9-6-2024

"I Really Like the Idea of Being the Source of Change": The Perspectives of Black and Latine Youth Experiencing Low Income About How Personal Change Occurs in Out-Of-School Group Programs

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“I REALLY LIKE THE IDEA OF BEING THE SOURCE OF CHANGE”: THE PERSPECTIVES OF BLACK AND LATINE YOUTH EXPERIENCING LOW INCOME ABOUT HOW PERSONAL CHANGE OCCURS IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL GROUP PROGRAMS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDICACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIAL WORK

BY

KEVIN M. MILLER

CHICAGO, IL

DECEMBER 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my sincere gratitude to the members of my committee for their invaluable support and guidance throughout the process of completing this dissertation. Their expertise and encouragement were instrumental in shaping this work. I would like to thank Dr. Maria Wathen and Dr. Marion Malcome for their constructive feedback and suggestions, which significantly improved the quality of this dissertation. Their expertise was crucial in deciding on my methodology and in deriving meaningful conclusions from my analyses. I am also grateful for Dr. Amzie Moore's guidance throughout my dissertation research as well as for the mentorship he has provided me for almost ten years now. Thank you for always encouraging and supporting my pursuit of a Ph.D. and for helping me learn how to be an academic. While not on my committee, I want to acknowledge and thank Dr. Maryse Richards for her mentorship and for believing in me—thank you for taking me into your lab and making me feel like I belong. Lastly, I am eternally grateful to Dr. Katherine Tyson McCrea, my committee chair and mentor for the past decade. I would not be who I am today without Dr. Tyson's unending support and mentorship. From recruiting me into the field of social work, to guiding me through the many challenges of getting a Ph.D., to inspiring me to do good in this world—thank you for showing me how to become a better researcher, clinician, professor, and person.

I also want to thank my family—my three sisters, Courtney, Shannon, and Caitlin, my brother, Michael, and my nephews, Jude and Noah, and my newest nephew, Sullivan, for helping me think about something other than my dissertation and reminding me that I am defined by

more than my work. Whether it was watching movies on the projector in the backyard, going out to eat, or just hanging out at home, having that time to slow down was invaluable to me and my well-being. I am also grateful for my mom and dad, Marion and Richard, for supporting me in so many ways—for being role models, showing me how to push through hardships, teaching me how to be a good person and how to do good in this world.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my wife, Dr. Rachel Miller, who was there with me for my highest highs and lowest lows. Without your unending, unconditional support, I am not sure I would have attended college in the first place, let alone pursue two master's degrees and a Ph.D. When we were 19, you wrote my first college application when I did not think I was smart enough to do it myself. You have always supported my academic pursuits—I vividly remember the moment I brought up the idea of applying to Ph.D. programs. We were walking down the sidewalk in front of our first apartment in Lakeview and before I could even finish my pitch, you said, “do it!” The confidence you have had in me throughout the past 10+ years continues to both surprise and inspire me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

LIST OF TABLES x

ABSTRACT xii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
Background and Context 2
Rationale and Significance 4
Problem Statement 7
Statement of Purpose 8
Research Approach 8
Implications of the Participatory Program Theorizing and Evaluation 9
Role of the Researcher 10
Research Assumptions 11
Empowering Counseling Program Participatory Science Initiative 11
Stand Up! Help Out! and CRIME 13
Love Your Love Life 14
Law Under Curious Minds 15

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 17
Impact of Structural Violence on Community Contexts in Chicago 17
Marginalized Communities of Color as Developmental Contexts 18
OSPs as Developmental Contexts 19
How Can OSPs Enhance Youth Change Processes? 20
Internalization of Program Relationships and Curriculum 21
Change in Positive Youth Development Programs 23
Identity Development 26
Ethnic-Racial Identity Development 27
Gender Identity Development 27
Identity Development Rooted in Resistance to Injustice 28
Critical Consciousness and Sociopolitical Development 29
Intersubjective Relatedness, Attachment, and Internal Working Models 30
Role of Program Instructors 31
Group Factors that Enhance Personal Change Processes 31
Youth Perspectives of Personal Change and Internalization 32

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 36
Questions and Sub-Questions 36
Specific Research Questions 36
Research Design 36
Participatory Methods 37
Data Collection Methods 38

Sample (Peer-to-Peer Interviews) 38
Data Analysis Methods 39
Qualitative Approach 39
Scientific Rigor 40
Managing Threats to Validity 41
Implications of Methodology 41
Strengths 41
Limitations 42

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 44
What is it About These Program Curricula That Work Well According to Youth? (i.e., What Are the Program Mechanisms as Described by Youth?) 44
How Would You Describe This Program to Someone? 44
Program is Personally Helpful, Interesting, or Inspiring 45
Program is Fun 45
Helps Learn or Practice Relational, Social, or Communication Skills 46
Learn About Your Rights, Law, Social Justice Issues 47
Develop Responsibility or Autonomy, Personal Growth 49
Why Did You Decide to Join this Program 50
Joined Program to Relate to Others 50
Youth Needed Job and Income for Survival 51
Program Content Helpful for Future Goals 52
Why Did You Decide to Keep Coming? 52
Social or Relational Reasons, Connecting with Others 53
Learned Personally Helpful or Interesting Content 54
Can You Talk Some About Your Favorite Part of the Program? 55
Relationships and Connections Made with Others 56
Engaging Discussions and Feeling Respected and Heard by Others 57
Can You Talk Some About a Part of the Program You Did Not Enjoy? 58
Youth Stated They Enjoyed Everything 59
Activity Was Unstructured or Disappointing 59
Wanted More Positive Experiences with Peers 59
What Did You Enjoy or Thought Went Well? 60
Opportunity to Relate to or Help Others 61
What Would You Change About the Program? 62
Would Not Change Anything 62
Issues with Schedule 63
Youth Wants More Positive Interactions with Peers 63
Give Feedback to the Instructors 64
Instructor Broadly Helpful 65
References to Street-Based Social Work 65
What Would You Like to Do in the Next Program? 66
Wants to Learn More About Social Justice Topics 66
More Games and Fun 67
More Activities That Benefit Self and Future 68

To What Degree Does the Participant Prioritize Connections with Others? 68
Youth Prioritizes Connections with Others Above Any Other Program Element (N=124) 69
How Do Youth Conceptualize What "Changes" When Youth Internalize Program Mechanisms? 70
Do You Feel You Learned Anything from This Program? 70
Youth Learned Relational or Communication Skills 70
Youth Learned About Social Justice and Rights 72
Did You Learn Anything About Yourself (or Your Capabilities) From This Program? 73
Learned About Relational and Communication Skills 74
Youth Responded "No" or Said They Already Knew About Themselves 75
Do You Feel the Instructors Helped You Personally? 75
References to Instructor Practicing Street-Based Social Work or Accompaniment 76
Helped Improve Relationships, Communication, and Leadership Skills 78
Has This Program Influenced Other Parts of Your Life? 78
"Getting Ready for the Real World" and Helping with Future 79
Helped with Relationships and Communication 80
"Be a Better Person": Program Changed Youths' Perspective 81
How Do Youth Understand the Process of How the Program Works? 82
Can You Talk Some About You and Your Peers? 82
Overall Positive Experience with Peers 83
Youth Describes Peers Disengaging, Negative Experience, Without Resolution 84
Did You Feel Like You Were Able to Make Decisions and Contributed in Activities? 84
Youth Describes Decisions and Contributions 85
Did You Have Any Opportunities to be a Leader in the Program? 86
Youth Describes Having Leadership Opportunities 87
Youth Describes Having Choice or Autonomy in Program 88
Why Did You Give Yourself That Rating? (Engagement in Program) 89
Youth Felt Mostly Engaged 90
Youth Described Being Fully Engaged 90
Were There Any Challenges to You Attending Sessions? 91
Challenges with Getting to the Program: Transportation and Technology 91
Why Do You Think Some Youth Did Not Attend Sessions Regularly or Left the Program? 92
"Wasn't Feeling It" or Peers Not Committed 92
Personal Reasons Unrelated to Program 93
Challenges with Transportation or Technology 93

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION 95
Purpose 95
Summary of Literature Review 95
Overarching Research Question 97
Specific Research Questions 97
Summary of Findings 97

Consistency of Themes Across Communities and Time Frames 99
Implications for Understanding Adolescent Development 100
The Developmental Process 100
Youth Priorities for Experiencing Themselves Growing: Relational Capital and Positive Identities 101
Problems with Existing OSP Intervention Theory and How it is Developed 103
"One Size Fits All" Approaches 104
Overview of Positive Youth Development 104
Critiques of Positive Youth Development 105
Epistemic Violence 107
Human Rights and Social Justice Priorities 108
Theory About OSPs' Mechanisms of Action Derived from Youths' Experiences of Change 109
Respectful, Caring, and Affirming Relationships Promote Personal Growth According to Youth 109
Youth React to How Instructors Treat Other Youth as well as to How They are Treated by Instructors 110
Intersubjectivity: Youth Finding Themselves in the Positive and Accurate Images Instructors' Sustain About the Youth 111
"Fun" is More Than "Fun" 112
Helping Dreams Crystallize and Come True 113
Participation as an Epistemology and Mechanism of Change 114
Guidelines Derived from Youths' Perspectives: What Do Interventions and Programs Need to Do? 116
Cultivate Positive Relationships with Instructors 116
Incorporate an Individualized, Street-Based Social Work Model of Care 117
Free Sharing and Conversation: Integrating Humanistic Therapy 119
Adding Dimensions to Existing OSPs 122

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS 124

APPENDIX A: PEER-LED PROGRAM EVALUATION PROTOCOL 128

APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK 132

REFERENCE LIST 150

VITA 167

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. How Would You Describe This Program to Someone? 44

Table 2. Why Did You Join This Program? 50

Table 3. Why Did You Decide to Keep Coming? 53

Table 4. Can You Talk Some About Your Favorite Part of the Program? 55

Table 5. Can You Talk Some About a Part of the Program You Did Not Enjoy? 58

Table 6. What Did You Enjoy or Think Went Well? 60

Table 7. What Would You Change About the Program? 62

Table 8. Give Feedback to the Instructors 64

Table 9. What Would You Like To Do in the Next Program? 66

Table 10. To What Degree Does the Respondent Prioritize Connections with Others? 69

Table 11. Do You Feel Like You Learned Anything From This Program? 70

Table 12. Did You Learn Anything About Yourself (or Your Capabilities) From This Program? 74

Table 13. Do You Feel the Instructors Have Helped You Personally? 76

Table 14. Has This Program Influenced Other Parts of Your Life? 78

Table 15. Can You Talk Some About You and Your Peers? 82

Table 16. Did You Feel Like You Were Able to Make Decisions and Contributed to the Activities to the Activities You Participated in? 85

Table 17. Did You Have Any Opportunities To Be a Leader in the Program? 87

Table 18. How Interested Were You in the Program? 89

Table 19. Were There Any Challenges To You Attending Sessions? 91

Table 20. Why Do You Think Some Youth Did Not Attend Sessions Regularly or Left the Program? 92

ABSTRACT

Structured out-of-school programs (OSPs) can be contexts in which youth can be producers of their own positive change (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). However, despite a considerable body of research documenting the benefits of participating in OSPs, there is a lack of knowledge about how youth of color in low-income communities define positive personal change in OSP settings. As a result, many OSPs and interventions designed for youth of color rely on adult practitioners' or researchers' perspectives of the change process, which may weaken program impact and fail to holistically meet youths' developmental needs.

This study uses a critical realist scientific paradigm to carry out an interpretive, phenomenological qualitative examination (Denzin, 1989; Cresswell & Poth, 2018) of youths' perspectives on the program mechanisms that bring about their personal change. From this realist standpoint, change does occur via youths' internalization of program experiences. The purpose of this study is to explore youths' perspectives about how they internalize OSPs (curricula and relationships with instructors, each other, and other participants) and define personal change in an OSP context. This study addresses the following overarching research question: Since program impact occurs via youths' internalization of the program offerings, what do youth perspectives tell us about how they internalize the experience of an out-of-school, high-dosage, strengths-based program? Specifically, this study aims to:

(1) understand youths' perspectives of personal change, including the nature of youths' internalization processes; and

(2) identify program elements that function as mechanisms of change that youth say are helpful and not helpful.

Data were gathered based on feedback of 212 youth participants enrolled in OSPs using three different curricula in four neighborhoods in Chicago over a 17-year time span. Data consist of youths' qualitative peer-to-peer program evaluation interviews with each other at the conclusion of each program.

Qualitative peer-to-peer interviews were analyzed with NVivo12 using a causal thematic and content process analysis (Denzin, 1989; Maxwell, 2004). This research design is well suited to answer the present research questions because it can produce grounded, "rich descriptions" and explanations of internalization processes situated within real-life contexts (Miles et al., 2019). The qualitative data were coded initially to generate themes and compile a coding manual. Inter-rater reliability of coding manuals was achieved at 91%, which preceded the analysis of all qualitative data (Miles et al., 2019).

Understanding how youth themselves define and experience meaningful personal change is important in mitigating the traumatizing impact of epistemic violence and for optimizing services to improve care and promote healthy, culturally relevant practice models of youth development.

The findings of this study represent a realist interpretation of SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM's efficacy (Pawson & Bellamy, 2006). In other words, the causal power of these programs lies in their underlying mechanisms. Youth identified program mechanisms that they prioritized, which are represented by the themes that emerged from their peer-to-peer interviews. The results of this study indicate that youth strongly value having positive connections with peers and instructors in their program and suggest that the process of relating to others helps

develop their own personal identity and sense of self. They also describe program mechanisms that facilitate the developmental need of relating to others. Moreover, there are many youth responses suggesting that the OSPs were impactful in part because they enabled youth to consolidate a positive identity (*"I'm a good person"*). This did not occur via curricula about self-affirmation or positive thinking (a more cognitive behavioral approach) but was connected by youth with the experience of feeling respected, heard, cared for, and affirmed by instructors and peers (a more humanistic approach).

The mechanisms of action described by youth lead to specific guidelines for intervention providers, elucidated in this study. The theories of therapeutic change developed from adult treatment do not fully encompass the unique aspects of clinical work with youth. With a practice knowledge base rooted in this study's findings about youths' subjective meanings and experiences of services, social work practitioners can design practice models that are more suitable and relevant to youths' cultural strengths and existing strategies of healthy development. Approaching out-of-school program design with an emphasis on human rights, humanistic group therapy, participatory approaches and resistance-building processes could provide a theoretical framework that can contrast overly medicalized models and help social workers address the profession's core values. By doing this, youth may see themselves as less pathologized by the "intervention" and view concepts of personal "change" in the program as defined by themselves, made possible by incorporating participatory elements throughout program design, implementation, and evaluation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study explores Black and Latine youths' definitions and experiences of personal change in out-of-school program (OSP) settings. The purpose of this study is to 1) understand youths' perspectives of personal change, including the nature of youths' internalization processes, 2) identify causal program mechanisms of change that youth say are helpful, and 3) understand the impact of contextual factors, including characteristics of participants and program locality, on how program mechanisms are internalized by youth. This study is a critical realist interpretive phenomenological qualitative examination (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin, 1989; Bhattacharya, 2017; Maxwell, 2004) of how youth define personal change in the context of three OSPs in Chicago. Using phenomenology and content and thematic analysis methods (Miles et al., 2019; Denzin, 1989), this study addresses the following overarching research question: since program impact occurs via youths' internalization of the program offerings, what do youth perspectives tell us about how they internalize the experience of an out-of-school, high-dosage, strengths-based program? From this realist standpoint, it is assumed that change does not occur via program curricula, but rather the internalization of program experiences. Thus, this study seeks to understand the phenomenon of how youth internalize program experiences by describing a culturally relevant causal process (Pawson & Bellamy, 2006; Maxwell, 2004) of personal change from the youths' perspective.

The first chapter of this study begins with an overview of the background and context that frames this study. This is followed by a description of this study's rationale and

significance, problem statement, purpose, research design, and research questions. This chapter concludes with a description of the OSPs being examined in this study.

Background and Context

Racialized systems of marginalization and oppression permeate major U.S. institutions, such as criminal justice, political and economic systems, housing, employment, and education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Feagin, 2006). Racialized injustice is evidenced in numerous health and economic disparities (Fredrick, 2018), including a 30-year difference in life expectancy, on average, between one wealthy white community and an economically oppressed community of color in Chicago, separated by only eight miles (Gourevitch et al., 2019).

Racialized oppression also manifests in the form of epistemic violence, which is defined as the persistent dehumanization of marginalized peoples and groups through the systematic exclusion of their knowledges and ways of knowing from, for example, research, health services, or social services, such as OSPs meant to serve their needs (Glass & Newman, 2015). Given its systemic nature, epistemic violence disproportionately harms economically marginalized communities of color (Smith, 2021). In other words, scientific knowledge occurs "about" persons of color, not "with" them, denying them testimonial credibility (Fricker, 2013) and expertise about their conditions, personhood, and experiences of interventions. The cost this has for the accuracy of scientific knowledge cannot really be known until knowledge is produced with youth of color, grounded in respect for their expertise about their circumstances, inner lives, and change processes.

Youth of color living in marginalized communities are at particular risk for adverse life outcomes. Childhood and adolescence play a substantial role in an individual's future quality of life. Socioeconomic and racial stressors during youth can result in anxiety, depression,

aggression, and delinquency (Allard, 2009). Latine and Black youth (ages 6 to 18) have the lowest and second-lowest mental health service utilization when compared to White and Asian ethnic groups (Garland et al., 2005), largely due to the lack of accessible services and the lack of cultural relevance when services are available. Key disparities emerge regarding the mental health care of youth of color compared to other ethnic groups in outpatient service use, informal service use (such as self-help and peer counseling), inpatient care, and receipt of appropriate medications (Garland et al., 2005). Inadequate identification, stigma, poor access to care, lack of culturally appropriate services, and treatment of mental health concerns in ethnic minority communities lead to and maintain significant disparities in mental health outcomes for Black and Latine youth (Garland et al., 2005).

The resulting toxic impacts of structural violence are compounded by a lack of relevant and available supportive services for youth of color living in marginalized communities. Across the US, approximately 25-million-children are currently unable to access OSPs (Afterschool Alliance, 2020). Despite their greater need due to the many ACEs associated with low-income, youth from lower-income neighborhoods have fewer OSP opportunities than their more privileged peers, and many low-income families of color report unmet needs for high-quality and accessible programming (Deschenes et al., 2010; Afterschool Alliance, 2020).

When programs are available, frameworks of how change occurs tend to be defined by outside adult researchers using categories researchers have chosen (such as standardized scales) to filter youths' perspectives. Neither practitioners who care for youth, nor youth tend to contribute significantly to theorizing about mechanisms of action in OSPs for low-income youth of color. The perspective of this dissertation is different in the sense that I am a social worker who for several years has offered diverse OSPs and individual counseling for youth.

Accordingly, the priorities and interpretations stem from my experiences listening and caring for dozens of youth over several years. Further, the data consist entirely of youth perspectives using an interview protocol youth designed, refined and carried out. Even though all interpretations are filtered through my lens as a researcher, the effort in this study is to be as close to youths' experiences as possible with a minimum of imports from my assumptions and knowledge base.

The omission of knowledge from youths' perspectives interacts with a lack of relevant and available supportive services for youth of color living in marginalized communities to create a severe need for increased and improved services. For example, youth living in economically marginalized communities experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) more frequently than young people living in wealthier communities (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Moreover, Black youth experience the greatest number of ACEs of any U.S. youth group on average while Latine youth experience the second greatest number of ACEs (Liu et al., 2018). Despite experiencing ACEs are a higher rate than White children, Black and Latine youth are 1.5-3 times more likely to go without mental health services (Kataoka et al., 2002), compared to White youth. Black youth living in economically marginalized communities are also at the greatest risk for exposure to threatening or frightening experiences (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted pre-existing social, economic, and health inequities in the U.S. based on race and wealth (Brooks, 2020), emphasizing the need for increased and improved supportive services for youth of color, including more relevant OSPs.

Rationale and Significance

Research suggests that, when available, OSPs can help ameliorate some of problems associated with poverty, and youth may benefit from the psychological, social, educational, and personal assets developed within programs (Jones & Deutsch, 2013; Huebner et al., 2004;

Christenson et al., 2008; Huebner et al., 2009). But poverty and racism remain significant barriers in treating youths' mental health concerns (Castro-Ramirez et al., 2021). Nationally, more than 60% of children in poverty who need mental health care never receive it (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013) and 59% of low-income Black youth and 52% of low-income Latine youth are not able to access OSPs (Afterschool Alliance, 2020).

Despite the inaccessibility of OSPs for many low-income youth of color, public and private funding and support for OSPs are historically high (Afterschool Alliance, 2020), partially due to the proliferation of the youth development frameworks based on adult perspectives (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). For example, one of the most predominant youth development frameworks adopted by OSPs in the U.S. is the positive youth development model (Jones & Deutsch, 2013). Broadly, positive youth development programs and interventions aim to address determinants of adolescent health-risk behaviors by promoting youths' inherent strengths to develop a sense of empowerment, belonging, self-efficacy, and competence (Bowers et al., 2010). This framework has been widely adopted by OSPs across the U.S. and is recognized by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers as one of the prevailing theories of change in youth OSPs (Ciocanel et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). For example, the integration of positive youth development into OSPs is bolstered by the Afterschool Youth Development Project Act signed into law by the state of Illinois in 2010. This law defines 'afterschool program' *as* 'positive youth development activities' and declares its purpose to be: "to provide all young people between the ages of 6 and 19 with access to sufficient and sustainable funding for programs that promote positive youth development" (Illinois General Assembly, 2010).

Others have argued that current formulations of positive youth development are based on white middle-class conceptions of youth, which simplifies their identities, homogenizes their experiences, and conceptualizes them through one dominant cultural frame (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). As a result, youth of color experiencing social, political, and economic marginalization are deprived of culturally relevant OSPs compared to privileged peers. When available, programs tend to have high rates of attrition (exceeding 50%) (Heller et al., 2017), suggesting a mismatch between program offerings and youths' priorities. These programs often have underdeveloped infrastructure, such as a lack of transportation to and from programs. It follows that when programs are not well matched to youths' strengths and priorities and begin with overly negative assumptions about clients, the disappointment they engender can aggravate feelings of dehumanization, alienation, and internalized oppression. Youth outcomes in after-school programs are determined by the ways in which individual youth with unique developmental needs and histories interact with the myriad features present within an organization (Jones & Deutsch, 2013). When program features are informed by youths' definitions and perspectives of what works for them, their interactions with their after-school program features become stronger and more impactful (Bulanda & McCrea 2013).

Speaking methodologically, there has been a focus on outcome-based research about interventions for youth of color. This means that the perspectives of youth about their experience of the interventions in which they participate have not been included as data. There has also been a lack of research aimed at understanding how contextual and individual factors impact how programs work and for whom they work. Two meta-analyses of OSP effectiveness highlighted this dearth of knowledge and called for future research to examine the ways that individual and contextual factors, including gender and program and neighborhood characteristics relate to how

youth internalize program offerings (Ciocanel et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2010). Increasingly, realist approaches to intervention design emphasize that the mechanism of change that occurs in social interventions is the participants' internalization of programming, and that this internalization process needs to be studied in order to optimize intervention effectiveness (Pawson & Bellamy, 2006; Spangaro et al., 2015). This project responds to that priority. The literature review will also use the realist synthesis approach, to allow a window into mechanisms of program action.

Problem Statement

Despite their demonstrably greater need, youth of color remain one of the most underserved populations (Bringewatt & Gershoff, 2010). Contributing to these problems is a lack of knowledge and research on how youth internalize, perceive, and experience personal change in out-of-school settings. It is important to understand youths' definitions of personal change so that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can design, fund, and facilitate more culturally attuned OSPs. Oppression and its effects are well documented, however, research on personal change through young people's perspectives is novel and limited. The inattention to youths' perspectives as sources of knowledge is an example of what Fricker (2013) and Smith (2012) call epistemic violence. To meaningfully counteract the effects of epistemic violence for youth of color in OSP settings, it is necessary to first understand whether their theories of personal change reflect widely adopted definitions of change according to dominant theories of youth change. Marginalized communities are over-researched by universities and many OSPs designed to meet youths' needs are conceptualized within a violence prevention intervention framework, which arguably over-emphasizes individual coping and skill-building as primary modes of personal change (Watts et al., 1999). This is problematic because individual interventions are emphasized

and are deficit-based, even reflecting an implicit racist bias in that it implies that the youth are pathological and need help coping by definition. Moreover, these programs and interventions are not necessarily designed to address factors associated with injustice and oppression.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore youths' perspectives of how they internalize OSPs (curricula and relationships with instructors, each other, and other participants) and define personal change in an OSP context. This study addresses the following overarching research question: since program impact occurs via youths' internalization of the program offerings, what do youth perspectives tell us about how they internalize the experience of an out-of-school, high-dosage, strengths-based program? Specifically, this study aims to:

(1) understand youths' perspectives of personal change, including the nature of youths' internalization processes; and,

2) identify causal program mechanisms of change that youth say are helpful.

Thus, this study provides a culturally and contextually relevant definition and understanding of how youth of color define their change processes in OSP settings, which can equip practitioners and researchers with stronger tools to build more relevant programs with youth.

Research Approach

The present study is a qualitative examination of program evaluation interviews collected between 2006-2020. Interviews were conducted between peers, meaning participants used a previously youth-created protocol (Bulanda et al., 2013) (See Appendix) to interview each other about their program experiences and evaluations. Since a major goal of this study was to rely on the participants' perceptions and understanding of personal change within OSPs, a phenomenological approach was utilized (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). This approach accounts for

people's understanding of their lived experience of a phenomenon and examines the meaning made of the phenomenon being experienced (Bhattacharya, 2017). Since phenomenology maintains that there is an intersubjective reality to existence (Moustakas, 1994), analyzing participants' peer-to-peer program evaluations are an ideal way of accessing youths' subjective experiences of their definitions and experiences of personal change in this OSP context.

Implications of the Participatory Program Theorizing and Evaluation

Over the timespan of interviews in this study, three different programs were created and facilitated. Program and curriculum emphases are arrived through participatory methods that explicitly elicit from youth their priorities for their programming. This form of evidence-base differs from those evidence-based programs that derive strictly from theory refined in applied studies. This means that the interventions being studied already are informed by youth perspectives. Youth first prioritized violence prevention and community support for anti-violence initiatives (Stand Up Help Out and CRIME), then sexual and romantic health education (Love your Love Life), and then education about human, civil, and legal rights (Law Under Curious Minds). Youth named every program, each of which is described in more detail below. Cross-age mentoring was also prioritized by the youth, initially as part of the anti-violence initiatives, and is studied elsewhere (Richards et al., 2021). Youth opinions contributed to the best practices that were used in every program:

- Humanistic support group with highs and lows (Miller et al., 2020a)
- Stress management in various forms
- A "primary" worker for each youth
- Street-based social work (Tyson McCrea et al., 2019b)
- Peer-to-peer program evaluations

The decision to adopt this highly participatory process arose out of concerns about (1) the lack of engagement of youth in most OSPs, which typically is below 50% (Deschenes et al., 2010), and (2) the validity of using standardized scales and traditional outcome measures with youth. Several groups of youth told instructors that the diverse standardized measures the ECP-PSI initially used did not reflect their experiences or their priorities and made it clear they felt they were faking it when completing them.

Role of the Researcher

As the author of this proposal and facilitator of one of the after-school programs under examination in this study, there are power dynamics and biases that I must be aware of and actively address. I am a white male Ph.D. student working with youth of color in their communities, so I must be constantly reflexive of my positionality and how my identities grant me privileges and power throughout this study. This study attempts to address the research gap of youth-based knowledge on after-school programs by centering youths' perspectives on their own development. However, my personal background and my role as the facilitator of a program may influence both power dynamics, including adultism (Arnold et al., 2022), and my interpretation of the data. To help manage biases, bell hooks (2003) suggests that "...critical thinking requires that we all engage in some degree of critical evaluation of self...it helps if we can engage in self-motivated interrogation rather than reactive response to outer challenge" (p. 107). Aligned with hooks' notion of engaging in self-motivated interrogation, I will engage in reflexive practices throughout this study, including reflexive journaling where I critically challenge my own assumptions and conclusions to reduce the likelihood of researcher bias (Probst, 2015) related to my identities and position as facilitator of one program.

Research Assumptions

Critical realism provides a useful framework for understanding how youth change in OSP contexts. Realism assumes that causation is generative, which challenges the notion that what works is the program in and of itself or everything about a program (Pawson & Bellamy, 2006). Rather, critical realism allows us to ask: what is it about a program that works? Pawson and Bellamy (2006) argue that the answer to this question must be given in terms of the program mechanisms. OSPs provide renewed choices for youth in the form of material, social, emotional, and/or cognitive resources. Thus, it is this process of integrating multiple program resources into youths' reasoning that captures the engine of change (the causal power) of an OSP (Pawson & Bellamy, 2006). Realists assume that it is not programs that work, instead, it is youth internalizing program resources that make programs work (Pawson & Bellamy, 2006). Moreover, critical realism accepts metaphysical realism over idealism and adheres to an "anti-foundational approach to knowledge, because rather than defining reality to fit the mind, it accepts that knowledge is conceptually and socially mediated" (Zembylas, 2013, p. 667), providing the theoretical justification of practice models potentially being effectively shaped by the youth themselves. This also justifies this study's focus on youths' perspectives of how they internalize program mechanisms.

Empowering Counseling Program Participatory Science Initiative

This study focuses on three OSPs facilitated by the Empowering Counseling Program Participatory Science Initiative (ECP-PSI), which provides free supportive out-of-school social services for economically marginalized youth of color, responding to structural oppressions by engaging youth and community members in rights-based participatory processes (Miller et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2020a, Miller et al., 2020b; Tyson et al., 2019a; Tyson et

al., 2019b). For 16 years, the ECP-PSI has co-designed OSPs and counseling services in partnership with marginalized youth of color, community agencies, schools, churches, and medical centers on Chicago's South and West Sides. The ECP-PSI addresses problems that youth identify, centering their strengths and wisdom about services that are most meaningful for them.

The three OSPs from which data were gathered are: (1) Stand Up! Help Out! (SUHO), (2) Love Your Love Life (LYLL), and (3) Law Under Curious Minds (LUCM). All three programs served adolescents aged 14-19. Each program utilized a fully participatory program model, including working with all youth participants to design and evaluate their program. The ECP-PSI program was led by a faculty member, who supervised social work master's and doctoral students who were program directors and team leaders. Doctoral students with qualifications also served as intern supervisors. SUHO and LYLL operated on the following schedule: three program cycles each year (four hours per day, four days per week for six weeks in the summer and two hours per day, four days per week for ten weeks each in fall and spring. LUCM differed slightly, while still adhering to the three program cycles each year. It went for five hours per day, five days per week for six weeks in the summer and two hours per day, four days per week for ten weeks each in fall and spring. Thus, programs were relatively high-dosage compared to many social interventions, averaging 80 hours of in-person instruction time per semester. All three types of programs consistently achieved high rates of engagement (between 90%-99%), compared with maximum engagement rates reported by other OSPs (between 70%-79%) (Deschenes et al., 2010).

Drawing from 17 years of feedback from youth clients about street-based service provision in a university-community partnership context, the ECP-PSI developed and

implemented the street-based social work intervention model, which is a model for responding to the "social disaster" of U.S. urban youth of color experiencing poverty who fall through the cracks of policies and services (Tyson McCrea et al., under review; Tyson McCrea et al., 2019b). Street-based social work is designed to be a human rights-based counter to mass criminalization of youth of color, support youths' efforts at redressing human rights abuses, and yield knowledge about how social safety nets fail and should be improved (Tyson McCrea et al., under review; Tyson McCrea et al., 2019b). This model also provides a culturally sensitive accompaniment-based approach (Wilkinson & DeAngelo, 2019) to care, which means youths' social workers provide support where and when they need it. Social workers meet youth where they are, including in school hallways, restaurants, parks, and libraries. Youth are accompanied by their social workers through life events like scholarship ceremonies, visiting hospitalized family members, navigating the legal system and police when relatives are arrested, and college tours. Street-based social work draws from evidence-based practices including multi-systemic family therapy (Hengeller & Schaeffer, 2016), strengths-focused service learning in school settings (Johnson et al., 2017), humanistic play therapy (Bratton et al., 2005), and developmental mentoring relationships (Boat et al., 2021). With these approaches, street-based social work addresses the lack of mental health support available to youth of color experiencing poverty and offers youth a positive childhood experience known to positively impact development (Bethell et al., 2019).

The following sections describe SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM in further detail.

