Ferret, offered opportunities to participate in social justice activism and modeled patience and care for students. When asked why she felt Mr. Ferret influenced her high school education and path to activism, Clarissa stated:

He was the dopest teacher I've ever had. He wasn't for a lot of the norms in schools where it made us feel like we were prisoners, he wasn't strict. He was very free flowing in his classes, and he accepted open discussions. If a student was going through something, he would actually care about them. He invested in his students, whether it was emotionally or for the education, just [try to] get them involved.

For Clarissa, the care and opportunities opened by Mr. Ferret (including connecting her with BOOM) contributed to an environment in which Clarissa began to see herself as an agent of change within her community. When asked about the types of activities Mr. Ferret offered students, Clarissa noted that beyond offering an after-school social justice club, he also practiced an open-door policy for participation and connected students to nonprofit organizations within the community.

Honey attended schools and organized within her community of residence on the southwest side, as well as across the city in Albany Park, both during and after her high school career. Honey is another participant who mentioned having supportive teachers who offered social justice curriculum and care for students. The excerpt below highlights how Ms. Doe and Ms. Kelly facilitated a social justice curriculum by creating a sense of familial bonding with their students. When asked whether she viewed either Ms. Doe or Ms. Kelly as directly impacting her community work, Honey remarked the following:
Yes, indeed, because I was taught so much. Especially Ms. Doe, the fact that you can make things change. That's the only way we can really stop this stuff is making the change by yourself. I want to say, Ms. Doe was a big, big influence. They both were aware, Ms. Kelly and Ms. Doe, that I was involved with organizing, so they helped out with that as well; they were very supportive. They taught me a lot, and I think they pushed me, they [were] always educating me, and it was like, although they were older than me, I was able to talk to them as if it weren't just a child and adult, we were able to have real conversations, we sat at the same table.

Honey’s response above highlights how Ms. Doe and Ms. Kelly attempted to address anti-youth and ageist approaches to schooling, allowing Honey to feel as if she was “sitting at the same table” with elders. The efforts of Ms. Boston, Mr. Ferret, Ms. Doe, and Ms. Kelly helped create environments for students to engage in social activism. Study participants gave insight into how, through the creation of caring relationships with teachers, metaphysical stars (stars that transcended classroom spaces and/or school norms) were instrumental in their constellations and their entrances into organizing/activism.

**Community Struggles for Social Justice and Education Equity**

In addition to teachers, school practices, a rich youth organizing landscape, and commutes, several participants named local community struggles for educational equity as influential factors for their relationships with education as well as their development as organizers/activists. Liz and Esperanza, alums of Justice High School, expressed a deep reverence for their community elders who fought (and won) to create the high school they attended. When asked what it was like attending schools within her community, Liz’s response included her reflections on the organizing efforts that led to the founding of her high school:

In high school, it was such a pride to go here, because that's when you start learning about the civil rights movement; [with] my high school, it started … because a group of women had a hunger strike, so you know you start learning that, and you're like, *Hell yeah, I'm in this school.* I love that because it was convenient, you know, it was right here, right there.
Within her reflections, Liz described how for some youth, histories of community struggles for education offer a sense of pride and identification with schools and communities. In concert with many other factors, this sense of pride and identification helps to activate youth into public life. Esperanza also commented on the Justice Hunger Strike and connected that history to youth activism during her time as a student. When asked about her path through high school, Esperanza shared the following reflections:

I didn't want to [attend Justice High School], but once I got in there, I learned more about the high school, and it exposed me to how our community just shows up for each other. So, you know, Justice got created because 14 community members went on a hunger strike for that school to be built. I thought that was pretty interesting and, like, amazing; that the community did that in order for us to have a better education.

Esperanza shared a similar sentiment with other study participants about a general lack of excitement for the high school in which she enrolled in. However, unlike many other participants, learning of the organizing efforts by 14 community members offered Esperanza the ability to develop a sense of pride and an example of a community "showing up for each other.” These factors later led to her support for a more recent fight to restore AP courses to one of the four Justice High Schools, which she described:

Justice is a high school with four little high schools inside. Each little high school has a prime focus, and one of the high schools, they got their AP classes and honors classes taken away because there was no more funding. The entire school did a walk out. They were just passing out tape to the rest of the schools for the students to put tape over the mouth so we could be part of the movement. I was kind of like, *I'm not going to participate in school either unless this other school gets funding for their classes again.* It was a whole day process, but at the end of the day, they ended up getting the funding back.

As illustrated in the excerpt above, for many communities in Chicago, fights for education equity include historic and current struggles. From limited funding to school closures,
persistent inequity emerged as an important aspect in participant constellations. Paru, an alum of Heights High School, described his high school career as one in which he organized and fought alongside community members to save his school from closure. The fight for Heights High School eventually led to community members from Kenwood engaging in a 23-day hunger strike. The school has since reopened, and Paru currently leads youth organizing efforts and restorative justice training for students and staff. Below, Paru shares about his experiences as a student at a school he was organizing to save and how it shaped his entrance into activism/organizing:

I spent almost all my years organizing to keep the high school open. They started opening up back up when we started organizing the community, but it was still like, Why, when we have these resources, you don't use it? You know it's bad when students feel like we weren't learning nothing. We actually felt we weren't going to be anything because that's how we felt people were treating us. I know I got burnt out because I'm just like, Why am I spending all my life right now trying to fight to keep the school open and y'all don't care about it?

The exhaustion of organizing to save his school for four long years was a similar sentiment shared by other study participants who, in their early 20s, were already 6-, 7-, or 8-year organizing veterans. While Paru was the only study participant who had the first-hand experience of having his school close during his K-12 education, he was not the only one impacted by school closures. In our conversations surrounding how her school community reacted to her activism, Nairobi shared how her experiences with a fellow student organizer only occurred as a result of the classmate's high school being closed, thereby putting the two youth organizers in relationship with each other:

After her school shut down in Englewood, she came over; she would just be telling me how her school was so underfunded that they shut things down, but the CPD budget is expanding. She just started radicalizing me even more because I didn't even know about that. I didn't know about the Englewood school shutting down. She was a person that
always challenged my mind and made me want to do more. We would always go to these actions together; it was awesome. She was just like my partner in crime.

Here, Nairobi again describes several important aspects of the Constellations of Civic Engagement that others shared throughout their interviews and this chapter. First, education and public policy impact more than just targeted populations and communities. While Chicago is widely recognized as one of the most segregated cities in the nation, these segregated communities are in relationship to each other, and shifts in one community (whether facilitated by school closure or gentrification) will inevitably impact others. Second, some stars emerged via their spatial existence within the city. The ability to create spaces to process school closings, police budgets, abolition, and reform provided Nairobi and her classmate with the opportunities to create some of the stars within their constellations.

**Stars Formed in Kinship.** As noted, *constellation* refers to the web of relationships and spaces that aided participants on their paths into organizing and activism. For example, Esperanza and Lidia noted how having access to supportive community members (in addition to other factors) offered a sense of comfort and safety as they charted their paths into activism/organizing. For Esperanza, on the walk to and from school, she had the opportunity to “vent” and gain insight from the “tamale lady” she passed on the way. Lidia commented how her landlord became such a support to her and her parents that he became her “chosen grandfather.”

For Liz, her involvement with Harold’s Challenge and community-led mutual aid for newly arrived residents inspired her to continue the legacy of her parents and fellow street vendors. A participant’s becoming involved in organizing or activism was rarely attributable to a single person, event, or program. In fact, for all study participants, entrance into public life began and was often sustained by a wide range of supportive stars within their constellation of
community. This is further exemplified by Vanessa, Lidia, and Star, who identified various community stakeholders that inspired them to begin early careers in activism. For example, Vanessa, a housing activist, noted that her sister's work with a local nonprofit exposed her to housing advocacy work that prioritized relationships as a vehicle for community cohesion. As noted above, one of the stars in Vanessa's constellation of community was her commute to and from school. Another star was her sister and other community organizers. Her commute and her sister aided in shaping Vanessa’s constellation and brought her closer to becoming involved in housing activism.

