12-2021

Exploring the promotion of youth voice and activism by youth development workers in community-based programs.

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EXPLORING THE PROMOTION OF YOUTH VOICE AND ACTIVISM BY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORKERS IN COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

By

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M.S.S.W., University of Louisville, 2010

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Raymond A. Kent School of Social Work of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Social Work

Kent School of Social Work
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2021

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A Dissertation Approved on

November 23, 2021

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DEDICATION

"Anything worth doing at all, is worth doing well."

-Philip Stanhope and then Virgie L. Bloomer

I dedicate this dissertation to one of my first role models in female empowerment, my granny,

Virgie L. Bloomer

To the woman that has supported and sacrificed for my accomplishments, my mom,

Rita J. Bloomer

AND

To my partner and children, loving me while weathering the consequences of my depleted time, energy, and patience,

Ahmed S. Farah

Naomi Q. Bloomer Farah

Rami A. Bloomer Farah

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first thank my committee chair, Dr. Lesley M. Harris, for introducing me to qualitative methods, and being an amazing person and mentor. I recognize the countless hours you spent meeting with me to debrief findings, reading and providing feedback on drafts, and providing encouragement. You gave your time and wisdom freely and I will be forever grateful for you.

To Dr. Thomas Lawson, my first academic mentor. Others attempted to dissuade me from pursuing youth development, but your guidance allowed me to follow my true path. You have been an asset throughout this process, and I am grateful to have you in my corner.

Special thanks and acknowledgement must go to Dr. Aishia Brown, who willingly took a random student from the School of Social Work under her wing. A kindred youth development spirit, your presence allowed me to explore my area with confidence. You gave validity to my research interests and confirmed I was moving in the right direction. I am forever grateful for your unwavering support and willingness to have my back. Together we will topple systems of oppression.

To my committee member, Dr. Shantel D. Crosby, for joining my committee without reservation. Your flexibility has been so appreciated in this process. Your professional wisdom has been invaluable, as has your feedback.

I want to acknowledge my fellow doctoral students, especially Sara Williams and Lisa Purdy, for your willingness to both uplift and commiserate during this process. To Sherry Gass, who was always willing to lend an ear, provide feedback, and build me up. And to the youth development community for remaining open and supportive as I moved from direct service worker to researcher.

I want to express my gratitude to my family for their support. To my mom, who sacrificed her own time and energy to help me reach my goals. I will forever be thankful. To my children, who were patient (ish) during long nights of research and writing. And to my partner, Ahmed Farah, who had faith in me when I waivered. You affirmed me with your patience and positive outlook. Because of you, I knew I would get through it. To all of those named and many others that I could not directly address, I thank you wholeheartedly. I am forever appreciative for your support.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE PROMOTION OF YOUTH VOICE AND ACTIVISM BY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORKERS IN COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMS

Rebecka M. Bloomer

November 23, 2021

Youth-adult partnerships (Y-APs) and youth voice promotion are best practices within the youth development sector, but youth development workers receive little training or guidance in employing these concepts. A scarcity of research explores the relationships between organizational supports, as demonstrated by training, supervision, evaluation, and worker engagement in promoting youth voice. The two studies within this dissertation investigated the social processes of how and why youth development workers promoted youth voice. Program participants were primarily youth of color living in areas of high multidimensional poverty. They also explored how and why organizational factors impacted the promotion of youth voice within programmatic contexts.

Three aims were established in pursuit of this goal: 1) describe the relationship between organizational support, as demonstrated by job clarity and supervision, and youth development worker promotion of youth voice 2) develop a context-specific framework describing the necessary conditions for high youth voice promotion and 3) develop a context-specific framework describing the social process of youth development workers promoting youth voice while experiencing varying degrees of organization

support. Questions supporting these aims included: 1) What processes do youth development workers engage in when promoting youth voice? 2) What strategies do youth development workers employ when they face barriers in promoting youth voice? Furthermore, 3) How do youth development workers make meaning of their role within the organization and program?

The approach to these studies was Constructivist Grounded Theory aided by Situational Analysis, which included methods of coding, memoing, relational and positional mapping, using in-depth interviews with 19 youth development workers. Results of Chapter 2 indicated that sharing experiences and internalizing social justice youth development principles resulted in adopting roles more congruent with high youth voice promotion. Organizational policies and restrictions acted as barriers for workers in promoting youth voice when they restricted flexibility in programmatic development. A context-specific framework entitled "Internalizing Social Justice Youth Development Principles: Conditions for Promoting High Levels of Youth Voice Programs" was produced. Results of Chapter 3 indicated a relationship between job role clarity and perceptions of self-efficacy for youth development workers in navigating conflict within programming. Higher levels of perceived self-efficacy led workers to adopt the stance "love them through it" and promote higher levels of individual youth voice. External factors, such as funding entities and youth development models, influenced the conceptualization of job roles for workers and led to the adoption of more educationally based foci. A context-specific framework entitled "Promoting Youth Voice: The Influence of Role Identity and Self-Efficacy in Youth-Adult Relationships" resulted from findings.

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CHAPTER 1

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Introduction

The field of youth development has established core principles and values for working with young people, including promoting youth voice, agency, and empowerment (Hamilton et al., 2004; Ginwright & James, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). Despite the presence of central features of best practices for programs, the sector caters to a broad range of youth with varied experiences and identities. This dynamic requires youth development workers to develop flexibility and accommodations within programmatic structures to build skills for a variety of involved youth. The heterogeneous nature of youth development programs necessitates workers to possess skills corresponding to the employing program, but few formal mechanisms exist to ensure workers receive necessary training (Borden et al., 2011; Colvin et al., 2020). While diversity between programs creates opportunities to focus on various youth needs, it also presents challenges for workers in identifying the necessary skills and mechanisms for connecting with youth, engaging youth voice, and fostering positive youth outcomes.