Stand Up! Help Out! and CRIME

SUHO focused its curriculum on promoting alternatives to community violence using cross-age mentoring, based on self-determination theory and the strengths perspective (Bulanda

et al., 2015). There were 203 youth in total enrolled in SUHO between 2006-2011 who completed peer-to-peer interventions. The majority of youth enrolled in SUHO emphasized three experiences as most meaningful: 1) the compassion and care of instructors, 2) being able to mentor younger children, and 3) feeling empowered to respond constructively to community violence (Bulanda et al., 2015). Pedagogical methods included didactic lectures, group discussions, team building, a weekly sharing circle, experiential learning, and fun icebreakers and games. SUHO youth regularly led anti-violence and anger management programs for other after-school programs and social-emotional learning class segments in community schools. SUHO's curriculum evolved based on 1) feedback in a qualitative peer-to-peer program evaluation process (Bulanda et al., 2013), and 2) SUHO instructor's experiences supporting youths' efforts to effectively carry out the community development and child mentoring activities the youth found most meaningful (Bulanda et al., 2015).

Love Your Love Life

As youths' priorities changed based on participants' peer-to-peer program evaluation interviews, the ECP-PSI responded by shifting from an anti-violence program to one that focused on relationships and sexual health. As a result, the LYLL program was facilitated by the ECP-PSI between 2011-2014 and focused its curriculum on sexual health, romantic relationships, partner and family violence, healthy conflict resolution, avoiding human trafficking, and referrals for medical care including birth control resources (Stokar et al., 2017). 155 youth participated in LYLL between 2011-2014. LYLL was the first sexual and romantic health services program co-designed and co-instructed with disadvantaged African American adolescents. LYLL was grounded in participatory action research, self-determinization and strengths perspectives, and trauma treatment approaches (Stokar et al., 2017). Youth participants authored a guide to dating,

authored workbooks, created documentaries, and presented their sexual and romantic health curriculum to other youth in their schools and communities.

Law Under Curious Minds

LUCM arose in part as the human rights approach was explained and responded to positively by youth in the Love Your Love Life program. Another influence was increased awareness of human rights violations youth experienced at the hands of police, which made it a priority to support youth by ensuring they knew their human, legal, and civil rights. As The ECP-PSI focused on a human rights approach to afterschool and summer programming, the programs attained 90% participant program completion and several other measures of program excellence that exceed national standards (Miller et al., 2018). The ECP-PSI's Law Under Curious Minds program is a rights-based after-school and summer program, which builds resistance and resilience in youth with a human rights approach to practice and research and acknowledges that practice and research is always taking place in a political context. 283 youth participated in LUCM programming between 2017-2023. This program utilizes critical participatory pedagogy and research (Torre et al., 2012), humanistic group therapy principles (Shechtman & Pastor, 2005), street-based social work (Tyson et al., 2019b), the human rights perspective (Berthold, 2014), and the Social Justice Youth Development model (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002) to provide culturally attuned, holistic individual and group clinical care and after school programming designed to build resistance and resilience with a human rights-based, youth co-designed curriculum (Miller et al., 2020a; Miller et al., 2019; Tyson McCrea et al., 2019a; Tyson McCrea et al., 2019b).

Moreover, informed by Freire's (1972) notion that the primary goal of education should be to engage students in learning to decode and challenge their social conditions, the ECP-

PSI engages youth in analyzing (critical reflection), navigating (self-efficacy), and challenging (critical action) the oppressive social forces influencing one's life and community (Freire, 1972; Seider et al., 2017; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) through critical group dialogue and reflection on oppression, physical engagement in activism, exposure to political processes, and policymaking through participatory action research, rights based-community forums, and involvement in political processes, such as attending city council meetings and meeting elected officials. Youth-led discussions on oppression and resistance are grounded in human rights and humanistic group therapy, while the street-based social work model of practice reframes mental healthcare as a right by bringing free trauma-informed care to the youth, making it more accessible (Tyson et al., 2019b).

First, this study will examine the literature on OSPs, internalization processes, and youths' perspectives of personal change followed by the proposed methodology to answer the research question, including methodological implications and limitations. This paper will conclude with a discussion of the micro, mezzo, macro, and social justice implications of the proposed study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review begins by reviewing OSPs as contexts of youth development, and then moves on to a more in-depth discussion of youths' internalization and change processes in OSP settings.

Impact of Structural Violence on Community Contexts in Chicago

Communities of color in Chicago have historically endured (and still do) many forms of structural violence, which is defined as indirect violence, where there may not be an identifiable perpetrator of violence because the violence is embedded into the structures of society and shows up as unequal access to resources essential for life, such as health care, and therefore reduced quality of life and opportunities compared to those not oppressed by structural violence(Galtung, 1969). For example, a structural system of segregation was being shaped and enforced in Chicago by implementing an "invisible fence." Private agreements between property owners and real estate agents established that homes were not to be sold to or occupied by Black people, which made it extraordinarily difficult for Black residents to find housing outside of the "invisible fence." The Chicago Real Estate Board also actively encouraged restrictive covenants. It voted to expel any member that sold or rented property to Black residents in White neighborhoods (Ewing, 2018). Moreover, the Chicago Housing Authority's "Plan for Transformation" was Mayor Daley's plan to overhaul public housing in Chicago in 1999 (Smith, 2015). Under this plan, the city demolished 17,000 units of public housing in an effort to relocate residents into mixed-income communities. Seventeen years and $3 billion later, only about eight

percent of those households now live in mixed-income communities (Ewing, 2018). Structurally violent policies like the "Invisible Fence" and the "Plan for Transformation" brought with them the loss of agency and autonomy of economically marginalized people of color. These policies continue to shape modern systems of marginalization, segregation, and violence that create the need for high-quality supportive services.

Marginalized Communities of Color as Developmental Contexts

Due to the impact of structurally violent policies, economically marginalized communities of color are highly reactive to the quality of the social safety net and variations in the quantity and quality of those services. For instance, one SUHO program in Kenwood in 2010 was held in a school where there were six drive-by shootings during the Springtime, directly threatening youth and staff. Youth reacted with a Community Forum entitled "Voices of We Who are Violence-Free." During the 2017 LUCM program, Chicago Public Schools announced that they were permanently closing the high school in which the program was being held, in addition to all other high schools in the community. In response, youth used the program to plan and discuss strategies to protest their school's closure, which proved to be successful (Miller, 2021). When decisions are made by lawmakers and policies are enacted, youth with insufficient resources who are dependent on public agencies and schools experience the impact directly. Therefore, the study of locality is an important contextual factor to consider when understanding how young people experience the impact of social services, including OSPs (Jagosh, 2019).

Moreover, low-income youth of color are the persons suffering the most stress of any other subgroup in the United States. They experience the most ACEs (Liu et al., 2018), the most exposure to community violence (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019), the most exposure to police violence (Jackson et al., 2021), and the greatest poverty with its attendant deprivations (Castro-

Ramirez et al., 2021; Fredrick, 2018). The challenge for the researcher is both to document the extraordinary stress and not to fall into a pathology focus that overlooks the considerable strengths and community cultural wealth of the youth, their families, and their communities (Yosso, 2005).

OSPs as Developmental Contexts

Researchers are increasingly focusing on the contexts of adolescent and youth development, including the features of settings that impact developmental processes (Jones & Deutsch, 2013). Despite the increased emphasis on youths' contexts, such as families and schools, fewer researchers have examined OSPs as contexts of development (Jones & Deutsch, 2013). Structured OSPs can be contexts in which youth can be producers of their own positive change (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) because such opportunities can enable youth to experiment and express social roles (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Barber et al., 2005). Programs can aid youth in their personal development by providing a structured setting in which they can "work through developmental tasks through the provision of specific types of programs, activities, and relationships" (Hirsch et al., 2011, p. 71). The benefits of participating in OSPs have been well documented, including positive effects related to the development of personal and interpersonal assets (Dworkin et al., 2003), academic and socioemotional outcomes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007), including student engagement and achievement (Grolnick et al., 2007), and psychosocial and behavioral outcomes (Bartko & Eccles, 2003). Participating in a challenging and meaningful extracurricular program and forming significant relationships with other peers and nonparental adults may promote lasting changes in positive well-being across adolescence (Christenson et al., 2008; Huebner et al., 2009). Research suggests that OSPs can also address youth violence engagement by providing constructive opportunities for peer connections and skill development,

improving academic engagement of youth, and offering alternatives to unstructured, negative social networks (Durlak & Weisberg, 2007).

A meta-analysis of 68 OSPs that aim to enhance youth social and personal skills revealed that compared to controls, participants demonstrated significant increases in their positive social behaviors, school grades, self-perceptions and bonding to school, and levels of academic achievement, and significant reductions in problem behaviors (Durlak et al., 2010). Forty-three of the 68 studies in this meta-analysis specified the ethnicity of participants, and in only 10 of those 43 studies, participating youth were predominantly (>90%) Black. About half of the studies included in this meta-analysis reported the socioeconomic status of participants, and of those that did report, 17 (25%) indicated they served primarily low-income youth. Thus, despite their demonstrably greater need, youth of color experiencing low-income have not been sufficiently included in empirical studies about the impact of OSPs, a gap this study fills. The meta-analysis concluded that desirable changes occurred in three areas: school performance, indicators of behavioral adjustment, and feelings and attitudes (Durlak et al., 2010). However, it was not indicated whether any study included in the analysis triangulated their quantitative findings with youths' qualitative responses to how they may have changed as a result of participation in an OSP, a need to which this research responds.

How Can OSPs Enhance Youth Change Processes?

Contemporary research on youth development and change subscribes to a relational-developmental-ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Overton, 2010) or person-in-environment (Kondrat, 2013) perspective, where individuals are understood to be complex and influenced by overlapping factors in their environments. Youth development and change is understood to be social and relational by nature, which places an increased focus on understanding the context of

youths' relationships and interactions (Denzin, 1989). But youths' contexts alone do not promote personal development (Denzin, 1989). Importantly, youths' perceptions of and reactions to their contexts contribute to developmental processes, including identity formation. (Cooley, 1902; Denzin, 1989). As such, youths' change processes are complex, intersectional, and contextual across micro, mezzo, and macro settings (Cahill et al., 2008; Roy et al., 2019), which highlights the necessity of adhering to a person-in-environment perspective (Kondrat, 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), based on youths' perspectives of their realities. Broadly, positive therapeutic change in youth and children is thought to include behavioral improvements, increased expression of positive affect, and increased regulation and tolerance of negative affect (Barish, 2004). These changes are meant to increase young people's resilience, improved socialization and relationships, especially with peers and family, optimism, and academic performance (Ferguson et al., 2020; Barish, 2004; Seligman, 1995).

Internalization of Program Relationships and Curriculum

OSPs can promote lasting change through the internalization of out-of-school offerings. The American Psychological Association (APA) defined internalization as, "the nonconscious mental process by which the characteristics, beliefs, feelings, or attitudes of other individuals or groups are assimilated into the self and adopted as one's own" (VandenBos, 2007). Within psychoanalytic theory specifically, the APA defined internalization as, "the process of incorporating an object relationship inside the psyche, which reproduces the external relationship as an intrapsychic phenomenon" (VandenBos, 2007). For example, through internalization the relationship between child and mother is reproduced in relational theory between self and other, or between ego and superego (VandenBos, 2007).

Current research suggests that the fullest form of internalization occurs when the reason

for doing an activity is both personally meaningful and when it is brought in harmony with broader, more deeply anchored interests, values, and commitments of the individual (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). For example, during key-decision moments, like deciding what to study in college or what career to pursue, it may be crucial for a young person to contemplate their decision from a broader perspective and consider their personal dreams, future professional identity, and long-term aspirations (Erikson, 1968). When youth perceive their personal choices to be coherent with their interests, personal values, and future aspirations, they are more likely to display integrated regulation when engaging in their chosen activity (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). In other words, young people experience high ownership and personal endorsement of the activity because they see it as an expression of their self and as an extension of their identity, personal dreams, and future aspirations (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). This notion can be applied to OSPs, too. If youth perceive their OSP to be congruent with their interests, personal values, and future aspirations, they may be more likely to see the program as an expression of themselves, which can enhance the youths' internalization of their program's curricula. However, this degree of integration requires considerable maturity, self-understanding, and awareness, which is dependent on the individual adolescent's maturation and supports that develop self-reflectiveness (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). This integration is also highly individualistic and fails to consider how collective or environmental factors impact youths' self-reflectiveness about their goals and therefore the internalization process. Importantly, these definitions of internalization also exclude youths' perspectives of how they experience change processes in OSP settings. This study contributes to understanding these nuances more fully.

Change in Positive Youth Development Programs

One of the change frameworks adopted by many OSPs in the U.S. is the positive youth development model (Jones & Deutsch, 2013). Broadly, positive youth development programs and interventions aim to address determinants of adolescent health-risk behaviors by promoting youths' inherent strengths to develop a sense of empowerment, belonging, self-efficacy, and competence (Bowers et al., 2010). This framework has been widely adopted by OSPs across the U.S. and is recognized by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers as one of the prevailing theories of change in youth OSPs (Ciocanel et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). For example, the integration of positive youth development into OSPs is bolstered by the Afterschool Youth Development Project Act signed into law by the state of Illinois in 2010. This law defines 'afterschool program' *as* 'positive youth development activities' and declares its purpose to be: "to provide all young people between the ages of 6 and 19 with access to sufficient and sustainable funding for programs that promote positive youth development" (Illinois General Assembly, 2010).

A recent meta-analysis examined the effects of positive youth development interventions in promoting positive outcomes and reducing risk behavior in young people (aged 10-19), including 24 studies (all employed randomized control trial designs) and 23,258 participants (58% African American/Black) in the analysis (Ciocanel et al., 2017). The meta-analysis used a randomized control trial design to examine the impact of positive youth development out-of-school interventions on outcomes including academic achievement, prosocial behavior, psychological adjustment, behavioral problems, and sexual risk behaviors. Independent of participant age and program characteristics, out-of-school positive youth development interventions had a small but significant effect on academic achievement and psychological

adjustment. However, no significant effects were found for sexual risk behaviors, problem behavior, or positive social behaviors (Ciocanel et al., 2017).

Moreover, positive youth development interventions did not lead to significant reductions in violent or antisocial behavior compared to control interventions. The analysis also found that low risk young people derived more benefit from positive youth development interventions than high-risk youth (Ciocanel et al., 2017). However, the authors noted that their ability to draw conclusions was weakened by methodological flaws within their sample of studies.

Ciocanel et al. (2017) also found that there is considerable diversity in the features and activities that characterize positive youth development programs. For example, Catalano et al. (2004) conducted a systematic analysis of published rigorous program evaluations and identified 15 key program objectives of positive youth development programs. These objectives included fostering resilience, self-determination, self-efficacy, and spirituality; promoting bonding and social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competence; and providing opportunities to develop pro-socially and receive recognition for positive behavior. Moreover, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) posited that to be considered a positive youth development program, it must (a) foster program goals, such as confidence, competence, character, connections and caring; (b) provide young people with opportunities and experiences at school, at home and in the community so that they can develop their interests and talents and build new skills and competencies; and (c) create a supportive atmosphere in which young people can develop bonds with the adults involved in delivering the program as well as with the other program participants.

Relatedly, the specific mechanisms of positive youth development programs thought to bring about change in young people are also diverse. These mechanisms are thought to include (1) engaging youth in productive and structured activities to divert them from unhealthy behavior

(Roth et al. 1998), (2) providing young people with resources and time to develop knowledge, skills and social networks (Pettit et al. 1997) and (3) addressing risk factors such as poor educational attainment, low self-esteem, and low aspirations for the future by developing protective factors such as social and emotional competencies (Catalano et al. 2002). Positive youth development programs must also be long-lasting and stable to allow youth to form and benefit from positive relationships with peers and adults.

Critics of Positive Youth Development programs contend that 'positive' views of youth are simply the flip side of 'negative' views of youth (Kelly, 2006; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). Whether positive or negative is emphasized, both "serve equally well to signal a particular set of institutional and ideological expectations about whom we should, as adults, become" (Sukarieh & Tannock, p. 678). In dialogue with the variability in the process and structure of effective positive youth development programs, Brooks-Gun & Roth (2014) argued that while the philosophy and aims of positive youth development have been articulated, the core components of an effective positive youth development program are unclear. Despite massive public and private investments (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011), the opacity of what makes positive youth development programs effective, how they are effective, and for whom these programs are effective for led Ciocanel et al. (2017) to conclude, "Given these limitations, it is not currently possible to give strong recommendations for the use of positive youth development programs" (p. 499). As such, a considerable research gap remains related to the empirical validity of positive youth development dimensions for youth of color (Travis & Leech, 2014). Positive Youth Development assumes a highly individualistic framework focused on individual change, which is ill-suited perhaps for youth with collectivist orientations and those committed to community uplift. Positive Youth Development does not capture adolescents' ideals of justice

and is imposed based on findings cut across all youth, rather than derived specifically from the needs and strengths of youth suffering multiple traumatic stressors.

Finally, positive youth development is a theory of human development, not a theory about how social interventions work that would comprehend resources, youths' goals and experiences, and the mechanisms of action of interventions. This may be why there is so much diversity and little specificity about what constitutes positive youth development. In sum, there has been a gap in programs that build OSP intervention theory from the perspectives of the youth who suffer more injustices than any other sub-group in the U.S. and in the interest of social justice, the process engaged in here responds to that need.

Identity Development

Adolescence is the developmental period when tasks of identity integration become most relevant, including exploring and synthesizing one's sense of self across relationships and contexts (Erikson, 1994). Developmental changes related to youths' cognitive, social, and emotional functioning create the conditions for increased attention to identity development (Dweck, 1999). While it is acknowledged that identity development continues past adolescence, Erikson theorized a normative pathway for adolescent identity development (Erikson, 1968). Broadly, Erikson argued that identity development occurs via significant relationships and societal opportunities and narratives (Erikson, 1968), which is rooted in social psychology and symbolic interactionist theories including the generalized other (Mead, 1934) and the looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902). Critical to identity development is the creation and recreation of a socially mediated self-representation (Dweck, 1999). Because identity construction is social by nature, it is important to adopt a view that privileges the context of relationships in which youth interact (Denzin, 1989), including OSPs.

Ethnic-Racial Identity Development

Ethnic-racial identity development is a normative developmental task that is critical for youth's positive adjustment in the U.S. (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). Ethnic-racial identity is an important construct to consider in OSPs for youth of color that is not consistently a focus of Positive Youth Development approaches to programs. Research across decades has shown that a clearer sense of one's ethnic-racial identity can be achieved through meaningful exploration of this identity domain, and understanding how ethnic-racial identity fits within one's own self-concept promotes positive psychosocial functioning in youth (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Specifically, a positive sense of racial identity has been linked with youths of color development of healthy coping strategies in general, a sense of belonging in their communities, self-esteem, and lower rates of depression (Blash & Unger, 1995; Roberts et al., 1999; McMahon & Watts, 2002). Spencer et al., (1997) argued for the use of a phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), in which normative development for youth of color involves exposure to environments that devalue their ethnic and racial group. Consequently, research has found that a positive racial identity helps adolescents cope with stress related to discrimination and devaluation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2008; Dotterer et al., 2009).

Gender Identity Development

Like ethnic-racial identity, gender identity is an important factor that needs to be considered when understanding how youth change in OSP settings. Gender identity refers to the extent to which a person experiences oneself in relation to gender categories (Steensma et al., 2013). Contemporary research on gender identity development subscribes to a perspective that views gender as complex and comprised of several dimensions, all requiring separate assessment (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). For example, Tobin et al. (2010) identified five dimensions of gender

identity: (a) membership knowledge (knowledge of membership in a gender category); (b) gender centrality (the importance of gender relative to other identities, e.g., racial identity); (c) gender contentedness (satisfaction with one's gender); (d) felt pressure for gender conformity (felt pressure from self and others for adhering to gender stereotypes); and (e) felt gender typicality (perceived similarity to same-gender others) (Perry & Pauletti, 2011).

Identity Development Rooted in Resistance to Injustice

Erikson (1968) argues that the development of political commitment is a key dimension of identity formation in adolescents. Participation in social change and politically oriented programs can have profound impacts on youth and potentially on systems of oppression. When youth are provided opportunities to remedy social problems, they often feel a sense of agency and responsibility for society's well-being (Yates & Youness, 1998). Moreover, when youth have opportunities to address social problems in groups with peers and adults, youth can reflect on the dominant moral and political ideologies used to understand society (Yates & Youness, 1998). As a resistance-based approach to youth programming, critical youth empowerment entails processes through which youth engage in actions and behaviors that contribute to social change, including changes in structures, norms, values, and policies (Jennings et al., 2006). In order to support youths' identity development through a critical youth empowerment framework, Jennings et al. (2006) identifies six necessary programmatic dimensions: (1) a welcoming, safe environment, (2) meaningful participation and engagement, (3) equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, (4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes, (5) participation in sociopolitical processes to affect change, and (6) integrated individual and community-level empowerment. All three of the ECP-PSI programs contained

these six necessary dimensions, and so youths' responses about the impact of programs for them will advance our understanding of essential components of OSPs youth find valuable.

Critical Consciousness and Sociopolitical Development

Understood as a conscious form of resistance, Paulo Freire conceptualized critical consciousness as an education-based form of resistance against oppression and defines this concept as the ability to engage in reflection and action upon the world to transform it (Freire, 1972). Resistance conceptualized as critical consciousness stands in direct opposition to oppression. Watts & Hipolito-Delgado (2015), Watts & Abdul-Adil (1998), and Watts et al. (1999) outline a resistance-based theory of youth development, which posits that critical consciousness development is an essential aspect of sociopolitical development for combatting oppression. This theory avers that the process of developing critical consciousness can bring about psychological and identity-based changes that can result in engagement in critical reflection and action meant to address oppressive conditions, including structural and epistemic violence. Critical consciousness can also help marginalized youth overcome structural constraints on agency (Diemer & Li, 2011).

Critical consciousness is predictive of several key outcomes in adolescents marginalized by inequities in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, including resilience (Ginwright 2010), professional aspirations (Diemer & Hsieh 2008), academic engagement (O'Connor 1997; Ramos-Zayas 2003), and civic and political engagement (Diemer and Li 2011; Watts et al., 1999). Building resistance to injustice in youth of color can be accomplished by promoting and fostering critical consciousness through education (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998; Freire, 1972) and participatory action research (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010). Moreover, research suggests that the development of critical consciousness happens through group dialogue, participatory action, and

empowerment in arenas known as "opportunity structures" (Watts & Flanagan, 2007, p. 784), situating after school programs as a viable method to build resistance in youth of color (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998; Woodland, 2016; Hedemann & Frazier, 2017). In a review of the literature on how to promote and build critical consciousness, (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015) found that program structures and activities entailed shared values, including: fostering awareness of sociopolitical circumstances, encouraging critical questioning, fostering collective identity, and taking sociopolitical action.

Intersubjective Relatedness, Attachment, and Internal Working Models

Intersubjectivity or intersubjective relatedness refers to the "sharing of subjective experience between two or more people" (VandenBos, 2007). It is understood to be essential to the production of social meaning and is often applied to the relationship between a client and therapist (VandenBos, 2007). Intersubjective relatedness is also theorized to be the basis for attachment and for one's overall worldview, and the foundation for future relationships, self-concept, and identity (Orange, 2009; Frey, 2004). Thus, the role of the therapist and the ways in which therapists relate and attune to clients is enormously important to the therapeutic relationship and to the client's change processes (McCrea et al., 2019). For example, when receiving services, young people build representations or internal working models of themselves and the attachment figure (therapist) (Bowlby, 1973), also termed patterns of attachment (Sroufe et al., 2005). These internal working models are complementary and represent the young person finding an accurate reflection for themselves as positive, adaptive persons in the mind of the caregiver (Bonovitz, 2003). Youths' internal working models have also been theorized to reflect their own appraisal of and confidence in the self as worthy of care and protection, which in turn is developed based on the caregiver's committed responsiveness, and the young person's

appraisal of the attachment figure's desire and ability to provide care and protection (Frey, 2004). Sroufe et al.'s 2005 study of the impacts of social interventions on the internal working models of at-risk youth demonstrated that social interventions can modify and improve persons' dysfunctional patterns of attachment, which is an important theoretical base for the potential of OSPs to support youth experiencing structural violence.

Role of Program Instructors

In OSP contexts, the program facilitator or instructor can function as youth participants' attachment figure and thus have a significant impact on the young person's models of attachment. It is through the program instructor's responsiveness and empathetic recognition that youth feel understood and known (Bonovitz, 2003; Schafer, 1959). Program instructors can facilitate this attachment process by embodying an empathetic attitude and recognizing young people's distress, sadness, worries, disappointments, and grievance (Barish, 2004). Moreover, program instructors can aid the process of therapeutic change by embodying enthusiastic, affirming responsiveness to young people's positive affects and interests (Barish, 2004). Engaging in these practices can aid program instructors in engaging youth in OSP contexts and can enhance youths' personal change processes. This study will examine how instructors' actions were perceived by youth, thus shedding more light on youths' experiences of instructor actions and their impact on youths' internal change processes.

Group Factors that Enhance Personal Change Processes

Participating in groups can have therapeutic effects on youth, which can impact how young people change in out-of-school contexts. There are many benefits to participating in groups, which have been well theorized and researched. For example, Yalom and Leszcz (2020) described twelve factors that facilitate positive change via participating in group services: 1)

instillation of hope, 2) universality, 3) imparting information, 4) altruism, 5) the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, 6) development of socializing techniques, 7) imitative behavior, 8) catharsis, 9) existential factors, 10) group cohesiveness, 11) interpersonal learning, and 12) the group as a social microcosm. These factors can be incorporated into OSP groups and can aid in youths' engagement in the program and in the development of an internal working model that they can identify with.

Humanistic approaches to group work may be particularly impactful for youth experiencing complex trauma and can create an environment conducive to individualized change processes because it emphasizes that the steps and actions taken towards goals are as important as the outcome of the goal itself (Kirschenbaum, 1979). The aim of humanistic group therapy is not to solve a specific problem, but to facilitate personal growth and develop effective ways of coping with problems (Kirschenbaum, 1979). A meta-analysis of humanistic therapy outcome research concluded that humanistic therapies are effective, and clients experience similar results as clients undergoing CBT treatment (Elliott, 2002). In addition to individual treatment, group therapy using the humanistic approach was found to be effective in treating clients with a variety of disorders (Page et al., 2001). In a study comparing the effectiveness between Cognitive-behavioral treatment groups (CBTG) and Humanistic Group Treatment (HGT) in treating children with learning disabilities, researchers found the HGT was more effective than CBTG (Shechtman & Pastor, 2005). Instead of concentrating on dysfunction, humanistic therapy aims to help people fulfill their potential and maximize their well-being and self-actualization through interpersonal support and learning (Page et al., 2001).

Youth Perspectives of Personal Change and Internalization

Understanding what young people believe to be important therapeutic achievements can

aid practitioners in attaining a good therapeutic collaboration and in enhancing treatment outcomes (Dittman & Jensen, 2014). Research shows that young people are able to provide coherent accounts of how their experiences are related to self-change (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Ben-Arieh, 2005), however, much of what we know about adolescents is based on psychological models of development through the adult practitioners' or researchers' perspective (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Enright et al., 1987; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011; Damon, 2004; Males, 1996). Moreover, research shows that consistent and engaged participation is essential to realizing the benefits of OSPs(Strobel et al., 2008). Thus, researchers must capture what youth find appealing and what motivates them to maintain their involvement over time in meaningful ways (Deschenes et al., 2010; Bulanda & Tyson McCrea, 2013). However, the perspectives of youth themselves are often missing from discussions about how OSPs should be organized (Strobel et al., 2008).

Moreover, the literature on how youth define and experience personal change, from their point of view, is essentially non-existent. Only a few studies examine how youth broadly define or make meaning of personal change as a result of therapeutic or supportive services, including OSP settings. For example, when researchers investigated how a sample of British adolescents experienced change as a result of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), youth described their development or growth as an absence of difficulties or as changes in their sense of self (Donnellan et al., 2013). A sample of Norwegian youth also described their personal development, as a result of participating in Trauma Informed-CBT as an absence of symptoms and as changes in how they acted, thought, and felt about themselves. (Dittman & Jensen, 2014). Wood et al. (2009) interviewed 108 youth (about 30% were Black youth) enrolled in OSPs and found that adolescents can view themselves as more responsible through participation in OSPs.

Specifically, these youth suggested that they experienced personal development through becoming more responsible by successfully fulfilling program expectations, adhering to their commitments, and considering the consequences of their actions on others (Wood et al., 2009).

However, critics contend that the dominant frameworks for the healthy development of youth of color are based on universalistic, adult (Barish, 2004; Shapiro & Esman, 1985), white middle-class conceptions of young people (Ginwright and Cammarota 2002). Broadly, personal and therapeutic change in youth of color in the U.S. is often defined by privileged researchers and practitioners and is thought of as overcoming pathological conditions or symptoms (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Even through strengths-based perspectives like positive youth development, researchers have argued that personal change is understood as an individualized process, decontextualized from youths' cultural experiences and perspectives of structural and institutional discrimination and oppression (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002) aimed at reducing youths' "problem behaviors" and promoting "desired outcomes" (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 12) defined by adult researchers and practitioners. While dominant youth development frameworks do consider youths' proximal micro and mezzo ecologies, including family and community (Lerner et al., 2011a), these frameworks rarely consider contextual factors, such as youths' culture or broad social, economic, and political issues and conflicts (Ginwright and Cammarota 2002; Males 1996). Importantly, developmental researchers have not comprehensively studied the goals of youth of color experiencing low income, with some exceptions (McCrea et al., under review). Examine. Thus, it is not clear that the outcomes desired by youth reflect the "desired outcomes" according to frameworks like positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 12). Moreover, models of therapeutic change based on the treatment of adults necessarily differ considerably from theories of therapeutic action with children (Barish, 2004).

These gaps in research contribute to the lack of knowledge about how youth define personal change in OSPs. It is important and potentially more efficient for program providers to understand how youth define personal change in OSPs, in order to build on existing strengths and positive developmental processes that youth already engage in. Additionally, the findings from this study can support social work practitioners and researchers designing programs and interventions so they have a more holistic understanding of what youth find useful and valuable in OSP, as well as a replicable method to discover meanings that other groups attach to personal change in OSP contexts.

Potentially, relevant OSPs can help remedy the racial and economic disparities in mental health care and supportive services for youth of color because they are less stigmatizing than formal mental health services (Bulanda & McCrea, 2013). But engaging youth in under-resourced contexts is challenging (Kazdin, 2004) and can negatively impact program engagement and attendance. Even in the most extensive randomized controlled trial with economically marginalized Black youth, the Becoming a Man Program, which occurred with youth in a school context, the attendance rate was about 50% (Heller et al., 2017). Broadly, youth experiencing social and economic marginalization are deprived of relevant OSPs, fueled by a misunderstanding of how they think about change in social services. While most youth programs and interventions focus on family and individual risk factors (Matjasko et al., 2016), many researchers have identified the need for a different type of practice model and approach to research that contrasts conventional programs and interventions with programs for youth experiencing structural violence (Watts et al., 2002; Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Questions and Sub-Questions

This study addresses the following overarching research question: since program impact occurs via youths' internalization of the program offerings, what do youth perspectives tell us about how they internalize the experience of an out-of-school, high-dosage, strengths-based program?

Specific Research Questions

1. What is it about these program curricula that work well according to youth? (i.e., what are the program mechanisms as described by youth?)
2. How do youth conceptualize what "changes" when youth internalize program mechanisms and resources?
3. How do youth understand the process of how the program works?

Research Design

Youth participants enrolled in three OSPs in four neighborhoods in Chicago across 17 years conducted qualitative peer-to-peer program evaluation interviews with each other at the conclusion of each program.

This study uses a critical realist scientific paradigm to carry out an interpretive phenomenological qualitative examination (Denzin, 1989; Cresswell & Poth, 2018) of program mechanisms with strong participatory components. From this realist standpoint, change does not occur via program curricula, but rather via the internalization of program curricula.

Qualitative peer-to-peer interviews (N=212) were analyzed with NVivo 12 using a causal thematic and content process analysis (Maxwell, 2004). This research design is well suited to answer the present research questions because it produced grounded, "rich descriptions" and explanations of internalization processes situated within real-life contexts (Miles et al., 2019). The qualitative data were coded initially to generate themes and compile a coding manual. Inter-rater reliability of coding manuals was achieved at 91%, which preceded the analysis of all qualitative data (Miles et al., 2019).

Using a critical realist scientific paradigm, an interpretive phenomenological qualitative approach (Denzin, 1989; Cresswell & Poth, 2018), and content and thematic methodologies (Denzin, 1989), this study addresses the following overarching research question: since program impact occurs via youths' internalization of the program offerings, what do youth perspectives tell us about how they internalize the experience of an out-of-school, high-dosage, strengths-based program? Consistent with previous research on how youth define therapeutic processes (Wood et al., 2009), this study refrains from "imposing the researchers' language or theoretical framework into these accounts" (p. 299). Rather, the present study assumes that a deeper, subjective understanding of these phenomena is needed, which rationalizes avoidance from relying solely on rigid preconceived notions of what these concepts mean to the research participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). This approach is meant to be theoretically open-ended and flexible and the way in which the key variables are operationalized will be conceptualized based on the participants' communications.