In Uptown, Star noted how the resources and relationships provided by the nonprofit Seven Generations, as well as having a father who was an active Chicago Teachers Union delegate, allowed her to develop her poetry and leadership skills and form her constellation. When asked how she became connected to Seven Generations, Star responded with the following:

Well, I didn't know it was activism or organizing at the time. That was around the time in which the Laquan McDonald case came out. That's when I first got my first toe in the water of activism. I was doing a lot of poetry, a lot of, like, art around what was going on. I also joined Seven Generations. They were making sure that you understood what was going on in the world [and] how you can be involved in that work and how we're not separated just because our age.

Star later noted that while Seven Generations exposed her to new topics and training, the staff often provided access to resources and relied heavily on young people to lead the direction of their activism/organizing work. Similarly, for Lidia, the Logan Boulevard Coming Together (LBCT) played an instrumental role in her entrance into community work. Through LBCT’s administration of an After School Time (AST) program and leadership development training,
Lidia earned the moniker of "megaphone" for her outspoken voice during protests. When asked to describe her entrance into community organizing, Lidia stated the following:

I needed something that was within walking distance. LBCT was the thing that was closest to me, and their description of their youth leadership program, it seemed very interesting. Ever since then, I've been working on housing efforts and to see how we can stop gentrification. Obviously, we were unsuccessful in doing so since Logan Square is clearly white at this point, but helping those who are there now, mom and pop-owned buildings, undocumented folks, or any leftover Latinx folks that are still in the community, finding ways to keeping them there.

From the excerpt above, several important aspects of Lidia's constellation of community emerge. First, unlike other participants who sometimes traveled 14 miles to connect with their built communities, Lidia's involvement with LBCT relied heavily on the fact that it was walking distance from her home in Logan Square. We see then that for some youth, after-school programming becomes accessible only when located within their geographic community. Secondly, Lidia created another star by expressing her agency and choosing the organizing issue she felt the most connected with, housing. Therefore, while some stars of the Constellations of Civic Engagement are independent of participants (such as housing shifts or even the existence of LBCT), others were intentionally created by youth based on interest, identification, or other factors.

**Dimmer Stars**

This subsection describes aspects of schooling, space, and activism less frequently named by study participants. First, in Chapter Two, I discuss the potential role of formal civics courses in encouraging youth to become civically engaged. From the data, enrollment within formal civics courses did not emerge as an influential factor for entrance into activism/organizing. Only two participants identified being enrolled in a civics course, and of those two, Carissa named
only a connection between her civics teacher, Mr. Ferret, not course content, as playing a role in her early activism. Paru named having a civics course in which he “liked” the teacher but stated he did not see a connection between the course and his organizing work. Moreover, I anticipated that many more of my participants would identify education organizing as a current project of their work. Only Paru, Nairobi, and Lidia identified education organizing as a current project. Paru currently runs restorative justice training for youth and adults at Heights High School, Nairobi is working to remove school resource officers from public schools, and Lidia leads youth councils to “decolonize curriculum” on the north side.

Pertaining to their early careers in activism, several participants identified a growing frustration with having to re-tell traumatic experiences they had as youth to large crowds or CBO funders. Finally, and perhaps most telling regarding perceptions and realities of urban youth experiences, only two participants named interactions with street organizations (gangs) as a notable aspect of their K-12 schooling or spatial existence. Liz and Lidia were the only two participants to identify street organizations at all. Liz noted regularly seeing local members helping elders in the community; and Lidia mentioned how recent “gentrified art” did not make sense to her, but street organization graffiti did.

**Conclusion**

Chicago is a city like many others in the United States. It is one built on historic and continued inequity and simultaneously on rich traditions of community resilience and resistance. In this sense, the Constellations of Civic Engagement that emerged from data could also emerge in the vantage point of New York, Philadelphia, Oakland, Atlanta, or Dekalb. Study findings indicate that there are powerful connections between schooling, space, and the development of
young adult activists/organizers. The leading finding suggests that throughout their K-12 education, study participants resisted constrained notions of youth agency by co-creating constellations that served as navigational tools throughout and after their K-12 education. The stars identified within this study’s findings were representative of trends within the data and should not be interpreted as linear. Instead, the stars that compose the constellations were fluid, concurrent, and complex. Paths into early careers in activism were shaped by the universe of places, people, policy, and practice that exist within and beyond schools. The following chapter will consider the ways in which study findings may help to inform the field of education for scholars and practitioners.
CHAPTER FIVE
IMPLICATIONS

Chapter Five considers the implications of my study's primary findings by describing the study's inspiration, contributions to existing literature, implications for practice and research, and limitations. This study was inspired by my experiences within Chicago and Chicago Public Schools, my career as a community organizer and youth worker, and my training as a sociologist of education. I sought to address several aspects regarding the possible relationships between schooling and the development of young adult activists/organizers. These potential relationships were explored for several reasons. Schools are often recognized as sites for personal, familial, and community uplift. Yet, as the work of Watkins (2001) and Morris (2016) highlight, schools have also been historic and current sites of oppression for youth and communities of color. Schools can operate as sites where poor and minority youth are channeled into prisons and are hyper-surveilled (Giroux, 2013; Kupchik, 2009).

Schools can also serve as sites where young people are encouraged to become leaders in their communities via formal and informal civics curriculum (Ginwright, 2008; Levinson, 2012). Therefore, schools can simultaneously serve as sites of uplift, oppression and create opportunities for students to participate in the public sphere (Arendt, 2013). School spaces offer youth experiences and paths into a wide range of post-secondary life, including college, incarceration, and entry into early adult activism/organizing. For scholars and school-based practitioners interested in promoting civically engaged students and democratically involved
young adults, understanding the complex relationships between schooling and activism is important. It is important to appreciate the types of experiences that lead students into early careers in activism in order to promote positive opportunities for youth to be encouraged to take on leadership roles within and beyond schools while minimizing negative school and organizational practices.

Through the collection and analysis of demographic surveys and semi-structured interviews with 14 young-adult activists, this study sought to address first what kinds of relationships, if any, exist between schooling and the development of young adult activists? And second, in what ways do young adult activists create meaning from their schooling and spatial experiences in and around schools? Study findings provide the basis for several implications regarding schooling, space, and the power of youth to shape and impact their environments. I learned that entrance into public life via constellations of civic engagement complicates how schooling and space encourage youth to become civically engaged during their K-12 schooling and into early adulthood. Specifically, while historic inequity is the foundation of current urban education policy and practice, for participants, paths into activism were not narrowly informed by these factors of urban life. Rather, while historic inequity and negative schooling experiences did contribute to entrances into activism, so too did positive relationships with teachers, access to youth leadership spaces within and beyond schools, peer relationships, and community context. Among many other things, I have learned that paths into activism were the result of participants choosing to exercise their agency by using their experiences (and access to leadership opportunities) to become involved in activism/organizing within their K-12 careers and into early adulthood.
This chapter will consider how study findings may inform urban education policy and practice. First, due to my prioritization of Chicago and urban landscapes, I consider how study findings contribute to scholarship on urban spaces and urban schooling. Next, I contemplate how this study contributes to critical youth studies and scholarship on identity projects. The concluding sections of this chapter discuss implications for practice and future research. Finally, I hope to offer readers a critical perspective regarding how study participants further nuanced understandings of the possible connections between schooling, space, and activism.

**Schooling in Space: How Constellations Inform Literature on Urban Education**

From the literature on urban spaces, scholars have demonstrated that young people inherit spaces built on histories of inequity (Luckey, 1995; Tate, 2008). This study's findings may contribute to the field of urban education policy and practice as I believe scholars and practitioners alike can gain valuable knowledge from the everyday school practices that contributed to participant constellations. As noted within the previous chapter, findings indicate that within their K-12 schooling, participants created constellations comprised of places (classrooms and nonprofits), experiences (positive and negative), and relationships (with peers and community elders) that aided in their identification (and involvement) as activists/organizers. Participants proactively built connections and organized in communities around the city, including but not limited to their communities of residence and school sites. As noted in Chapter Two, scholars within the fields of urban sociology and sociology of education have noted how youth within urban landscapes inherit and occupy places built on historic inequity (Dougherty, 2007, 2012; Shiller, 2011). While historic inequity may set a proverbial stage for urban schooling, youth maintain agency in navigating and building spaces for resistance and
leadership. That is, youth are not merely policy receivers but policy actors and shapers (Ayers, 2003; Taines, 2012).