Afterschool programs emerged as early as the 1870s, spawning from societal changes that created an unoccupied space of time for children and youth (Borden et al., 2011; Halpern, 2003; Mahoney et al., 2009). These changes resulted in young people,

often immigrants experiencing poverty, playing in the streets alone (Halpern, 2003; Colvin et al., 2020). Afterschool programs developed as a response, forging the legacy of helping “at-risk" children that persists today (Baldridge, 2019; Colvin et al., 2020; Halpern, 2003). Black and Latinx youth (hereafter referred to collectively as “youth of color”) are the current groups viewed with deficit-based and problem prevention foci and deemed “at-risk”, a view that replicates the oppressive structures embedded in educational policy into the afterschool space (Baldridge, 2019).

Youth of color attending youth development programs often have complex experiences and needs rooted in oppressive practices that span economic, social, and political domains (Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, 2010). These practices range from disproportionately harsh disciplinary procedures within schools and experiencing educational inequities to disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system (Anyon et al., 2014; Kayama et al., 2017; Bottiani et al., 2018; Mallett, 2017; APA, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006a; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Youth development workers often lack education or training specific to working with youth experiencing poverty or identity-based oppression, resulting in difficulty providing appropriate care and support within the programmatic context.

The introduction of concepts such as trauma and adverse childhood experiences have been linked to professional development opportunities within the practice sector, often emphasizing the importance of youth-adult connections (i.e., "the caring adult") for workers (Rhodes, 2004). However, many afterschool programs are pressured by funders to focus on academic improvement, narrowing the scope of potential learning for youth and leaving little time for engagement in cultural supports, identity building, and social

justice opportunities (Baldridge, 2019; Hammer & White, 2014; Colvin et al., 2020). Limited funding streams are available for youth development programs, especially those devoted to strengths-based approaches centering on youth voice. Because of this, programs feel pushed to include academics to be more competitive for funding. This dynamic leads youth development programs to engage in homework help or STEM activities, even when incompatible with organizational mission or vision (Baldridge, 2019; Colvin et al., 2020).

As grant opportunities for youth development programs prioritize youth experiencing disadvantage, program participants often reflect groups experiencing societal social exclusion. Halpern (2000) discussed the potential benefits associated with afterschool programming for youth that have been marginalized, making the argument that

> "low-income children, as all children, need times and places in their lives where the adult agenda is modest, if not held at bay; where the emotional temperature is low, and acceptance is generous; where learning is self-directed, experiential, and structured to be enjoyable; where talents can be identified and nurtured; and where possible identities can be explored without risk of failure or ridicule. After school programs are well-suited to meet these needs" (p.186).

The focus on academic remediation by funders and schools has shifted the focus of youth development programs away from meeting other critical development needs of children (Halpern, 2000). Despite over twenty years passing between Halpern's writing and today, youth development programs are still being asked to absorb the burden of the educational system and act as an extension of the school day.

The association between youth development programs and schools is vital for the framing of this dissertation. While youth development programs operate independently of

schools, youth development workers in afterschool programs face challenges related to experiences of discrimination by youth both within the school system and community more broadly. Community-based youth development programs have increasingly invested in youth-adult partnerships (Y-APs) to enhance youth agency, empowerment, and engagement practices. Y-AP refers to intentionally formed relationships and transactions between youth and adults characterized by shared power in decision making, working collaboratively to address community concerns or advance social justice practice (Zeldin et al., 2013). As youth development workers may interact with youth daily (depending on the program model), their potential to influence positive youth outcomes through Y-APs cannot be understated. Youth cannot be separated from the various social and environmental contexts that shape who they are, specifically if those contexts serve to marginalize, create disparate outcomes, or silence the voices of youth.

Workers are often asked to use an asset-based approach when working with young people, engage in Y-APs, and foster youth voice and empowerment. Nevertheless, few studies have investigated whether youth development organizations sponsoring effective youth development programs implement assets or strengths-based approaches with their workers. Maletsky and Evans (2017) explored how youth workers' promotion of youth voice was related to organizational components. However, the concept of youth worker voice within the organization was not investigated. Researchers have yet to explore how organizational support, demonstrated by job clarity, supervision, and work evaluation may influence how workers support and value the voice of program participants, which is the purpose of this research.

This dissertation follows a two-paper dissertation format, requiring the production of two independent manuscripts. Within this dissertation, the manuscripts occur in Chapters 2 and 3. While the two studies within these chapters are interrelated, the manuscripts and findings are meant to stand alone.

The following dissertation proposal begins by providing a detailed description of youth development. This description introduces the social justice youth development framework and provides an overview of the literature regarding youth-serving organizations and workers. A proposed conceptual model is provided, and sensitizing theoretical orientations are discussed and their applicability to the proposed studies.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to describing a context-specific framework grounded in the voices of youth development workers describing the necessary conditions for high youth voice promotion with varying organizational supports. Chapter 3 sought to understand the relationship between the perception of job role and youth voice promotion for youth development workers in community-based programs engaging with youth. Chapter 4 weaves the findings of the studies together to provide an overarching summary of the results. It also offers recommendations and implications for research, policy, and social work practice.

Youth Development

Youth development programs remain an untapped resource for youth in under-resourced communities as several studies have demonstrated promising outcomes for involvement in youth development programming. Studies show significant benefits in academic gains, physical health, peer acceptance, and social and emotional development

for participating youth (Barber et al., 2001; Durlak et al., 2010; Taylor-Winney et al., 2018). These studies suggest that youth development programming provides an essential context for fostering skill growth and character-building outside the traditional educational system.