Participatory Methods

A participatory approach (Fine, 2010) was utilized to develop the peer-to-peer interview protocol (in Appendix) and as an approach to data collection. Specifically, youth conducted

program evaluation interviews with each other, rather than an adult researcher interviewing participants. The peer-to-peer program evaluation interview protocol was initially designed by the first cohort of youth and staff in SUHO and was amended by cohorts of youth participants across the SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM programs. Changes to the protocol typically involved the addition and subtraction of questions. Youth participating in the Empowering Counseling Program's OSPs (SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM) were trained by program staff on how to be interviewers and interviewees, including how to practice active listening, strategies on how to probe interviewees for additional information, and how to answer questions comprehensively (Bulanda et al., 2013). Youth also participated in mock interviews with program staff to practice these skills before conducting interviews.

Authentic youth participation in OSP design and evaluation can build developmental assets, including youths' understanding of complex human rights issues (Schusler et al., 2019). Youth as interviewers of each other has distinctive epistemological advantages in contexts where youth experience multiple marginalizations (race, income), as they may be made anxious or alienated by university researchers holding considerable privilege (Fine, 2012; Hall, 2012). Additionally, this process also facilitates relationship-building between youth (Malorni et al., 2022). Thus, training youth to be interviewers and interviewees not only helps develop these practical skills and assets but also improves the ecological validity of the study (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Data Collection Methods

Sample (Peer-to-Peer Interviews)

This study analyzed a sample of 212 qualitative peer-to-peer program evaluation interviews collected at the end of each ECP-PSI program between 2006-2020. These interviews

follow a 19-item protocol developed by previous cohorts of ECP-PSI youth participants (Bulanda et al., 2013). Youth were able to choose not to answer any question that they found uncomfortable. The peer-to-peer interview protocol (in Appendix A) includes questions such as, "Why did you decide to keep coming to the program?" and "Did you learn anything about yourself (or your capabilities) from this program? Can you give examples?" The peer-to-peer interviews give participants an opportunity to evaluate their experiences in the intervention, present feedback about the program, and comment on their community concerns. Youth have said they share more readily with each other than they would with an adult, no matter how "nice" the adult is (Bulanda et al., 2013).

All youth enrolled in SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM programs were between the ages of 14-18 at the time of their interview. The program evaluation interviews also captured the youths' gender demographics, which were as follows: SUHO: 67% female; LYLL; 66% female; and LUCM: 62% female.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative Approach

Thematic and content analysis were used to analyze peer-to-peer interviews (Miles et al., 2019; Denzin, 1989). Specifically, the researcher engaged in an initial open-coding stage to generate themes and compile a coding manual for the qualitative data. Qualitative data analyses utilized an analytic process with inter-rater reliability, which entails creating a codebook based on a subset of the data (15%), achieving inter-rater reliability (91%), coding inductively and deductively, and constructing meaning (Paulus et al., 2008; Miles et al., 2019). This iterative model involves multiple cycles of constructing meaning, which is meant to strengthen rigor and transparency of qualitative research (Paulus et al., 2008). Content and thematic analyses of the

qualitative data also yielded descriptive statistical data. Variations of qualitative analysis were used to afford multiple perspectives on the issue of internalization. Specifically, content analysis made it possible to understand how many youth discussed a specific theme and the frequency with which youth discussed specific themes related to change and internalization.

Also, during the process of creating a codebook and reflecting on the analytic memos, the primary researcher noticed the prevalence of youths' prioritizations and the value of having positive relationships within their program. Regardless of program or year, youth consistently valued relating to and learning from their peers, instructors, and mentees when the programs included a cross-age mentoring component. Thus, an additional code was created to capture the youths' general prioritization of relationships and connections to others in the program. The item was called, *"To what degree does the respondent prioritize connections with others?"* and the specific codes assigned to each interview were a 1 (lowest prioritization)-5 (highest prioritization). The process for applying this code is described in more detail in the findings section. The coding manual is available in Appendix B.

Scientific Rigor

To improve scientific rigor and meet the standards of qualitative data analysis, the qualitative team, comprised of this study's author and another doctoral student, achieved 91% inter-rater reliability before coding all qualitative data. This process entailed coding a subset of the data (20%) (different interviews than the 15% of data used to create the codebook) and calculating the total number of agreements divided by the total number of coding decisions made (Miles et al., 2019). Moreover, trustworthiness was bolstered through triangulation, including analyzing program evaluation data from multiple programs across 17 years, which compensates for any one form of bias by ensuring data are collected from four different communities using

three different curricula. Trustworthiness is also strengthened by engaging in researcher reflexivity, which includes the researchers engaging in reflective writing and in dialogue with each other about the research process and utilizing analytic memos throughout the coding process (Laws et al., 2013). This sample meets standards for saturation in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2018).

Managing Threats to Validity

There are many conditions outside of the program that could impact the results, so it is necessary to manage threats to validity. Differences between university researchers and marginalized youth can impact ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This was addressed throughout programming using participatory methods, by including youth and community partners as co-researchers and co-evaluators of services, ensuring that the program remains culturally relevant. Including youth in the data collection and design process was intended to promote the perceived relevancy and usefulness of the study. It was also meant to increase youths' motivation to participate honestly and fully. The peer-to-peer approach is intended to reduce the bias that would result from youths' feelings about adults in authority inhibiting youths' spontaneous discussions about what the program means to them. This is done to increase the study's ecological validity, and trustworthiness, and improve the overall rigor of the proposed methodology (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Implications of Methodology

Strengths

This design is best suited to answer the proposed study's research question because there is a lack of knowledge about how OSPs can best support Black and Latine youths' personal development and change processes from their perspectives. The implications of building on this

knowledge base include creating a relevant practice model for youth, which can improve client engagement, reduce program attrition rates, and maximize program impact for youth. This approach can also help improve future interventions for Black and Latine youth by using contextualized youth-based qualitative findings to inform program design by providers and program elements prioritized by potential OSP funders. Furthermore, this approach can produce a qualitative evidence base for supportive and effective programmatic mechanisms. Finally, because research is lacking about Black and Latine youths' experiences of their social interventions, the study can contribute youth perspectives to theories of the youths' cultural wealth in interaction with OSP resources as they impact youths' developmental processes.

Limitations

One limitation of the present study's methodology is relying only on qualitative research methods. Specifically, subjectivity is inherent and purposeful in qualitative research due to the reliance on researchers' interpretations and judgments. However, this subjectivity introduces the potential for bias, as researchers invariably bring preconceived notions or personal beliefs that influence their analysis and conclusions (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Additionally, qualitative research often involves smaller sample sizes compared to quantitative research, which limits generalizability using statistical standards of generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, this study has a substantial sample size, across several different communities and time frames, and so is likely to be applicable, a standard that is more meaningful for studies intended to improve social interventions (Maxwell, 2021). It is important to note though that despite these limitations, qualitative research provides valuable insights into complex social phenomena and individuals' experiences and can inform the development of theories and hypotheses for further research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative inquiry assumes that social life is dynamic and complex. Thus, it is also assumed that qualitative researchers should not claim that findings from one site apply to other sites in the same way, even under similar conditions. In other words, “history does not repeat itself, although it may sometimes rhyme” (Erickson, 2020). Moreover, while specific causal relationships may not generalize across ecological contexts, causal processes likely do (Jagosh, 2019) because of universalities in humans’ developmental needs Erickson, 2020).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

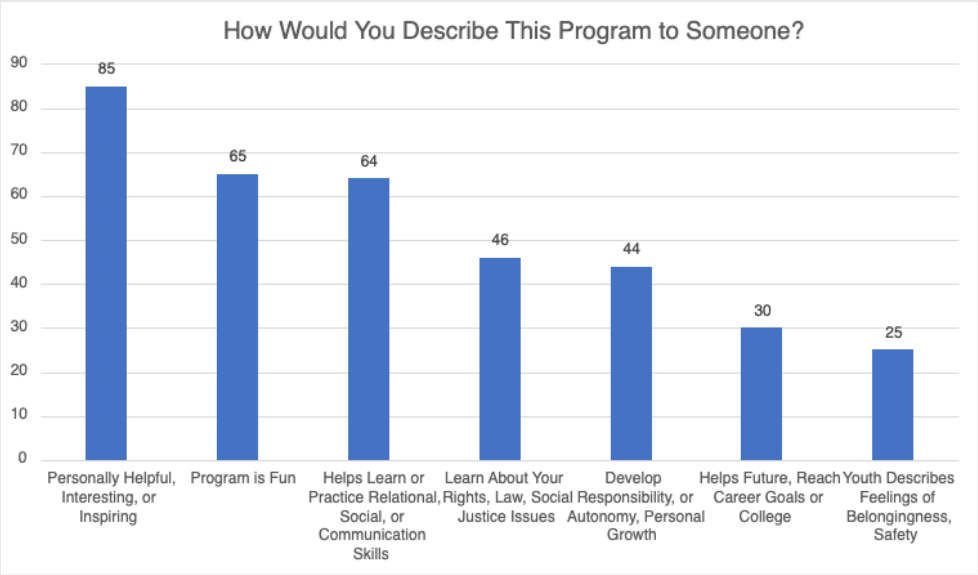
The qualitative findings of this study are organized around the three central research questions. Within each of those sections, findings are organized around the relevant parent codes (peer-to-peer interview questions) and then structured around the most relevant themes.

What is it About These Program Curricula That Work Well According to Youth? (i.e., What Are the Program Mechanisms as Described by Youth?)

How Would You Describe This Program to Someone?

Seven themes emerged from youths' responses to the question, "how would you describe this program to someone? These themes reflect youths' ideas of the content of their program and often describe the program elements that they found to be most impactful. See Table 1 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 1. How Would You Describe This Program to Someone?



Program is Personally Helpful, Interesting, or Inspiring

The most frequent response was characterized by describing their program as personally helpful, interesting, or inspiring (N=85). This theme included broad references to their program being educational or themselves as having learned content that was personally important. For example, one youth stated the following:

> I would describe this program as…well, to somebody, I should say…very intriguing, very interesting. You learn a lot about stuff you really didn't even know–knew. And, uh, I just feel like if someone really needs to take that boost to really get into something, I feel like this program's really it" (LUCM). Another youth said, "I would describe this program as a great learning experience that everyone should try, and a program that is meant for teens to lead. (SUHO)

This code also included broad positive responses related to the program being helpful or interesting. For example, youth responses include, "amazing" (LUCM), "interesting" (LYLL), and "I'd describe this program as a great program" (SUHO).

Program is Fun

Youth participants described "having fun" across SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM programs (N=65). Regardless of program content or activities, youth consistently stated that they would describe the program as fun. Many youths' responses included the word "fun" in combination with another descriptor, such as "interesting," "social," "open," and "comfortable." These instances were coded accordingly, and those themes were captured with other codes. Other examples of this are, "I would describe this program as interesting, fun, cooperative and a way of communication'" (LYLL), "I would describe this program to someone that it's like you know fun and at the same time it's you know you learning new things about you know kids, working, and stuff" (SUHO), and "I would describe it as an eye-opening experience and fun" (LUCM). This may suggest that youth can have fun while developing skills, learning new information, and

building connections with others, which could have implications for program design. In other words, having "fun" is not necessarily distinct from growing and learning and youth may not prioritize both separately, but rather, value them together.

Helps Learn or Practice Relational, Social, or Communication Skills

Outside of the two most frequent themes, which broadly capture a range of themes relating to the program being helpful and fun, the third most frequent theme was youth describing their program as being specifically helpful for learning or practicing relational, social, or communication skills (N=64). For example, one participant stated:

> Well, I would describe this program as a very fun and interesting learning experience and just getting to know new people like that I would never ever meet and like if I never join this program, like so many kids that I know now. And like, it was fun like waking every morning, coming here and learning. (LUCM)

Another youth stated that, "I would describe this program as a place you can come, and you talk to other teens about things that you probably wouldn't talk about with other people. And just a place to feel comfortable with other teenagers" (LYLL). Moreover, one response may have highlighted an important dimension to programs facilitating and fostering relationships between youth participants:

> Interviewee: I would describe it as a—um fun, chill and talking environment. Interviewer: Why did—why did you pick those words? Interviewee: Um. Because they didn't really force anybody to do anything they bring us in with talking to each other. We kinda could talk about whatever we wanted to talk about. (LUCM)

This response suggests that youth may value autonomy and choice within the process of connecting with peers. Additional themes from other PTP interview questions emerged related to youths' prioritization of autonomy within programming, which will be discussed in those sections.

Also included in this theme were references to youth engaging in mentoring and "learning to work with children" (SUHO), which is a program mechanism that facilitates positive connections to others and helps youth learn and practice social and relational skills. For example, one youth described the program as, "It's a place where you stay out of trouble and you learn how to mentor others and you learn to be mentored yourself. And, they help you with your problems. Fun, interesting, in working with kids" (SUHO). Another youth described more specifically what the connection to their mentee meant to them:

> It's a place to help you with your skills in working with children, providing kids with the knowledge they could use for the future. For instance, about bullying. That could guide them and help them, drugs, poison and that stuff. (SUHO)

Another participant framed relationships with others and mentoring as being helpful to their community:

> I would describe this program. It's a chance to learn things you don't already know. And, it's a chance to give back to the community by helping the kids and being a mentor, something you probably didn't have when you were little. (SUHO)

Overall, many youth characterized their program as being an opportunity that helps develop relational and social skills. Their responses indicated that they valued connecting with others, including having the program facilitate relationships and interactions with peers that they may not otherwise have had, and having the opportunity to mentor and help other young people in way that they may not have had.

Learn About Your Rights, Law, Social Justice Issues

Many youth described their program as an opportunity to learn about social justice topics, including legal and human, legal, and civil rights (N=46). For example, one youth stated, "basically this program is like aimed to like help teenagers and like young adults learn their

rights and like teach em' about human civil and legal rights basically" (LUCM). Another participant stated,

> If I had to describe this to someone I would describe as very hands-on in the profession of like law and very informative cause most students don't learn about all of this throughout high school they leave this part out about human rights and legal rights and the difference between the two and how people confused the two. So it's a good extra method of learning to top up what you probably learn during the school day. (LUCM)

Other youth framed learning about social justice and rights as learning about their dignity and how they deserve to be treated by others. For example, one participant stated, "The program teaches us about our human rights and how we should be treated as human beings" (LUCM). Another youth said,

> Um it's a program where we talk about our human rights and how we should be treated as human beings in the United States. Um it's just a learning experience you get to learn your rights and how you should be treated by the police, by the law or anyone. (LUCM)

Some participants connected learning about their rights in their program to preparing for their futures. For example, one of the youth stated, "It is a great program to join. They tell you about laws and about stuff that you should know when you become an adult" (LUCM). Another said, "I would describe this program as a good program for somebody who actually wants to go into the law, would wanna major in law" (LUCM). Moreover, another participant stated,

> I mean, the way I would describe this program is that it's a good tool to learn that if you want to be some sort of human rights activist or some sort of lawyer. You learn a lot about, uh, equality and how the society is structured. I think it is just good that young kids can learn about this stuff so early on like in high school and up. Because it really clings to our world and everything we do." (LUCM)

This theme was primarily found within LUCM interviews because that was the focus of the program's content, but youth from other programs discussed this theme, as well. For example, one youth enrolled in the Love Your Love Life stated, "It was decent. I learned a lot of stuff about HIV and a lot of other stuff and women abusing, domestic violence" (LYLL).

Additionally, a participant from Stand Up! Help Out! Described contributing to community change,

> Um, it's a program for teenagers, um, who are interested in making a change in their community, I guess, um, who are interested in doing something positive, giving back. Um we mentor children, um, and we wrote a book that's going to be published. And I feel that it would help a lot of people. (SUHO)

Develop Responsibility or Autonomy, Personal Growth

Youth across programs also described their program as being an opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility, autonomy, and to grow as a person (N=44). For example, one youth described the sense of responsibility they felt from having a job in the program,

> Well from being in the program since 05, I would say it's a very nice experience because you coming here every, like four days out of the week you feel as if you are a part of something and you doing something and on top of that you getting paid for it so you look you looking at your friends like you know I got a job and you know, you know like right I'm only fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and I got a job, I'm on top of everything, like you know I'm going to school and I'm working so… (SUHO)

Another participant stated, "I think the goals was to show a bunch of kids that live in poverty that you don't have to accept your environment, that there are other ways out or to get paid than drugs and gangbanging like college" (SUHO). Moreover, one participant said, "I think the purpose of this program was to teach us about self-reliance how to be independent and I do think our goal was met" (SUHO).

Many youth also described their program as being helpful to their personal growth or "changing your mindset",

> This program is a great opportunity to expand your mindset. Everyone here is very welcoming and work hard with you to meet any goals that you have set, like a family. Above all I think this program would make a great impact on you, improving/broadening your view on those around you. It's a great program that I highly recommend. (LUCM)

Another youth stated,

> I would say that this program is very very nice life experience and learning experience. It teaches you future skills on how to carry yourself and it helps you to be, knowing that you a good individual or a good mentor. It teaches you how to be a better mentor with kids and job skills and you know work on personal skills. (LYLL)

Why Did You Decide to Join this Program

Eleven themes emerged from youths' responses to this question in their peer-to-peer interviews. See Table 2 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 2. Why Did You Join This Program?

Joined Program to Relate to Others

The most frequent theme that emerged from this question was that youth joined the program for opportunities to have positive relationships with others (N=75). Across programs, youth consistently indicated that they valued having connections to others including other peers, mentees, and instructors. For example, one youth enrolled in Love Your Love Life stated, "I

decided to join this program because I wanted to learn more about how to maintain healthy relationships and other things" (LYLL). Another said,

> I decided to join this program because I felt that I like to do new things and this is a way for me to learn new things and also help me with my relationships with other people and how to develop good healthy relationships." (LYLL)

Moreover, one participant stated, "Because I felt that it would help me to meet new people" (LYLL) while another youth said, "I decided to join this program to learn more about what different people like to do in their life and how they feel" (LUCM). Another stated,

> I did it last summer and I really enjoyed the people, environment and what I was learning. The people there definitely left a lasting impression on me that I will never forget andthis has pushed me to decide to pursue my career in social work. (LUCM)

Some youth indicated that they also valued connections with instructors. For example, one participant answered, "Cuz I always wanted to work with [instructor] and [instructor]" (SUHO). Another youth said,

> I decided to rejoin this program which I've been in this program 3 times already this year is my last year with the program but well I decided to rejoin because I really like the instructors in the program they make me feel comfortable with speaking out in the open and give good advice. (LUCM)

Youth Needed Job and Income for Survival

Many youth mentioned their desire to have a job and their financial needs when discussing the reasons they joined their program. For example, one youth stated, "Because I wanted a job and when I found out about the program, I wanted to work with the kids" (SUHO), and another said, "I came here for the money, but I came out with something more" (LYLL). Another youth's response was,

> I mean, I'm not gonna lie, I've been broke for like five whole years. Maybe even more. I heard that they were gonna give $708 so I went on to, uhm, join this program with my brother, but that's when I went in learned about everything in this program about inequality and human rights and it really taught me something. (LUCM)

Another participant said, “Okay. Um. At first I decided because like it was a lot of money but there was another option because I kinda wanted to be a lawyer, and I needed to learn about the law so yeah” (LUCM). Providing a stipend is a necessity in programs that provide services to youth experiencing low-income and is a powerful motivator for youth engagement, especially when combined with other elements that youth value.

Program Content Helpful for Future Goals

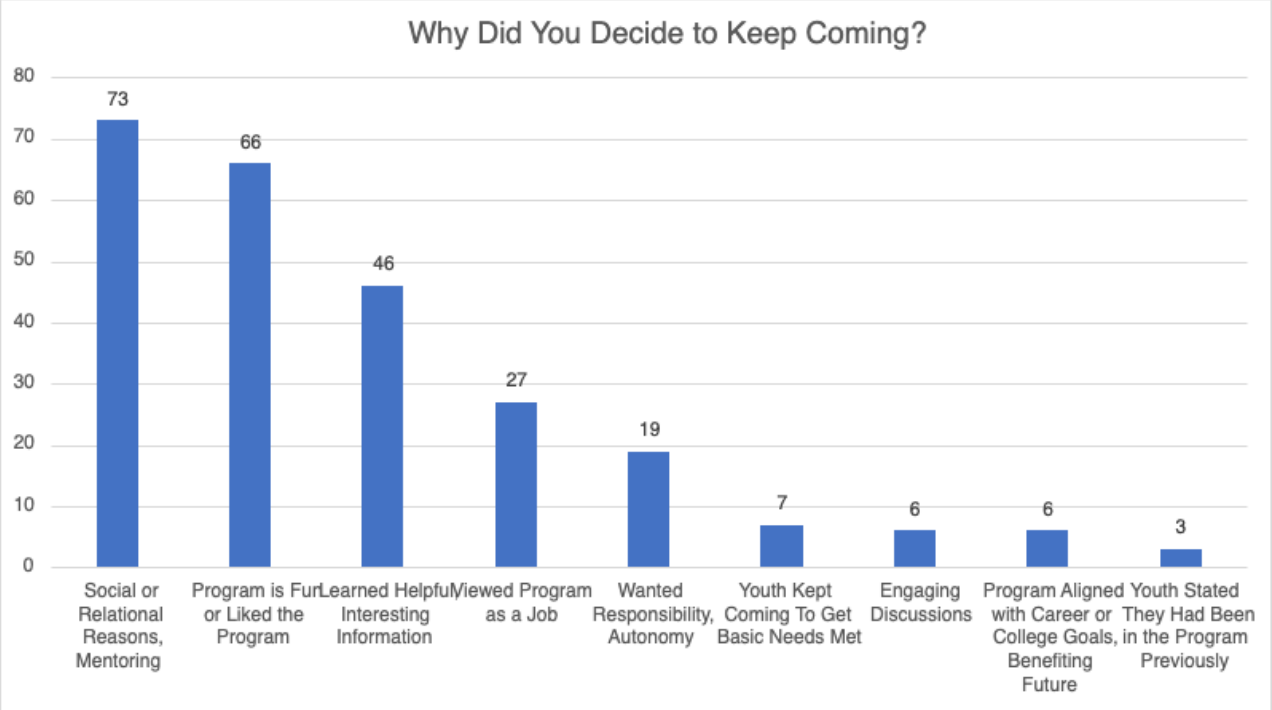
Many youth said the reason they joined the program was because they thought the content or activities would be helpful in achieving their future goals (N=33). Specifically, many participants mentioned wanting to build their resume for college or for attaining a career they were interested in. For example, youth stated, “I felt it would be a great opportunity to put on my resume” (LUCM), “I heard about it from a friend and I heard it was a pretty good program. It’s something that you can learn from and it’s good to go on your resume” (LYLL), and “Because I wanted this experience. I personally want to go into, um, a job in social work one day” (SUHO). Moreover, another participant said, “I always wanted to be a lawyer and I feel like knowing my rights can lead to me helping others learn theirs” (LUCM), while another stated,

> The reason why I decided to join this program is because it always looks good on a resume to see that you was involved in different programs. So the reason why I basically got involved into this it because I feel like it'll look good on my records and also to get a better understanding of what goes on in my neighborhood that I don't know about. (SUHO)

Why Did You Decide to Keep Coming?

Nine themes emerged from youths’ responses to the question, “why did you decide to keep coming to the program?” See Table 3 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 3. Why Did You Decide to Keep Coming?



Social or Relational Reasons, Connecting with Others

The most frequent reason why youth kept attending their program was for social or relational reasons, including having positive connections to others in the program (N=73). For example, one participant stated,

> Over time, I saw that there was a lot of cool people there. And that – that there was a lot of funny people and a lot of interacting. They're not shy to say what they want. And it was just overall a fun experience. Like, I actually like the people there and I miss them. (LUCM)

Another youth discussed the sense of intimacy and closeness they developed with others during the program,

> I decided to keep coming because, it wasn't like, it wasn't bad. We were, I would say a family but we didn't have enough time to have that family bond but we were a group, we were a community and it was chill, people were chill. It was nice, it was a nice environment and we learned things and we did things that you know, it's not a lot it's not a hassle but you get to know the information that they want you to learn and we got to do a lot of fun things. (LUCM)

Many youth also referenced having connections with mentees or younger youth in their program, which suggests they valued the mentoring relationships. For example, youth stated, "Because I enjoyed it. I really love working with the kids" (SUHO), "Because I wanted to help the kids in my community" (SUHO), and "Because I really like it and it would be good experience and I could learn good leadership skills. And I could have the opportunity to impact another child's life" (SUHO).

Moreover, youths' responses suggest they also valued the relationships that they had with the program instructors. For example, one participant said,

> I loved the people in this program. The admins were so easy to talk to and so nice and the kids in the program were nice as well. Shoutout to [instructor], [peer], and [peer] they're all just a big factor in why I stayed for so long because they livened the meetings and everything. (LUCM)

Another participant stated, "Because I enjoyed the people and the program and the instructors and the activities we were doing" (LYLL) and another youth said, "I like coming here and seeing [peer]. Just kidding. I like coming here cuz [peer] here and [instructor] & [instructor] make it fun" (SUHO). Moreover, youth stated, "I decided to keep coming because [instructor] made it interesting. There was never, like, a dull, boring day" (LUCM) and "I decided to keep coming because I liked the instructors. They are very supportive to me and they made sure I had everything and it was like a very fun opportunity to do something after school" (LUCM).

Learned Personally Helpful or Interesting Content

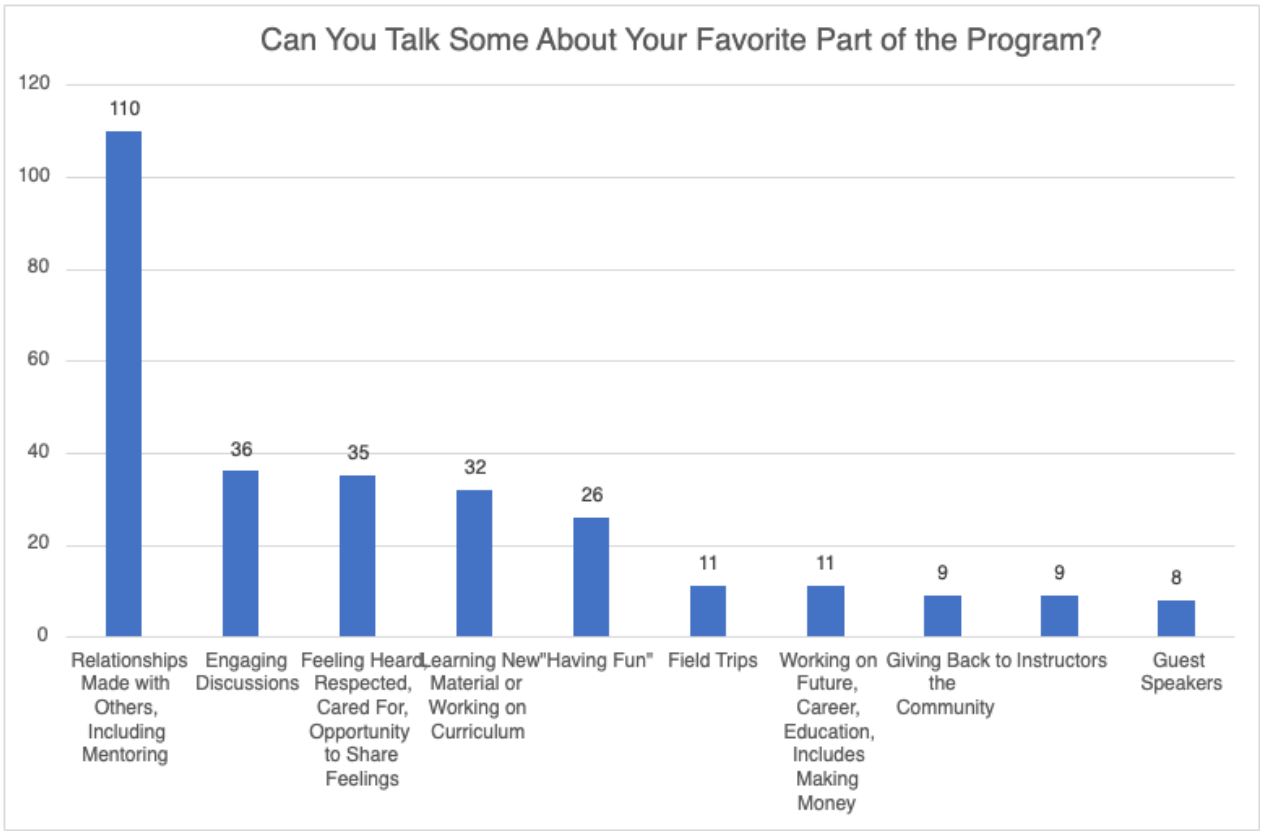
Youth frequently stated that one of the reasons they kept coming to the program was because they learned content that they found to be personally helpful or interesting (N=46). This code included references to youth saying the content was interesting or helpful broadly, such as "I decided to keep coming to the program because it helps me learn new things in life, I learn

new things and I bring it to other people" (SUHO), but also learning about laws or rights. For example, one youth said, "I decided to keep coming to the program because it caught my attention with some of the things I've learned like human rights. There were some things that I did not know we had rights over" (LUCM). Another youth referenced learning about social inequality regarding the COVID-19 pandemic response, "I decided to keep coming to it because the topic was super interesting to me. I had never thought about COVID like that and the more we talked about it I realized the disparities" (LUCM).

Can You Talk Some About Your Favorite Part of the Program?

Ten themes emerged from youths' responses to this item on the peer-to-peer interview protocol. See Table 4 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 4. Can You Talk Some About Your Favorite Part of the Program?



Relationships and Connections Made with Others

Most of the youth that responded to this question said that their favorite part of the program was the connections and relationships made within the program, which speaks to their prioritization of relating to others. For example, youth said they valued learning about and connecting with others. For example, "My favorite part of the program was getting to know the people in this program" (LUCM), "My favorite part is like meeting people and start playing games and getting to know each other" (LYLL), "My favorite part of the program is the interactions between everybody. When everybody wants to work together" (LYLL), and "Meeting new people" (SUHO).

Participants also said they valued the process of relating and being able to both listen, learn and share with others. For example, one youth said that their favorite part of the program is,

> When we would do our highs and lows in the morning, I thought that was weird and you know stupid but I got to know people and understand them, and that's something that I want to learn and master, like not just sympathy but empathy and that's pretty cool so I like that. That's something that we should keep even if kids don't like it, it teaches them to communicate and be open. (LUCM)

Additionally, one youth stated, "My favorite part of the program was the games, like Kahoot or two truths and a lie, also when one of us would make up a question, we really got to know More about each other" (LUCM), "I really like the group discussion that we had where I could relate with other people and talk about my problems and rights that we learn" (LUCM), and "My favorite part of the program was in large groups where everyone would be able to talk. It's similar to a classroom where everyone teaches each other, and that in itself can be thrilling to listen to (LUCM).

Many participants also stated that their favorite part of the program had to do with mentoring younger youth. For example,

> I liked my experience being mentor cuz it showed me that I was a good person and helping the kids in a positive way, I'd say that the favorite part of this program would be working with my mentee because I never actually dealt with a child the way I did, basically trying to make a connection with them. So I'd say working with my mentee. And also my other peers, I like helping them, like motivating them. To be involved with younger kids like be their mentor and do all the goals I'm doing with them. (SUHO)

Moreover, participants values forming close relationships with their mentees: "Working with the little kids, like how you have to bond with the little kids and help them do stuff and get the little kids to know you and you have to get to know the little kids" (SUHO), "Working with the kids. It's like these kids don't know you. They look up to like a big brother or big sister type thing and I like that. I'm like a role model" (SUHO), "My favorite part of the program was working with the kids. I worked with the second graders. It was fun to see them smiling every time I came and saying HI and they was telling me they glad I was here" (SUHO), and,

> Um some of my favorite parts of the program are actually um getting to know each student individually, tutoring them, mentoring them, actually you know having them to trust you, you know and to look up to you is one of the most re-memorable moments I will ever have in this program. (SUHO)

Engaging Discussions and Feeling Respected and Heard by Others

Related to youths' prioritization of connecting with others, the second most frequent code was engaging discussions (N=36) and the third most frequent theme was feeling respected and heard by others, including opportunities to share personal feelings and thoughts (N=35). For example, regardless of the topic, youth valued having discussions with each other and instructors: My favorite part of the program was probably the discussions because they were in depth and it was fun to talk about some of the things we talked about" (LYLL), "I like when we had open discussion" (SUHO),"When we having debates about stuff" (SUHO), and,

> My favorite part of the program is like I talked like when we done this program we always have like big concepts or controversy and we would get real deep even if it goes off topic sometimes it's like conversations be going. (LUCM)

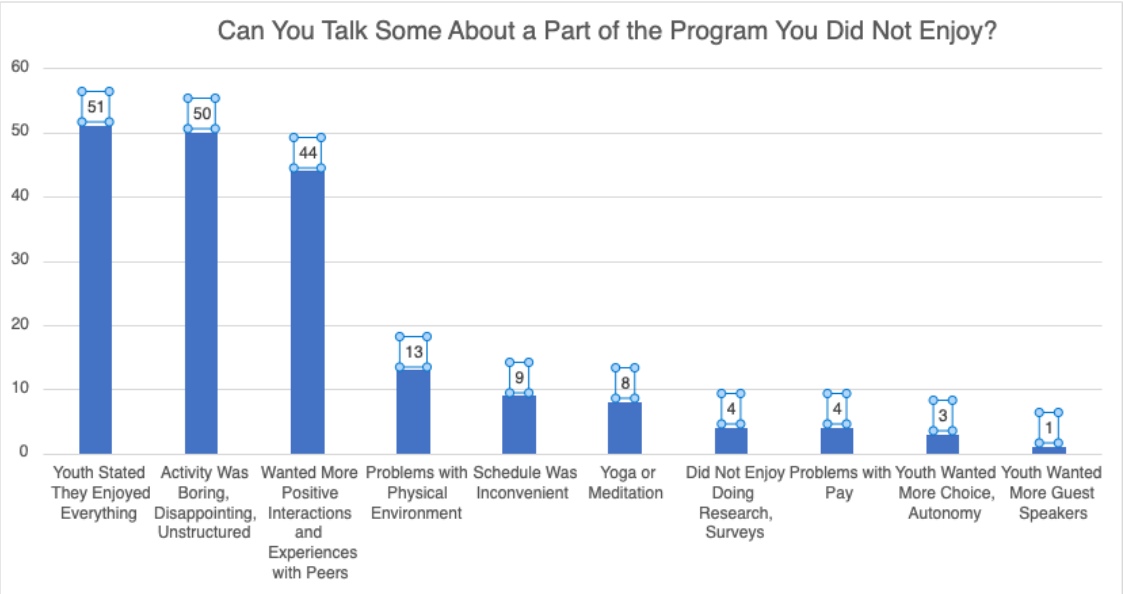
Furthermore, youth also valued feeling like their thoughts were respected during discussions and feeling like others want to understand them. For example, youth stated, "My favorite part was just discussions without the arguments" (LYLL), "My favorite part of the program is when we have group discussions and we get cohesive in our conversations" (LUCM), "Getting to know everyone and being able to have these serious conversations and even when someone had a different opinion there was never an argument" (LUCM),"My favorite parts of the program is when we do the high point of our day and the low point of our day and then we have conversations about what's goin' on in the world" (LUCM), and,

> Um my favorite part of the program is when we had like discussions and like everyone and participated in them and it was like everyone had feedback and everyone had opinions and I think it was really interesting to learn what everyone had to say. (LUCM)

Can You Talk Some About a Part of the Program You Did Not Enjoy?