Furthermore, within the context of neoliberal education reform, youth are faced with a constrained agency. Youth are positioned as consumers within a complex educational marketplace that ultimately places the responsibility for missteps on students and families, not systemic inequity (Phillippo, 2019). Participants demonstrated the ability to move beyond constrained agency by becoming involved in a range of activism/organizing such as passing laws, changing school practices, and creating safe spaces for one another. Specifically, participants such as Emcee, Sandra, Paru, Clarissa, and Jess engaged in policy advocacy and creation that altered ESL education and school disciplinary policies within Chicago and Illinois. Participants developed relational resources with educators to create after-school clubs, turn classrooms into safe spaces for dialogue, and engage in advocacy work in the state capital. From this study's findings, I have learned how participants utilized a wide range of resources within and beyond schools to actively shape their environments.

Furthermore, participants highlighted how formal and informal practices informed their entrances into organizing/activism. Some participants identified formal school practices (clubs, curriculum, assemblies, or being tracked into ESL courses) as factors that contributed to their growth as organizers. Others noted how informal schooling experiences such as positive mentor-like relationships with teachers and everyday practices, such as placing misbehaved students into special education classrooms as a form of punishment, also contributed to their constellations. When participants were engaged in policy creation, I learned that they were motivated to create a holistic environment for all rather than being driven solely by personal benefits. The influence of
formal and informal practices on participant entrances into activism/organizing encourages scholars and practitioners to investigate how school programming and policy shape student experiences.

Furthermore, participants demonstrated the limits of formal civics education. As noted in Chapter Two, the goal of civics education is to encourage lifelong democratically involved youth and young adults. However, this study's findings complicate the simple push for access to civics courses alone. Only two of the 14 study participants were enrolled in formal civics courses, and none attributed their enrollment as a feature in their constellation. As demonstrated by responses from Clarissa and Paru, enrollment in civics courses did not contribute to the development of their constellation as K-12 students or their current organizing work. Study participants highlighted how enrollment in programming (whether formal civics courses or after-school clubs) was not the singular cause of their entrances into activism/organizing or even enough to facilitate youth investment in classrooms and community spaces. Rather than formal civics courses, study participants identified relationships with elders and peers as important avenues for their entrance into activism. Classrooms, nonprofits, and youth organizing spaces that prioritized relationships and environments based on care and trust of youth leadership were often more relevant than whether formal civics or after-school programming were available.

If scholars, school personnel, and nonprofit-based practitioners are interested in promoting civically engaged students via programming and course offerings, this study nuances the simplistic push to increase programming and civics-based curriculum. Instead, as demonstrated within Chapter Four, a wide range of factors contributed to the development of civic engagement for participants. For example, the experiences of Paru, Sophia, and Honey via
school closures and discipline demonstrates how negative schooling experiences contributed to entrances into activism. Moreover, rather than excusing or accepting harmful schooling environments as a norm for urban students, practitioners are encouraged to critique the impact of negative schooling experiences for contributing to student civic engagement. In their early 20s, many participants who identified negative schooling experiences also expressed various degrees of burnout and exhaustion from having spent much of their K-12 schooling careers fighting against practices and policies that have proven damaging to students' wellbeing (Nicholson & Birchmeier, 2009). Furthermore, to promote positive experiences within schools, practitioners are encouraged to move beyond advocating for programming without ensuring that those programs and classrooms promote student ownership of classroom norms and a culture of care for students.

**Contributions to Critical Youth Studies and Identity Projects**

Participant experiences emphasize a noteworthy ability for youth to transform everyday settings into spaces of care, contestation, and growth. As such, this section considers how constellations offer new perspectives for the fields of critical youth studies. Within their work, Oldenburg (2000) and Gutierrez and Baquedano-Lopez (1999) bring critical awareness to the importance of "third places" in community and schooling environments. Oldenburg (2000) defines third places as public sites where people can meet and connect without the preoccupations associated with work and home. Oldenburg further argued that third places allow community members to meet and invest in local communities. Unlike first (home) and second (work) places, Oldenburg argues that creating third places helps support and sustain community safety and cohesion. The work of Gutierrez and Baquedano-Lopez (1999) further nuances
understandings of third spaces by focusing on the ways in which dialogue within third spaces offers participants (in third spaces) the opportunity to move beyond rigid understandings of prescriptive learning. In particular, Gutierrez and Baquedano-Lopez (1999) highlight how learning within third spaces is "polycontextual, multivoiced and multi scripted" (p. 287), meaning they are spaces in which participants curate a wide range of unscripted discourses leading to deeper levels of collaboration and learning.

This study advances the work of Oldenburg (2000) and Gutierrez and Baquedano-Lopez (1999) by highlighting how youth create spaces beyond work (or school), home, and adult-centered institutions. I borrow from Oldenburg, Gutierrez, and Baquedano-Lopez to define places as physical sites where people meet, such as schools, homes, or parks. Spaces are defined as sites where people engage each other and build collaborative opportunities for dialogue. The goals and directions of spaces are fluid and ultimately determined by the people involved. By creating stars within their constellations with other youth, participants demonstrated an ability to transform places into spaces of resistance, offer critical hope, and avenues into early careers in activism/organizing. Study participants made meaning of their schooling and spatial experiences by constructing constellations as navigational tools throughout K-12 schooling. In some instances, stars within constellations were co-created with the support of elders (such as teachers and adult organizers). Other stars were created amongst youth beyond the purview of adults, further described below. This aspect of constellations allowed participants to transcend their physical surroundings to encompass a wide range of experiences that moved beyond the hyper-surveilled, bureaucratic, curricular norms that many youths in urban settings exist within.
By creating youth-led third spaces, participants moved beyond their physical surroundings to create sites free from adult surveillance. When youth set the tone and direction of a place (classrooms, street corners, nonprofits, etc.), they became spaces of resistance to adult-centered institutions. These spaces became a site for community building, wrestling with issues of identity, and developing methods of social change without the hyper-surveillance that shapes many adult-centered institutions. In youth-led third spaces, elders/adults are brought in when youth request guidance, specific skills, tools, or support; this was the case for Clarissa, Star, and Emcee. Their classrooms and local nonprofit places evolved into youth-led third spaces when they, and their peers, were given the support to shape the direction of activities, create organizing campaigns, and build community with trusted adults. There exists a tension between youth-led third spaces and first and second places. Youth-led third spaces are absent of the hyper-surveilled, bureaucratic, curricular norms in which many youths in urban settings exist. As such, the existence of such a radical space comes into friction with the surrounding society dominated by adults and elders. However, from the data collected, we see how adults can contribute to the development of youth-led third spaces. Adults such as Ms. Doe, Mr. Ferret, and youth organizers at Communities Together, Asian Americans For Progress, and Southeast Side United all supported youth in their ability to create spaces by offering resources such as classrooms, relationships, and training.

Furthermore, study findings confirm and advance current conceptualizations of identity projects by highlighting how youth form and sustain identity projects. Literature on identity projects offered this study insight into how study participants may have used activism/organizing as an identity project throughout their schooling careers and early adulthood. Scholars such as
Rosen (2019), Best (2011), and Deluca and Clampet-Lundquist (2016) note that youth develop identity projects as navigational tools within urban subcultures and mainstream society, often giving them a tool to center everyday activities. This was confirmed by many of my study participants as all but one (13 of 14) identified as an activist/organizer during their K-12 careers. The identity project of activist/organizer offered study participants many activities to fill their everyday calendars during K-12 schooling that easily transitioned into a familiar occupation as they entered early adulthood.