While a youth development program may occur in an afterschool setting, the two terms are not synonymous. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) outlined the three characteristics of youth development programs that differentiate them from programs serving adolescents: 1) program goals that promote positive development, "even when seeking to prevent problem behaviors" (p. 97) 2) workers foster an atmosphere of hope: programs create physically and psychologically safe places with solid buy-in and commitment from youth 3) program activities offer youth informal and formal opportunities to nurture and develop skills, interests, talents. Youth development programs focus on youth as resources to be developed instead of problems to be mediated (Lerner et al., 2005). The youth development principles clearly distinguish it from other types of youth-serving programs. Taking a strengths-based approach alters programmatic content and delivery mechanisms, emphasizing youth choice and voice in offerings.

Social Justice Youth Development

Psychological theories of human development dominated the youth development field throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Benson et al., 2012; Ginwright & James, 2002; Lerner et al., 2014), emphasizing paradigms seeking to identify and prevent problem behaviors for youth (Catalano et al., 2002). This remains especially pertinent for youth of color. Ginwright and James (2002) found that nearly 70% of the research performed between 1985 to 1995 focused on problematic youth behaviors, pathology,

and prevention for the groups mentioned above. While the PYD model sought to emphasize assets, supports, and broader opportunities for development (Lerner et al., 2014; Benson et al., 2012; Catalano et al., 2002), it failed to account for the complex relationship between youth and the influences which contribute to their decision making (Ginwright & James, 2002; Wyn & White, 1997).

Conceptualizing youth as separate from their environments perpetuates and supports these oppressive and discriminatory patterns. Ginwright and James (2002) argued that youth problems result primarily from social and economic patterns in urban communities steeped in "racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic practices" (p.85). Instead of focusing on individual behavior, the authors asserted that researchers and scholars should investigate social and community contexts impacting youth. This includes evaluating the quantity of youth development programs offered within communities that have been marginalized and suggests a need to investigate *who* facilitates programming and *what values* are being espoused.

Social justice youth development (SJYD) offers guidance in research practices and provides a framework for direct service within youth development programming. SJYD seeks a shared vision for youth, which hinges on youth agency, collective action, and organization towards change in their communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006; Ginwright & James, 2002; Cammarota, 2011). Ginwright and Cammarota (2006) outlined four basic principles related to SJYD:

> Principle 1: Young people should be conceptualized in relationship to specific economic, political, and social conditions (p. xvi).
>
> Principle 2: The youth development process should be conceptualized as a collective response to the social marginalization of young people (p. xvii).

> Principle 3: Young people are agents of change, not simple subjects to change (p. xviii)
>
> Principle 4: Young people have basic rights (p. xix).

Critical Consciousness and Action

SJYD places specific importance on the relationship between critical consciousness (CC) and social action (Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, 2015). Freire (2000) defined CC as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). Freire (1973) described CC as an awareness that day-to-day life is a changeable and not irreversible reality. The current understanding of the construct characterizes CC as possessing three primary elements: critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action (Watts et al., 2011; Diemer et al., 2017). These elements cover critically assessing how one exists, where one exists in the world, motivations toward addressing injustices (real or perceived) (Watts et al., 2011; Diemer et al., 2017). CC may include critical action that does not result in institutional or community change; however, SJYD maintains that the integration of CC *and* social action offers youth an opportunity to begin to understand and change their social reality (Ginwright & James, 2002).

Ginwright and James (2002) and subsequently Ginwright (2015) discussed the three levels of progression required to seek praxis between critical consciousness and social action for youth: self-awareness, social awareness, and global awareness. The stages are progressive and interrelated. The authors discussed the need for youth to explore self to move towards positive self, social, and cultural identity in the self-awareness stage. The subsequent clarity regarding the interrelationship between identity, privilege, and power allows youth to critically evaluate issues in their community and

how power relates to social issues more broadly—social awareness. The evaluation of power in the community allows youth to know how groups and institutions can work towards eradicating inequalities at the community level (Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, 2015).

Both youth development and social justice youth development frameworks call for youth to have voice and agency within youth-serving programs. Youth do not have to wait until they are adults to lead their communities towards creating social change and promoting increased well-being. They need opportunities to collaborate. It remains imperative that youth from areas with high multidimensional poverty rates are provided the platform to take pride in their communities, evaluate strengths, and reframe the broader narratives that restrict improvements from occurring. Youth residing in these areas must have a say in naming the areas of need or improvement within their communities and formulating a meaningful response to lead change and social action.

Youth-Serving Organizations (YSOs) and Youth Development Workers

Youth development occurs in a variety of settings, sponsored by organizations with widely divergent mission statements. Religious institutions, national and local nonprofits, systems-related settings, and mental health facilities regularly offer youth development programming. Programmatic content may vary based on the sponsoring organization's mission and goals. However, for the program to be considered youth development, it must adhere to the basic youth development principles of promoting youth voice and agency. The diversity in service sectors makes standardized training and professional development opportunities for youth development workers challenging to implement. The lack of consistent ethics and training leaves room for organizations and

programs to continue policies and practices, which lead to the exclusion of youth that have been marginalized and the stifling of youth voice.

The complex nature of youth development stems mainly from the sector's historical tendencies to intertwine with psychology, social work, public health, education, and others (Borden et al., 2011). These disciplines have responded to societal shifts by incorporating emerging trends and research into curricula and training, often mandating continuing education to ensure sustained professional development, growth, and practitioner awareness while holding practitioners to codified ethical standards.

In contrast, youth development lacks universally recognized educational standards or codified ethics, making widespread and evenly distributed implementation of best practices challenging. The benefits of youth development programming remain well-documented, but the quality of program and staff play a significant role in determining when positive outcomes are achieved (Taylor-Winney et al., 2018). Youth-adult partnerships (Y-APs) and youth voice promotion are best practices within the youth development sector, but youth development workers receive little training or guidance in employing these concepts. For youth to gain the most from programming, youth workers should be adequately trained in best practices and youth development principles (e.g., promotion of youth voice, building critical consciousness) while receiving appropriate implementation support. At the very least, workers should know what youth development *is* and abide by youth development principles regarding how adults should behave and interact within youth development spaces.