Ten themes emerged from youths' responses to the item asking about the parts of the program they did not enjoy. See Table 5 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 5. Can You Talk Some About a Part of the Program You Did Not Enjoy?



Youth Stated They Enjoyed Everything

The most frequent theme in the participants' responses refers to when the youth said they enjoyed everything or did not have a part they did not enjoy (N=51). For example, youth said, "I mean, honestly, there isn't a part that I didn't enjoy about the program. Uh, no, not at–I enjoyed all of it. I enjoyed everything" (LUCM), "I really didn't enjoy… everything was good so I enjoyed everything" (LYLL), and "There really wasn't any part I didn't enjoy" (SUHO).

Activity Was Unstructured or Disappointing

Some youth reported being disappointed in activities that require them to be active earlier in the morning,

> Um, the parts of the program I did not enjoy is some days I'd wake up real tired, come here, and they'd make me move and stuff like that, and I really didn't have the energy for that. So, basically, just being energetic. (LUCM)

Conversely, some youth said they did not enjoy participating in activities that require them to be less active, "Yea sometimes it, I don't know just. Sitting down all day. Just made us sit down all day. After sitting down all day and then coming to this program sitting down again" (LUCM) and "I did not enjoy the parts where we talked a lot because I don't really like to sit and listen to people talk all day" (LYLL). Youth also alluded to being disappointed by disorganization. For example, "The disorganization for like, after spring break, everything was all over the place" (LYLL) and "I don't enjoy the breaks that they give us. Cause we should be more focused" (LUCM).

Wanted More Positive Experiences with Peers

Many youth also stated their desire for more positive interactions and experiences with peers in their program, including being disappointed when peers did not communicate respectfully (N=44). For example, "I didn't enjoy the children or the kids that didn't know how

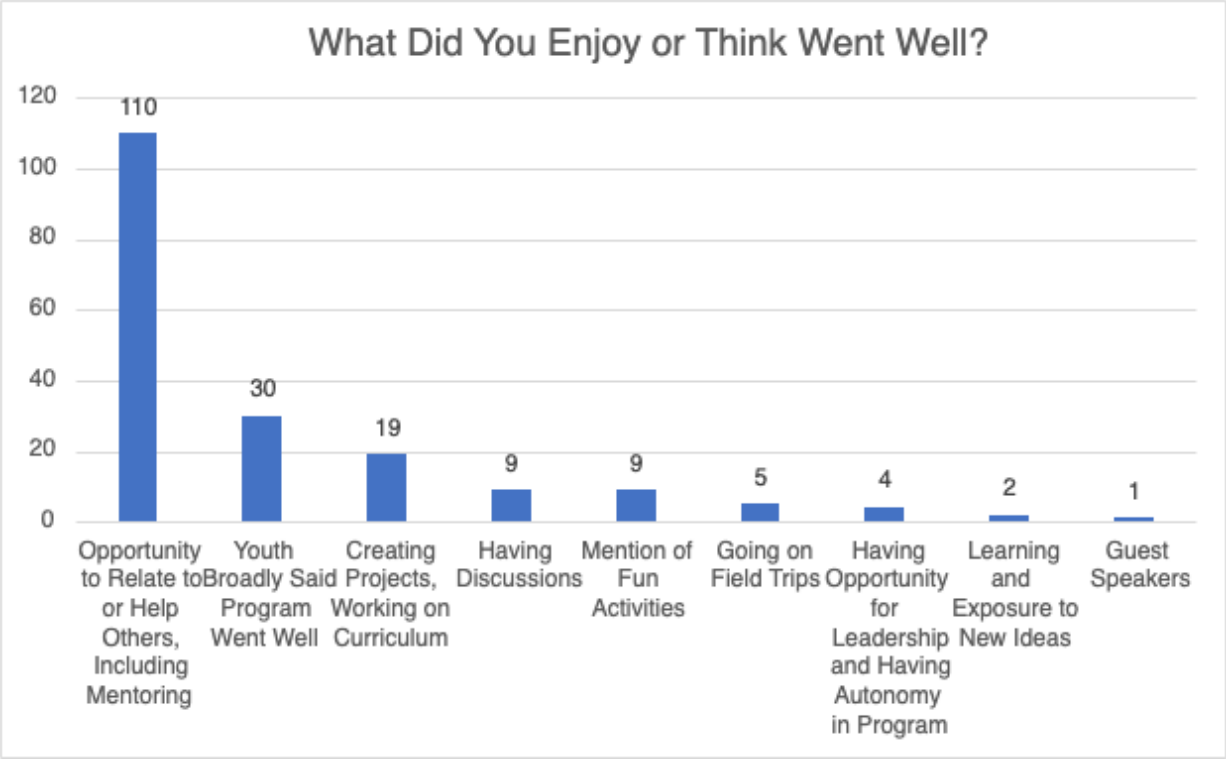
to respect others when others were talking they had conversations and all that so I didn't enjoy that" (SUHO), "when everybody was talking, trying to get their point across" (LYLL), "I didn't enjoy when people had attitudes and they weren't really respecting each other and listening so it would take longer to get things done" (LYLL), and

> Um, it's a, I really didn't have a major part that I did not enjoy, but I would have to say when people, you know, when other people would talk when everybody's talking over each other and not listening was like the part that I did not like. (SUHO)

What Did You Enjoy or Thought Went Well?

Nine themes emerged from youths' responses asking them what they enjoyed or thought went well in the program. See Table 6 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 6. What Did You Enjoy or Think Went Well?



Opportunity to Relate to or Help Others

The most prominent theme from youths' responses to this item was the opportunity to relate to or help others (N=110). Youth said they enjoyed getting to know others in the program. For example, "Um, things that I enjoy or think went well is that coming here, getting put in groups with people I never knew before, and basically just coming together and working together as a team" (LYLL), "We talked about what we did today, and what we are doing. I enjoyed talking about what was good about my day and what was bad about my day with other people" (LUCM), and

> I think what enjoyed was getting to meet new people. I feel that it is fun to learn about different peoples' characteristics. What I think went well was how everything was put together and what we were able to do in the program. (LUCM)

Many youth also stated that they enjoyed relating to and helping others through mentorship. Participants described specifically what they liked about mentoring younger youth in their program:

> Um, the part that I liked, or the part, yeah, the part that I liked was when we did meet with or mentees, it started off kind of wrong and it ended up turning great because I ended up making a good connection with my mentee. And now, every time that she sees me, she knows who I am she knows that she can talk to me. So I have to say, out of all of it, it ended up working out well because now my mentee can talk to me about anything." (SUHO)

> Um, I enjoyed talking to them because, I enjoyed talking to them just because they were like so different and like they were very smart and you would never think kids would actually know so much about what was going on until you actually tried to have a discussion with them. So that was enjoyable to me. (SUHO)

> Um I like the fact that I get to work with the younger kids and get to see what see what they are going through. Maybe like bring back my feelings of like my past and make them understand that I know what they are feeling. (SUHO)

> Um I found myself like understanding that I can actually be a mentor because like when I was younger or whatever I thought that I would never be like an actual mentor helping kids, well I found myself very interested in that and I feel that I can make a big impact in

these kids lives by helping them and telling them different things and the kids they actually enjoy my company when I be in their class. (SUHO)

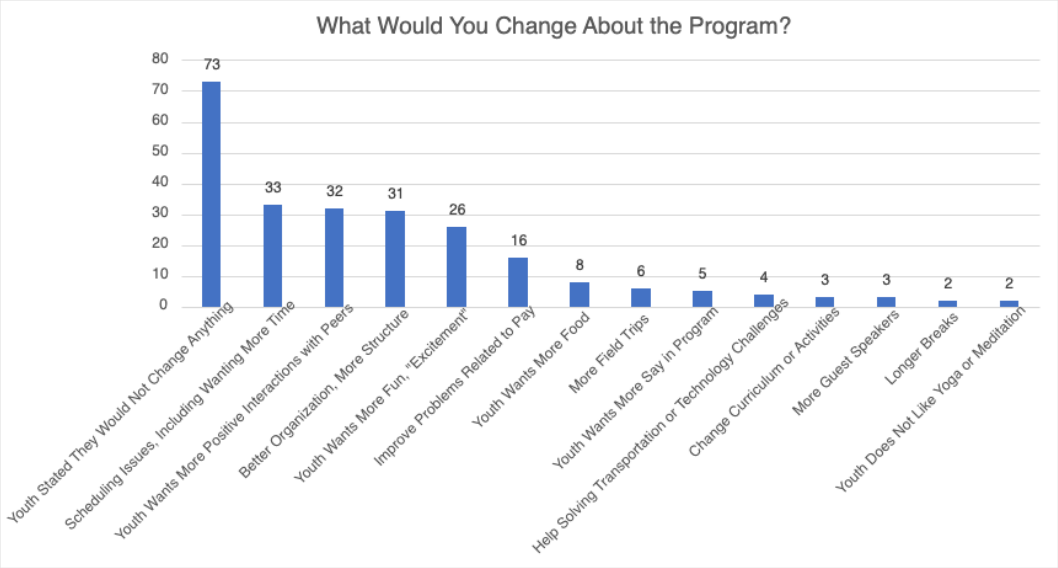
It felt as if I was a young mother to the kids. They come to me whenever they need something. I have a lot of nieces and nephews and I already know how it feel. It just make me more excited to see the younger kids. (SUHO)

Well, as for myself, I knew some of the kids we was working with and they seen me working and stuff, instead of me being outside on the streets doing what everyone else is doing, so they looked up to me, and it looked like they tried to stay out of trouble. (SUHO)

What Would You Change About the Program?

Fourteen themes emerged from youths' responses asking them what they would like to change about the program. See Table 7 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 7. What Would You Change About the Program?



Would Not Change Anything

The most frequent theme in youths' responses was youth stating that would not change anything about the program (N=73). Many youth responded with variations of, "No, cause the program is perfect the way it is. I like it. I think my peers like it too" (LUCM), "I don't think

nothing wrong with this program" (LYLL), and "Um basically I feel that everything is going well, it's going great, you know nothing really" (SUHO).

Issues with Schedule

Many youth also said they would change inconveniences or problems with the program schedule or time (N=33). For example, "I would change the times, make it start later. That's about it" (LUCM) and "Um, nothing in general, but as far as the summer goes, I would change the time from 9 to 10, like a hour back because, uh, I feel like 9 is just a little bit too early. It's not way early, but it's a little bit too early" (LUCM).

Youth also indicated that they wanted more time or days in the program. For example, "I would change the time we spend with them, so we could spend more time with them. And, that we could bring them gifts and other activities" (SUHO), "More days" (LYLL), "The fact that we only saw our mentees on Tuesdays" (SUHO), and,

> Interviewee: The number of days we had to spend with the kids.
> Interviewer: Would you make it less or more?
> Interviewee: More days. (SUHO)

Youth Wants More Positive Interactions with Peers

Consistent with the participants' responses to the item asking them about parts of the program they did not enjoy, youth made many references to wanting more positive experiences with peers in their responses to this interview question (N=32). For example, "The way kids working with one another. Instead of everybody snapping out on one another. Take time to listen to one another" (SUHO), "It was like on and off to me. Some days, I didn't like that some people weren't participating and wasn't respecting each other (SUHO), and,

> As I said maybe force kids to get to know each other a little bit more. Not like force but like suggest like, you should pair up with this person, you know small activities together and let them form tiny little cliques. (LUCM)

Related to remote programming, one participant said they wanted more presence and engagement from peers, “I would change how no one needed to turn they cameras on (LUCM).

Youth also indicated that they wanted their peers to take the program more seriously,

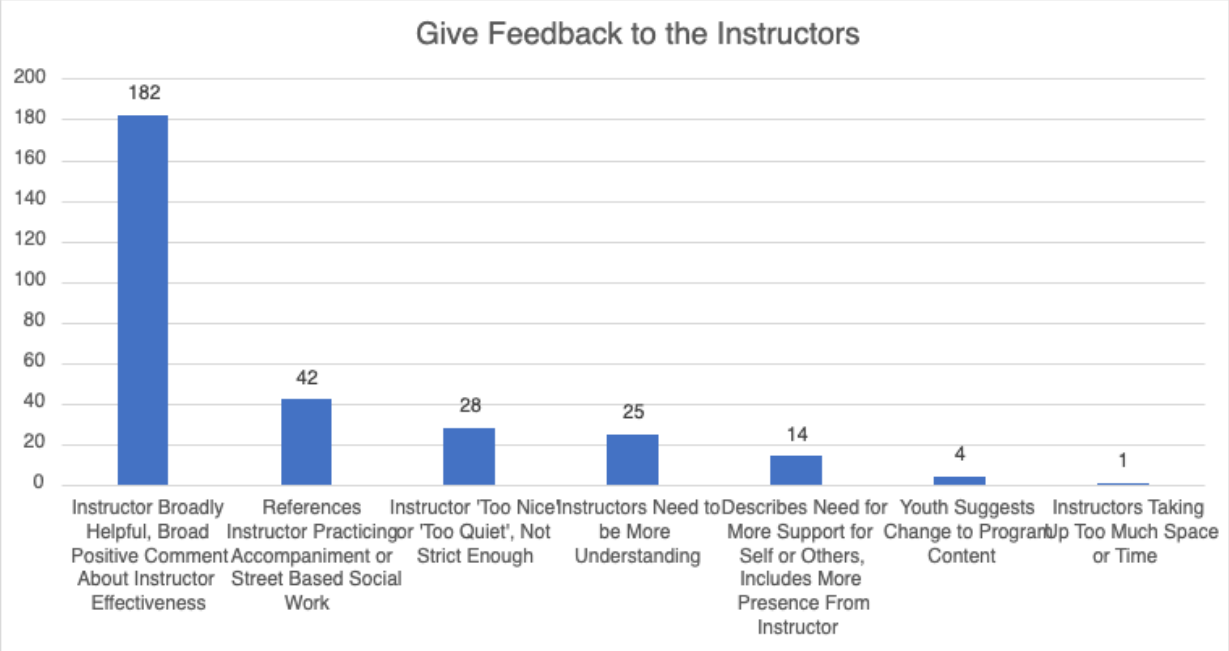
> One way I think the program could be improved is having more serious people in a group… people that want to be here and not people just want to be here for one reason and everybody’s taking the program more serious. (LYLL)

> Um, you know, I'm not, I'm not sure. I guess maybe, um, the interview process for the selected members can be more, I don't even now how to say, I guess more strict so that we won't end up with people who are going to quit o-, quit on us after the first couple of days because, um, you know, sometimes it can be hard working around, uh, people who are not doing their part. So, even though in the end we ended up with all good people, I feel like if we would have gotten these people from the beginning, we could have been a, a much better program. (SUHO)

Give Feedback to the Instructors

Seven themes emerged from youths’ feedback to instructors. See Table 8 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 8. Give Feedback to the Instructors



Instructor Broadly Helpful

The most frequent theme in youths' responses related to broad comments about the instructor's effectiveness and support (N=182). For example, "Uh, they both doing a good job, they don't need to worry about nothing" (LYLL), "[Instructor], very funny, can make you laugh" (SUHO), and "I feel like everyone does a good job at what they do" (LUCM).

References to Street-Based Social Work

Some youth described feeling a further degree of care from instructors, which refers to the instructor practicing street-based social work (Tyson McCrea et al., 2019; Tyson McCrea et al., under review). For example, "[Instructor], you know, she helped us a lot and it's easier to talk to her because you know she was just always there helping us and I think she went out of her way to help us" (LYLL).

Youth described in detail what it meant for them to feel like they could depend on their instructors to be there for them,

> Well, uh, I like the fact that my instructors…You can talk to them about anything if you need to. They listen to everything that you tell them. You can text them if you need to. Like, if need be, you can text them. Uh, and they just not about work. Like, they tell you to talk to them if you need anything personal or stuff like that, and I like that. Uh, it's nothing really they should work on. Just stay, like…They real helpful during the whole thing. So, just keep doing what they doing. (LUCM)

> The instructors are doing very good. I feel that they are really into what we have going on in the program. They are really in-depth with us. They get to know us and try their best to be a part of our lives and understand what is going on. I don't feel like they probably need to work on anything. (LUCM)

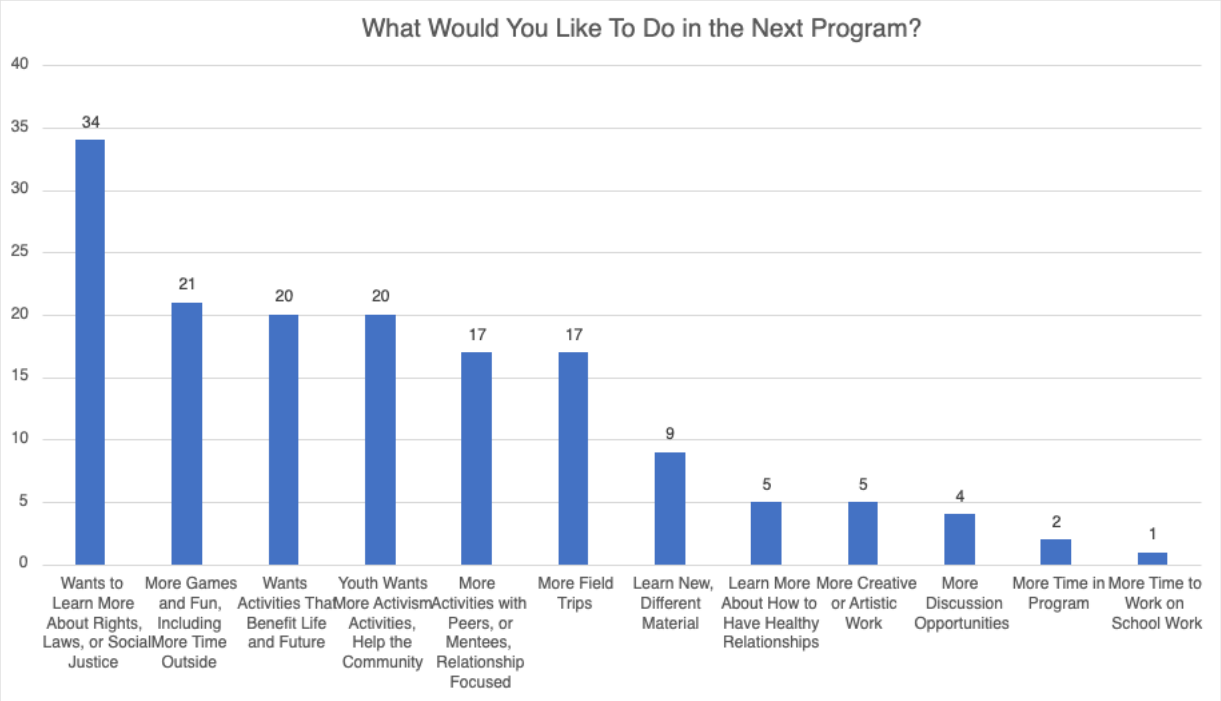
> [Instructor 1], um, well, from the first day that I met [Instructor 1], I kind of like got a connection with her because she was the one that interviewed me for this job. So, with me, she's kind of somebody who I look up to because she's smart and she knows her limits, like she's, well she tries to teach us our limits, like when not to talk and when should, when you should talk. So she's very understanding and I know that, if I had a problem, that I could talk to her; she'll help me. [Instructor 2], I feel the same, the same way about [Instructor 1] about her because, when me and her first started talking, she was

> like "well if you need help with any scholarships, you know, you can talk to me or I can help you." So, although me and her don't know each other, we haven't known each other a long time, she's still a caring person and I know that if there's anything that I ever need, she may try to help me or, yeah, help me. (SUHO)
>
> Alright, so, you guys did well on like the morning procedures where highs and lows and the question where it's a giant therapy session that I really like, because it gives a lot of feelings out of the way before doing work. And the way the instruction speech and move of authority, I think that's great. They can control the room, and they also do that in tandem by having us control the program ourselves which they're doing a great job with that. (LUCM)

What Would You Like to Do in the Next Program?

Twelve themes emerged from participants' responses to the question "what would you like to do in the next program? See Table 9 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 9. What Would You Like To Do in the Next Program?



Wants to Learn More About Social Justice Topics

The most frequent theme in youths' responses related to their desire to learn more about social justice topics, including human rights and the legal system (N=34). For example, "We

should do a documentary about violence in Chicago" (SUHO), "In the next program I would like to continue to discuss and interpret and understand things about social issues, and learn more about our rights and how we can advocate for our rights and for our people" (LUCM), and,

> I really like the fact that we were talking about the school and the security guards, cuz I never really had that at my school, because we don't really have behavior issues. And, I think it's important because even though it's not going on in my school, it's going on in other schools. What else would I like to talk about? Umm, I'd like to not just talk about security in the schools, but police in general. (SUHO)

> More about just, not just American culture but maybe more about international human rights affairs, what's going on in other countries and maybe even just in other cities maybe. Not just America cause sometimes it can be a little bit boring and I'd like to see what other countries major issues they're going through. (LUCM)

> We could have documentary on life. Period. Living in the projects. What we've been through. We could do a documentary on that. And, I'd like to learn more about my history, and more ways to better myself, more ways to get into college and stuff. (SUHO)

More Games and Fun

Youth also prioritized having more fun and playing more games in their responses (N=21). Most of the responses were short and provided fewer specific details about what fun means to youth. For example, youth said, "I would like to play games" (LYLL), "more games and prizes" (LUCM), and "I wanna see us do more games, more interacting stuff so everybody's involved instead of just a select few" (LUCM). Though, some youth were more specific: "I think we should be able to go on fun trips even if it's not related to the program. I think that would still help because it's fun and it will help" (LYLL), "Kahoots and stuff like that" (LUCM), and "I'd like to see more, more uh, more games played honestly, we only played like 1 to 2 games and we go outside play ultimate frisbee that's pretty fun. I'd just like to see more games. That's all" (LUCM).

More Activities That Benefit Self and Future

The participants also discussed their desire to participate in activities focused on helping them achieve future goals (N=20). For example, one youth said, "I would like to learn … I honestly don't know. Things that would help benefit my life and my future" (LUCM). Other participants stated, "I want to go on more field trips, learn more about college and high school" (LYLL), "Um you know something with work with like a career like finding a career and seeing how much you like it" (LUCM), and "I think we should go on more college tours and see how it is if we go to college" (SUHO).

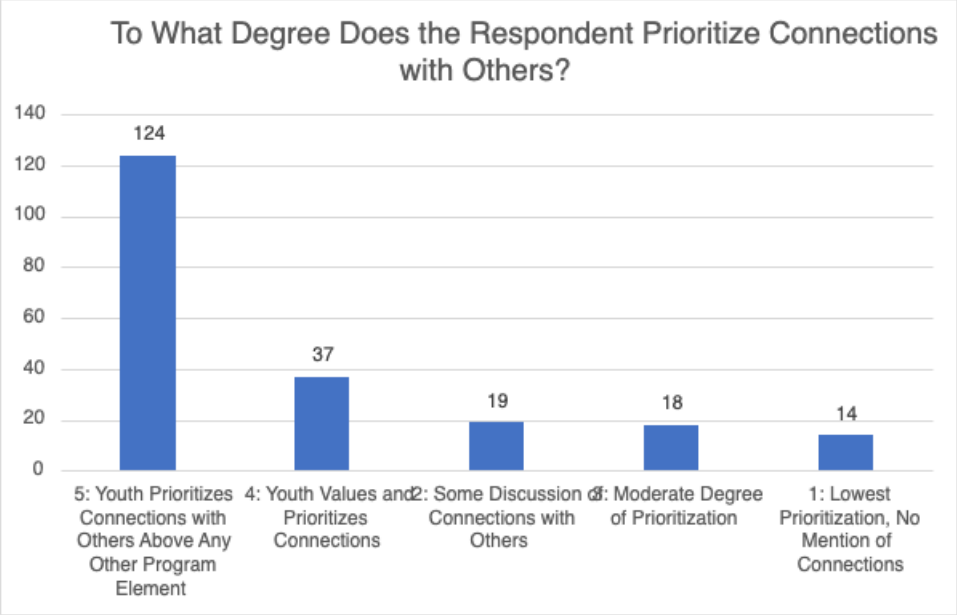
Other youth discussed their desire to learn more about ways to better themselves broadly. For example, one youth said, "I would like to learn about everything, honestly. I want to learn about all types of stuff. I would guess like more about teen life" (SUHO). Other youth stated, "I would like to learn how to better myself" (LYLL), and,

> I want help in life, not just you know law, but our program succeeded in helping us in other things in life like school supplies or understanding people's relationships with friends, girlfriends, boyfriends, you know people like that. And resumes, it would be really helpful. They're there to help us like counselors. (LUCM)

To What Degree Does the Participant Prioritize Connections with Others?

During the open coding phase of the analyses, youths' prioritizing relationships began to emerge across youths' responses to the peer-to-peer interview prompts. The researcher then created a Likert-scale code (1-5) that captured the overall, holistic sense of the degree to which youth prioritized connections with others in the program, including peers, mentees, and instructors. Responses with the highest or strongest prioritization of relating to others were coded as "5" and responses with the lowest prioritization were coded as "1," with three degrees in between. See Table 10 below for the frequencies of each code.

Table 10. To What Degree Does the Respondent Prioritize Connections with Others?



Youth Prioritizes Connections with Others Above Any Other Program Element (N=124)

This code was used when it was determined that youth prioritized connections to others over any other element of the program and comprised the majority of codes applied. This code was assigned when youth made frequent references to valuing relationships with others in the program and connections with others across interview prompts. Moreover, if youth said that their favorite part of the program had to do with the connections they made in the program, a higher prioritization code was considered. Though, single responses from youth, regardless of which item they were responding to, did not necessarily determine which code was applied. Rather, a more holistic sense was gathered by reading and reflecting on the meaning of youths' words across responses to all interview questions.

The prevalence of this code, in combination with the frequency with which youth referenced prioritizing connections with others, suggests that relationships made within programs are among the most important programmatic elements from youths' perspectives. The

connections made and sustained in programs can be powerful tools for increasing engagement, attendance, and may be a powerful mechanism for change in OSP contexts.

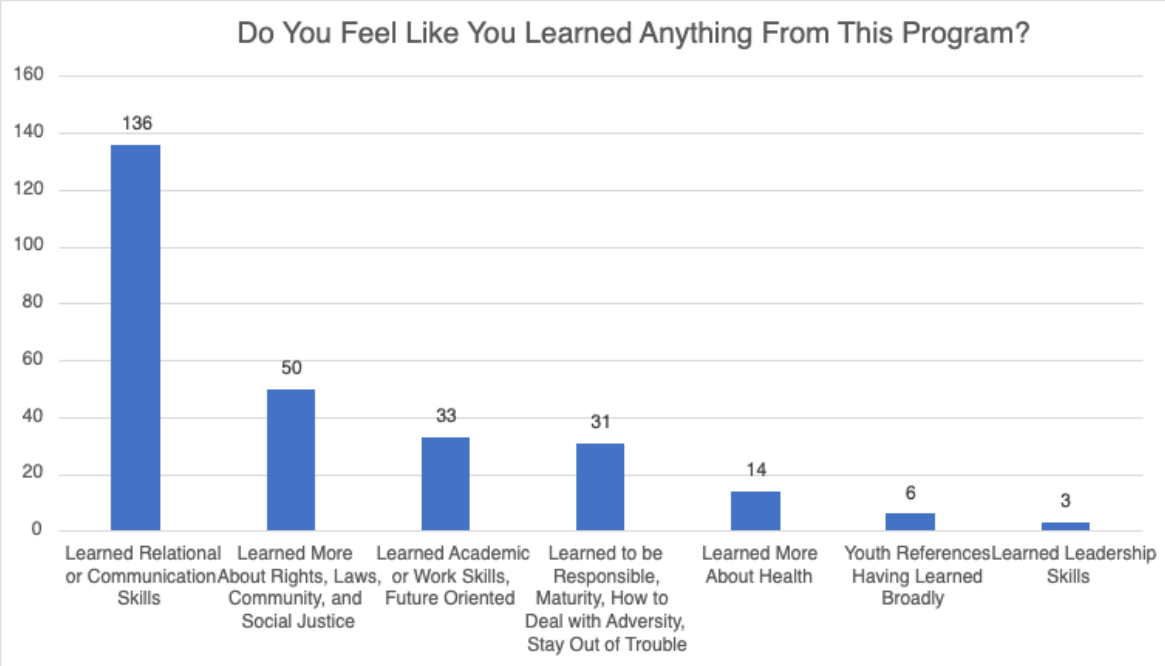
How Do Youth Conceptualize What "Changes" When Youth Internalize Program Mechanisms?

These themes reflect youths' perspectives about the ways in which they have changed or grown from internalizing program mechanisms.

Do You Feel You Learned Anything from This Program?

Seven themes emerged from participants' responses to the question "do you feel you learned anything from this program? See Table 11 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 11. Do You Feel Like You Learned Anything From This Program?