Finally, as Rosenblatt and Edin (2015) noted, many urban youth have inconsistent support in developing and maintaining identity projects, which proved true among my study participants. However, this study advances research on identity projects by highlighting how youth develop and sustain identity projects with peers. This was the case for Nairobi and Sophia, who noted how their identity project of activist/organizer was built and maintained by building relationships with their peers. For Nairobi, the relationship she developed with her classmate M.B. offered her consistent support and encouragement as she developed her sense of identity as an activist. Similarly, Sophia’s peer group developed a sense of confidence and camaraderie as they faced pressure from adults for their resistance to school discipline, ultimately viewing the pressure as a symbol of their success as activists. While all participants had access to supportive elders or school programs for periods of their K-12 careers, peer spaces within their constellations offered a consistent place of support and identification as they navigated schooling and early adulthood. Also noteworthy is that no participant framed their involvement in activism/organizing in opposition to community life or exposure to street crime. Rather, many
participants understood their roles as activists/organizers as an important piece of community life.

**Implications for Practice**

The following subsections consider the implications of study findings on various fields of practice. First, I consider implications for school-based practitioners. Then, I discuss how community-based organizations may benefit from this study. Lastly, I consider implications for youth navigating early careers and activism/organizing.

**School-based Practitioners.** This subsection identifies implications for school-based practitioners regarding the impact of formal and informal practices, promoting youth leadership, and partnerships with community-based organizations. First, the role of formal and informal school practices emerged as important features in participant schooling experiences. Participants expressed how a wide range of positive and negative schooling practices informed the development of their constellations. Notably, participants identified positive teacher-student relationships, ESL tracking, restroom policies, and school discipline informed how schools became safe or unsafe spaces. Many positive teacher-student relationships were created informally and often in opposition to formal practices. For example, Clarissa and Honey's description of Mr. Ferret and Ms. Kelly's classrooms as filled with patience and care was counter to the formal school-wide practices that did not communicate those things to them.

Similarly, while it is not fruitful to speculate about whether Jess' administrator was well-intended in offering her a restroom on the third floor, the ultimate impact of this formalized practice left Jess feeling like a burden in school. Therefore, school-based practitioners should interrogate their formal and informal school practices with a range of stakeholders, including
teachers, youth, parents, social workers, and others. Study findings encourage practitioners to investigate how school practices may intentionally or unintentionally re-produce or create harmful learning environments. In particular, the experiences of Honey and Sophia highlight how punitive school discipline harms students’ sense of connection with schools and adults. Regardless of the goal to promote civic engagement, practitioners should evaluate whether eligibility requirements for after-school programming could inadvertently limit the development of positive relationships between students and teachers, as exampled by Clarissa's description of Mr. Ferret's open-door policy for participation in his after-school clubs.

Second, findings encourage school-based practitioners to promote spaces for youth leadership. Consistent with the literature on promoting youth voice in classroom settings (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Emdin, 2016), this study affirms efforts to empower youth to shape school and classroom environments. Participants such as Sandra, Jess, and Nairobi highlight how when youth are given the space and support to lead, they can host trainings, create clubs, and become peer mentors, thereby creating more dynamic schooling environments. Often, what is branded in school spaces as youth-led is perceived as adult-dominated spaces with youth presence (Conner & Brown, 2016). This study encourages school-based practitioners to create open spaces for youth to lead and curate the direction of activities. As demonstrated in previous chapters, there is an array of ways youth can take ownership of school spaces (school assemblies, leadership clubs, or peer mentoring). However, what is often lacking is school-wide adult support for youth leadership. As noted in the previous chapter, the support that participants such as Honey received from Ms. Doe or Ms. Kelly was viewed in opposition to school norms that did not promote student leadership. It is important to note that adults who are willing to support
youth leadership often have to defend these spaces from other adults who are not invested in this anti-ageist approach to education (Libby & Rosen, 2005). A small but significant first step may be to open classrooms and offices before and after school for youth to connect with each other and mentors.

Third, several study participants identified relationships between teachers and community-based organizers as instrumental to their growth. Therefore, school-based practitioners interested in promoting youth civic engagement should build partnerships with community-based organizations. For example, Emcee and Sandra named the partnerships between their schools and AAFP organizers as important for bridging connections between school and community life. AAFP also led workshops and internships for youth during school days, which led many to become involved in long-term organizing work. Therefore, school-based practitioners can consider partnering with CBOs to offer training, workshops, or co-creating curriculum opportunities during and after-school hours to promote a connection between schools and communities.

Community-based Organizations. The community-based organizations identified in the previous chapter played an important role in many participant constellations by offering opportunities for leadership and engagement in community work. Therefore, CBOs interested in promoting long-term youth leadership are encouraged to reflect on several implications, including increasing opportunities for youth to lead organizing work, facilitating access to mental health supports, and countering deficit notions of youthhood. First, participants such as Lidia, Vanessa, and Star noted how local CBOs enabled youth organizing efforts by offering spaces for youth to take on leadership roles within existing and new organizing campaigns. In
many of these spaces, adults played a supplemental role offering training, funding, or office spaces when youth expressed a need. Star’s experiences exemplified this with Seven Generations, in which she described a sense of shock when adult organizers at Seven Generations empowered youth to plan workshops, trainings, and even trips around the country.

CBOs who work with and promote youth leadership are uniquely positioned to address activist burnout. As a result of their early entrances into activism/organizing, several study participants identified having experienced various degrees of exhaustion and fatigue with activism only a few years into their late teens. To this end, CBOs are encouraged to promote and facilitate easy access to mental health supports for youth organizers. Specifically, participants named retelling traumatic experiences to funders or policymakers as a stressful part of their volunteer or paid work. An important step in ending the stress caused by re-telling traumatic experiences is for CBOs to resist taken-for-granted deficit frames of youth experiences by not placing youth in positions where they are expected to retell their personal stories of trauma for organizational purposes. Instead, CBOs should work to uplift the ways youth positively impact communities and organizing work.

Youth Activists/Organizers. The final section pertaining to implications for practice is for current youth organizers within Chicago and beyond. The implications for practice are straightforward, developed from study findings, and inspired by responses from participants all around the city. First, continue to let your love for your community and its collective traditions of resistance be the compass for your work. This is exampled by the responses of Esperanza and Anna, who noted that their early and continued community work is inspired by generations of community elders who struggled and fought to build a better city for younger generations.
Second, take breaks when needed and build spaces for other youth to take on leadership roles. Experiencing feelings of isolation, exhaustion, and fatigue (commonly referred to as burnout) with activism work was not uncommon for many study participants. Paru and Liz both noted how their long-term organizing work is sustained by taking breaks, allowing others to support them, and practicing self-care when possible. Finally, perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of this study was having the honor to learn from organizers who refuse to settle for crumbs. Guided by their commitments to community and a better future, study participants exampled what it means to be the change. This is demonstrated most clearly by participants who led the fights to reform school discipline practices and ESL education, not just for themselves or schoolmates but for all students within Illinois. For current activists/organizers, I hope this study offers solace, knowing there are many others all around the city also fighting for the same goal of a more just Chicago.

**Implications for Further Research on Youth Activism**

Various fields of research and professional practice informed this study. This section considers implications for future research. First, one of the central features of this study is the hyperlocal context of Chicago. Future research can explore how this study's findings are expanded or nuanced by differing contexts, including how youth make meaning of their schooling and spatial experiences within metropolitan and rural landscapes to explore further how youth navigate and build spaces beyond city centers. Second, while not a focus of this study, what emerged as a striking reality among study participants is that all but one self-identified as either gender-fluid or female. Future research can explore more intentionally how women lead and shape Chicago's activism/organizing landscape. Lastly, aligned with this study's
Critical Youth Studies conceptual framework, future research can engage active K-12 youth activists/organizers as co-researchers in a Youth Participatory Action Research study. This partnership can further explore the possible relationships between schooling, space, and the development of activists/organizers.