Most youth development workers must rely on their organizations to provide necessary training or context (Colvin et al., 2020). Without this training, many youth

development workers are unfamiliar with the basic views of youth development and social justice youth development, with little promises of enhancing their knowledge base. The importance youth development workers place on youth choice and promotion of youth voice, leadership, and activism vary depending on individual characteristics and organizational context. But a scarcity of research explores the relationships between organizational supports, as demonstrated by training, supervision, evaluation, and worker engagement in promoting youth voice.

Greater emphasis must be placed on examining the experiences of youth development workers when serving youth disproportionately impacted by racism and oppression, as it informs both *what* and *how* organizational and community supports are implemented. Applying existing theoretical perspectives as sensitizing concepts provides a framework to begin exploring the experiences of youth development workers.

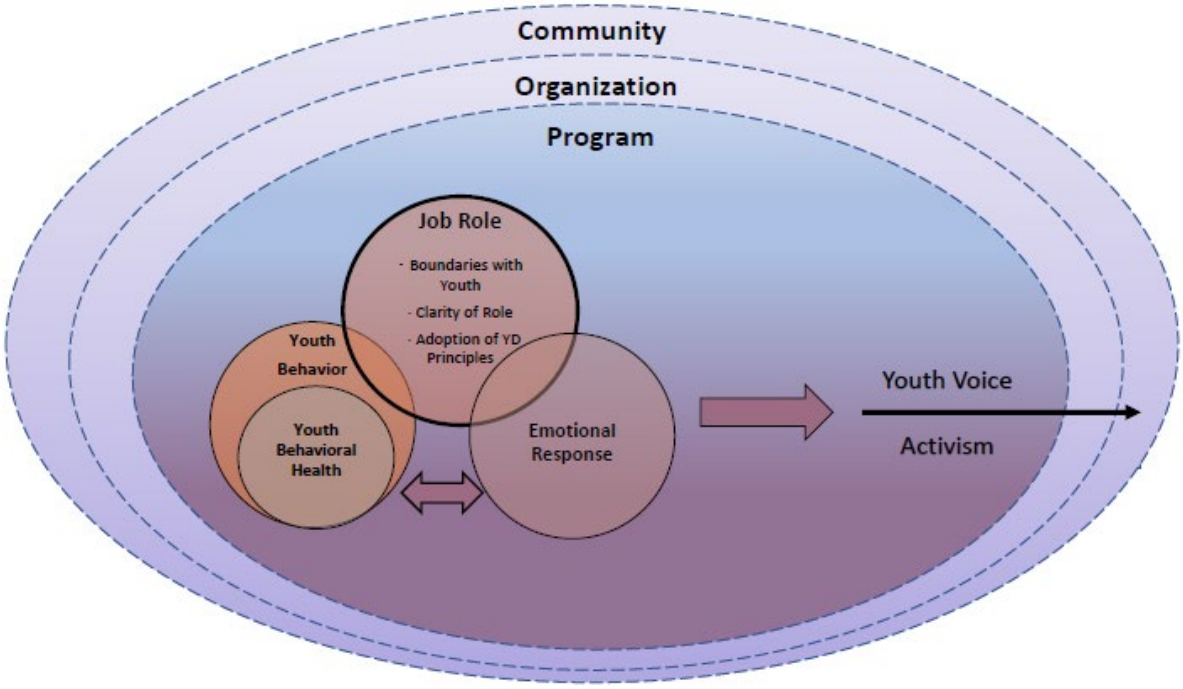
Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical perspectives can enhance the evaluation of problems, providing a lens to view potential causal and contributing factors and possible outcomes resulting from the social problem. Focusing on one specific theoretical framework limits the perspective of the issue to the orientation of the theory being utilized. Implementing a strategy of evaluating social problems through multiple lenses can be beneficial. Researchers often lean towards specific theoretical orientations, which subsequently inform how they design and implement research. Because underlying theoretical assumptions influence every step of the research process, it is essential to challenge dominant discourse and evaluate social problems from various perspectives. As such, Ecological Systems Theory, Critical Race Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, with emphasis on both micro and

macro constructs, will be applied in these studies as sensitizing concepts to offer a more comprehensive lens to inform research design and evaluation of results (Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, Organizational Role Theory and Role Episodic Model will act as additional sensitizing concepts for Chapter 3.

Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the proposed conceptual model (Figure 1) shows the relationship between challenges (job role, youth behavior, youth behavioral health, and emotional response) experienced by the youth development worker and their promotion of youth voice within the contexts of the youth development program, organization, and community. The proposed domains of job role (boundaries with youth, clarity of role, adoption of youth development principles) were examined concerning the promotion of youth voice and activism. At this stage of the research process, it was assumed that *how* the youth development workers position themselves with their role as workers influenced their promotion of youth voice and activism. However, the exact mechanism of influence was yet to be discovered. Youth voice and activism have an arrow extending through the program, organization, and community. It was expected that promoting the two within the programmatic structure potentially extended those actions into other contexts. The closed circles of the challenges indicate the influence of Symbolic Interactionism and individual meaning-making for the youth development worker. The dashed lines represent the influence systems have on one another and the macro-orientation of Critical Race Theory. Organizational Role Theory and Role Episodic Model influence the interaction between job role and emotional response, as well as the potential for youth workers to engage youth in ways that promote high levels of youth voice and activism.

Figure 1



Critical Race Theory

A theory seeks to explain the nature of a phenomenon. In the case of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the phenomenon of interest is racism. CRT is a set of ideas that provides an explanation of what racism is, how it operates, the emotional and psychological experience of being the target of racism, and the factors that contribute to the presence of racism (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT originated in the discipline of legal studies with the writings of Derrick Bell, a civil rights lawyer discussing how the gains of the civil rights era were no longer progressing and were dissipating (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Bell repeatedly argued that inequities in society resulted from the U.S. legal system seeking to perpetuate white supremacy and

not the result of a personal deficit on people of color. Moreover, racism functions through laws and rulings that disadvantage people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998).