Youth Learned Relational or Communication Skills

The most prevalent theme that emerged from youths' responses indicated that they learned skills and abilities associated with relating to or communicating with others (N=136). For

example, youth said they learned, “How to communicate better” (LUCM), “I learned about others experiences and got the chance to connect in a way I would've never done through school” (LUCM), “well I learned how to interact with people better” (LYLL), “I say yes because I have become a better person, work better with the kids, like you know be patient about things and keep things at a steady pace” (SUHO), “I learned many things on how to treat kids because I wish (I know) I’m going to become a father one day. So I’m taking advantage & is learning from others’ mistakes” (SUHO), and,

> I feel like I learned how to be more patient and to deal with multiple different personalities and attitudes all in the same room seeing that we all come from different places. But socially, the topics that we talked about I knew mostly about them but it helped me have a better understanding of them. (LYLL)

The youths’ responses also suggested that the relational skills they learned in the program translated outside of the program and often helped them with relationships with family members, friends, and other peers. For example, participants said,

> What I learned—what I learned from this program was how to say no to certain things like… for example I was in a crazy relationship I guess you could say but I talked to one of the counselors and she gave me good advice on how to just—how to say no without being mean and… I felt that really helped me as I went throughout this program and they helped me keep my word. (LYLL)

> Well yes, I learned a lot within the program about like just respecting, even though I knew how to do that already, buy, you know, respecting. I learned a lot of new things in the world. So it was more, it was like a more outside of the box type of thing. (SUHO)

> Yes, I do feel like I learned something from this program. Why? Because, first of all, it started off as something just so minor and then it turned out into something major, meaning that, at first, I ain't going to say that I was the kind of person that was laid back, but now I can be very outspoken. I don't have to really, um, I don't have to really be quiet or hold my tongue. I can just speak how I feel with others and agree and disagree on an appropriate level. So yeah, that. (SUHO)

Other youth described how the relational skills learned in the program helped them understand children more effectively. For example,

> I learned something. I learned how to be patient with people because, at first, children was a big part. I didn't really like them and I had to show how patient I could be with them, even if they were bad. (SUHO)

> I think I learned from this program cause at times I can be like nonchalant about certain things especially towards children, I just sometimes feel like I put them off and tell them to go talk to somebody else and I learned that I can't do that to children cause they'll feel like don't nobody want to be around them or don't nobody want to help them so I learned to be more patient and understanding and show empathy for younger children. (SUHO)

Many participants also discussed how they learned to be more open and feel more comfortable sharing about themselves. For example, "yes, I learned to open up and share my thoughts with others" (LYLL), "I learned how to better deal with people or I guess open up my shell more and I guess break out to other people" (LUCM), "I learned that you can really tell people how you feel, like the Highs and Lows. You can do that outside of the program too" (LUCM), "I learned that as students our opinion does matter and is heard and the instructors really understood where we were coming from" (LUCM), and,

> Honestly, I feel like I learned to be more in touch with my emotions than anything else, it taught me to understand and sympathize for other people. Like we talked about a lot of social current events and they're not so great in America right now, they're actually sad, and we talked about how people of our race are just overlooked. So I wanted to be more open and communicate more about my emotions and understand others as well. (LUCM)

Youth Learned About Social Justice and Rights

Many of the participants that described learning about social justice and human rights were enrolled in LUCM, which explicitly focused on teaching about rights (N=50). For example, youth said, "Yes. I learned tips about when you get pulled over by the police. I learned about different types of racism" (LUCM), "Yes. I learned a lot like what to do when the police stop you and stuff like that" (LUCM), "Yes. I learned about human rights and what rights I have, and what rights everybody else has" (LUCM), and,

> Yes, I did learn something. I learned more about my human rights. Like we talked about in school but we didn't go into depth. Like I know my rights if the police was to pull me over or something then I could be like well you can't do this you can't search my car without a warrant. (LUCM)

> Yes. I learned a lot. I know that we are supposed to learn this in about human rights in school, but I really did not pay attention in my classes. I feel like I had a choice to learn about it which made me feel intrigued. Not by force but by choice. (LUCM)

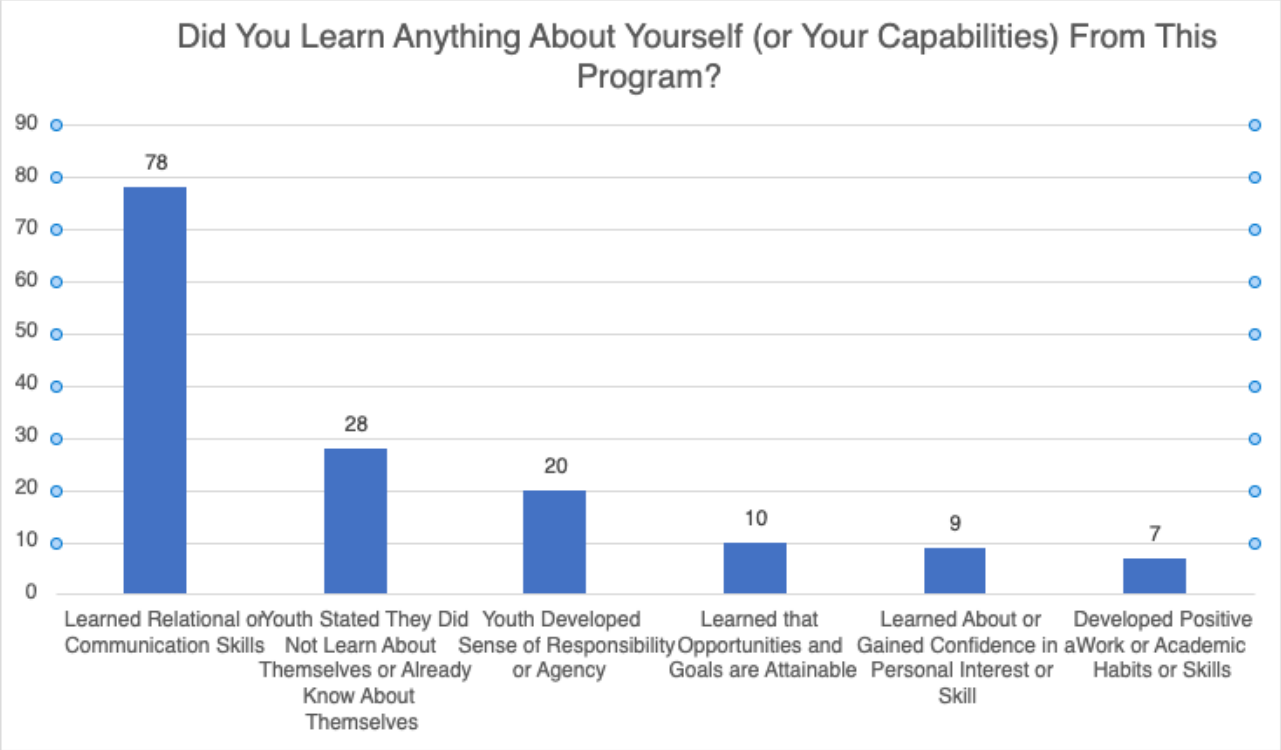
> Uh, I feel that I learned … Oh, I learned a lot more about my human rights as a person. And even being as a young adult, that even we still have human rights that we can use and, you know, we have to...Well we can try to get people to understand that we have those rights as well, even in our youth. (LUCM)

However, youth from LYLL and SUHO also reported learning about social justice and their rights. For example, "I feel that I learned how to build my communication skills when working with other people and a lot about HIV and AIDS that I didn't know. Like it affecting the black community the most" (LYLL), "I learned that…I learned a lot of stuff like dating and like various topics like about racial profiling and stuff" (LYLL), and "I learned a lot of stuff about the school system" (SUHO).

Did You Learn Anything About Yourself (or Your Capabilities) From This Program?

Six themes emerged from participants' responses to this question. See Table 12 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 12. Did You Learn Anything About Yourself (or Your Capabilities) From This Program?



Learned About Relational and Communication Skills

Like the most frequent theme from the previous interview question, most youth responded to this question describing learning about relational and communication skills (N=78). For example, one youth stated that he learned about his confidence in his ability to interact with others,

> Communication skills. I already knew I was good at communicating and good at talking to people. But, I didn't think I would be like, I – I like – I don't show no fear when talking to somebody. Like, I'm not shy to talk to somebody. (LUCM)

Relatedly, other youth said,

> Yes, um I did learn a lot. I expressed a lot of capabilities. Because at first I was like real shy I didn't really talk out and stuff like that, but now I opened up more and now I can like speak in front of people and not be scared. (LUCM)

> Yeah, what I learned about myself is that I'm a real sweet person. I'm a sweetheart. And I think I show that in so many ways. And, also I learned how I am from this program. I won't say mean, but I'll say courageous. I'm real courageous. (SUHO)

> Um I guess it helped improve my social skills cause speak on a social platform for when I had that little scholarship thing I had to go to Saturday and I had a presentation for ASM also but I had to go to. It kind of gave me confidence being around people that I don't know people that I'm not comfortable around speak around so when I did have to give presentations or something like that it came out pretty smooth. (LUCM)

> Yes, I did learn something about myself from this program. Like, I didn't have – I had a lack of communicational skills. So, basically, me, I was really shy about talking in a group of people. So, coming in in the morning, saying my highs and lows, and answering the question like what school I go to, what I like to do, what I enjoy doing, what I do in my free time and stuff like that. (LUCM)

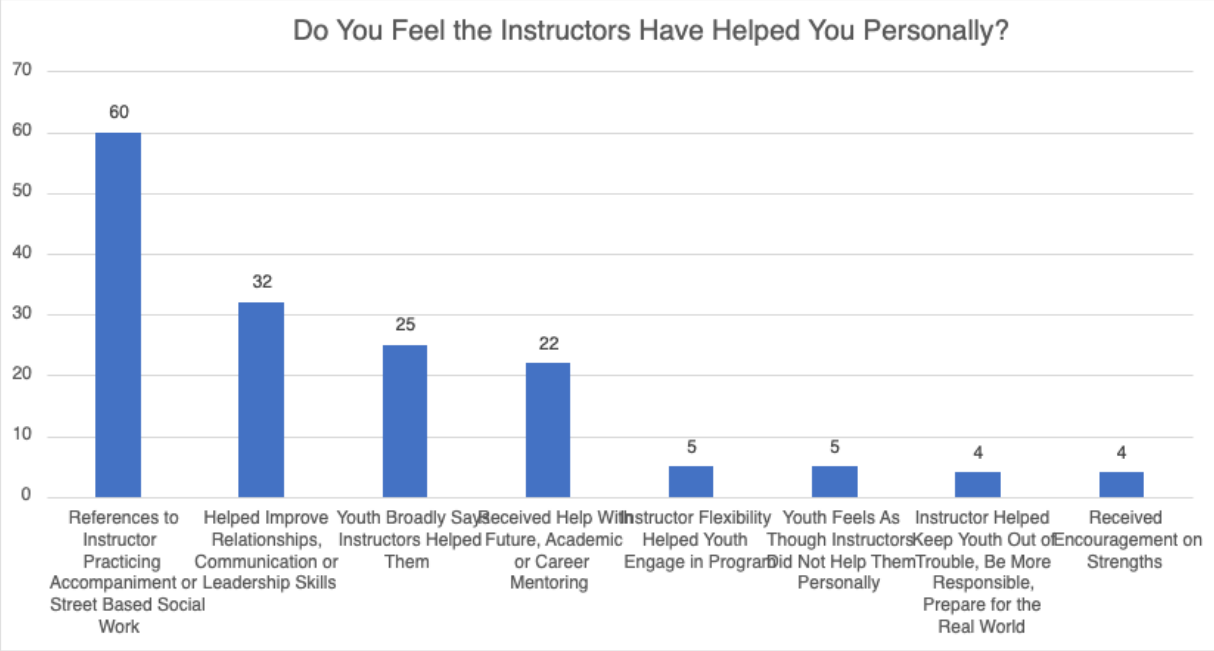
Youth Responded "No" or Said They Already Knew About Themselves

Several youth responded no to this question but interestingly, many participants across programs described not learning about themselves because they already know everything there was to know. For example, some youth said, "Well, not really. I mean, I've been the same old person for 15 years, so... [laughs]" (SUHO), "No, cuz I already learned everything" (SUHO), "No I knew everything about myself" (LYLL), "No. Everything about myself I know already" (LUCM). One participant responded "no," but then said they are just more informed, which suggests youth might differentiate positive growth from having a deficit "No. I did not learn anything about myself or my capabilities in this program. I am the same person I was before I started. Just more informed" (LUCM).

Do You Feel the Instructors Helped You Personally?

Eight themes emerged from participants' responses to this question. See Table 13 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 13. Do You Feel the Instructors Have Helped You Personally?



References to Instructor Practicing Street-Based Social Work or Accompaniment

The most frequent theme found in youths' responses to this question relates to youth describing instructors practicing with and providing a higher degree of care or support than what is typically expected of a program instructor. For example, because these three programs were held in communities experiencing high levels of poverty, hunger was an issue that youth described their instructors helping with "Yes. Sometimes I am hungry, and they make sure that I get something to eat" (LUCM). Some youth also struggled to secure affordable and safe transportation, which instructors helped with, too: "And [instructor] she was helping us with transportation" (LYLL) and,

> I felt the instructors did help me because every time I needed to get home on the bus, [instructor 1], I mean not [instructor 1], but [instructor 2] gave me a dollar or so or he, you know, dropped me and [peer] off if we needed to get somewhere and we couldn't get home. So that was very helpful. (SUHO)

Youth also described instances of when their instructor helped with general resource provision, "Yes they helped me outside of the program and they helped me to get new resources" (LYLL). They also discussed feeling a strong sense of being cared for and closeness towards their instructors. For example, "They made me feel welcomed and included. almost like I was one of their own family members" (LUCM), "Yes. They are really in-depth with our lives, what's going on, and how we feel. I feel like they really try to play a big part and help us out and understand where we are coming from" (LUCM), and,

> I actually like [instructor], I mean she helped us a lot I mean I feel like she's a good, I feel like she's a good person I mean she put her job on the line for us so many times and she constantly constantly comes back like we did a lot, I mean when people in the program did a lot of stuff and I feel like she never gave up on us so I think that is very positive about [instructor]. (LYLL)

> Umm yeah they kind of help me personally because once you grow like a friendship with somebody you become comfortable and it changes aspects of your life it gives you um it's just a trade you feel me. (LUCM)

Another youth described feeling broadly but deeply valued by their instructor, impacting their self-concept and self-esteem across different life domains,

> Interviewee: Uh, yeah they helped me. Uh, especially...
> Interviewer: You can't say names.
> Interviewee: Especially this one person. I can't say names. But–but, uh, they–this person really helped me. And, uh, the person I'm talking about really wanted me to strive for my goals, and yeah. Yeah.
> Interviewer: I'm just saying, in what ways did she or he, like, help you out? Like, was it that she or he made you, like, work harder, or be more determined or be more interested about the topic at hand, or? I wanna know.
> Interviewee: Alright. (inaudible) But, uh, yeah, in a way. Uh, he or she...there's no names, but, yeah, he or she really wanted–he–he or she really focused on me and…I really don't wanna say "he or she" anymore.
> Interviewer: You don't have to. You can just say "somebody."
> Interviewee: Oh yeah, somebody–that somebody I'm talking about really helped me and somebody…They just–he or she just helped me a lot and I really appreciate that and he or she really just made me focus on my capabilities and what I could do as a person, as an activist, or whatever really. Just me in general. (LUCM)

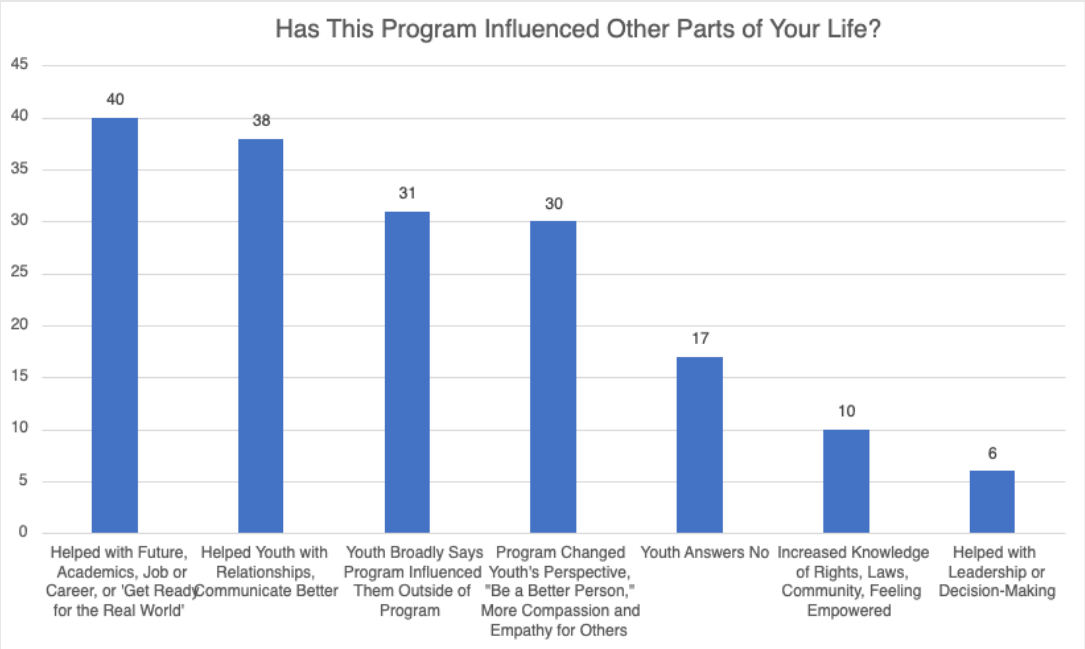
Helped Improve Relationships, Communication, and Leadership Skills

Many youth also described how their instructor helped them improve their personal relationships, in and outside of the program, and develop their communication and leadership skills (N=32). For example, "They made me feel confident in myself when it comes to opening up to people" (LUCM), "I feel like [instructor] and [instructor] pushed me when it came to like taking a leadership role in group activities and they like striving me to do better with that." (LYLL), "Yes, they basically like like [instructor] being specific he helped me like I don't know grow up from like things that I can like things that I can avoid like drama and stuff" (LUCM), "They taught me how to keep it steady and not lose my temper. Don't lose my cool" (SUHO), and "um, they help me open up and express myself to them" (LYLL).

Has This Program Influenced Other Parts of Your Life?

Seven themes emerged from participants' responses to this question. See Table 14 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 14. Has This Program Influenced Other Parts of Your Life?



"Getting Ready for the Real World" and Helping with Future

Several participants described receiving help from the program that influenced other parts of their lives. For example, many youth discussed their program's influence on their thoughts regarding career aspirations (N=40), "Yes what I want to do with my life. I wanted to go into child education and child development" (LYLL), and,

> Yeah, it has. It just made me sit there and wonder like "this is my, my future is coming fast and this is like helping me get towards my future because I want to be a social worker" So it's helping me get towards that goal. (SUHO)

> It helped me prepare myself I guess for like an actual corporate job. You can't be late, you have to interact with your co-workers and stuff and you can't just work by yourself. You have to talk to other people. (LUCM)

> I love talking to, I like helping kids. I would be a social worker for kids cause I like helping them. Like I like getting to the bottom of things and seeing how or seeing what affects them and how you can, you yourself can get around and help this person or child overcome whatever they going through. (SUHO)

Moreover, youth also said that the program influenced their decision to pursue a college education. For example, "Yes, um it influenced most of my life for the future and like my college decision and what I'm gonna do in life" (LUCM), "Go to college. [Did this program help you with that?] Yes [How?] Cuz we went on college tours; at first, I wasn't thinking about no college" (SUHO), "It made me more focused in school. I want to go to college now. I want a real career; I don't want no job at Jewel's or nothing like that" (LYLL) and,

> Yes. It helped me to know exactly what it is that I wanna go to school in. It helped me focus on the decision of me wanting to go to law school. It helped me open up my eyes and realize that is something that I might wanna do forever. So, yeah. (LUCM)

> Yes, it influenced me that I can be whatever I want. And, the world is out there. Reach for the stars. Reach for sky. Because at first, I felt like I wouldn't even be accepted into a college. And, if it weren't for [instructor] and [instructor], I wouldn't know what I'd do. (SUHO)

Helped with Relationships and Communication

Youth also stated that the program helped them with relationships and communicating with others outside of the program (N=38). For example, participants said that the program helped them understand what a healthy personal relationship looked like, "Yes the program has influenced my goals on the outside because it taught me how to develop healthy relationships" (LYLL), and,

> Yes, it has influenced me because once upon a time I was in an unhealthy relationship, and I didn't know the real definition of being in a healthy relationship and now I made a big change with my relationship decisions. (LYLL)

Youth also described their program as being helpful in developing positive connections and communicating with siblings and other children, "How I talk to my little brothers and sisters and stuff and be a mentor to them. I used yell at them all the time" (SUHO), and,

> As I worked with the kids, I learned to be patient. My little sisters be challenging. I be like "I ain't fitting to argue with you" My little sisters can be challenging…but working with these kids help me be a better person in working with my other sisters. I don't threaten them or nothing, I just tell them to get out of my face. (SUHO)

> Helping these little kids out here being bad. For example, my little sister they be bad. I'd just get mad at them and tell them what I'd do to them. But, now that I've worked with this program, I found a different way to discipline them. (SUHO)

> It helped me a lot cuz I have younger kids that I work with at school and younger nieces and nephews and stuff they be doing. And I could always look back at this job and say I have an example of that and have a way to resolve the problem. (SUHO)

> Working with my little brothers and sisters. I'll talk with my little brothers and sisters like I talk to the kids at work. I treat my little brothers and sisters with the same respect I treat the other kids. (SUHO)

> Yes because (Inaudible) like go to the park district and stuff like that to play ball um there be kids in there too, little kids like around the age of the kids that we like attend to and it's like I found different ways to approach the kids and not like all crazy and stuff like that. I approach them in another way and let them know what to do and not to do and the rights and wrongs and the do's and don'ts. (SUHO)

> It has affected me because like I like take on better ways to like push my little brothers and them and tell them to do things and stuff and like have patience with them when I asking them to do something and they don't do it, like waiting on it, but not for that long, but you know waiting and keeping everything on track. (SUHO)

"Be a Better Person": Program Changed Youths' Perspective

Many participants discussed experiencing a change in perspective, including the ability to "take step back" and evaluate problems and decisions with more patience and maturity (N=30). For example, one youth responded,

> Um, I feel like this program influenced…how I – how I – see things now. It takes me– makes me take a step back to look back to see, like, how other people are doing instead of being in my own world and seeing it only through my perspective, and like, reacting how I usually react. Cause usually I react without caution. And now, I feel like I see things a little bit differently. And like, if other teachers, like teachers, that get on my nerves or something like that, feel like they also have, like, a life or doing something outside of school that might be prohibiting them, so that's why they acting that way, or stuff like that. Or just people that have mental illnesses that see things differently and just making me see things differently as well. (LUCM)

> It has affected me in a good way because, it has affected me in a good way because I learned to walk away from problems or tried to resolve them as much as I can and then again I learned, well it's like I learned to resolve problems as much as I can and then again it has also helped me outside of the program because like I'm telling people the things that they can do to better their self to keep them out of trouble and things that they can avoid. (SUHO)

> I learned that everybody has issues so because a person acts a certain way you shouldn't like say that you're not going to talk to them or you're not gonna at least try to be friends or try to talk to them about how they're feeling because just because they act a certain way it doesn't mean that everything is fine with them, everybody has problems. (SUHO)

Other participants said, "Probably the way I make decisions at home and outside of the program" (LUCM), "Yeah, because some kids, instead of them going outside being bad, this program helped them, change their whole point of view" (SUHO), and "Yes, because I learned more than I knew. I learned a lot of new things and I changed the way I act. I feel I grown a lot" (SUHO), and,

> I feel the program has helped a lot. It taught me plenty different things I wouldn't have learned without coming. It helped in a lot of ways. For example, my friends from the neighborhood got locked up, but I wasn't around cuz I was at work and I think it really helped me out a lot in a lot of different ways. And, I got better grades cuz I put my focus on my work instead of being with my friends and running around the street and getting bad grades. (SUHO)

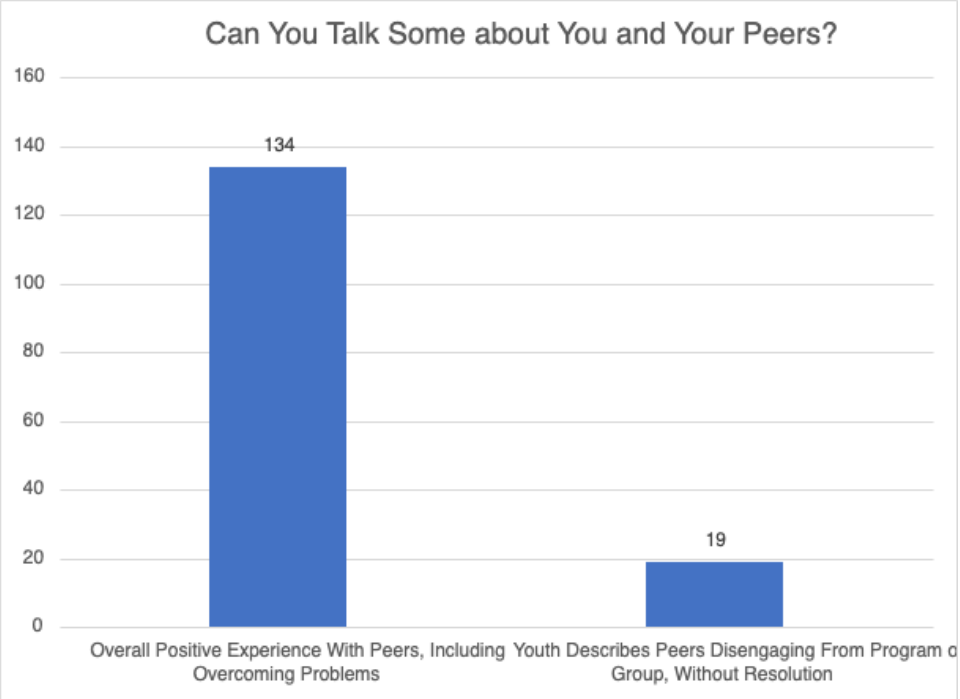
How Do Youth Understand the Process of How the Program Works?

These themes reflect youths' perspectives of how the program works and how it promotes change and growth in participants.

Can You Talk Some About You and Your Peers?

Youths' responses to this question were coded into two themes: 1) youth interactions with peers were mostly positive including when youth describe conflicts with peers but with resolution (N=134) and 2) interactions with peers characterized by negative feelings or attitudes, including conflicts without resolution (N=19).

Table 15. Can You Talk Some About You and Your Peers?



Overall Positive Experience with Peers

Most responses applied with this code were broad statements related to working well together or getting along with peers. For example, "Everyone work together. Everybody had the same goals" (LUCM), "Yes I do think that everyone worked together. There wasn't any problems with the team at all" (LYLL), and "No there were never any problems, me and all my co-workers got along just fine" (SUHO).

Some youth described overcoming or resolving problems with peers, "Everyone worked together, you know, most of the time. Sometimes work wouldn't get done due to certain people having conversations and stuff, but eventually at the end of the day we all got our work done" (LUCM), and,

> Uh, it was a minor problem. Sometimes, like, sometimes people was a little – like branched off in their own groups. And it wasn't really in a big group or some people wouldn't do anything at all. But, like, overall – overall I'd say people did work together, but, like, yeah, I think that was the only two real problems that people wasn't like, like … and it was a lot of little minor groups that stayed that didn't really interact with the whole group or didn't contribute a lot to the whole group. (LUCM)

> I feel like everyone worked together in the team. We might have had a few disagreements but never nothing too major that we couldn't get solve amongst each other without fighting and arguing. Was a few loud yelling but not as much as a argument but so much as you wanted to get your point across. (LYLL)

> I don't think it was like major problems but minor problems were like sometimes we couldn't agree on certain things so sometimes we would just have to get rid of our leadership and learn how to take the back seat for the first time or you know cause some people are natural born leaders and others are just slackers so the leaders kind of took the back row and we tried to push the slackers to do more so that they can become leaders just as well as we are so it was kind of like a, it wasn't really a problem, it was kind of like we helped each other. (SUHO)

> Interviewee: Of course when you get a lot of people together there's always gonna be problems. You're not ever gonna have a team together that just gonna be friendly-friendly-kookoo-buddy all the time. But…
> Interviewer: Friendly-friendly-kookoo-buddy? I like that.

> Interviewee: (laughing) But as a whole over all I think we did really good. We're all friends you know…we're all cool with each other and it was…we did good. (LYLL)

Youth Describes Peers Disengaging, Negative Experience, Without Resolution

There were nineteen instances of youth describing problems with their peers without resolution. Such responses include, "Sometimes we work together. Some people feel like they are too good to work with certain people" (LUCM), "There were definitely problems within me and my peers. Not with me personally but like with the rest of them. Communication skills were lacked and altercations were created" (LYLL), and,

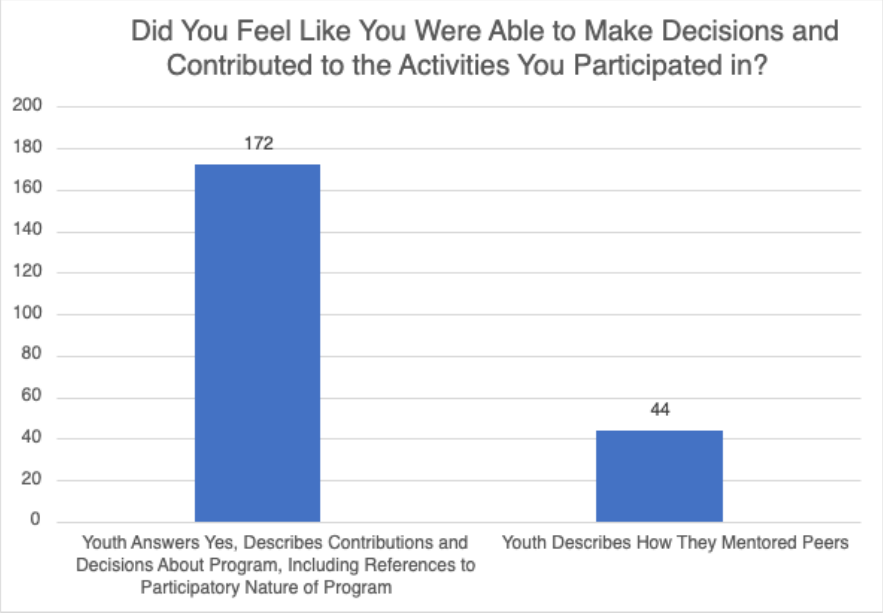
> Not all the time. I'm gonna be honest about that. Sometimes, we worked together and sometimes they act like they ain't interested and don't want to be in groups. [So, did your groups have a lot of problems?] Not really, problems with people not coming and doing their part and people just not being on their business. (SUHO)

> I don't think everybody worked together actually um… some people, including myself actually didn't do anything. Others they kind of took control and they participated more than others… I don't know. I don't feel like we actually worked together. (LYLL)

Did You Feel Like You Were Able to Make Decisions and Contributed in Activities?

Like the codes in the question above, youths' responses were broad and general, so themes related to this question were coded as 1) youth answers yes and may describe their contributions and decisions (N=172) and 2) youth references mentoring (N=44).

Table 16. Did You Feel Like You Were Able to Make Decisions and Contributed to the Activities to the Activities You Participated in?



Youth Describes Decisions and Contributions

Many youth answered "yes" without explanation or provided a broad explanation, "Yes. I was able to make decisions and contribute to the activities I participated in when we played fun games" (LUCM). However, many described specifically how they felt they contributed and made decisions about the program. For example, several participants referred to feeling like they had a voice or choice regarding their program's activities, "Yes. You could make your own decisions about what you are going to do and how you are going to do it" (LUCM), "Yes. Sometimes they asked us what we wanted to do throughout the day. I was allowed to give input" (LUCM), "Yes I felt like we did get to voice because every time we do an activity or a game we have to vote and the majority rules" (LYLL), and " I mean even just choosing an icebreaker is one of the ways I can contribute in activities" (LUCM).

Moreover, other youth responded,

> I mean we make decisions. That's how the structure as a whole where we can form the program the way we want it to be, especially during the morning where we were like playing games and getting energized. Mostly this is what we do. Even though we were making the book and stuff like that, we could choose what we want to do, what part of the book we are doing. The general structure of the book and everything else, it is not the instructors book it is our book, really want to put an emphasize on what it is. (LUCM)
>
> Yes. There were certain subjects that allowed us to choose what and how we did it. That made me feel empowered because I had the actual chance to take charge and contribute to what was going on in this program. (LUCM)
>
> Um, yeah, I was able to make decisions. Um, we were able to choose the topics that we wanted to write about and I ended up getting the topic that I really wanted. And once I got the topic, I was able to write freely about it, give my own opinions, and, um, you know, it was all of my words. And so, yeah. (SUHO)
>
> Oh yes. I feel like I was able to make decisions because we were asked what we wanted to do and how we feel about something that they told us to do. And I feel like I contributed to the activities that I participated in. I feel like I was a good sportsmanship about them. (LUCM)
>
> I was honestly able to make contributions to the activities we participated in and like help make decisions on what we should do, what games we should play, how we should present. For example when we presented to the other After School Matters group and I was in the presentation group. (LYLL)

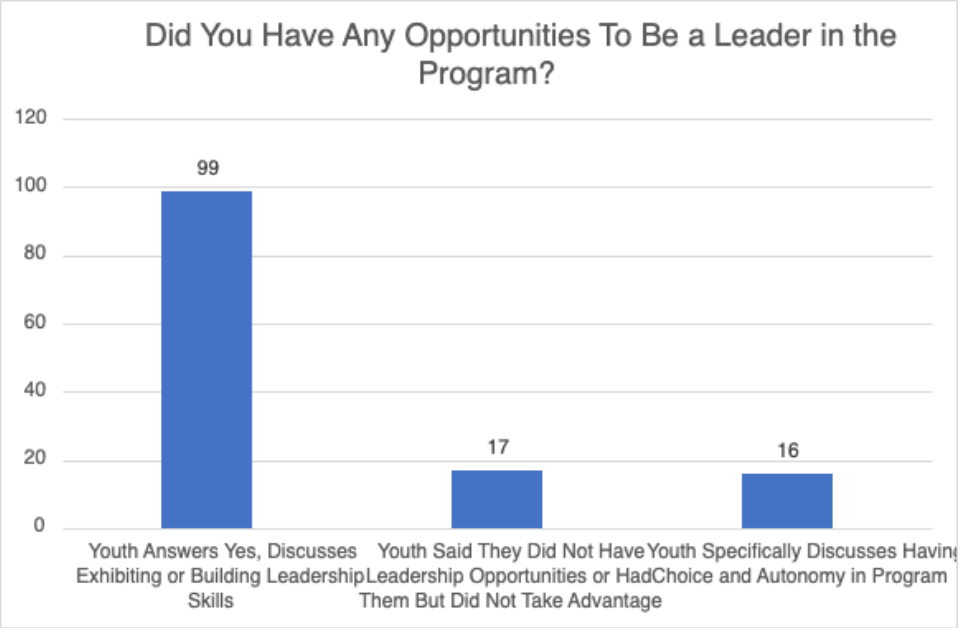
Some also youth described how they contributed their personal strengths to the program. For example, "Um, I think everybody contributed different skills. One of the ones I contributed was probably, um, being very self-motivated and determined" (SUHO), "I contribute my leadership skills, my listening skills and like my intelligence" (SUHO), "I think I contributed my skill of being interactive and really creative" (LYLL), "I contributed leadership skills and communication skills" (LYLL), and "I'm an outspoken person so, I'm always talking in the debates that we have" (LUCM).