**Limitations**

This section considers several limitations embedded within the study. First, I discuss limitations pertaining to the study's focus on the city of Chicago. Next, I consider the lack of variety and stakeholders engaged during data collection. Then, I consider limitations pertaining to participant ages. Lastly, I consider the impact of COVID-19 on the study. As mentioned within each of this dissertation's chapters, Chicago plays a central role in the inspiration and execution of this project. While I did not attempt to hide my relationship with Chicago or Chicago Public Schools, my study's focus on Chicago's political, social, and racial landscape may impact the study's generalizability. Ultimately, many of the characteristics that define Chicago are not unique to the United States or even the global landscape. However, I recognize that the particularities between urban spaces matter and caution against any grand generalizations of the study's findings since they draw from many experiences unique to Chicago, such as historic housing segregation, a school choice model that moves students across the city for K-12 schooling, and Chicago's long history of labor and community organizing. My focus on Chicago could unintentionally signal to readers that all urban students share my participants' experiences.

Second, this study's prioritization of young adult activist organizers limited the number of other school and community-based stakeholders included in data collection. As such, another limitation is the lack of diversity in recruitment, such as teachers, paraprofessionals, community
elders, parents, community leaders, etc. As stated within previous chapters, schools are meeting places for many different groups and people; therefore, readers may interpret the role of youth in school and community spaces to be overelaborate. While the study's CYS framework allowed me to focus on the transformative power of youth and young people in making meaning of their lived experiences, future research can include a broader range of stakeholders to offer different perspectives on school and community practices.

The third limitation considers how study participants were engaged several years after their K-12 schooling, rather than an ethnographic study as they transitioned into early adulthood. This study engaged young adult activists/organizers ages 18 to 25 in reflective interviews on their K-12 schooling and entrance into their early careers. Participants were encouraged to make meaning of their experiences through my interpretive phenomenological framework, ultimately allowing constellations to emerge as the primary study finding. In addition, participants had the privileged perspective of being several years removed from K-12 schooling to develop the narratives regarding their path into activism organizing, thereby offering this study's readers a cleaner (and potentially more polished) version of the relationships between schooling and activism.

Finally, over the last two years, the world has undergone massive change due in part to the emergence of the COVID-19 virus. Recent studies show that poor communities of color were most impacted by death and unemployment during the pandemic (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Many of my study participants represent many of these communities. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the degree to which COVID-19 limited the ability for activists/organizers to join the study; or how associated changes in society such as lockdown
requirements, death, or consistent economic hardship shaped responses or perceptions of schooling and entrances into activism/organizing.

**Conclusion**

When I began graduate school, I was seven years into my career as a youth worker and community organizer. At the time, I was leading student transitions for a controversial school merger in the Gold Coast and former Cabrini Green communities. Wrestling with the impact of my work as a youth advocate and developing scholar, I chose to pursue a field of study that I hoped would allow me not simply to report on my personal experiences or locate them within existing scholarship. Rather, throughout my graduate career and this study, I have sought to research and push beyond the confines of my own experiences to include the ways in which schooling and space shape and are shaped by city life.

From the experiences of undocumented, immigrant, trans, Black, and queer participants, I hope this study offers readers several points of reflection. First, all schooling is political and exists in a world that simply does not allow for objectivity. Second, whether in nonprofit settings or classrooms, practitioners are encouraged to reflect on the normed ageist practices that may derail youth from transforming those places into youth-led third spaces. Lastly, I hope this study offers youth and young adult activists/organizers solace in knowing that others around the city are working, building, and fighting to create a more just Chicago. You are not alone, and when we fight, we win.
Survey protocol

Basic demographic information
1. Pseudonym:
   a. Please create an alternate name for your survey and interview responses
2. Age:
   a. Open response
3. With what ethnic and/or racial group do you identify?
   a. Open response
4. Gender
   a. Open response
5. Are you currently employed?
   a. If yes, please list all jobs you currently have and employers

K-12 schooling
6. Highest level of education completed
   a. Grade school
   b. High school/GED
   c. Some college
   d. College
   e. Graduate school
7. What school(s) did you attend from K-5?
   a. Open response
8. What schools did you attend from 6th-8th grade?
   a. Open response
9. What schools did you attend from 9th-12th grade?
   a. Open response
10. What community/communities did you live in during your K-12 education?
    a. Open response

Activism/Organizing activities
11. In which community do you live?
    a. Albany Park
    b. Uptown
    c. Logan Square
    d. Woodlawn/Washington Park
    e. Little Village/Pilsen
    f. North Kenwood/Oakland
12. In which community do you do activism/organizing work?
    a. Albany Park
    b. Uptown
    c. Gage Park/Chicago Lawn
    d. Austin
    e. Little Village/Pilsen
f. North Kenwood/Oakland

13. How long have you been involved in activism/organizing?
   a. Open response

14. Have you ever been paid to do organizing or activism?
   a. Y/N
   b. When, where, and for how long?

15. Do you organize in any of the communities you went to school in?
   a. Y/N

16. Do you organize in any of the communities in which you lived for any period of your life?
   a. Y/N

17. How often do you participate in organizing/activism events?
   a. Every day
   b. Weekly
   c. Monthly
   d. Whenever something interests me
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 1
Semi-structured Interview 1

Centering

1. How are you?
   a. Is there anything on your mind you want to share?

Touring

1. May I ask what your thoughts were when I asked to talk with you for this research?

Activism

1. How do you define activism/organizing?
2. Tell me what activism you are up to these days.
   a. What communities do you do activism/organizing within?
      i. Tell me about the work you do within them?
3. Going a bit back in time, when did you begin your activism/organizing? What led you to that work?
4. After these experiences, what led you to your current activism/organizing work?
   a. (Listen for moments to connect to school/people/space/community)
5. Do you consider any of your work education activism/organizing?
   a. If so, what led you to education activism?
   b. If not, what led you to other kinds of activism?
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 2
Semi-structured Interview 2

Introduction and refresher: Hi again. Thank you for agreeing to this second interview on your experiences as an activists and student in Chicago. Before we begin, is there anything you’d like to share or talk about from our first interview? Great, if it’s okay with you, I’m going to ask you some questions about your past, specifically about where you lived and went to school during your K-12 Education. Does that work for you?

Schooling and Space

1. Tell me a little about the community/communities you grew up in?
   a. What kinds of experiences did you have within those communities?
      i. How did you navigate them?
   b. Are you still connected to that community at all? In what ways?

2. Tell me a little about the people that were in the communities you grew up in?
   a. Are you still connected to those people? In what ways?

3. Did you go to school in the community where you grew up?
   a. Tell me about that.

4. How did you get to and from school during your K-12 schooling?
   a. What kinds of things do you remember about getting to and from school?

5. What types of schools did you go to K-12? (private, charter, catholic, Montessori, etc.)
   a. What kinds of experiences did you have?

6. Tell me about your school communities
   a. Did you feel like an insider? Outsider? Or something else?
      i. What made you feel that way?

7. What kinds of activities did you participate in during and after-school?
8. Were you enrolled in any civics programs such as Mikva, Civics, student activism, 
service projects, or social justice work during your K-12 schooling?

   a. If so, tell me about them.
      
      i. Were they student led?
      
      ii. Did adults lead them?

         1. Do you remember anything about the teachers/adults leading those
            spaces?

9. Were there any experiences in school that you think influenced your early
   activism/organizing?

   a. If yes, what were they? In what ways do you think they influenced you?

Exit question

10. What should I know that I haven’t asked you about?

Are there questions you think I should ask other activists/organizers?
APPENDIX D

INTEGRATIVE MEMOS
Template

Interview 1 Memo Plan

1. Honey, Clarissa, Nairobi, Lidia
2. Anna, Liz, Paru, Vanessa
3. Star, Esperanza, Sophia, Jess
4. Sandra, Emcee,

Interview 2 Memo Plan

1. Emcee, Jess, Paru, Star
2. Liz, Sandra, Nairobi, Esperanza
3. Vanessa, Anna, Sophia, Clarissa
4. Honey, Lidia

Guiding reflection questions:

● What are people doing? what are they trying to accomplish how exactly do they do this?
● What specific means and or strategies do they use?
● How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
● What assumptions are they making?
● What do I see going on here?
● What did I learn from these notes?
● Why did I include them?
● How is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes?
● What is the broader import or significance of this incident or event what is it a case of?
Interview 1 Memo 1: Honey, Clarissa, Nairobi, Lidia

Guiding questions
- How do members talk about, characterize and understand what is going on?
  - What assumptions are they making?
- What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?
- How is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes?