Scholars from other disciplines began extending CRT into other domains (e.g., psychology, education, sociology) (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The extension of CRT into education provides specific insight into the challenges experienced by children and young people of color as they navigate the barriers present in educational and community systems relative to their developmental stage. Given the influence of critical race theory on social justice youth development, this framework will serve as a theory used as a sensitizing concept for this study.

Underlying Tenets

Critical race theorists view racism as a pervasive and permanent feature of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Despite feelings to the contrary, racism is ordinary. This very commonplace nature presents difficulties in making meaningful strides towards reduction or elimination, as racism is both every day and invisible. The groups affected most by racism lack the power, in many instances, to make substantial gains in eradication; moreover, Whites have little incentive to press forward on the issue (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Any advances experienced by people of color in the United States have resulted from the dual benefit experienced by White people (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Race is a social construction, but it can be manipulated and adjusted when those actions are deemed necessary (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018). Intersectionality and antiessentialism are critical features of CRT, as it emphasizes how the intercentricity of multiple identities creates difficulties for people of color to possess one collective identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). For

example, a Black female youth does not only experience the discrimination and oppression relative to being Black *or* female *or* a youth but instead experiences the compounding oppression of *all* identities simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1991).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) published the first article using CRT and applying it to the educational setting over twenty years ago. The authors stated that CRT had been untheorized in relation to the educational setting and sought to enhance the existing framework by applying basic tenets specific to education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) based their model on three central propositions:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can
   understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48).

These propositions are not distinctly different from the foundational underpinnings of CRT in general; however, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) dismissed the idea that race is a social construct. The authors asserted that viewing race as a construct or objective condition failed to account for how society is racialized and the impact on people of color.

Ladson-Billings (1998) furthered this idea in subsequent writings, taking the view of Whiteness as property. She discussed how Whiteness was more than race and how one may have the privilege of Whiteness depending on proximity in the given situation. For instance, when a Black youth is at school with a recently arrived Asian youth with limited English proficiency, the Black youth possesses the privilege of Whiteness due to their knowledge of the dominant language. This example is not meant to indicate that Black

youth or any specific race or ethnicity always possesses the privilege of Whiteness over the group, but merely to demonstrate the idea of how positionality may result in a non-White person exhibiting Whiteness as property.

CRT has often acted as a framework to inform the work of scholars conducting social sciences research (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). According to Johnson-Ahorlu (2017), CRT has directed education scholars to "create interdisciplinary studies that recognize the role of race and racism in education, and its intersection with other forms of oppression; challenges ideologies that position students of color as deficits; recognizes the importance of experiential knowledge; and promotes social justice" (p.731). Similarly, CRT emphasizes the importance of pointing out the unique voices of people of color to provide counternarratives, highlighting the importance of including diversity between voices in storytelling and historical accounts (Stepinsky & Ritzer, 2018). This feature remains congruent with both social justice youth development and qualitative inquiry more broadly.

While CRT is often used when working with people of color, it is also a valuable tool for investigating experiences more broadly. The field of youth development employs individuals from diverse backgrounds. Notwithstanding, CRT offers a means to interrogate why youth development workers establish or endorse specific expectations for youth behavior related to the youth being served. For instance, how are White youth development workers who primarily serve Black and youth of color imposing values and ideals on youth by centering expectations based on their cultural reference points?

Symbolic Interactionism

Despite the significant difference in the thought of scholars contributing to the intellectual foundation of symbolic interactionism, similarity exists in the way human interaction and existence are studied from this perspective. Building on these similarities, Herbert Blumer (1969) sought to develop a relevant and clear theoretical approach and coined the term symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism accentuates the individual and the present state of society and/or the environment. It does not seek to address how things ought to be but instead looks at what is. Whereas the previous social theories emphasized object (society), symbolic interactionism views the individual (subject) as the central focus for analysis.

Underlying Tenets

Blumer (1969) asserts symbolic interactionism has three primary premises:

> 1) human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them
> 2) the meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction that one has with one's fellows
> 3) these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p.2).

The first premise seems relatively straightforward: meaning is the basis of human action. As human beings interact with one another or objects, they simultaneously engage in the process of interpretation and meaning making. Response, therefore, only occurs after interpretation and results from the meaning an individual places on the preceding action. Meanings are social products created by and through interaction between people. Despite the common reduction of human behavior to stimuli and response, symbols and interpretation mediate the two (Blumer, 1969, p.79).

Symbolic interactionism views society as a human group comprised of individual human beings. While other perspectives may approach social issues from societal forces acting upon the individual, symbolic interactionism sees human groups as individuals engaging in action. In other words, society "exists in action" and must be viewed accordingly (Blumer, 1969, p.6).

The mind and self are integral components of symbolic interactionism, as the existence of self allows for engagement in social processes and action. The presence of self allows humans to become the object, the receiver of action, meaning humans can act towards themselves. Examples of this would be when humans get angry at themselves, argue, take pride, or set goals (Blumer, 1969, p.79). Humans use this self-action to guide them as they face decisions in the world. This mechanism of making indications to self is involved in making meaning, defining, and interpreting the actions of others (Blumer, 1969, p.80). Unlike objects and outside forces playing upon the individual and calling forth behaviors, the individual constructs objects based on their continual interactions and meaning making.

Enhancing Understanding

Often, theoretical orientations focusing on society and how society "ought to be" are the primary frameworks used to investigate race or ethnicity-based social problems. CRT offers an example of this orientation, as it heavily emphasizes the impact that race plays in explaining the experience of people of color when interacting with predominantly racist systems and institutions. Symbolic interactionism does not discount or seek to dispute the existence of disparities and oppression; however, it places primary importance on the individuals *as* individuals. Each person is a complete individual that

differs from others, as the self is constructed by all the interactions one faces and engages in throughout the lifespan. This directly aligns with the CRT principle of intersectionality, which rejects the idea of one universal truth or meaning and highlights that voice emerges from the combination of multiple identities. As such, no one person can be completely identical to another. Combining the macro concepts of CRT and microelements of symbolic interactionism, the framing of this study provides a lens from which to explore the experiences of youth development workers as they discuss their experiences, challenges, and needs associated with the role.