Did You Have Any Opportunities to be a Leader in the Program?

Like the question above, themes from youths' responses here were coded into 1) youth answers yes and may provide an explanation (N=99), 2) youth said they did not have leadership

opportunities or said they did but did not take advantage of them (N=17), and 3) youth specifically describes having choice or autonomy in the program (N=16). See Table 17 below for frequencies of each code.

Table 17. Did You Have Any Opportunities To Be a Leader in the Program?



Youth Describes Having Leadership Opportunities

Many youth discussed exhibiting leadership through a less structured, redirecting of peers. For example, one youth said, "I contributed my leadership skills because when the group gets distracted I can kind of redirect them" (LYLL), "Being able to decide what we are doing next, guiding people to the right path, and being able to be recognize as a leader" (LUCM), "Yes, I did. I was always a leader, especially my group, you know, Teen Exclusive, yeah. When we'd got off topic or out of control, I stepped up and said "it's work time!" (SUHO), and,

> Um, yes, I did have opportunities to be a leader because, when someone else wasn't doing right or when somebody else wasn't doing their job right, then I felt like I was the leader because I tried to teach them, well not teach them, but I tried to show them that that's not the right way to go and that they should, like "why are they working on it when they do?" (SUHO)

> I did have an opportunity to be a leader is when I was helping out with the mentees, when I was, not telling them what to do, but helping them to do what they need to do and getting it done; telling them when it's time to play and when it's time to be serious. (SUHO)

> Um, personally, I think – I don't think I was that big of a leader though, this program. But I'll try to be one next time I come. But, but, personally, there was some chances – some cases I was a leader, and, like, helping and showing people they off task, they need to wake up or wake somebody that was sleeping. Or, like, just talking to the group trying to actively make everybody do something. And, yeah, that was – that was like, I don't know. It felt like – I felt like the leader then. And like, I don't know. (LUCM)

> If I had to, I would say yeah, I was, probably when it was coworkers who had problems in the past and brought them into the work area. I basically took them to the side and just told them like "this is a work, this is a work environment and we don't want to bring nothing from the outside in, So let's just all, you know, be friends at work and after work is whatever." (SUHO)

Several youth also described leading their peers during activities, presentations, or projects. For example, "I say yes. I felt with working on the presentation I felt like giving my part of what I felt we should have did and gave a big help" (LYLL), "I got to lead some of the games, that was fun, and I also got for the upcoming forum I get a chance to speak so that's going to be very interesting" (LUCM), "Being a leader was fun. Sometimes I had to lead questions that were asked in the beginning of the sessions and everyone would elaborate" (LUCM), and,

> Yeah, this one time, when we was working the safety fair, a lot of our work we left it with people and they wasn't coming to the program. So I stepped up and helped out with people in my group who didn't know what to do cuz they didn't have their papers. (SUHO)

Youth Describes Having Choice or Autonomy in Program

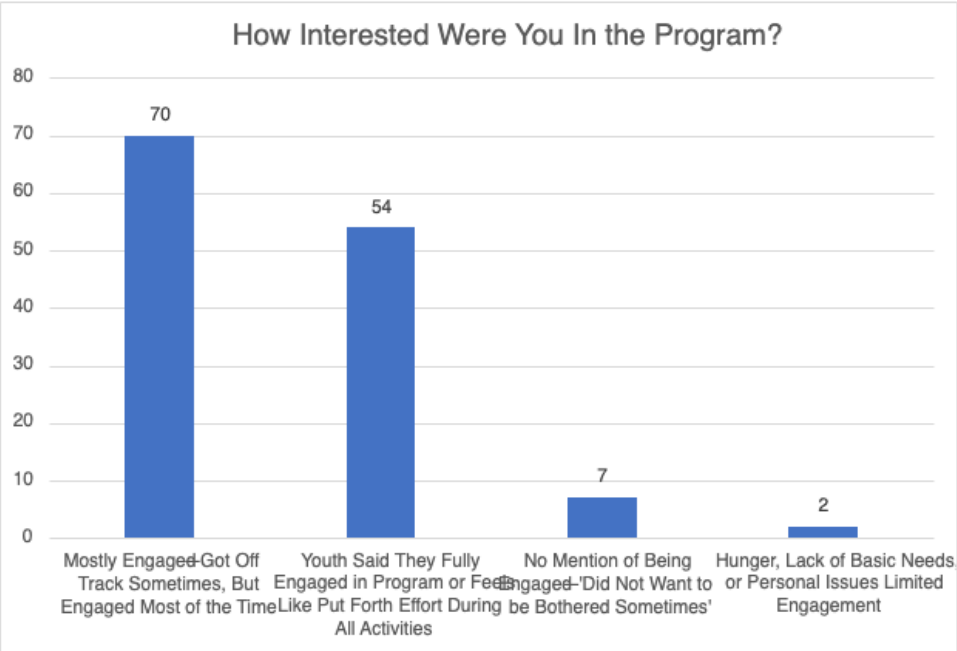
Some youth discussed leadership as having choice or autonomy in the program, suggesting they value having the power to make choices about elements of their program. For example, youth said, "Yea, the instructors listened to our suggestions. So they didn't really run

us and I think that's cool" (LUCM), "Like how we made our own rules, how we're going to, we're going to, um, how we're going to go about the program and stuff." (SUHO), "Yes, I feel like I had a voice in this program" (LUCM), "Yea everybody was able to voice their opinion and we voted on a lot of stuff before we did it (LYLL), and "Um yes I got to be a leader in a game we played. Um in the program and it was like very fun cause it gave me like the power" (LUCM).

Why Did You Give Yourself That Rating? (Engagement in Program)

Youth were presented with the following prompt, "on a scale of 1-10, where 1 means you were not interested at all and 10 means you were always involved in the program, how interested would you say you were in this program?" Part two of this question was, "Why did you give yourself that rating?" The following codes refer to that latter question. Four themes emerged from youths' responses. See Table 18 for frequencies of each code.

Table 18. How Interested Were You in the Program?



Youth Felt Mostly Engaged

Most frequently, youth said there were instances of disengaging or "getting off track" but that they always re-engaged and overall were engaged in most of the program's offerings (N=70). For example, youth stated,

> I wanna say a 9 because um because it'd be like it won't be all the time but it'd be like a couple times I won't be interested in the topic even though I still contribute to it but it's just not my type of topic so yeah. (LUCM)

> I give myself that rating because certain times, well, to be honest, sometimes I come into the program, where I don't really feel like working. I be too tired, but I don't really let it get to me, but somehow it can show. Like if I'm tired or sick or something, it could show. So, I don't feel like I always gave my 100% best, but if I didn't give my 100%, at least like 95. It was still worth it. (SUHO)

> I would give myself a 9 because for the most part I was here mentally everyday, ready to so whatever was asked. But, there was some days where I didn't really feel like doing anything and I didn't put my best foot forward that day. (LYLL)

Youth Described Being Fully Engaged

Many participants described feeling fully engaged in the program and did not mention disengaging at all (N=54). For example,

> I gave myself a nine because I really was involved in the group and I even spent time to design some stuff for the program. And I really wanted to finish some of the things so that the projects looked good. And in the end, the overall book was fantastic. It got everybody's opinions out there. So, I feel like – and I just like that, I just like the people there too. Like, all the people there was fun at interacting. They all had different personalities, but they agreed to the same kind of thing and I'm cool with a lot of them, so, yeah. (LUCM)

> 10, I was always interested in all the games and I was always involved with any type of fun any type of games we had there like any type of group conversations that we had, I just basically tried my best just to volunteer just to get active. (LYLL)

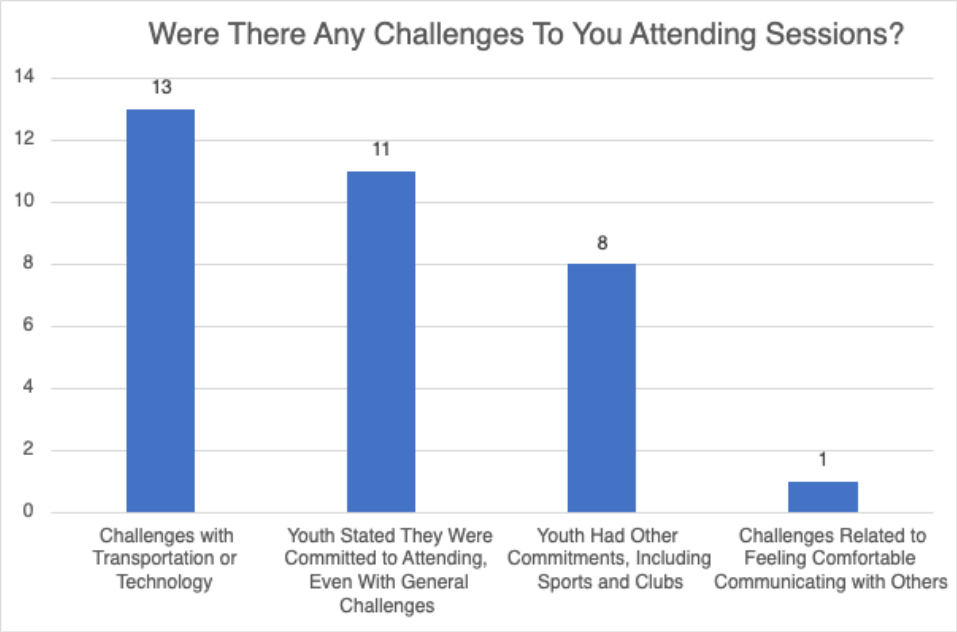
> Um, the reason why I said 11 because what I did, how I picked the program was how, something I that I knew I was going to feel comfortable with, something that I knew I would enjoy doing. So, when I got into this program, it was something that I really enjoyed doing. I looked forward to coming to work everyday. I never had any problems

> or altercations with anybody. So that's why I gave it 11 because I enjoyed everything, everything I did and contributed to the program. (SUHO)

Were There Any Challenges to You Attending Sessions?

Related to engagement, youth were asked if they experienced any challenges related to attending program sessions. While the N was low (N=33), it is still useful to understand the challenges that some youth experienced. Four themes emerged from youths' responses. See Table 19 for frequencies of each code.

Table 19. Were There Any Challenges To You Attending Sessions?



Challenges with Getting to the Program: Transportation and Technology

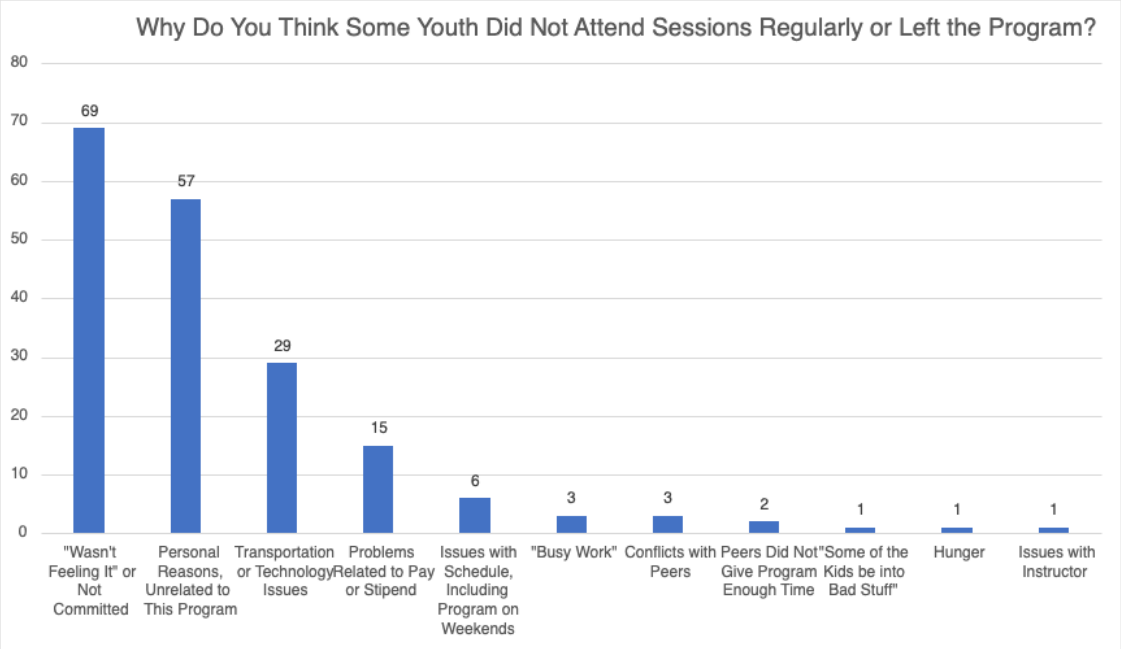
The most frequent theme in youths' responses related to having challenges commuting to in-person programs and accessing remote programs with technology. For example, youth said, "Um, uh, getting to the sessions it was a challenge, uh, in the beginning because I didn't have any bus fare or anything like that. But I was able to manage everything out (LUCM), "There was a challenge coming to the sessions sometimes because I don't walk here. I have to take an Uber

every day 4 times per week. The cost comes up to $5 - $6 so that's up to $24 per week" (LUCM), and "Just internet and technological issues" (LUCM).

Why Do You Think Some Youth Did Not Attend Sessions Regularly or Left the Program?

Understanding the challenges youth face and the causes of program disengagement is crucial in ensuring youth benefit from their program's offerings. Youth were asked why they thought their peers might have disengaged from the program. Eleven themes emerged from youths' responses. See table 20 for frequencies of each code.

Table 20. Why Do You Think Some Youth Did Not Attend Sessions Regularly or Left the Program?



"Wasn't Feeling It" or Peers Not Committed

The most frequent theme in youths' responses refers to when they felt some of their peers were not committed or "wasn't feeling it" (N=69) For example, "Probably just wasn't feeling it one day. They was tired or something like that and they just didn't feel like coming regularly" (LUCM), "Because some people just lazy. Some people feel they weren't getting nowhere with

the program. Some people feel like it wasn't for them" (SUHO), "I think they have poor attendance because it is the summertime and maybe they just don't feel like getting up this early" (LYLL), and,

> Because everybody has their different days going outside the program and they can't make it every day so… I mean things probably came up that they had to attend to that were more important than this program. Also, they just probably bored with it like not everybody's gonna like this program, unfortunately. But yea… I wasn't one of them apprentices so. (LYLL)

Personal Reasons Unrelated to Program

Many youth also said they thought their peers may have disengaged for personal reasons unrelated to the program (N=57). For example, youth said,

> Uh, some people might leave because of personal reasons. And not really–I don't think it really had anything to do with the program to be specific. But most likely probably personal reasons and other, um, activities and programs that they do outside of this one. (LUCM)

> The reason why was because the simple fact that they other things to do. Other school activities, they dealing with college applications, they have other stuff to do education-wise. But, a couple other people felt like they just wanted to come in whenever they felt like it. They didn't have anything else to do. But for most people, they had other school activities and they were trying squeeze it in with the time they had and try to get to work on time, but sometimes it didn't work out. (SUHO)

Challenges with Transportation or Technology

Several participants suggested that their peers may have disengaged due to challenges related to transportation and having technological difficulty in accessing remote programs (N=29). For example,

> Um by the timing, cause in the winter time it gets dark early and we like by making sure everyone have proper transportation, making sure no one is traveling too far at such a late time and everything will be alright towards that (SUHO).
> Interviewee: Because they don't really have like someone to travel with like a car.
> Interviewer: That's a good answer.
> Interviewee: Or bus fare.
> Interviewer: Yes those are common problem to run into.

Interviewee: Or uber.

Moreover, youth said, “Cause some people can’t afford the bus” (LYLL), “They weren’t able to get transportation” (LUCM), “My they got another job or they couldn’t make it or they didn’t have bus fare to come” (SUHO), “Bus money. Basically, no transportation to the program” (LYLL), “they just didn’t have the resources to get to work that day” (LYLL), and “Probably something came up or they had a ton of technical problems” (LUCM).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 provides conclusions based on research findings from data collected about youths' perceptions of personal change in OSP settings, as well as discussion and recommendations for future research. This chapter will review the purpose of the study, literature review, research questions, and findings of the study. It will then address the implications of the study results for understanding adolescent development since developmental theories tend to underpin intervention models with adolescents. Then, the implications of findings about how youth understand personal change will be applied to understand mechanisms of change in OSP with African American and Latine youth experiencing low income.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore youths' perspectives of how they internalize OSPs (curricula and relationships with instructors, each other, and other participants) and define personal change in an OSP context. Specifically, this study aimed to:

(1) understand youths' perspectives of personal change, including the nature of youths' internalization processes and,

(2) identify causal program mechanisms of change that youth say are helpful.

Summary of Literature Review

Key disparities emerge regarding the mental health care of Black and Latine youth compared to other ethnic groups in outpatient service use, informal service use (such as self-help

and peer counseling), inpatient care, and receipt of appropriate medications (Garland et al., 2005). Inadequate identification, stigma, poor access to care, lack of culturally appropriate services, and treatment of mental health concerns in ethnic minority communities lead to and maintain significant disparities in mental health outcomes for Black and Latine youth (Garland et al., 2005). A more relevant OSP model for Black and Latine youth can aid practitioners working within agencies and organizations to address these gaps in service utilization. Potentially, OSPs are an alternative to more formalized mental health care clinics, however, many urban OSPs struggle with how to effectively recruit and retain youth, especially older youth, and continue to seek ways to improve this process (Deschenes et al., 2010).

However, there is a lack of relevant therapeutic OSPs for marginalized youth and existing research suggests there may be misunderstandings of the needs and goals of youth of color experiencing low income regarding their OSPs. One could interpret the low rates of attendance and engagement in OSPs as indicating that traditional models of OSPs for youth of color living in structurally oppressed communities fail to holistically meet their needs (Heller et al., 2017; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). The high rates of need for mental health support also suggest unmet needs (Castro-Ramirez et al., 2021). For instance, marginalized youth of color are often over-researched by universities and many programs designed to meet their needs are conceptualized within a violence prevention intervention framework which is consistent with deficit discourse, but not youths' goals. Another misunderstanding assumes that low-income youth of color should experience the same benefit as privileged youth from programs based on white middle-class conceptualizations of youth development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), which emphasize individual coping and skill-building (Watts et al., 1999). Moreover, these

programs and interventions are not necessarily designed to address factors associated with injustice and oppression, like structural and epistemic violence. As a result, this research responds to the need for more research about how OSPs can provide more culturally attuned and more effective services to marginalized youth of color to promote healthy personal development, as defined by the service consumers (youth), including resistance of injustice. Recruitment and retention metrics can improve as a result of adopting a service model that addresses youths' desires and needs, including their contextual definitions of personal change. Youth could be more likely to voluntarily join OSPs and continue their participation when they believe it is helpful and relevant to them.

Overarching Research Question

This study addressed the following overarching research question: since program impact occurs via youths' internalization of the program offerings, what do youth perspectives tell us about how they internalize the experience of an out-of-school, high-dosage, strengths-based program?

Specific Research Questions

This qualitative research study addressed the following specific research questions:

(1) What is it about these program curricula that work well according to youth? (i.e., what are the program mechanisms as described by youth?)

(2) How do youth conceptualize what "changes" when youth internalize program mechanisms?

(3) How do youth understand the process of how the program works?

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study represent a realist interpretation of SUHO, LYLL, and

LUCM's efficacy (Pawson & Bellamy, 2006). In other words, the causal power of these programs lies in their underlying mechanisms. Youth identified program mechanisms that they prioritized, which are represented by the themes that emerged from their peer-to-peer interviews. They also described how they perceived the program to work and how they are impacted their program's offerings. Overall, the findings suggest that youth find the most value in the relationships they make with others in the program and in building skills to be able to relate more effectively to others in and out of their program. Specifically, the theme of youth prioritizing positive connections with others and developing relational skills was the most frequent theme to emerge from youths' responses to the following peer-to-peer interview questions:

(1) Why did you decide to join this program?

(2) Why did you decide to keep coming?

(3) Can you talk some about your favorite part of the program?

(4) What did you enjoy or think went well?

(5) Do you feel you learned anything from this program?

(6) Did you learn anything about yourself (or your capabilities) from this program?

(7) Can you talk some about your peers?

To what degree does the respondent prioritize connections with others? Moreover, it was found that the strongest overall prioritization code (*youth prioritizes connections with others above any other program element)* for question eight on the list above was applied almost four times more frequently than the next most frequently applied code. Also, one of the most prominent themes that emerged from the question, "can you talk some about a part of the program you did not enjoy?" was youth wanting more positive interactions with their

peers and feeling disappointed when they had negative relational experiences with others in the program. This reinforces the strong degree to which youth find value in being able to make positive connections with others in their OSP. Relatedly, the youth participants also frequently emphasized their desire to "have fun," including with peers and program instructors.

Youth also described finding value in working towards their futures, such as building resumes, gaining job experience to improve future career outcomes, and planning for college, including going on college visits with ECP-PSI instructors. There are many youth responses suggesting that the OSPs were impactful in part because they enabled youth to consolidate a positive identity (*"I'm a good person"*). This did not occur via curricula about self-affirmation or positive thinking (a more cognitive behavioral approach) but was connected by youth with the experience of feeling respected, heard, cared for, and affirmed by instructors and peers (a more humanistic approach).

Consistency of Themes Across Communities and Time Frames

While this research occurred over 17 years of programming, in four different communities and using three different curricula, there were consistent themes throughout. This suggests that despite variations in contextual conditions such as degrees of police violence, resource availability, program sites, etc., from youths' perspectives there are common factors in elements of OSPs that promote positive change for youth of color experiencing low income. Designing programs for youth that are informed by their perspectives of personal change may enhance program effects because they may see the program as more relevant and can see themselves in terms of their strengths, and less pathologized. Thus, this study provides a blueprint for program providers and funders regarding what works in OSPs from the youths'

perspectives.

Implications for Understanding Adolescent Development

The Developmental Process

Youth persistently said that one of the most important experiences they had in the program was freely sharing their thoughts and feelings, and listening as others did the same. Youth development researchers utilize a relational-developmental-ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Overton, 2010) or person-in-environment (Kondrat, 2013) perspective, where individuals are understood to be complex and influenced by overlapping factors in their environments. Erikson (1968, 1994) argued that an individual's identity develops in relation to other people. Moreover, outside definitions of self, including social constructionist concepts of identity in context, multiplicity of self, and negotiation of self are never static and these concepts of self are dependent on the relationships that we have with others (Hall, 2012). Thus, the ways in which youth change is understood to be social and relational by nature, which places an increased focus on understanding the context of youths' relationships and interactions (Denzin, 1989).

Moreover, the interactionist perspective (Denzin, 1989) conceptualizes youths' environments or settings, including relations to others, as active agents in promoting development. This perspective also emphasizes that youths' perceptions and reactions to their contexts determine how youth internalize out-of-school program offerings (Denzin, 1989). This is consistent with current youth development literature, which suggests that the fullest form of internalization occurs when the reason for doing an activity is personally meaningful and when it aligns with youths' broader, more deeply anchored values, interests, and commitments in their social contexts (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). This perspective strengthens the argument for both

implementing evaluative mechanisms to ascertain what youth want and value in their out-of-school programming and for providers to build programs around youths' values, interests, and commitments, rather than imposing adults' program priorities on youth, such as reducing impulsivity or targeting violence prevention.

With regard to the common view that most youth of color in poverty communities need help with violence prevention, the ECP-PSI experience is that there have been only eight fights across 17 years of SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM programming for hundreds of youth. This anecdotal evidence suggests that the primary need of youth who attend OSPs in high-poverty communities of color is NOT for violence prevention but rather to meet the needs of youth described in this research. When violence prevention is a focus, youth may not find programs valuable or personally meaningful and may not attend. If they do attend, they may cooperate but not find the program resonating with their deepest needs and personal goals and might not internalize the curricula fully. For change to occur, youth *themselves* must believe their program is personally meaningful, which means programs need to be in harmony with youths' values, interests, and commitments (Philip & Gill, 2020).

Youth Priorities for Experiencing Themselves Growing: Relational Capital and Positive Identities

The person-in-environment (Kondrat, 2013) and interactionist perspectives (Denzin, 1989) direct attention towards youths' understanding of processes and the qualities and behaviors of the social contexts of their out-of-school program (Jones & Deutsch, 2013). During adolescence, changes in social contexts have significant effects on youths' development (Steinberg, 2008). Youth need to balance their developmental need for autonomy with the

expectations and authority of adults (Jones & Deutsch, 2013), including program instructors. As adolescents mature, they take on more responsibilities in the adult world, and this process is influenced by social contexts like relationships with adults and peers. It is known that adults can provide support during this transition (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004), and peer involvement can facilitate positive outcomes in settings like out-of-school programs (Brown, 2004). Engagement in out-of-school programs can promote positive social development, as it allows youth to express and experiment with social roles (Barber, Stone, Hunt, & Eccles, 2005), which is consistent with the themes that emerged from this study's analyses, including the opportunity to mentor younger children.

There is also an equity dynamic to what youth receive from out-of-school programming. For example, spending on out-of-school programs among wealthy, white families continues to grow and these families have embraced out-of-school programs as an enrichment mechanism to prepare their children for success in college and beyond (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Lareau, 2011). This creates an *engagement gap* between those who can pay for these programs and those who cannot (Snellman et al., 2015). Moreover, the out-of-school programs that wealthier, white youth attend provide more opportunities to develop strong personal identities, interests, and social capital compared to programs designed for low-income youth of color, which broadly focus on academic gains and reducing "problem" behaviors, like violence engagement (Philip & Gill, 2020). This contributes to the *engagement gap*, which deprives low-income youth of color of critical, developmental opportunities to build personal identities, interests, and social capital.

Over 17 years, youth in SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM consistently and emphatically described wanting opportunities to develop personal identities, interests, and social capital. For

example, with the understanding that our personal identities develop in relation to other people (Erickson, 1968, 1994; Hall, 2012), the present study's finding that the theme of youth deeply value the connections they made in their programs over anything else has can be thought of with an added layer of developmental importance. When youth say their favorite part of the program was having fun with the friends they made, the reason they decided to join the program is that they wanted more positive relationships and the reason they decided to keep coming to the program was due to the fulfilling connections they made in their program, it can be argued that what they were also saying was that these relational processes helped them develop their own personal identities. Their prioritizing of forming and learning about relationships within SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM, in addition to content like learning about human rights and developing social capital like creating resumes and visiting colleges, provided the opportunity and enabled youth to engage in these critical developmental processes, which can help bridge the engagement gap.

Problems with Existing OSP Intervention Theory and How it is Developed

While Positive Youth Development remains the dominant theory of change in out-of-school programs for youth (Ciocanel et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011), some researchers argue that current formulations of Positive Youth Development are rooted in white, middle-class perspectives, which oversimplify youth identities, homogenize their experiences, and view them through a single cultural lens (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). Consequently, youth of color that face social, political, and economic marginalization often lack culturally relevant out-of-school programs that allow for identity exploration and construction compared to their privileged peers. When available, these programs frequently experience high attrition rates, exceeding 50%, suggesting a mismatch

between program offerings and the priorities of the youth (Heller et al., 2017). Additionally, these programs often lack necessary infrastructure, such as transportation, further exacerbating the disconnect between the programs and the youth they serve. This mismatch between program design and the needs and priorities of youth can lead to feelings of dehumanization, alienation, and internalized oppression for youth. The outcomes of after-school programs are influenced by the interactions between individual youth with unique developmental needs and the features present within the program (Jones & Deutsch, 2013). When program features are informed by the perspectives and definitions of youth regarding what works for them, their internalization of out-of-school program curricula can become more effective and impactful (Bulanda & McCrea, 2013).

"One Size Fits All" Approaches

When program providers attempt to apply *"one-size-fits-all"* theories of change, like Positive Youth Development, youth engagement and internalization of curricula are limited. Adolescents need flexible, but structured program mechanisms that allow them to make individualized meaning from their program's offerings. Shifting programs' operating theory of change away from universalistic theories like Positive Youth Develop can aid in this process. The following sections discuss the critiques of Positive Youth Development in detail and provide alternative theories of youth change.

Overview of Positive Youth Development. Positive youth development encompasses a field of research and practice that aims to identify the essential competencies and characteristics required for youth to develop into *thriving* adults within a *free* and *productive* society and economy along with creating the necessary factors and conditions that facilitate such healthy

development (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). Interventions informed by Positive Youth Development also address determinants of adolescent risk behaviors by promoting youths' strengths to build empowerment, competence, self-efficacy, and belonging (Bowers, et al., 2010).

Critiques of Positive Youth Development. Promoting youths' strengths to develop competencies, self-efficacy, and belonging is a worthwhile endeavor, however, the process by which Positive Youth Development programs attempt to achieve these goals is mismatched with youths' natural change processes. There is some evidence to support these claims. To reiterate, a meta-analysis which examined the effects of positive youth development programs in promoting positive outcomes and reducing risk behavior in young people (aged 10-19), including 24 randomized control trials and 23,258 participants (58% African American/Black) in the analysis (Ciocanel et al., 2017). This meta-analysis utilized a randomized control trial design to examine the impact of positive youth development out-of-school interventions on outcomes including academic achievement, prosocial behavior, psychological adjustment, behavioral problems, and sexual risk behaviors. Independent of participant age and program characteristics, out-of-school positive youth development interventions had a small but significant effect on academic achievement and psychological adjustment. However, no significant effects were found for sexual risk behaviors, problem behavior, or positive social behaviors (Ciocanel et al., 2017). Moreover, these researchers found that positive youth development programs did not lead to significant reductions in violent or antisocial behavior compared to control interventions. The analysis also found that low risk youth derived more benefit from positive youth development interventions than high-risk youth (Ciocanel et al., 2017).

One of the factors limiting these programs' effectiveness is that Positive Youth Development's theory of change is not well matched with the realities of low-income youth of color. While the positive youth development model has successfully challenged the conventional problem/prevention model of youth development, this paradigm fails to recognize the influence of structural violence on young people and does not focus on providing youth with supports and opportunities (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011) to offer at least partial remedies for structural violence. The Positive Youth Development framework also depoliticizes social analysis and action and is constrained by its inability to comprehensively analyze the intricate social, economic, and political forces that impact the lives of urban youth (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

In support, Sukarieh and Tannock (2011) argue,

> Instead of addressing political and ideological conflict and difference directly, the positive youth development model offers a supposedly expert and scientific body of knowledge that provides a standardized and universal set of principles (the Five Cs or five promises, etc.) for what we need to do to facilitate healthy youth development." (p. 684)

The problem/prevention and Positive Youth Development models fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of urban youth of color. These models incorrectly assume that youth themselves are the subject in need of change, rather than addressing the systems of oppression shaping their contexts and environments. Instead of separating youth from their contexts, low-income youth of color require a theory of change that considers the impact of social and economic patterns that perpetuate deeply entrenched racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic practices in urban communities. By shifting our focus from individual behavior to the impact of social and community forces on youth, we gain a deeper understanding of how

they navigate and respond to the oppressive influences that shape their lives (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011).

Epistemic Violence

Another reason that the Positive Youth Development theory of change is not well-matched with how low-income Black and Latine youth define change is due to race-based epistemic violence, which excludes young people from freely offering their opinions and experiences to develop scientific knowledge, instead straining youths' perspectives through sieves of standardized scales developed by privileged researchers' science (Glass & Newman, 2015). Critical Race Theory (CRT), which assumes that race and racism are central and fundamental to understanding how society functions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016), helps illuminate, explain, and address this social justice problem. CRT is a framework that examines, theorizes, and challenges ways that racism implicitly and explicitly impacts social discourses, practices, and structures, (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). A central tenet of CRT has to do with valuing experiential knowledge. Specifically, CRT explicitly draws on the lived experiences of Communities of Color by ontologically and epistemologically assuming that methods like storytelling and narratives are valid tools of knowledge (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Yosso, 2005).

One implication of excluding Black and Latine youths' knowledge from developmental after-school program models is that practitioners and researchers paste white middle-class conceptualizations of change, such as positive youth development (Ginwright and Cammarota 2002), onto Black and Latine youth without critically challenging its assumptions or asking young people if they find it relevant. For example, one of the six Cs of positive youth

development, 'character' is conceptualized as morality or moral identity (Lerner et al., 2005). Specifically, 'character' according to positive youth development refers to one's attitudes about societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behavior, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity (Travis & Leech, 2014). However, this formulation fails to acknowledge that it is "precisely differences of opinion about 'what is just, right, and good' that are at the heart of all social, cultural, and political conflicts" (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011, p. 681) and it is these conflicts that shape the well-being and development of youth. Without critically considering how positive youth development may or may not address Black and Latine youths' identities, ecologies, and cultures, out-of-school program practitioners and researchers risk designing programs around socially unjust models that invalidate youths' experiences.