Memo

Within interview one, study participants expressed a wide range of organizing backgrounds and experiences. Three of the four participants within this memo said reservation around engaging in community organizing issues that did not affect them directly. In one instance, honey expressed a kind of distance between engaging in community work in Albany Park and engage in and work in Englewood, the community in which she feels she comes from. Clarissa expressed a similar type of distance between her community work in Albany Park and the community in which she lived within for a large part of her adolescence, Chicago lawn/ Gage Park. In a similar tone, Lydia expressed reservations about working in education or organizing. She had hesitancy to begin her organizing career in education because she was primarily educated within private Catholic schools. However, they will be communicated a strong ability and comfortability with organizing in many communities throughout Chicago, whether it be Washington Park the community when she primarily organizes out of, or Logan Square or she left several actions around the mayor’s house.

Regarding their current work, participants expressed a wide range of areas of organizing. Lydia a former board member for LBCT now works with an alderman leading several youth councils. The youth councils work on decolonizing educational curriculum, food fridges, and zoning. Lydia didn’t know that this version of her, the version of her working for the alderman, is more toned down than the work she had done with LBCT. Honey currently works full-time for an insurance company yet engages in youth efforts with good kid mad city Inglewood, where her current mentor is the lead organizer. Nairobi currently works with the Washington Park branch of good kid mad city and several other initiatives around the city including love fridges and defunding the police. Clarissa has recently resigned from her role with a local nonprofit in Albany Park, but has reengaged with youth organizations in the community she wants lived in comma Chicago lawn Gage Park. Clarissa expressed to me that the reason she left organizing was because she didn’t want to “fake the funk”. She also expressed a concern around the organizations rhetoric for mental health supports and lack of support for staff accessing mental health supports.

Several of the participants in this memo expressed their current and future career and educational goals. Lydia and Nairobi are both on a path to becoming elementary and high school teachers. Nairobi explained that the relationship and mentorship of a teacher a person she referred to as “a Bruja woman” drastically shaped the direction of her life as a queer black woman and work in community. Lydia also viewed her current work with an alderman as an
investment in your future plans to become an elected official, name in specifically mayor of Chicago. Honey, now full-time employee with an insurance company expressed a kind of freedom within her current work with Goodkids Madcity Englewood that differed from her work in Albany Park. Specifically, she expressed the ability to join efforts when schedules aligned rather than working “24/7” on organizing issues that were not directly affecting her or her community.
Interview 1 Memo 2

Anna, Liz, Paru, Vanessa

Guiding questions:

- How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
  - what assumptions are they making?
- What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?
- How is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes?

Memo

Within interview one, study participants expressed a wide range of organizing backgrounds and experiences. Three of the four participants in this memo noted very clear difference between organizing and activism. Vanessa noted that organizers typically engage in behind-the-scenes effort to organize collective actions, while activist show up to events when called upon or needed. This is echoed by the comments made by Paru, who was trained by a deeply entrenched nonprofit organization within the Kenwood Oakland community. Liz made similar comments toward defining “organizing” noting that she viewed herself as a lifetime organizer through her existence and life path as a Little Village street vendor. Anna come, was more liberal in her definition of organizing noting that she viewed organizing as collective efforts toward positive “free” resource creation for communities that have historically lacked them.

Participants in this memo also noted a wide range of institutions that activated them toward community work. Vanessa and Paru, both commented that their initiation into organizing and activism came primarily thoroughly nonprofit organizations in the community. Vanessa noting the work that her sister began with Bicker dike development corporation, Paru noting his work with the Kenwood Oakland community organization. Defining “institutions” broadly, Ana and Liz noted that either church (Ana) or street vending (Liz) were sites in which they became more activated toward community engagement and collective work.

Study participants also named several different organizing issues that they are currently engaged in. Paru noted his current work with mutual aid, restorative justice practices in schools, and fight to save Mercy Hospital. Vanessa noted that her passions for community work mostly center around housing and gentrification issues. Ana noted her work has been primarily defined as a teacher for catechism class house in her church in Pilsen, what she later referred to as “ethical education” work. Liz described her work as ranging from mutual aid support undocumented families and increasing the visibility of peace efforts in Little Village.

Finally, I was struck by a comment Vanessa made about “clout chasing” within the organizing community. In her comments she noted little black squares and photos at marches on Instagram not being enough to result in substantive changes to the community.
Interview 1 Memo 3

Star, Esperanza, Sophia, Jess

Guiding questions:

- How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
  - what assumptions are they making?
- What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?
- How is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes?

Memo

Within interview one, study participants expressed a wide range of organizing backgrounds and experiences. Only two of the four participants had strongly defined views of organizing and activism, Sophia and Jess. For Jess and Sophia activism seems to be defined by unpaid participation in community efforts and a lesser degree of planning for community actions. Sophia in particular noted a kind of tension between whether to consider the community work her family has done for generations as organizing, since many of them were more concerned in doing what was good for the community and were not paid to do it. Star, Sophia and Esperanza also noted the role that their family networks played in connecting them with nonprofits (Star), parks (Esperanza), churches (Esperanza), and communities around Chicago (Star). Star and Sophia have both engaged in organizing work in communities on the north and south side. Star in Uptown and Washington park, and Sophia in Logan Square and Brighton Park. Sophia noted she returned to Chicago wanting to work in Brighton Park, the community in which she still has many family members but was referred to LBCT due to lack of funding to hire her full-time.

There were several ideas that were named throughout these interviews I found to be thought provoking. First, during her interview Jess noted that she embodies so many identities as a trans person with undocumented parents, and learning disability, that the work is never ending. She also noted that her work with youth feels like a responsibility for space that were offered to her as a young person. Star made a similar comment regarding her youth work, noting that she loves when her student challenge her because she was allowed to do that as a student and young person. Star also made a comment about needing to pull back from organizing around the city because the work became exhausting and potentially feed into a savior’s complex with notions that without her the work would not continue and guilt became a driving force. She noted this is not the case and the movement should not stop with any one person, but she had become burnt out.
Interview 1 Memo 4

Sandra, Emcee,

Reflections
  o How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
  o what assumptions are they making?
  o What did I learn from these notes?
  o Why did I include them?
  o How is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes?

Memo

Within interview one, study participants expressed a wide range of organizing backgrounds and experiences. Both participants named an interest in my research topic. For Emcee she was curious if I had done organizing work in my past, she has recently been reflecting on the types of impacts being involved in community work leaves on organizers. Sandra, expressed an appreciation for the different areas I am targeting, noting that too many people talk about Chicago as one space when locally things are very different from community to community. Both the participants expressed that their introduction to organizing came by way of summer internship with AAFP, both also noted that their first reason for joining (pay) quickly moved to the back burner when the work they were doing aligned with their personal experiences of being from an immigrant community.

On the topic of being undocumented both participants noted very interested reflections. For Emcee she expressed a great deal of fear when speaking out publicly but ultimately felt accountable to her community. Sandra expressed feeling an injustice when she and her classmates were pulled out of class to translate for parents. Regarding the issues they are working on, Emcee is currently working with her universities student council to improve access to relief funds for undocumented students. Sandra most recently worked on the SRO campaign around the city.