Organizational Role Identity and Role Episodic Models

Biddle (1985) theorized that roles created predictable patterns for human behavior relative to the social identities of the individual and the situations encountered. While professional identity and roles are not synonymous, the presence of an articulated role for youth development professionals would assist in providing clarity around purpose. Roles have titles which reflect positions, whether within an organization or more broadly, that offer space to generate shared meaning. Expectations, obligations, and responsibilities emerge from shared meaning, which also assists in establishing how one may be evaluated for job purposes. Because of this, roles allow the individual to assign meaning congruent with the position. Within an organization, an individual may take on multiple roles with various purposes assigned by different entities, such as coworkers or supervisors, to ensure organizational needs are met. And the delegation of roles and corresponding duties may occur whether the individual feels prepared or even willing to undertake the responsibilities of that position (Biddle, 1985).

The role episodic model centers on the cyclical interactions between a role sender and role receiver, with the interactive exchange of information defining expectations for both parties (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ashforth et al., 2016; Kahn et al., 1964). The role episodic model acts as a partition separating organizations from other social situations and contexts, as organizations primarily exist in a hierarchal, task-oriented, pre-planned, and formally structured manner (Biddle, 1986; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Role conflict occurs when ambiguity, uncertainty, or confusion surround a role and its corresponding behaviors and performance evaluation (Kahn et al., 1964). Kahn et al. (1964) identified five types of role conflict, with three having significant implications for youth development professionals: 1) intra-sender: conflict arising when workers asked to fulfill role demand without necessary means and resources 2) inter-sender: conflict spurring from multiple entities within the organization having incompatible role demands (e.g., supervisor, peers, youth) and 3) person-role: conflict developing from incongruent role expectations with an individual's personal needs, values, and ethics. Intrasender conflicts may be the most emotionally exhausting conflict endured by youth development workers, as role expectations from the funders trickle down into organizational policies which restrict youth workers in engaging with youth and meaningfully promoting youth voice and partnerships.

Enhancing Understanding

Tenets of Organizational Role Theory and Symbolic Interactionism together presents the opportunity to explore relationships between role clarity, perceptions of self-efficacy, and strain. Perceptions of self-efficacy develop in accordance with self-concept. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as the individual's belief that they can capably

engage in specific behaviors necessary to navigate situations or roles successfully. Youth workers conceptualize their roles relative to job descriptions and interactions in the position. Based on those interactions, an internal stance towards their self-efficacy in their perceived job role develops. Wood and Bandura (1989) hypothesized a relationship between self-efficacy and the perceived difficulty of situations. Those with higher self-efficacy would experience multiple work roles with ease, while individuals with low self-efficacy would experience strain due to their believed inability to manage multiple roles.

Given the diversity of roles undertaken by youth development professionals and the potential to encounter challenging situations within those roles, better understanding the dynamics between the two remains vital for building more significant support for workers in the sector.

Research Study

The practice field of youth development often promotes caring adults as protective factors against trauma which forge resiliency for involved youth (Witt & Caldwell, 2018). This dynamic has the potential to encourage professionalism and engagement. Nevertheless, the field has failed to establish the range of youth-adult relationships which may be beneficial for youth in combatting negative life experiences. Youth attending programs often bring complex needs and present challenging situations for often underprepared and under-resourced youth development workers. Despite practitioner knowledge regarding the difficulties surrounding youth development work, researchers have not made a meaningful effort to explore and describe the challenges and needs of workers in this sector.

Researchers within the Kent School of Social Work and the School of Public Health and Information Sciences partnered together with the Louisville Office of Youth Development to better understand the challenges and needs experienced by youth development workers. The Office of Youth Development offers training, support, and funding to youth development workers and youth-serving agencies throughout the city. The purpose of the study was to explore challenges and needs experienced by youth development workers in Louisville. Participation in youth development programming may benefit youth in a variety of ways. However, the program's quality directly relates to its staff and their familiarity and competence in engaging with youth and promoting fundamental aspects of youth development programming (e.g., focusing on youth as resources instead of problems to be mediated (Lerner et al., 2005)). The study sought to create recommendations that would enhance the existing support structures for workers and improve outcomes for participating youth. The two proposed papers stemmed from areas that emerged from initial analysis with this dataset comprised of 19 participants and 33 total interviews.

Study Aims

Both proposed papers were derived from the original dataset. The researcher conducted six additional interviews to achieve theoretical saturation. Both papers used constructivist grounded theory (CGT) in addition to situational analysis to assist in the development of two context-specific theories. The purpose of paper one was to create a context-specific theory, grounded in the voices of youth development workers, describing the necessary conditions for high youth voice promotion amidst fluctuating organizational supports. The purpose of the second paper was to develop a context-

specific framework describing the social process of how and why job roles impact youth workers' promotion and engagement of youth voice in programming. In both papers, the workers were trying to promote youth voice while working with youth historically excluded from sociopolitical involvement.

These studies investigated the social processes of how and why youth development workers promoted youth voice. Program participants were primarily youth of color living in areas of high multidimensional poverty. They also explored how and why organizational factors impacted the promotion of youth voice within programmatic contexts. Three aims were established in pursuit of this goal: 1) describe the relationship between organizational support, as demonstrated by job clarity and supervision, and youth development worker promotion of youth voice 2) develop a context-specific framework describing the necessary conditions for high youth voice promotion and 3) develop a context-specific framework describing the social process of youth development workers promoting youth voice while experiencing varying degrees of organization support. Questions supporting these aims included: 1) What processes do youth development workers engage in when promoting youth voice? 2) What strategies do youth development workers employ when they face barriers in promoting youth voice? Furthermore, 3) How do youth development workers make meaning of their role within the organization and program?