Human Rights and Social Justice Priorities

One change framework that contrasts Positive Youth Development is the Social Justice Youth Development Model (SJYD). The SJYD model shifts the unit of analysis from individual behavior to the impact of social and community forces on youth (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). While not examined extensively by researchers in after-school program contexts or based on youths' perspectives, the SJYD model emphasizes that healthy development is a process, but not necessarily as the only outcome. Another outcome or goal of SJYD is healing: "the process of fostering emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical wellness" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 92). Specifically, SJYD posits that young people heal "from the impact of racial and economic suffering when they comprehend and address the complex, hidden social and economic forces fomenting their everyday challenges" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 92). Focusing on youths' social context, culture, and personal experiences, the SJYD model can

enhance the knowledge base of how young people navigate and respond to injustice and oppressive forces, including epistemic violence. The SJYD model argues that healing can provide youth with a sense of meaning and assumes that social transformation begins with the self (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

This model is also consistent with the findings of this study. For example, the results of this study indicate that many youth valued learning about human rights specifically and social justice topics broadly. Even youth enrolled in SUHO and LYLL, which were not explicitly human rights-focused, said that they wanted more opportunities to learn about social justice issues and human rights. Youth across programs also indicated they appreciated having and wanted more opportunities to address problems in their community, including service-based activities, like helping community members attain emergency COVID-19 supplies and engaging in street outreach, such as passing out supplies and food to people experiencing homelessness.

Theory About OSPs' Mechanisms of Action Derived from Youths' Experiences of Change

In a nutshell, the findings from this research and the discussion of the literature above indicate that there is a difference between conceptualizing interventions based on developmental theory alone, and deriving theory about interventions' change mechanisms from the expertise of those who experience and participate in the intervention (the aim here).

Respectful, Caring, and Affirming Relationships Promote Personal Growth According to Youth

The priority youth accorded to the relationships they experienced in the OSPs reinforces the developmental attachment research that indicates that development occurs in the matrix of positive caring relationships (Sroufe, 2005). Youths' themes about the value of the relationships

were consistently relationships that were respectful, affirming, allowed everyone to speak and participate, and that responded with care to their distress. Punitive, shaming, rejecting, or contemptuous forms of relating were never mentioned by youth as helpful in any way, suggesting they are counter-productive for promoting youths' personal growth. Instructors need to ensure youth are relating with each other in positive, affirming ways, in part by modeling those positive, affirming communications themselves. Youths' communications about the relationships are discussed in further detail below.

Youth React to How Instructors Treat Other Youth as well as to How They are Treated by Instructors

Strong relationships with adult instructors facilitate youth participation in OSPs (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997). Accordingly, youths' responses indicated that they are acutely sensitive to the way that their instructor treated them and their peers. The youth felt intensely respected when their instructors humanized and affirmed them and their peers, including replacing punitive, harsh reactions with compassion and patience. This is a crucial programmatic element because Black and Latine youth experiencing low income are at particular risk for systemic marginalization and dehumanization. They experience the most exposure to community violence (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019), the most ACEs (Liu et al., 2018), the most exposure to police violence (Jackson et al., 2021), and the greatest degree of poverty with its attendant deprivations (Castro-Ramirez et al., 2021; Fredrick, 2018). It is crucial that program instructors relate so they provide a positive contrast with Black and Latine youth of color's with negative experiences in their daily lives. When instructors conveyed to youth that they are valued by their instructors and peers alike, youths' responses indicated that it was therapeutic in light of the

multiple marginalizations that they experience. One of the most effective mechanisms that helped ECP-PSI instructors convey to youth that they are valued was through humanistic "check-in" circles, which are discussed in further detail below.

Intersubjectivity: Youth Finding Themselves in the Positive and Accurate Images Instructors' Sustain About the Youth

ECP-PSI instructors embodied enthusiastic, affirming responsiveness towards youths' positive affects and interests (Barish, 2004) and were committed to genuine care for youth in the program. Importantly, the youths' opinions about their instructors consistently focused on feeling cared for and respected by their instructors. In other words, youth perceived their instructors to be genuinely committed to providing care and protection for them and to treating them with unconditional positive regard and respect throughout interactions in the program.

This suggests, per the work of Bonovitz (2003) and others about intersubjective therapeutic effects, that the ECP-PSI programs promoted youths' positive personal change in part because the instructors sustained positive inner images of the youth they were serving. In turn, this enabled youth to find their own positive identities through relationships with their instructors and others in the program. The youth felt understood and known through their instructors' empathetic recognition of their humanity (Schafer, 1959) and in turn, developed a sense of self that is worthy and deserving of care and protection (Frey, 2004) and being able to provide the same sense of care in their relationships with others in and outside of the program.

"Fun" is More Than "Fun"

The findings of this study also indicate that while youth prioritized relationships, learning about social justice, and giving back to their communities, they also valued having fun and

feeling joy in their programs. “Having fun” is a developmental and relational process that allows youth to feel a sense of deeper connectedness to others in the program. While youth development-focused research on OSPs has not explored the meaning of fun from youths’ perspectives in-depth, the literature on youth sports and youth athletics engagement provides a fuller understanding of the role of fun in relation to youth engagement in programming. For example, fun has been identified as the primary reason youth decide to participate in sports teams (Petlichkoff, 1999; Bengoechea et al., 2004). Moreover, one study found that 39% of boys and 38% of girls describe their primary reason for disengaging from their sports team was a lack of fun (Witt & Dangi, 2018). Assuming that these findings can be translated across youth engagement in OSPs broadly, having fun becomes an important dimension of engagement that should be prioritized.

Fun is particularly important for youth of color living in marginalized communities yet is often deprioritized by program providers in lieu of emphasizing dimensions associated with the deficit discourse like violence prevention or reducing “problem behaviors.” However, given the context of experiencing multiple intersecting marginalizations, Black and Latine youth experiencing low income have stated their desire to have fun across responses in their peer-to-peer interviews and the contextual importance of such themes should not be trivialized. “Fun” and joy can be an act of resistance that allows youth of color to feel as though they are defined by more than their struggles and losses (Dunn & Love, 2020). Black joy can be understood to contribute to community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and is relational by nature (Tichavakunda, 2021). Youth discussed having fun and finding joy in several program elements, including field trips, discussions, having guest speakers, working on curriculum projects, and

having unstructured time with peers. Youth in this study indicated that joy and fun can be achieved through diverse means, but suggested that positive relationships with peers and instructors are common elements, including the prerequisite of feeling respected and understood. Centering Black joy and joy among youth of color broadly helps youth heal and feel seen, recognized, loved, and valued (Love, 2019). As Bettina Love writes, "what is astonishing is that through all the suffering the dark body endures there is joy, Black joy" (2019, p. 15).

Helping Dreams Crystallize and Come True

Beliefs that youth of color experiencing low income are unmotivated for positive life trajectories are clearly unfounded. Youth indicated that they valued opportunities to fulfill personal goals and work on their futures and described this as being one of the motivating factors for engaging in their program. While ECP-PSI explicitly utilized mechanisms to aid youth, including helping youth create resumes, accompanying them on college visits, and aiding them in applying to college, these were all inherent desires from within youth themselves. This inherent motivation and value for dreaming and working toward a positive future can be thought of as being related to community cultural wealth, specifically drawing from Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital.

ECP-PSI nurtures the aspirational capital that youths' families and communities imparted to them. Youth described their personal goals and desire for a positive future in their responses for why they decided to initially join the program, meaning that it was the responsibility of their program to nurture this aspirational capital. This is consistent with research on youths' future expectations, which shows that relationships with caring, competent adults and peers encourage youth to envision a positive future (Aronowitz, 2005; Guthrie et al., 2014). Contextually, this is a

crucial program element because the circumstances of many youths' realities, including experiencing structural and epistemic violence, can lead to a sense of hopelessness (Stoddard et al., 2011).

Participation as an Epistemology and Mechanism of Change

A practice, conceptualized as "participation," has emerged in approaches to working with youth. This term has evolved and is now widely used in youth work to describe ongoing processes of information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect (Assembly, U.G., 1989). The appropriateness of different forms of participation depends on different cultures, contexts, and youths' capabilities and interests (Hart et al., 1997), but there are many benefits to youth participation. When adults relinquish some of their power, young people are positioned to take on more prominent and authoritative leadership roles (Siffrinn & McGovern, 2019), increasing self-determination and self-efficacy. Authentic youth participation in out-of-school program design and evaluation can build developmental assets, including youths' understanding of complex human rights issues (Schusler et al., 2019). It can also impact changes to personal, community, and policy level change (Sprague et al., 2018).

Youth participation is conceptualized as an ongoing process of involving young people in the decisions that affect their lives (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006), including in their afterschool program. Youth enrolled in SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM programming had opportunities to be co-researchers and interview their peers about program evaluation and their feedback is implemented in following sessions (Bulanda et al., 2013). Moreover, the SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM curricula implemented informal and formal youth feedback processes that provided youth with opportunities to share their program experiences and suggestions (Miller et al., 2018).

For example, youth enrolled in LUCM programs in 2019 reported their desire to engage in more service projects and more opportunities to help their communities in their peer-to-peer interviews. In response, program staff revised curricula to include service opportunities including conducting a community needs assessment during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and more opportunities to share their work through community forums (Miller et al., 2018). In doing so, youth report feeling empowered and heard, aligned with Article 12 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (Assembly, U.G., 1989), and the curriculum becomes more relevant to youth.

The use of peer-to-peer interviews in this study enabled youth to deepen their participation in the program and provided them a mechanism to shape curricula. Moreover, having youth interview each other about their program helped them feel comfortable speaking honestly and freely, which provided a unique view into their inner world, including their perspectives about personal change that might otherwise go uncaptured. It appears that the more participatory programs became, the more engaging and meaningful the program becomes for youth, strengthening youths' internalization processes, in turn increasing program effectiveness. In other words, the program became more meaningful for youth as ECP-PSI progressively relied on the youth themselves to drive all facets of the program. Imparting youth with programmatic power related to decision-making and leadership helped build relational skills but also empowered youth to develop agency, autonomy, and confidence across contexts.

Guidelines Derived from Youths' Perspectives: What Do Interventions and Programs Need to Do?

The mechanisms of action described above lead to specific guidelines for intervention providers, elucidated below. The theories of therapeutic change developed from adult treatment do not fully encompass the unique aspects of clinical work with youth. These distinctive factors include our specific approach to engaging with young clients, their specific needs, and the unique process of change involved, specific to working with young people (Barish, 2004). Thus, practitioners that work with children and adolescents must not only be aware of the differences between working with youth compared to adults but must also implement alternative approaches and change theories that are more relevant for young people.

Cultivate Positive Relationships with Instructors

The importance of positive connections to peers has been discussed extensively, but it is also critical for program providers to cultivate positive, helpful relationships between youth participants and their instructors. Research suggests that engagement with youth is fostered by two critical therapeutic attitudes: 1) the instructor's empathetic recognition of the youths' distress, sadness, and disappointment, and 2) the therapist's affirming and enthusiastic responsiveness to youths' positive affects, interests, and strengths (Barish, 2004). The second element is particularly important because the therapist's empathic responsiveness is the primary way through which young people feel known and understood (Sander, 2002; Barish, 2004). This is consistent with the findings of this study. Youth enrolled in SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM consistently found their instructor to be helpful and empathetically supportive. They said they felt respected and dignified in their relationships with their instructors and valued having the

security in knowing that they could speak to their instructor about anything they may need help with, alluding to unconditional care and support. Many participants also described their instructor helping them with their individualized needs, including help researching and applying to colleges, working on resumes, and building specific interests and skills, like writing or drawing.

Incorporate an Individualized, Street-Based Social Work Model of Care

While the youth in this study may not have been violence-engaged, they were much more highly stressed than privileged youth and also disproportionately lack mental health care (Liu et al., 2018; Garland et al., 2005; Morsy & Rothstein, 2019). Incorporating individualized care into OSPs was received enthusiastically by youth. Specifically, youth described receiving a further degree of care from their instructors, referring to the Empowering Counseling Program's operating clinical model, Street-Based Social Work. Broadly, the street-based social work model of practice reframes mental healthcare as a right by bringing free trauma-informed care to the youth, making it more accessible (Tyson et al., 2019b). Street-based social work decolonizes the traditional view and role of the therapeutic relationship by not hindering opportunities to know youth and individuals in non-clinical settings. Working alliances form based on services that are participatory and responsive to the youth and individuals' needs. In other words, services need to happen when and where the client can participate and focused around the client's purpose in seeking care (Tyson McCrea et al., 2019b).

Moreover, evidence-based programs in the United States do not cater to the specific needs of children from marginalized communities experiencing poverty. The findings of this study indicated several significant barriers that exist for youth, such as limited transportation

options, fear of traveling outside their safe zones, lack of awareness and time to seek available mental health care, chronic hunger, and inadequate school settings (e.g., a low ratio of social workers to children), can prevent these children and their families from accessing the necessary support. Street-Based Social Work aims to address these obstacles through the following strategies:

(1) Building trust by establishing a therapeutic relationship that creates a safe space.

(2) Prioritizing client self-determination and respecting their autonomy.

(3) Designing services that are participatory and responsive to individuals' priorities, focusing on their strengths to counteract the negative impact of poverty and racism.

(4) Ensuring services are accessible in terms of location, eliminating transportation costs and providing flexible timing to accommodate clients whose schedules are disrupted by survival needs.

(5) Providing additional resources alongside services, including essential items like food, clothing, and connecting clients with other relevant resources.

(6) Implementing out-of-school programs that offer clear pathways out of poverty, fostering trust with clients. For instance, out-of-school programs that provide stipends to participating youth not only demonstrate the possibility of employment but also support positive future expectations, instill hope, and incorporate a structured curriculum.

(7) Challenging the traditional view of role conflict, recognizing that professionals who have built trust through ongoing interactions are more likely to be trusted and confided in by youth. Although confidentiality and jealousy concerns should be addressed, therapists who have earned trust can have a greater impact on relationship building.

By adopting these individualized approaches and rejecting “one-size-fits-all" frameworks, it is possible to enhance mental health support for youth of color in poverty and address the existing contextual barriers they face (Tyson McCrea et al., 2019b).

Free Sharing and Conversation: Integrating Humanistic Therapy

Youth persistently said that one of the most important experiences they had in the program was freely sharing their thoughts and feelings, and listening as others did the same. Youths’ definition of change is unique to them because their perceptions of self and their identities are complex, relational, and individualized. For example, one participant said they became a “better person” because they learned how to be empathetic. This may not apply to others or may differ in highly contextualized, nuanced ways. Thus, program providers need a nuanced understanding and approach to programming that allows young people to inductively develop their individualized, contextualized perceptions of self and their identities. Humanistic therapy is a holistic framework for youth that allows youth to pick-and-pull precisely what they need from a program when they need it (Witkin, 1991).

Broadly, Humanism refers to the belief in the capacity of conscious human beings to reason, make choices and act freely (Payne, 2020). More specifically, humanistic therapy places equal value on the outcome of a goal and the steps and action (process) towards that goal. The aim of humanistic therapy is not to solve problems explicitly, but rather to help the individual grow and develop the necessary tools to cope with and address the problem themselves (Kirschenbaum, 1979). In other words, rather than concentrating on deficits and dysfunction, humanistic therapy aims to help people fulfill their potential and maximize their well-being and self-actualization. The therapist helps the client to identify conflicts and understand feelings in

order to help the client take control of their own life to overcome their challenges (Page, Weiss, & Lietaer, 2002). In group settings, including out-of-school programs, youth are encouraged to assume responsibility for what is discussed in the group and overall direction of the group (Page, Weiss, & Lietaer, 2002).

Humanistic therapy also cultivates an atmosphere in which youth can discuss personal problems and engage in interpersonal learning (Page, Weiss, & Lietaer, 2002), which is one of the primary relational mechanisms that participants in this study identified as being helpful and engaging in their programs. SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM instructors applied Humanistic therapy principles throughout programming because it worked better than any other approach with the youth. Moreover, this study found that youth said their program is often the only time they converse freely and openly, which they experience as providing key therapeutic benefits. For example, ECP-PSI instructors facilitated daily "check-in" activities based on principles of Humanistic therapy (Miller et al., 2020a). This activity provides instructors with an opportunity to understand and develop relationships with youth by listening to and sharing life experiences.

During this activity, instructors check-in with youth and facilitate a support group process with the larger group. Based on youth feedback, the daily check-in was among the most useful and crucial components of SUHO, LYLL, and LUCM programs. First instructors and youth, form chairs in a circle so all participants feel included and are visible to each other. Before beginning, instructors remind youth to stay present during the activity, to refrain from having side conversations, and to give each other the respect that they would like to receive in return, which are group rules consistently suggested by the youth themselves.

During the check-in activity (Miller et al., 2020a), youth share a high (a positive experience/detail of the day, week, month) and a low (a negative experience/detail of the day, week, month). This provides the instructors and youth opportunities to form closer relationships through listening to and sharing life experiences with each other. The instructor can use the peer group as a support factor for the youth by empathetically "breaking down" each youth's "high" and "low" in the context of a support group. This process can also facilitate "fun" as many of the youth and instructors often made jokes and shared amusing stories. Importantly, instructors ask youth to choose a third question that all group members answer, in addition to the high and low. Sometimes, especially in the beginning phases of group formation, youth are reluctant to identify a question. It can be helpful for instructors to be patient, acknowledge the silence, or give example questions. Throughout this process, instructors have a responsibility to be genuinely concerned about and connecting with youth, treating them with warmth and acceptance (Payne, 2020).

Humanistic practice also aims to re-establish the focus of social work as empowering and liberating rather than problem-solving in character (Payne, 2020). This is supported by this study's findings, which suggest that using Humanistic therapy principles to facilitate youth critical social reflection and discussion using the same physical format as the daily "check-ins," allows youth to develop communication and leadership skills and develop a unique lens that illuminates structural oppression and group-based activist solutions to address these problems (Miller et al., 2020a).

These processes lead to an emphasis on equality between instructors and youth. The importance of this position is that many practice approaches emphasize individuality because it

allows a clear ethical focus on the factors and processes identified by youth as being effective and helpful. Individuality in psychological theories is instrumental: it is emphasized because it improves program and practice effectiveness. Humanistic practice, on the other hand, values individuality because it is fundamental to humanity (Payne, 2020).

Adding Dimensions to Existing OSPs

There are many providers that facilitate helpful OSPs for youth of color experiencing low income. This research builds upon what others are doing and adds another dimension. For example, one OSP that receives significant funding is Becoming a Man (BAM). The focus of BAM is to get youth to "slow down and reflect on what sort of response is most adaptive for the circumstance they are facing" (Heller et al., 2017, p.38). BAM creates safe spaces for youth to express themselves and helps young people learn about healthy masculinity. However, out of the 27 selected example program activities listed, only two are associated with building youths' social and relational skills as mechanisms of personal change, with the remaining 25 example activities focusing on interpersonal problem solving, impulse control, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy skill building (Heller et al., 2017). Considering youths' strong prioritization of building and practicing social and relational skills found by the current study, it is unsurprising then that BAM attrition rates exceeded 50% (Heller et al., 2017).

Other programs do have a stronger focus on relational skill building. For example, Opportunity Reboot is a program enhancement model and found that strong relationships with program staff and other adults were crucial to improving youth outcomes (Syvertsen et al., 2021). The Opportunity Reboot program model includes four key features: 1) positive mentoring

relationships, 2) individualized goal supports, 3) coordinated career pathway supports, and 4) impactful cross-sector partnerships (Syvertsen et al., 2021).

Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) is a theory-based youth violence prevention program meant to empower youth to be leaders and create community change as well as promote Positive Youth Development and reduce risk behavior (Messman et al., 2022). YES has a stronger emphasis on community change and developing leadership than on facilitating relationship building and working on youths' social skills (Messman et al., 2022). Leadership and community change are certainly important, but so is providing youth with opportunities to build positive relationships through a process that they say works for them best.

Becoming a Man, Operation Reboot, and YES encompass important elements for youth change but could be enhanced by this study's findings. For example, none of the three programs discussed above utilize a humanistic or street-based social work approach to individualized care for youth. Moreover, it appears as though all three of these programs were developed by adult researchers with little to no input from youth participants. Overall, this study's findings can contribute to existing OSP theory and aid in the engagement process, strengthening effects for youth that need it most.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Dominant theories of change in out-of-school programs, like Positive Youth Development, imply that youth have deficits and claim to promote more desirable traits in youth. This can be thought of being within deficit discourse, which refers to a pattern of practice that represents people in terms of deficits and inadequacies (Kohfeldt et al., 2016; Raygoza, 2016; Pica-Smith & Veloria, 2012). To counter deficit discourse, programs must be participatory and allow youth to construct their own identities and narratives through the methods that they say work best for them. In support, Article 12 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (Assembly, U.G., 1989) states that children have the human right to be heard, which impacts their right to attain self-determination (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).

Several program mechanisms of change from youths' peer-to-peer interviews emerged as crucial elements that help youth change in the subjective, individualized ways that they desire to. These mechanisms include,

(1) Having respectful, caring, and affirming relationships among peers and instructors;
(2) Youth finding themselves in the positive and accurate images that instructors sustain about them;
(3) Having fun, finding joy, and celebrating with peers and instructors;
(4) Nurturing youths' existing aspirational capital and accompanying them in future building;
(5) Incorporating an individualized, Street-Based Social Work model of care; and
(6) Integrating Humanistic therapy approaches into programming.

These are priorities that youth identified as being mechanisms of change. When social interventions are not matched to youths' priorities, they can aggravate feelings of dehumanization, alienation, and internalized oppression. Therefore, building a relevant practice model for engaging marginalized Black and Latine youth is foundationally crucial to improving their mental health and well-being and working toward liberation. These findings suggest that a participatory program model and having decision-making power within their program can help youth feel organized, knowledgeable, and empowered to address problems across life domains, and be more politically engaged in addressing hardships (Miller et al., 2020a; Miller et al., 2020b). This notion is well supported in the literature.

When young people define their own problems rather than discuss the ones given by adult authorities; when they design their own age-appropriate methods rather than uncritically accept adult ones; and when they develop knowledge for their own social action and community change rather than "knowledge for its own sake"—when they work in these ways, as Wang and Burris (1997) contend, it can raise their consciousness and their spirit and move them to action" (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003, p. 22).

A prevailing assumption is that interventions should result in measurable change in pathology-focused traits in marginalized youth. But youth perspectives emphasize the problem lies within society, manifesting as oppression, and they experience enhanced well-being by developing strategies of resistance and emancipation (Miller, 2021). These findings suggest:

- youth eschew pathology-based programs assuming they need help with violence engagement;
- find social justice-oriented programs free up their identities from internalized negativity;

- value a humanistic, trauma-focused support group model for developing strengths from mutual caring from peers and instructors;
- make use of programs to build collective-based identities that resist societal oppressions and sustain their dignity; and
- appreciate participatory program planning that enable them to constructively reveal and shift community problems resulting from profound structural violence (Miller et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020a; Miller et al., 2020b; Tyson et al., 2019b).

Interventions and programs designed for youth of color can pathologize and medicalize social injustices. Fine (2012) contends that the turn away from macro interests has caused science to "obsess empirically about the individual who is 'damaged,' 'at risk', or 'a potential terror'" (p. 422), which contributes to the erasure of the structural politics that shape people's everyday lives. For example, substance abuse and gang violence are framed as mental health problems, while structural influences of these problems, such as a lack of employment, underemployment, and low wages have a weaker impact on the formulation of the problem (Gambrill, 2018). Pathologizing and medicalizing social injustices is a form of epistemic violence, which refers to the dehumanization of marginalized groups through the exclusion of their ways of knowing and knowledge from research or programs intended to serve their lives (Glass & Newman, 2015). For example, Watts et al. (1999) writes,

> To be healthy… young men need a holistic approach that includes the personal, cultural, sociopolitical, and spiritual domains. Conventional interventions on coping, stress management, conflict resolution, and similar personal skill-building are necessary but not sufficient. An exclusive focus on individual psychosocial development neglects the skills for building collective consciousness and promoting social justice. When the two domains are combined, it is possible to see personal and community development as two sides of the same human development coin." (Watts et al., 1999, p. 256)

Approaching out-of-school program design with an emphasis on human rights, humanistic group therapy, participatory approaches and resistance-building processes could provide a theoretical framework that can contrast overly medicalized models and help social workers address the profession's core values. By doing this, youth may see themselves as less pathologized by the "intervention" and view concepts of personal "change" in the program as defined by themselves, made possible by incorporating participatory elements throughout program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Structural prescriptions made on the basis of age have constrained children's agency and silenced their voices by 'problematizing' or 'pathologizing' expressions of resistance or protest, while research on children's issues has commonly been associated with policymaking that has embedded children in families and schools (Mason & Hood, 2011). This move away from pathologizing interventions and pathologized definitions of change to youth-defined concepts could help researchers reevaluate how they conceptualize and measure benchmarks of change. As outlined previously, young people have the human right to be heard (Assembly, U.G., 1989). Therefore, research and practice with Black and Latine must be highly and genuinely participatory and must be tailored to how youth themselves define effective and helpful programming, including their definitions of personal change.

APPENDIX A

PEER-LED PROGRAM EVALUATION PROTOCOL

(This initial part is completed by the research team)
Date: _____

ID (of person being interviewed) _____
ID (of person interviewing) _____

Gender: ___male _____female ___other

Grade _____ Age_____

School_____

(The following part is the script for the teens)

TEENS WORK IN SAME-GENDER-IDENTIFIED PAIRS AND INTERVIEW EACH OTHER, USING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONAIRE. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU FIND UNCOMFORTABLE.

Please start every interview with:

My name is:

The site is:

The date is:

I am interviewing:

About the Program

1. How would you describe this program to someone?

2. Why did you decide to join this program?

3. Why did you decide to keep coming to it?

4. Can you talk some about your favorite part of the program?

5. Can you talk some about a part of the program you did not enjoy?

6. We would like feedback on each part of the program.

    a. What did you enjoy or think went?

    b. What would you change about the program?

7. Do you feel you learned anything from this program?
    - If yes, what?
    - If no, why do you think you didn't learn anything?

8. Did you learn anything about yourself (or your capabilities) from this program? Can you give examples?

9. Do you feel like you changed as a result of being in this program?
    a. If yes, how?
    b. If no, why not?

10. Give feedback to the instructors: Let them know what they are doing well and what they need to work on. (please do not use instructors' names)

11. Do you feel the instructors have helped you personally? If so, how?

12. Can you talk some about you and your peers?
    a. Did everyone work together?
    b. Were there ever any problems with the team?
    c. Have the issues been resolved? If so, how?

13. Did you feel like you were able to make decisions and contribute in the activities you participated in? Can you give some examples?

14. Did you have any opportunities to be a leader in the program? Talk some about what that was like for you.

15. On a scale of 1-10, ***where 1 means you were not interested at all*** and ***10 means you were always involved in the program***, how interested would you say you were in this program?

1_____5_____10

    a. Why did you give yourself that rating?
    b. Were there any challenges to you attending sessions? If so, what were they?

16. Why do you think that some youth did not attend sessions regularly or left the program?

17. Has this program influenced other parts of your life? If so, how?

18. As we plan for the next program, what would you like to do in the next program?

19. Do you have any ideas for project topics? What Other activities would you like to see? What would you like to learn?

APPENDIX B

CODEBOOK

Name	Description
01. How would you describe this program to someone	
Develop Responsibility, Autonomy, or Personal Growth	Youth mentions any concept related to self-determination (i.e., self-reliance, independence, etc.). Includes "staying out of trouble" Also includes mention of having a job, in the sense that having a job allows for more independence. (Ex: "you getting paid for it so you looking at your friends you know I got a job you know and I am only 14 of 15…"
Learn About Your Rights, Law, or Social Justice	Ex: "basically this program is like aimed to like help teenagers and like young adults learn their rights and like teach em about human civil and legal rights basically." Ex: "You learn about your rights like. Rights like when you get stopped by the police. Stuff like that."
Program Helps Future, Reach Career Goals or College	Includes describing program as getting you ready for the future Includes becoming "a better person" or "a better young adult" Ex: "It's a good program. It helps kids with their life and help them find a job…" Ex: "I would describe this program as a good- as a good experience for my future because it's a good spot at letting me know how I would want my future to be and what, what I'd be good working at."
Program Helps Learn or Practice Relational, Social, or Communication Skills	Includes discussion of working with kids or mentoring Includes learning about dating Ex: "we talk about love life issues and stuff that can happen to us in real life and how we go through It and stuff" Ex: "…getting to interact with different people that has different or agreeing ideas" Ex: "I would describe this program to someone as fun and social." (*Also code for "Fun") Ex: "I learned experiences where you get to be a role model to young kids."
Program is Fun	Youth must say the program is "fun" This code suggests a different level of maturity as compared to the code: Youth Stated the Program is Helpful, Interesting, or Inspiring, Learning Broadly. That code implies a different a degree of seriousness compared to "Program is Fun." Ex: "I would tell them that it is a fun program to be in." Ex: "I would describe this program as very creative and fun for young people."
Youth Describes Feelings of Belongingness, Safety	Doesn't have to say the word belongingness explicitly Excludes learning relationship skills (ex: "we talk about love life issues and stuff that can happen to us in real life and how we go through it" Ex: "feel like you are a part of something" Ex: "I would describe it as a program that's like open and it's like… it's like I don't know it's hard to describe it but it's like it's an interesting

	program and it's like you can…you can speak your mind like it's very open like everything stays in the group."
Youth Stated the Program is Personally Helpful, Broadly Interesting, or Inspiring	Includes "learning" broadly—ex: "a good learning experience", "program is informative" Also includes broad, positive answers, like "amazing" Ex: "I would describe this program as very informative. I feel it can be very useful for people that are not informed about society." Ex: "I would describe this program as a great learning experience because I personally learned a lot from the program."
02. Why did you decide to join this program	
Interested in Having New Experiences or Learning New Material	Includes youth stating they were interested in learning generally but didn't state anything specific. Excludes youth wanting to learn about others. Ex: "I read and heard good things about it" Ex: "I decided to join this program truthfully because I just wanted something to do. But after coming for a days and becoming engaged with what was going on, it caught my attention. I have learned new stuff."
Learn About Self, Build Personal Skills	Ex: "Because I really like it and it would be good experience and I could learn good leadership skills." Ex: "To learn about new things and new people and most importantly learn about myself in the process"—learn about new things and people coded as social, relational code
Needed or Wanted Money, Job	Excludes references to future, building resume, to get job experience. Use future code for these references. Ex: "Um to be honest the main reason I decided to join this program was because I needed money" Ex: "I decided to join into this program because I wanted to learn more about my rights and it paid and I had nothing to do over the summer." (*Also code as Wants to Learn About Rights or Social Justice)
Parent or Other Adult Enrolled or Suggested Youth in Program	Ex: "I decided to join this program because, honestly, my mom put me in because my little brother was going in. And she said, uh, she wanted me to job, or wanted me to do something for the summer. So I said I'll come to this program and see what it's all about."
Program Content Helpful for Future Goals	Ex: "I decided to join this program because I wanted to be a lawyer" Ex: "Yes cause you learn about different colleges" Ex: "I felt it would be a great opportunity to put on my resume"
Program Had Open Spots, Availability	Ex: "it was the last one on the list that was open."
Thought Program Would be Fun	Ex: "Well when I first thought of this program I was just coming to the center just to be coming to the center but then they was having a in…they was interviewing people for the program and then they was describing like all the things that they were going to be doing and just it sounded real fun and like it

	sounded fun and it sounded like we would learn a lot from being in the program and I did."
Wants to Learn About Human Rights, Law, or Social Justice, Help Community, Make Social Change	Ex: "I wanted to learn more about political and human rights and things of such" Ex: "at the same time I also wanted to learn more about my own rights and how I could um use them and how they could be used against me and stuff like that."
Youth Had Been in an After School Matters Program Previously	Ex: "I decided to join this program because I had joined another After School Matters program the last summer."
Youth Joined Program For Relational or Social Reasons, Including Mentoring and Relating to Instructors	Includes any reference to youth wanting to learn about others, liking children, or wanting to relate to others, including instructors. Includes wanting to help others Also includes being referred to program by a friend or peer Ex: "I decided to join this program to learn more about what different people like to do in their life and how they feel." Ex: "To meet new people and make money." (*Also code as Needed Money).
Youth Wanted to Stay Out of Trouble, Something to do After School or Summer	Ex: "It kept me out of trouble." Ex: "Well I don't want to be stuck in the house all summer so I decided I needed to do something"
03. Why did you decide to keep coming	
Engaging Discussions	Mention of being interested in discussions that occur in the program Includes youth stating they liked hearing others' opinions Ex: "we always had a discussion that was really good, and we talked about the current, um, and older, like, topics and stuff, like, um … different – what is it? Like, different, um, events that happened. Like, such as segregation and stuff." Ex: "And it was very interesting hearing everyone's opinion on certain topics that we covered throughout the program."
Learned New, Helpful, Useful, Interesting Information	Including about rights and laws. Includes youth saying the program was interesting broadly. Also includes youth saying that the program offerings match what they want to receive. Ex: "Because it got more interesting, and I was learning that I didn't even know." Ex: "decided to keep coming to the program because I felt like it was helping me to discover that I did not know about and learn about human right and the law."
Program Aligned with Career or College Goals, Benefiting Future	Ex: "Because I knew that it would help me in the future with my career."