Finally, I found Emcee’s background as a south Asian (by way of Germany) undocumented youth to be often unacknowledged in many social justice conversations. When I asked how she felt about visibility she noted an appreciation for the longer struggles or other groups and excited to be a part of the group South Asian activist community. Sanda having spent her early childhood in Ghana expressed a culture shift in how to spend her out of school time, she noted that in Ghana being active in community life was the norm so getting involved with AAFP felt like a return to what she knew in Ghana.
Interview 2 Memo Plan

Emcee, Jess, Paru, Star

Guiding questions:

- What are people doing? what are they trying to accomplish how exactly do they do this?
- What specific means and or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
- What assumptions are they making?
- What do I see going on here?
- What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?
- How is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes?
- What is the broader import or significance of this incident or event what is it a case of?

Memo

Within interview 2 participants expressed a wide range of experiences relating to their educational and community histories. Interestingly, several of the participants named moving across the city to our various points in their life. For example, Star having spent her early years in the “wild 100” later moved to Washington park and then to uptown where she is now engaged and community work in both Washington Park and uptown. Paru, having spent early years of his life in Garfield Park in Chicago west side traveled across the city to Kenwood Oakland where he currently engaged in organizing work. Jess, having spent many of her formative years in Belmont Cragin also travels across to Albany Park to engage in community work through community United.

Pertaining to the school and experiences of study participants several interesting aspects emerged as I reread the interviews. Only one of the participants (Emcee) named having an influential teacher as a part of her schooling experience, this was particularly noticeable as she described spending lunch in the teacher’s classroom and the relationship between the teacher and the nonprofit AAFP that she later interned for. Just noted that as a special education student she felt many of her classrooms were either in Mad Spaces or in converted gym showers naming that many of her schools felt “tight” with an overflow students. Paru, remarked that three of his former schools had been closed by CPS, leaving him with the feeling that closing black schools was normalized whether on the west or south side. Perhaps most notably he commented that much of his high school career had involved organizing to save it from closure, he attended Dyett high school. Paru, noted that after four years of organizing to see if his score he was “burnt out” by the end of his high school career. Star, me too interesting comments during our interview about her schooling experiences. First she named that all of her experiences in but she called underfunded schools pushed her into her current work in uptown uplift high school. She also noted when I seen her father, and art teacher, losing his job during a school turnaround
being an influential moment in her life. In her time living in the hundreds star noted that she grew up knowing the name of Darion Albert, student that was killed as a result of school closures.

When describing youth lead spaces several of the participants named striking comments about the roles of adults and defining features of those spaces. All of the participants named the adults and youth lead spaces played a secondary and supportive role to use ideas and organizing efforts. In some instances adults funded or buffered bureaucratic practices at schools or organizations. In other instances they provided the skills such as organizational planning fundraising or leader ship development required to execute on youth ideas. As it pertains to formal organizing spaces you study participants saw a direct connection between those programs and the schools in which they attended, even if the program was held in the school. This was the case for Paru, Jess, and Emcee, who all had nonprofit organizations offering workshops or after school programs in their school site yet these spaces seem to be a space within a space connected perhaps by the classroom but not by vision or direction. Finally in naming the youth lead spaces that are for participants were engaged in two were affiliated with the same city wide initiative voices of youth in Chicago education (BOOM) and different ends of the city Jess (Belmont Cragin) and Paru (Kenwood). The other two participants, star and Emcee worked with use lead spaces offered through Seven Generations and AAFP (Youth Power).

Finally, several comments were made that have stuck with me since recording and rereading interview transcripts. First I asked both Jess and Paru why in the face of such a stressful educational experiences did they choose to act and organize, just responded “maybe I was born with superpowers” and Paru noting “Black people don’t have a choice”. MC, named her experiences with the Indian club Amanda high school been influential about her understanding of her ethnic identity noting that in Germany she has no such conceptualization that race is often unaddressed. She also noted that on the commute to school she enjoyed taking up the street with her friends as they walked two blocks from their apartment buildings to Mather high school, also noting that the luster of this experience left when they a group of young women or harassed and approached by elder men.
Interview 2 Memo 2

Liz, Sandra, Nairobi, Esperanza

Guiding reflection questions:

- What are people doing? what are they trying to accomplish how exactly do they do this?
- what specific means and or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
- what assumptions are they making ?
- what do I see going on here ?
- what did I learn from these notes ?
- why did I include them ?
- how is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes ?
- what is the broader import or significance of this incident or event what is it a case of ?

Memo

Withing interview 2 participants expressed a wide range of experiences relating to their educational and community histories. Several of the study participants made interesting comments about their communities of residence during their elementary and high school grades. For Liz and Esperanza street vendors small businesses and Street organizers (gang members) stood out as notable features of the community both communicating the message about a “hustle” that was on display. Esperanza, commented that she was a “park kid” meaning she participated in park district activities for most of her childhood and high school career even becoming a staff member for teen club she viewed this employment as making her a “Super Park kid”. For other participants such as Nairobi her community became defined by identity features such as blackness and queerness she noted traveling from her home in Ashburn to Hyde Park. Spatially, here she was familiar with other youth who shared these identity features with her. Especially two participants made very striking comments about how and in what ways they learned about different areas of Chicago. For Liz she noted her experience looking for cute boys at Farragut high school has been a influential moment when she learn the differences within Little Village noting a drastic difference between the east and the west side as two different worlds in the same community. For Nairobi her commute with her grandmother every morning from the hundreds to Washington park for elementary school became opportunities for her to observe the changing landscape in Chicago marked by investment and disinvestment potholes empty lots in Green grass and Field homes.

Relating to the educational experiences of participants each named an array of experiences that informed or contextualize their youth activism. Esperanza and Liz both noted that the history of their school, being created by a hunger strike, informed their approach to learning in Little Village and how there was a sense of pride in knowing that their community fought for the school. Liz noted reading Otavio pass labyrinth as and important moment where she asked questions about the status quo and whether it was acceptable. They will be noted that
her first teacher of color a Mexican Bruja woman became an important part of her development and comfort level with being black and clear. They were also noted that her best friend in high school MB transferred in as a result of MB school closing in Englewood. Relating to teachers, almost all of the participants named having influential and supportive teachers that shaped their educational experiences. For Nairobi having her teachers be both supportive of her identities and supportive of her activism work around the city allow her the opportunity to reflect on her future career, she is now enrolled in the University to become a teacher. Sandra noted that having an ESL teacher that used her brakes to tutor and opened her classroom for lunch allowed her to see teachers that were dedicated to students. One of the most striking comments I heard were from two students who arrived to the United States during their elementary school. Liz and Sandra both arrived to Chicago during their fifth and sixth grade years, Liz in Little Village Sandra in uptown. Both noted what they felt was a lack of support for transitioning them into American education Liz framing this as an adventure and the risks that come with it and Sandra noting that much of what she learned was through observation of the teachers and her peers. Finally, Sandra made an interesting comment about what she was told of Lakeview as a “white ass school” to what she experienced and heard from her aunt which was that Lakeview was primarily Latino. Sandra noted an extreme confusion about what Latinos were prior to this noting that she had only known black and white.
Interview 2 Memo 3

Vanessa, Anna, Sophia, Clarissa

Guiding reflection questions:

- What are people doing? what are they trying to accomplish how exactly do they do this?
- what specific means and or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
- what assumptions are they making ?
- what do I see going on here ?
- what did I learn from these notes ?
- why did I include them ?
- how is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes ?
- what is the broader import or significance of this incident or event what is it a case of ?