CHAPTER 2

INTERNALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND SHARING EXPERIENCES: PAIRING ROLES AND SETTING CONDITIONS FOR HIGH LEVELS OF YOUTH VOICE PROMOTION

Introduction

Youth development programs can offer spaces to shape skills for disrupting forms of inequity that youth of color experience in other contexts (Ginwright, 2007; Kirshner, 2015; Warren et al., 2008). Programs centering on equity and social justice allow youth to challenge the harmful rhetoric associated with identities facing marginalization, assisting youth to situate their oppression within the community and global systemic patterns. Youth development programs can build spaces that honor youth voice and radical healing practices (Ginwright, 2010; Diemer et al., 2017). Within youth development programs, youth workers provide critical services to support youth. Workers take on multiple roles within programs, acting as mentors, tutors, and caring adults while juggling ambiguous job expectations of the employing organization (Bloomer et al., 2021). Youth workers often interact with youth daily, acting as frontline workers and a steady presence for youth. They offer a unique opportunity to positively influence outcomes for youth while delivering care. However, youth workers are under-researched, unrepresented, and experience a lack of support as a workforce.

Youth development programs build reciprocal relationships between youth and their peers, communities, and adult allies but only experience success when organizations

employ and retain quality, skilled staff (Borden et al., 2011). Workers require adequate training and orientation in centering the voice of youth, specifically youth historically facing identity-based exclusion (Zeldin et al., 2013). However, they also need employing organizations to value their voice and contributions by providing structured opportunities to give input and feedback, raise concerns, receive training, and experience positive upward mobility within the organization (Bloomer et al., 2021; Colvin et al., 2020).

The education system plays a central role in perpetuating the marginalization of youth of color, sitting at the center of disproportionate academic achievement, disciplinary practices, and representation within the criminal legal system (Anyon et al., 2014; Kayama et al., 2017; Bottiani et al., 2018; Mallett, 2017; APA, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Not only do youth of color experience exclusion within educational spaces, but the current war on critical race theory (CRT) in schools has served to protect and perpetuate systemically embedded racism by maintaining broad ignorance of racist policies and practices. Often occurring in "after school" or "out of school time" contexts, youth development possesses a complex relationship with the education system (Baldridge, 2019). While youth development programs offer flexible spaces to foster growth and development for youth who have been racially and historically marginalized, they also harbor the capacity to reproduce oppressive academic practices from educational spaces. In this way, youth development spaces hold the possibility to resist or replicate repression of youth of color (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994; Baldridge, 2017).

Theoretical Sensitizing Concepts

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is a set of ideas that provides an explanation of what racism is, how it operates, the emotional and psychological experience of being the target of racism, and the factors that contribute to the presence of racism (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Stemming from legal studies, CRT scholars argued white supremacy embedded within the U.S. legal system created inequities for individuals and communities of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Racism is a permanent, pervasive, and ordinary feature of American society. The ordinary nature of racism within society makes it invisible and creates significant difficulty in taking steps towards eradication.

Intersectionality and antiessentialism are critical features of CRT, as it emphasizes how the intercentricity of multiple identities creates difficulties for people of color to possess one collective identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). CRT emphasizes the importance of pointing out the unique voices of people of color to provide counternarratives, highlighting the importance of including diversity between voices in storytelling and historical accounts (Stepinsky & Ritzer, 2018).

Social Justice Youth Development Framework

Critical Race Theory serves as the roots for social justice youth development (SJYD), highlighting the inequities faced by youth of color. Rather than focusing on individual-level outcomes or characteristics of youth, SJYD principles call for youth to be conceptualized in relation to their environmental, social, and political conditions.

Youth with various identities have historically been excluded from social and political processes and educational opportunities. Because of this, the physical, social, and cognitive-behavioral developmental processes of excluded youth should be viewed as a response to this marginalization. Ginwright and James (2002) argued that youth problems result primarily from social and economic patterns in urban communities steeped in "racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic practices" (p.85). Instead of focusing on individual behavior, the authors asserted that researchers and scholars should investigate social and community contexts impacting youth. This includes evaluating the quantity of youth development programs offered within marginalized communities and suggests a need exists to investigate *who* facilitates programming and *what values* are espoused.

SJYD offers guidance in research practices and provides a framework for direct service within youth development programming. SJYD seeks a shared vision for youth, which hinges on youth agency, collective action, and organization towards change in their communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006; Ginwright & James, 2002). Ginwright and Cammarota (2006) outlined four basic principles related to SJYD:

> Principle 1: Young people should be conceptualized in relation to specific economic, political, and social conditions (p. xvi).
>
> Principle 2: The youth development process should be conceptualized as a collective response to the social marginalization of young people (p. xvii).
>
> Principle 3: Young people are agents of change, not simple subjects to change (p. xviii)
>
> Principle 4: Young people have basic rights (p. xix).

SJYD places specific importance on the relationship between critical consciousness (CC) and social action (Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, 2015).

Freire (2000) defined CC as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). The current understanding of the construct characterizes CC as possessing three primary elements: critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action (Watts et al., 2011; Diemer et al., 2016). These elements cover critically assessing how one exists, where one exists in the world, and motivations toward addressing injustices (real or perceived) (Watts et al., 2011; Diemer et al., 2016). CC may include critical action that does not result in institutional or community change; however, SJYD maintains that the integration of CC *and* social action offers youth an opportunity to begin to understand and change their social reality (Ginwright & James, 2002).