Program is Fun or Liked the Program	Includes youth saying broadly that the program was fun or that they liked it.
Social or Relational Reasons, Including Mentoring	Ex: “Um I decided to keep coming because I met a lot of nice people here. I made a lot of friends” Ex: “to help out the children.”
Viewed Program as a Job	Ex: “Because we were getting paid.”
Wanted Responsibility, Autonomy	Includes “I’m not the type of person that quits” Includes building leadership skills Ex: “I decided to keep coming to the program because it was something that i could do after school. Something that I could be responsible for and have to go to.” Ex: “Because I really like it and it would be good experience and I could learn good leadership skills.” Ex: “I think that it’s a great experience to learn and writing this book really taught me something about how diligent and how I can tolerate work…”
Youth Kept Coming to Get Basic Needs Met	Can include food, safety, warm or cool environment, etc. Includes feeling emotionally and physically safe Ex: “Go somewhere to keep me warm and have fun.” Ex: “I felt like before I had a open safe space to come to to talk about things and learn new things.”
Youth Stated They Had Been in the Program Previously	Ex: “I decided to keep coming to this program is because this is my second semester and last semester I enjoyed it and I got a big—I got a big input out of it and I decided I wanted to keep on coming.”
04. Can you talk some about your favorite part of the program	
“Having Fun”	Ex: “My favorite part of the program is when we get to go out on trips and really have fun.” (Also code as Field Trips)
Engaging Discussions	Must mention or refer to discussions, talking, etc. Can mention learning but must also mention discussions. Excludes “check-in’s” Ex: “My favorite part of the program is when we sit around and talk about our rights and what we’ve learned” Ex: “Oh. Um, my favorite part of the program had to be the discussions because we always, like … It was always a new topic”
Feeling Heard, Respected Cared For, Opportunity to Share Feelings, “Check-in's”	Includes mention of “high’s and low’s” and Includes “check-in’s” Excludes “Discussions” (which focused on content/curriculum) Ex: “no matter what topic we talked about, everybody voiced their opinions and everybody opinions was heard” Ex: “And, like, people are, like, telling me – like, giving me encouragement to stay doing what I love doing” Ex: “My favorite part of the program could be highs and lows”
Field Trips	Includes references to leaving the program setting and “seeing new things”

Giving Back to the Community	Ex: “My favorite part of the program is when we go give back to the community.”
Guest Speakers	
Instructors	Ex: “the instructors, Angel & Jeff.”
Learning New Material or Working on Curriculum	This code is for mention of learning broadly—enjoying learning, liked learning, etc. Also includes mention of liking the program curriculum or specific pieces of curriculum. Does not include having discussions—but if youth mentioned learning explicitly, apply this code too.
Relationships Made with Others, Including Mentoring	Includes helping others Excludes “check-in’s” Ex: “My favorite part would have to be the open discussions and mentoring the kids.” (*Also code as Engaging discussions”) Ex: “my favorite part of the program is that some of us are so close.”
Working on Future, Career or Educational Goals or Skills	Includes working on homework or schoolwork Ex: “It was hard getting it ready. But, when it was time to present, I loved it” Ex: “college tours, they be starting me early”
05. Can you talk some about a part of the program you did not enjoy	
Did Not Enjoy Doing Research, Surveys	Ex: “The part of the program I didn’t enjoy really was learning about the research program.” Ex: “The interviews. I really didn’t like the interviews cuz too many pressures on the questions. [so, you don’t like this interview?] Not like that. It’s OK [Laughs]”
Problems with Pay	
Problems with Physical Environment	Includes references to setting being too cold, too hot, safety concerns, etc. Ex: “It can get too hot in the class room” Ex: “Going to feed the homeless because it was cold outside. If it was warm than yeah. Doing it is a good thing.”
Program Schedule Was Inconvenient	Ex: “that we had to come on Saturdays”
Activity Was Boring, Disappointing, Unstructured	Includes too Much Writing or Talking, Not Enough Activities Includes being sidetracked and unstructured Ex: “a lot of writing” Ex: “I didn’t enjoy that I watched really long videos or like we watch a really like short video and then we just kept watching videos and videos instead of like learning about something else. It got annoying.”
Wanted More Positive Interactions and Experiences with Peers	Ex: “When the children got out of hand.” Ex: “when everybody was talking, trying to get their point across.”

Yoga or Meditation	Ex: “I did not enjoy the meditations.” Ex: “When we sit down and do breathing exercises. I can breath and I don’t need to do breathing exercises.”
Youth Stated They Enjoyed Everything	Ex: “I mean, honestly, there isn’t a part that I didn’t enjoy about the program. Uh, no, not at – I enjoyed all of it. I enjoyed everything.” Ex: “There wasn’t nothing I didn’t enjoy.”
Youth Wanted More Choice, Autonomy	This refers to any instance when youth say they didn’t enjoy an activity because they were told or asked to do something without being able to choose (i.e. “put me in these groups I didn’t want to be in”) Ex: “when they put me in these groups I didn’t want to be in.”
Youth Wanted More Guest Speakers	Includes wanting to hear from others that have similar life experiences. Ex: “One part of the program that I really didn’t enjoy was the fact that we didn’t have like lots of guest speakers come in like I think I really--I would have really enjoyed that if we had more people come in and talk to us instead of like basically us just talking. I think that when you have somebody who’s been through similar things as you it kind of impacts you more as you grow up.”
06. What did you enjoy or think went well	
Enjoyed Creating Projects, Working on Curriculum	Ex: “What I enjoyed was … Huh. What I enjoyed was definitely the projects and, uh, creating something new”
Going on Field Trips	Mention of field trips, going on trips
Guest Speakers	Refers to any instance of youth stating they want more guest speakers
Having Discussions	Ex: “I think it went well. Everyone came and we all discussed how we felt about racism and issues that we are having.” Ex: “I think the conversations we had went well.”
Having Opportunity for Leadership and Having Autonomy in Program	Ex: “What I enjoy most about this program was being the leader.” Ex: “I enjoyed that we have freedom…”
Learning and Exposure to New Ideas	Ex: “Also – also I, uh, just like how this year, how it was so – different ideas was going by left and right and it was just a fun experience.
Mention of Fun Activities	Ex: “Also – also I, uh, just like how this year, how it was so – different ideas was going by left and right and it was just a fun experience.” Ex: “the games portion went well.”
Opportunity to Relate to or Help Others, Including Mentoring	This code includes references to mentoring and being a mentor. Includes “I enjoyed talking to them and getting to know the kids”—this refers to mentoring implicitly Ex: “I liked the tutoring. I felt I helped the kids and they understood how I broke it down to them” Ex: “When we did homework and

	when they came to us to talk about their problems and what happened during that day." Ex: "I enjoyed the way that we worked together and the way we communicated."
Youth Broadly Said Program Went Well, Includes Being Well Organized	This code is for when say the program went well or was good but doesn't say anything more specific. Ex: "I think it went well. It was very organized and professional."
07. What would you change about the program	LYLL interview has an item "Give one way for this program to be improved"—code those answers under this question
Better Organization, More Structure	Ex: "um about how many kids in one class." Ex: "the disorganization"
Change Curriculum or Activities	This code is for when youth say they want to do different activities or learn about different topics broadly. Ex: "I would change the curriculum of what we do." Ex: "Make it more interesting. [How?] Like, by doing different things, every year we do the same stuff – health fair, safety fair – I understand the new people need to do it, but it's the same stuff."
Help Solving Transportation or Technology Challenges	Ex: "Location because during this summer the program was moved and dealing with transportation."
Improve Problems Related to Pay	Ex: "to be improved, I would say more pay rate and the days that we come."
Longer Breaks	Ex: "By giving us longer breaks"
More Field Trips	Ex: "Maybe more field trips to places, but that's it" Ex: "better field trips"
More Guest Speakers	Ex: "… have more people to come in and talk."
Scheduling Issues, Including Wanting More Time in Program	Including more time with friends, mentees, or more time in program overall. Includes broad mention of "the days" or "the schedule" Ex: "I would change the fact that the program was too short." Ex: "more days", "the days"
Youth Does Not Like Yoga or Meditation	Ex: "I would change the meditation part. I don't like that."
Youth Stated They Would Not Change Anything	Ex: "I wouldn't really change anything about the program. Like, I wouldn't change anything."
Youth Wants More Food	Ex: "We need food. F-O-O-D. And, I'm not talking about no graham crackers and Snapple. I'm talking about real food."

Youth Wants More Fun, 'Excitement'	Apply this code for when youth say they want to liven things up, or wants more excitement Also includes youth saying they want more activities Also includes youth wanting creative alternatives to activities or curriculum Ex: "Probably add more activities. It's very good when you get more people involved." Ex: "The program would be much better if more liven up, what I mean by that, more energy, excitement, creativity, things like that, etc."
Youth Wants More Positive Interactions with Peers or Other Youth in Program, Including Wanting Others to 'Act Better'	Ex: "One way I think the program could be improved is having more serious people in a group… people that want to be here and not people just want to be here for one reason and everybody's taking the program more serious."
Youth Wants More Say in Program (More Participatory)	Ex: "I think it could be improved by more stuff that the workers would like to do and the kids and… or as teenagers and I think it should be youth led because I think don't nobody know the youth better than the youth so I think it can be better for them."
08. Do you feel you learned anything from this program	If yes, what? If no, why do you think you didn't learn anything?
Learned Leadership Skills	Ex: "I think I learned how to be a controlled and better leader in this program."
Learned More About Health	Ex: "Yea I learned more about HIV, diseases and what the program was really about." Ex: "Yes. I learned a lot about my health and safety…the safety fair. Like how smoking affects your lungs. They get all black."
Learned More About Rights, Laws, Community, and Social Justice	Includes current events, staying informed Ex: "Uh, I feel that I learned … Oh, I learned a lot more about my human rights as a person. And even being as a young adult, that even we still have human rights that we can use and, you know, we have to … Well we can try to get people to understand that we have those rights as well, even in our youth." Ex: "Yes. I learned tips about when you get pulled over by the police. I learned about different types of racism."
Learned Relational or Communication Skills	Includes learning how to work with kids and patience. Includes broad references to learning from others Ex: "Yes I learned something I learned how to… how to… how to be patient with children and more about like… like the diseases and stuff like that." Ex: "Yes, I learned that I'm a good public speaker; I learned that I'm great with kids; I'm smart, intelligent, noble" Ex: "I think I learned from this program, I think I learned from the kids, they just, you learn something from the kids' everyday so"
Learned to be Responsible, Maturity,	Including mentions of being more responsible and being a role model Ex: "I have learned a lot I've learned what to do in a bad situation" Ex: "Yes I feel I

How to Deal with Adversity, Stay Out of Trouble	learned more things from this program because I got taught more about healthy relationship and how to take responsibilities into my own actions and to help—to be a good role model for our little ones."
Learned Academic or Work Skills, Future Oriented	Including building resumes, how to apply to college, etc. Includes learning about technology: (i.e. "I learned how to use a lot of apps that we had to use for the program") Ex: "I learned to have fun and stay in school and stay out of bad things." Ex: "Yes. I learned about different colleges"
Youth References Having Learned Broadly	This codes refers to when youth say they liked learning in the program or felt like they learned better in the program compared to school because it was by choice, not by force. (Ex: "I felt like I had a choice to learn about it which made me feel intrigued. Not by force but by choice") Ex: "Yes. I learned a lot. I know that we are supposed to learn this in about human rights in school, but I really did not pay attention in my classes. I feel like I had a choice to learn about it…not by force but by choice
09. Did you learn anything about yourself (or your capabilities) from this program?	Can you give examples?
Developed Positive Work or Academic Habits or Skills	Ex: "I learned that I was able to sit in a chair for a long time after I've been at school." Ex: "I learned to be a good worker"
Learned About or Gained Confidence in a Personal Interest or Skill	Excludes learning or gaining confidence in communication abilities Ex: "Um, I learned that, like, usually – usually with drawing I don't really draw, uh – Like, I usually draw people, or I draw, like, in a certain style or way. I didn't really think I could draw, like, nature or, like, draw pretty good, detailed maps and comics and stuff like that. So I didn't really know I could do that."
Learned Communication and Relational Skills	Includes learning how to communicate feelings to others Includes leadership references Includes patience Ex: "Um … oh, okay. I start talking to groups of people that I didn't know more. Because when I first came to the program, I didn't know anybody. And I didn't - I don't usually, uh, talk to people, like, I don't know. But I got more open with it with the highs and lows and the discussions in the morning that helped me get to know people." Ex: "I learned how to speak out in the open."
Learned that Opportunities and Goals are Attainable	Ex: "Yeah, I learned that there's opportunities and I should take them."
Youth Developed Sense of Responsibility or Agency	Ex: "I learned that even though I am a minority, I can still take charge and stand up to people." Ex: "One thing I learned about myself is to—to learn how

	to take responsibilities into my own action and to own up to most things that I do and… that's it."
Youth Stated They Already Know About Themselves, or Did Not Learn About Themselves	This refers to instances when youth say they did not learn anything about themselves because they already know about themselves. Ex: "No. Everything about myself I know already." Ex: "o, baby, I been knew about myself. I didn't learn nothing about myself. They made me learn about myself in the last program."
10. Do you feel like you changed as a result of being in this program?	If yes, how? If no, why not?
Building Overall Happiness, Sense That They Are Cared For, Positive Outlook on Life	
Changed Negative Behaviors	Ex: "Yes because I changed about my behavior…"
Developed Empathy and Compassion, Change How Relates to Others	Includes references to learning how to work with kids. Ex: "Yes because I changed about my behavior, and do things to other people." Ex: "Yes, because at first I didn't know how to work with kids "
Gained Job Experience	Gaining job experience may be related to feeling like they are "growing up" or becoming adults Ex: "Yes I have grown because before I cam here I did not have job experience but now I have a whole lot"
Gained Knowledge or Interest in College and Education	Ex: "Yes, because at first…I didn't know anything about colleges or interviews"
No Change, Including Implication That Did Not Need to Change	Youth says they did not change because there wasn't necessarily a need to change. They might highlight existing strengths, but th overall sentiment is that change was not necessary. Ex: "No because I consider myself a good leader and most people feel that way too."
11. Give feedback to the instructors	Let them know what they are doing well and what they need to work on. (please do not use instructors' names)
Instructor 'Too Nice' or 'Too Quiet', Not Strict or Serious Enough	This code includes youth saying instructors aren't strict enough or other youth take advantage
Instructor Broadly Helpful, Helped Youth Learn, Broad Positive	Includes instances when youth say they "learned a lot" from instructors Also includes youth saying the liked an instructor. Ex: "They don't need to work on anything. They are focusing and listening to the speaker well." Ex: "She do a good job"

Comment About Instructor Effectiveness	
Instructors Need to be More Understanding	Includes youth stating instructors need to be calmer, more collected, more level Ex: “Well I think some instructors need to learn how to cope with us. We are still teenagers, growing, and developing. They have to understand that we are still just kids.”
Instructors Taking Up Too Much Space or Time	Instructors Should Talk Less or Instructors should let youth speak more. Instructors taking up too much space or time. Ex: “Um, I think one of the instructors should work on – should work on their trying to talk less and let more of the people talk.”
References Instructor Practicing Accompaniment or Street Based Social Work	Includes references to youth believing instructors care deeply for them. This implies a different degree of care, understanding, and services from instructor. Ex: “You can talk to them about anything if you need to. They listen to everything that you tell them. You can text them if you need to. Like, if need be, you can text them. Uh, and they just not about work. Like, they tell you to talk to them if you need anything personal or stuff like that, and I like that. They real helpful”
Youth Describes Need for More Support or Help for Self or Others, Includes Wanting More Effort or Presence from Instructor	Ex: “They need to work on helping everybody. Some people feel down and upset sometimes.”
Youth Makes a Specific Programmatic Suggestion	Ex: “I think they need to have more activities that will help people like role playing of real life scenarios”
12. Do you feel the instructors have helped you personally	
Helped Improve Youth's Relationships, Communication or Leadership Skills	Includes having more patience, “opening up,” and express themselves This includes references to instructors helping with Love Your Love Life Ex: “I think they helped me personally. Most likely just to open up. Like, talking because they come and start conversations and I don’t do that. And they, like, kind of come over like “yeah, what you doing?” So yeah, they help start conversations”
Instructor Flexibility Helped Youth Engage in Program	Ex: “The instructors helped me personally. When I was late, they said I could come anyway. I like this program. I am thinking about coming next year too.”

Instructor Helped Keep Youth Out of Trouble or Helped Be More Responsible, Prepare for the Real World	Ex: “Yes, the instructors helped me in many ways. School-wise, work-wise, and for the streets, cuz they kept me from outside doing negative things. They kept me on track, basically.”
Received Encouragement Regarding Strengths	Ex: “Also, uh, one of the instructors put my name out there that I am – that I’m capable of drawing, that I’m capable of doing stuff extra”
Received Help With Future, Academic or Career Mentoring From Instructor, Including Learning About Rights	Includes mention of instructor helping youth learn about their rights Includes instructor helping with job related skills like being on time. Ex: “Yes. The instructors that are in the program will help you with your classwork if you need it, and they will help you with understanding stuff that you don’t know.” Ex: “Yes. Some of the human rights I did not know the meaning of them.”
References to Instructor Practicing Accompaniment or Street Based Social Work	-This includes youth stating an instructor “was always there for them,” implying a deeper presence. -This code also includes instructors helping youth meet basic needs (i.e. food, water, heat/air, etc.) -Includes youth saying instructor made them feel safe. -Includes when Youth Says Broadly that Instructors Helped Them Personally or Outside of Program Ex: “Yes. Sometimes I am hungry, and they make sure that I get something to eat.” Ex: “Outside of the program, yes they have helped me personally.”
Youth Broadly Says Instructors Helped Them	This code is for when youth answer “yes” or any variation of yes without more explanation. This implies a lesser degree of presence compared to the Accompaniment and Street Based Social Work code. Ex: “Yes I do think the instructors helped me.”
Youth Feels as Though Instructors Did Not Help Them Personally	Includes “not needing help” and “not having problems Ex: “I don’t really have any problems so there’s nothing they can really help me on.” Ex: “no”
13. Can you talk some about you and your peers	Did everyone work together? Were there ever any problems with the team? Have the issues been resolved? If so, how?
Overall Positive Experience With Peers, Including Overcoming Problems	Includes working well together Can include having some broad problems but the overall sentiment of the response is positive Ex: “Uh, yeah. My peers, everybody, - we all worked together. We all had discussions all the time. It wasn’t really, like, nothing confusing.” Ex: “Yes, I feel we did a great job. We worked together. We’re a great team. There were little problems, but we got over them.”
Youth Describes Peers Disengaging From Program or Group, Without Resolution	Overall, the youth describes a negative experience with peers. They can mention some positive elements but the overall sentiment must be negative, mixed, unsure, etc.—not clearly positive. Ex: “I feel I guess we worked

	together at times but at some points I feel like we needed to learn the difference between when it's play time and when it's time to be serious"
14. Did you feel like you were able to make decisions and contributed in the activities you participated in	Can you give some examples? *On some LYLL interviews, there is a question, "what skills did you contribute to the program?"—code those answers under this question.
Youth Describes How They Mentored Peers	Ex: "From me being older I think I gave people a lot of advice with things such as the ACT, like how do deal with your teachers and why you need to do this for school and stuff like that." Ex: "Yeah, I feel I'm a great leader. I gave a lot of information to my coworkers."
Youth Describes Integrating Peers' Ideas With Their Own	Youth Discusses Building and Integrating Ideas and Feedback with Peers Ex: "Yes I gave them a piece of information that I learned from my background history to contribute to theirs."
Youth Describes Their Contributions and Decisions About Program, Including References to Participatory Nature of Program	This code includes when youth refer to participatory processes, like having input in what they did in the program. This code is also for general statements—youth may just answer "yes" or "yes, I felt like I made decisions and contributed. Ex: "Oh yes. I feel like I was able to make decisions because we were asked what we wanted to do and how we feel about something that they told us to do. And I feel like I contributed to the activities that I participated in. I feel like I was a good sportsmanship"
15. Did you have any opportunities to be a leader in the program	Talk some about what that was like for you.
Youth Discusses Exhibiting or Building Own Leadership Skills	This code is for when youth mentions working on their leadership skills Includes youth answering "yes" broadly Ex: "Yes. In the starting circle and passing things out." Ex: "We all got a chance to be leaders. It felt good to tell people how to start off their conversation."
Youth Discusses Having Choice and Autonomy	Specifically mentions having choice Ex: "Uh, yeah. During some of the games and some of the activities, they allow us to choose something that we want to do. And they also allow us to go about it how we want."
Youth Said They Did Not Have Leadership Opportunities or Had Them but Did Not Take Advantage	Includes not having opportunities because it "was an equal group" Ex: "Like a major leader, no I don't think so"

16. Why did you give yourself that rating	On a scale of 1-10, where 1 means you were not interested at all and 10 means you were always involved in the program, how interested would you say you were in this program?
Hunger, Lack of Basic Needs, or Personal Issues Limited Engagement	Use this code for when youth say lack of basic needs (i.e. food, water, sleep) limited engagement in anyway. Do not also use another code. Ex: “I am really engaged in the program but sometimes I am tired. Sometimes I am hungry so I don’t really pay as much attention as I should.”
Mostly Engaged—Got Off Track Sometimes, But Engaged Most of the Time	Engaged Some Days, Some Days Disengaged, Got Off Track Sometimes But Got Back On Track Includes interest in some things and not interested in some other things Ex: “I was involved but some days I wasn’t involved as I could have been” Ex: “I think a 8 and the reason why—the reason why I gave myself this rating is because I think I was more interested in…in having big group discussions in the program and things like that and trying my best to make it here and be here”
No Mention of Being Engaged—'Did Not Want to be Bothered Sometimes'	Excludes references to being engaged most days but some days was not—this code is for when youth do not mention being engaged at all Ex: “I be sleepy and sometimes I don’t want to talk. You all make me talk when I don’t want to talk.” Ex: “Sometimes I did not feel like being bothered with people. Every day you see the same faces.”
Youth Said They Fully Engaged in Program or Feels Like Put Forth Effort During Activities	Code when youth feel as though they engaged fully, with no hesitation or times when they did not engage. Ex: “9 because I’m always here when I can be here and I enjoyed it.” Ex: “Because I think that I was involved in all the activities that we participated in.”
17. Were there any challenges to you attending sessions	On a scale of 1-10, where 1 means you were not interested at all and 10 means you were always involved in the program, how interested would you say you were in this program?
Challenges Associated with Transportation or Technology Logistics	Ex: “There was a challenge coming to the sessions sometimes because I don’t live around here, and the bus would be late. I still came because I like the program”
Challenges Related to Feeling Comfortable Communicating with Others	Ex: “Um, my main challenges were just in the beginning. Learning to communicate with people and not shut down on everybody.”
Youth Committed to Attending, Even With General Challenges	This includes youth saying “I wanted to come” despite challenges Ex: “I didn’t really skip a lot of days because I really liked this program.” Ex: “There was a challenge coming to the sessions sometimes because I don’t live around here, and the bus would be late. I still came because I like the program”

Youth Had Other Commitments, Including Sports and Clubs	Ex: “Because I always had practice.”
18. Why do you think that some youth did not attend sessions regularly or left the program	
'Busy Work'	This code includes references to busy work or work done within the program in which youth may not see the point or how it relates to program goals. Ex: “The busy work. Like okay I understand like we gotta do the work to understand but I think we should just like you know give feedback instead of written work.”
'Some of the Kids be into Bad Stuff'	This code refers to youth suggesting their peers engage in destructive behaviors like smoking, drinking, violence, etc. Ex: “I don’t know. Some of them smoke, drink, they be bad and stuff.”
'Wasn't Feeling It' or Not Committed	This includes mentions of being too tired or being ‘lazy’ or some youth thinking the program is boring or losing interest Ex: “Or probably it just wasn’t feeling it one day. They was tired or something like that and they just didn’t feel like coming regularly.” Ex: “I think some people had poor attendance at the program because they were uninterested in being here or they had other outside activities that they had to fulfill that was more important than this program at that time.”
Hunger	Ex: “But, people be having the same problem, they want to go home, and people be hungry.”
Issues with Instructor	Ex: “Some people did not attend the program a lot because maybe they did not like the instructor.”
Issues with Peers	Ex: “Some people didn’t like their peers”
Issues with Schedule, Including Program on Weekends	Ex: “Probably Saturday and stuff like that.”
Peers Did Not Give Program Enough Time or Disengaged Too Early	Ex: “I feel like they did not give it enough time to see what it was actually about.”
Personal Reasons, Unrelated to This Program	Ex: “Uh, some people might leave because of personal reasons. And not really – I don’t think it really had anything to do with the program to be specific. But most likely probably personal reasons and other, um, activities and programs that they do outside of this one”

Problems Related to Pay or Stipend	Ex: “Sometimes it took a long time to get paid at the normal time.” Ex: “the stipend”
Transportation or Technology Issues	Ex: “Probably transportation.” Ex: “busses be running slow”
19. Has this program influenced other parts of your life	If so, how?
Helped with Future, Academics, Job or Career, or 'Get Ready for the Real World', Including Financial Flexibility	Helped Youth Think About or Choose Academic or Career Path, Financial flexibility or freedom Ex: “Yes. It helped me to know exactly what it is that I wanna go to school in. It helped me focus on the decision of me wanting to go to law school. It helped me open up my eyes and realize that is something that I might wanna do forever. So, yeah.”
Helped with Leadership or Decision-Making	Includes decision making of any kind outside of program Ex: “I was able to make decisions about sex and using protection” Ex: “yes it helped me better with decision making”
Increased Knowledge of Rights, Laws, Community, Feeling Empowered	Ex: “Yes. The program has influenced other parts of my life because I get to know about other races and what police officers think about when they see black people in public. This could explain some family losses and why the hate with blacks happen. Ex: “It has influenced other parts of my life. Now, I am walking through the world knowing that I actually have the right to do this, and that people don’t have the right to do this towards me.”
Program Changed Youth's Perspective, 'Be a Better Person,' Including Compassion and Empathy for Others	Also includes learning how to relate to others more effectively, including friends, family, etc. Ex: "Um, I feel like this program influenced … how I – how I – see things now. It takes me – makes me take a step back to look back to see, like, how other people are doing instead of being in my own world and seeing it only through my perspective, and like, reacting how I usually react. Cause usually I react without caution. And now, I feel like I see things a little bit differently…”
Program Helped Youth with Relationships, Communicate Better	Ex: “Yes it has influenced me because once upon a time I was in a unhealthy relationship and I didn’t know the real definition of being in a healthy relationship and now I made a big change with my relationship decisions.”
Youth Answers No	Ex: “no” Includes any form of no
Youth Broadly Says Program Influenced Them Outside of Program	Ex: “You could say that.” Ex: “yes” Ex: “um yea about the stuff the guest speakers were talking about”

25. As we plan for the next program, what would you like to do in the next program	Including: 1. what would you want to learn in future programs, 2. do you have any ideas for project topics?, and 3. what Other activities would you like to see?
Learn More About How to Have Healthy Relationships	Ex: "During the summer program I think I would I would still want to stick with learning a little bit more about Love Your Love Life because it's-it's an interesting program to me and it made me understand more and it affects my future a lot about me growing up a bit into different relationships and knowing more about them."
More Activities or Time with Peers, or Mentees, Social and Relationship Focused	Includes any mention of wanting more time or more activities with their mentee or "the kids" Ex: "I would like to do more with the kids."
More Creative or Artistic Work	Ex: "Um, let's see … What would I'd like to do next program … Uh, I don't know. I wanna – I still wanna do some more creative, artistic stuff."
More Discussion Opportunities	Ex: "I would like to … I would like to keep the discussions going"
More Games and Fun, Including More Time Outside	Including mention of more field trips Ex: "I wanna see us do more games, more interacting stuff so everybody's involved instead of just a select few" Ex: "I would add games"
More Time to Work on School Work	Ex: "I would like to have more time to do homework and get help with school work. By us coming here right after school and then getting home at around 6pm that is not enough time to get everything done."
Youth Wants Activities That Benefit Life and Future	Includes references to "goal activities" or reaching goals Ex: "And what would I like to learn? I would like to learn … I honestly don't know. Things that would help benefit my life and my future."
Youth Wants More Activism or Service Based Activities, Help the Community	Includes wanting to work more with kids Ex: "I'm tired of doing documentary. We need to step up and actually help the community. Like step it up and buy gifts for the community. Like these kids don't have no coats, shoes, no nothing. We need to step it up. Jeff and them need to ask for another grant and we need to get this money, man!"
Youth Wants More Field Trips	Ex: "Trips with the kids. I'd like to go on trips with the kids, get more involved with the kids. I would like to do more activities with the children [like what would you like to do?] In the summertime, we could go to the pool, to the park"
Youth Wants More Time in Program	Ex: "I think that program should run longer and longer breaks. That's it." Ex: "um I say to start earlier"

Youth Wants to Learn More About Rights, Laws, or Social Issues	Ex: "More role playing and games based on society and more things to help us learn about the outside world before we get out there. Ex: "I'd like to learn more stuff about real situations that's happening in the world. Not just stuff we have to learn about… stuff we need to know."
Youth Wants to Learn New, Different Material	This code refers to youth saying they want to learn about new topics. Includes youth saying generally, something new, and youth saying specifically "want to learn about something other than human rights" (new, different material) Ex: "I would like to learn about something other than human rights." Ex: " I would like to move on from the teen dating part because we've been doing it for some years now. I would like to start a different project."
26. To What Degree Does the Respondent Prioritize Connections with Others	To what degree does this respondent prioritize connections with peers, instructors, or mentees as the primary significance of the program for them? *Scale - 1-5 (1 being the lowest, 5 is the highest) This is a holistic code with no specific question to focus on—rather, rate the overall interview based on your sense of how the youth prioritizes connections with others in the program.
1—Lowest Prioritization, No Mention of Connections	1: The respondent does not prioritize or mention any connections with others.
2—Some Discussion of Connections with Others	2: This code is for when mention or discuss connections with others in the program but there is not a strong focus or prioritization in terms of what is important about the program to them.
3—Moderate Degree of Prioritization	3: This code is for when youth discuss connections with others in program and describes those connections as important but not necessarily as the most important aspect of the program.
4—Youth Values and Prioritizes Connections	4: This code is for when youth clearly say or show that they value and prioritize connections with others in the program. Use this code for when this theme is present in some but not most/all of the youth's responses.
5—Youth Prioritizes Connections with Others Above Any Other Program Element	5: This code is for when youths show or say that the connections with others in the program is the most important element to them. If youth discuss connections with others in several questions and if you get the sense that they attend or keep coming to the program because of the connections with others in the program, use this code.

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VITA

Kevin Michael Miller began his academic career at Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois in 2010. He transferred to Dominican University in 2012 and graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminology in 2014. Subsequently, Dr. Miller was accepted to pursue a Master of Arts in Sociology from Loyola University Chicago and graduated in 2016.

During the pursuit of his first master's degree, Dr. Miller began working at the multidisciplinary Risk and Resilience lab at Loyola University Chicago by serving as a research coordinator in the Englewood and North Lawndale neighborhoods of Chicago. Shortly after, he was appointed Director of the Empowering Counseling Program Participatory Science Initiative (ECP-PSI), where he oversaw the development, implementation, and evaluation of human rights-based out-of-school youth programs on Chicago's south and west sides. It was during these experiences that Dr. Miller discovered that he wanted to be a social work professor and researcher and began the Master of Social Work (MSW) program at the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice at the University of Chicago in 2018.

Halfway through the MSW program at the University of Chicago, Dr. Miller was accepted and transferred to Loyola University Chicago's School of Social Work to earn his Ph.D. and to complete the final year of his MSW. In 2022, a year before completing his Ph.D., Dr. Miller was appointed as an assistant professor at Dominican University's School of Social Work.

Dr. Miller's research aims to advance the scientific foundations for highly participatory, human rights-oriented social work practice with severely oppressed children of color and their communities. More specifically, Dr. Miller's research focuses broadly on 1) developing culturally relevant service models, especially in out-of-school program contexts, based on youths' definitions of clinical change and personal development; 2) Developing and advancing a postpositivist approach to research for the social and behavioral sciences with an emphasis on participatory action and qualitative research; and 3) Developing clinical theory in the areas of a) trauma-focused group psychotherapy, b) development of clinical social work skills, and c) participatory program evaluation of services for children and economically marginalized youth.