Memo

Within interview 2 participants expressed a wide range of experiences relating to their educational and community histories. Regarding community and space participants named several interesting aspects about their lived environment as teens and youth. Sophia Clarissa and Anna all commented that community members watching over looking out for them was usually viewed as a positive aspect of community life. This is contrasted against Vanessa’s experience in humble park in which she communicated it with suspicion. Vanessa also named having her home broken into, no other participant name such an interaction in their communities. Vanessa also noted that the disparities in Chicago landscape for her first learned commuting to and from school she attended Lincoln Park high school while living in Humboldt Park, referring to it as the ghetto. Ana communicated that her participation in local park district in the Midway community never felt like community work because it was predominantly her family members occupied much of the space. She also noted a connection between your father and the Polish immigrant neighbors through broken English and large family gatherings. Sophia made two comments that struck me as powerful as she described her experience in Joliet as a high school student. First Sophia noted that her parents viewed the move out of Chicago as taking Sophia and her younger brother away from the traumatic experiences they had in Brighton Park. She also noted that during her high school years as a Joliet student her parents did not initially encourage conversations around race or racial prejudice in school viewing it as a Chicago issue or an issue they left in Chicago. And finally Sophia noted her experiences in Joliet been similar with underfunded schools compared to the surrounding suburbs yet it lacked the sense of community that was offered in Brighton Park. Finally Clarissa me an interesting comment about the perceived urgency of organizing issues in Albany Park community she worked with as a paid organizer and Chicago lawn gage park where she felt the need for resources was much more drastic.
Pertaining to the educational experiences of participants, several striking comments were made. Ana felt that her private Catholic school education in Pilsen was a direct connection to her current work teaching catechism classes in the same community. Their relationship with father Z stood out as a particularly influential one to her because he was from the community and often advocated for church members to get involved in community events. Clarissa similarly named Mr. B as one of the best teachers she ever had deserving of some type of award for his ability to work and listen with students she named him as the connector between her and the voices of youth in Chicago education (BOOM) work at her school. Ana and Vanessa both communicated that attending schools outside of the community to some degree was negotiated through family members who were aware or attended the school that they went to outside of the community. Ana going to school in person and later Westtown and Vanessa going to school in Lake View and Lincoln Park. Interestingly Vanessa and Clarissa both named tension with school staff been marked as an important feature of the student activism work Clarissa naming that her work on the school to prison pipeline with voice cause tension with administration and some staff while Vanessa felt that reaction from school staff while she was a student at Joliet high school approved her student activism was making an impact. Finally Vanessa made a very interesting comment about her perception of neighborhood schools in many instances noting that her local elementary and high schools would have negatively impacted her learning and life path, then she would try to buffer the conversation by saying “it may sound rude” or “I’m sure they were plenty of good kids there”.

Finally I was struck by one of the first comments Sophia made regarding her reflections and paid and unpaid organizing. She noted reflecting after our first interview and the ways in which community work is either recognize or unrecognized by virtue of pay. This is a similar comment made by another study participant Liz who does organizing work in Little Village.
Interview 2 Memo Plan 4

Honey, Lidia

Guiding reflection questions:

- What are people doing? what are they trying to accomplish how exactly do they do this?
- what specific means and or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about characterize and understand what is going on?
- what assumptions are they making ?
- what do I see going on here ?
- what did I learn from these notes ?
- why did I include them ?
- how is what is going on here similar to or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in the field notes ?
- what is the broader import or significance of this incident or event what is it a case of ?

Memo

Within interview 2 participants expressed a wide range of experiences relating to their educational and community histories. Pertaining to community spaces both participants expressed a kind of endearment with having community elders or neighbors watch over or hang out at their homes. For Honey she equated this has been the hangout spot wherever she and her siblings moved so too did the hangout spot. For Lydia she affectionately spoke about grandmothers watching from their porches or windows as she and her friends played in the street. Perhaps strikingly both participants named a kind of breakdown between relationships that they had in their early youth and teenage years. Lydia described her family relationship with their landlord an elderly gentleman who her parents took care of and who drove Lydia to school but during elementary high school and even during college. The relationship with him broke down as he sold the building with a little communication, this is also how she named she learned about tenants rights. Lydia’s primary area of organizing was housing. Honey described the breakdown of relationships taking place after her mother a woman who she recalled taking care of many of the young people in the community not getting the support she needed after being victim of gun violence. Lydia also noted that on her commute to school the transformation of the 606 became clear marker of neighborhood transformation. Noting that as a child seeing white people was rare and as she commuted to and from high school she noticed “fancy Art” replacing gang graffiti she also noted the green graffiti never offended her or her parents they understood it as marked territory and never had any negative interactions with the gang members. Nancy the communities in which she was commuting to from her residence on the southwest side to her high school on the northwest side was marked by “outdated gang members” and learning about different types of communities.

Relating to their school experiences both participants named very interesting aspects about their experiences. Nancy noted a few teachers doing her elementary and high school years whom she would spend lunch periods in the classroom, this has come up several times
throughout interview two. Nancy also noted that a reactive administrator often try to stop these lunch. Assuming that students were going to get in trouble or do something to get them in trouble. There’s a ministration also bragged about being the principal Chance the Rapper mentions in his debut mixtape. Lydia noted that many of her teachers included social justice content into their coursework as a result of their schools Catholic social justice orientation. When I asked whether she thought this lead her into organizing she noted it may have if the teachers were not white saviors. She credits LSNE with giving her the tools to be an organizer and her school giving her the ability to be an activist. Lydia also expressed intention that rose in her schooling as a result of an IB program being introduced and leading to an influx of white girl students. She noted that many of these white girls flexed their power in the school via their fathers donations and they’re outside of school extracurricular activities. Nancy described peers who she perceived as soft and relatively privileged noting that to the students getting their car stolen it was a hard time while her and her neighbors on the southwest side or used to street corners with her friends had been murdered. Honey also no detention with any stakeholder in her school anytime she shared that she was from the southwest side feeling as if she was in a position to defend the community when she came from and highlight the good from the southside. Honey also shared that she was thankful of her experiences going to school on the northside, noting that in Albany Park she learned what a refugee was and that immigrants weren’t just Mexican. Finally pertaining to the educational experiences of participants Lydia noted that the reason or one of the reasons why she wasn’t rolled in Catholic school is that she was Miss treated as an ESL student in CPS her parents outraged by the lack of support decided instead to enroll her into catholic school.

Finally pertaining to activism and organizing both participants named very interesting aspects of how they perceive their schooling relating to organizing work. For Nancy she felt as if the way disciplinary policy is existed in her scores were catalyzing factor into organizing. She also noted that as an organizer with community United Phelps removed from that work because she could not see the results of her work on like a student activism work as an elementary school student in the community where she lived. In this example she describe the improvements to a school playground. And as a concluding thought an appointment I don’t want to lose Lydia made a striking statement about her perception of students that became organizers as a result of attending Kelvyn Park high school the quote is below

“they’re living something in frustration that caused them to be organizers which is me I had an experience, I wanted to do more, that made me become an organizer.”

Also, the comment about white people playing with fire being the moment she knew the community was lost.
APPENDIX E

STUDY FLYER
STUDY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Exploring the relationships between K-12 education and early careers in activism

Purpose

To explore the possible relationships between K-12 schooling and the development of city Activists/Organizers

Interested in participating?
Contact David Castro at dcastro@luc.edu or complete the attached form

Requirements

- Between the ages of 18 and 25 years old
- Educated within the city of Chicago for at least five years (K-12th grade)
- Organizing in:
  - Albany Park
  - Uptown
  - Logan Square
  - Little Village/Pilsen
  - North Kenwood/Oakland
  - Washington Park/Woodlawn

Participation in this study is voluntary

This study is led by David Castro, Ph.D. Candidate Loyola University Chicago
REFERENCE LIST


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VITA

Dr. Castro is a scholar-practitioner focusing on the complexity of race, space, and education. He is a co-author of current and forthcoming publications on student-teacher relationships, competitive school choice, and Latinx anti-Blackness in education. Castro is affiliated with several academic organizations including the American Education Research Association and the Sociology of Education Association.

Dr. Castro’s professional work includes over 10 years of community organizing, youth development, and school mergers. Castro’s organizing history includes work with Grow Your Own Teachers Illinois, the Southwest Organizing Project, TGI, GoodKids MadCity Englewood, Grand Victoria Foundation, and Mindful Practices. Castro regularly consults with schools and education-based organizations on best practices, organizational restructuring, teacher coaching, youth and community engagement, and restorative justice practices.

Dr. Castro completed his doctoral work in Cultural and Educational Policy Studies at Loyola University Chicago. He received his BA from Loyola University Chicago and M.Ed. from DePaul University and is a proud alum of Lake View High School.