Literature Review

Youth-Adult Partnerships

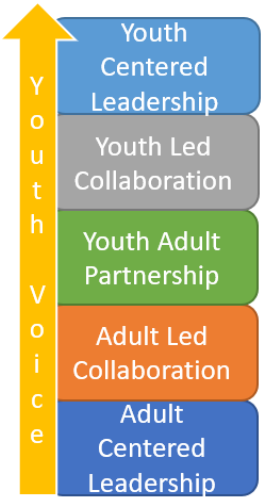
Community-based youth programs have increasingly invested in youth-adult partnerships (Y-APs) to enhance practices around youth agency, empowerment, and engagement. Y-AP refers to intentionally formed relationships and transactions between youth and adults characterized by shared power in decision making, working collaboratively to address community concerns or advance social justice practice (Zeldin et al., 2013). Zeldin et al. (2014) further identified youth voice and positive relationships as two distinct aspects of Y-APs. Whereas youth and adults collaborate intergenerationally in various contexts, Y-AP remains distinctive due to the emphasis on collective action and equitable power distribution between youth and adults. These distinct features distinguish Y-AP from other youth-adult relationships preserving an ageist hierarchy based on unsubstantiated beliefs relating advanced age with greater

wisdom. While various examples of this fallacious belief exist for most people, its presence undermines youth taking meaningful leadership roles.

Maletsky and Evans (2017) defined youth voice as the "active inclusion and promotion of youth feedback and meaningful decision making within an organization" (p. 2). When youth are provided meaningful opportunities to provide a voice in organizations, potential positive outcomes include building community, increased sense of belonging and participation, and increased problem-solving skills (Akiva et al., 2014; Lulow et al., 2014; Mueller et al., 2000; Maletsky & Evans, 2017). Youth voice has been conceptualized with youth possessing a range of control in decision making, from adults holding complete control to youth taking full leadership of programming, with several ladders of youth voice illustrating this concept (e.g., Hart, 1992; David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, 2012). Jones (2005) illustrated the varying levels of power undertaken by youth and adults within roles of the Y-AP (see Figure 1). The ladders demonstrate the disparate nature of youth voice incorporation and the scaffolded approach to building towards youth empowerment and leadership.

Figure 1

Jones (2005) Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships



Youth development programs employing tenets of social justice youth development (SJYD) seek to engage in strengths-based practices, building skills, and collective action for participating youth. Programs incorporating SJYD integrate concepts of youth governance, offering the chance for social-emotional learning and development through participation and leadership opportunities. These programs may include youth leadership in a variety of manners, including activity creation and facilitation, determining content direction and foci, and/or participating in youth advisory boards or councils. As youth workers often engage with youth daily, programs engaging in Y-APs provide opportunities to engage youth in collective decision making, promoting youth as active agents in the development of programs, community and self through the engagement of youth voice.

Youth Workers

Youth development principles advocate for adults providing youth supports, engaging in strengths-based approaches to engage youth in culturally appropriate

activities that center their perspectives and voice. These programs play a crucial role in developing youth skills and orienting them to activism and community change. Despite ample research focused on positive outcomes for youth involved in programming, less research exists identifying skills necessary for youth workers to perform their jobs successfully within youth development programs. Bloomer et al. (2021) found that youth workers often lacked clarity around their job roles, including corresponding expectations and objectives. Furthermore, working in programs in community-based spaces had become increasingly difficult for workers, as a greater range of skills were required to support youth participants.

At a time when programs demand more of youth workers, the workforce does physically and emotionally challenging work, all while experiencing low pay, heavy workloads, poor support, and turnover as high as 30-40% (Alley, 2020). Most programs rely on volunteers and service positions, as well as part-time employees to fully staff programs. In this way, turnover and staff inconsistencies are built into the programmatic structure. Borden et al. (2011) emphasized the negative impact experienced by high staff turnover, as young people are continuously required to develop relationships with new staff members, creating a sense of mistrust by the youth. They suggested sustained employment could further the strength of relationships between youth and adults.

Both practitioners and researchers support the presence of Y-APs, which serve as the crux for youth development programming. Even so, it is not clear how common Y-APs are or to what degree the youth workers place value on youth voice promotion. Given the absence of clear boundaries concerning their jobs, understanding how youth workers conceptualize their roles within Y-APs may inform future education and

practice. Additionally, investigating necessary conditions for workers to engage in roles congruent with high voice promotion may offer insight into better mechanisms for supporting youth development professionals.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a context-specific framework grounded in the voices of youth development workers describing the necessary conditions for high youth voice promotion amidst fluctuating organizational supports while working with communities of color. In doing so, we aimed to establish potential factors influencing voice promotion to inform training, professional development, and supports offered to workers.

Methods

Design

This qualitative study employed a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach to develop a context-specific framework that describes the social process of how and when youth workers promote youth voice in youth development programs. In addition, the research team ascribed to develop a conceptual model or theory that describes the social process in question (Charmaz, 2014). Data were collected and analyzed to clarify processes, conditions, and strategies to better understand how youth workers engaged with youth in voice promotion. Participants told their own stories of working with youth and were provided an opportunity to reflect on garnered conclusions.

Recruitment and Sampling

Per standard CGT methodology, the data collection and analysis process occurred iteratively. Initial recruitment of workers occurred via email distribution through the local

youth development government and nonprofit service agencies. All youth workers included in this listserv worked primarily with youth of color in programs offering free services to youth in communities experiencing poverty. To be eligible for the study, participants must have been employed by a youth development program in a direct service position and be at least 18 years of age at the time of interview. Due to the high turnover rate within the youth development sector, we included workers employed for at least 6 of the last 12 months to ensure adequate orientation and exposure to the position.

The primary sampling method used in this study was first purposive, followed by theoretical sampling, the process of collecting data for the generation of theory. Theoretical sampling calls for the researcher to collect, code, and analyze data in an ongoing iterative process to determine what data to collect next and where to seek it. Purposive sampling was used with theoretical sampling to ensure that a diverse group of youth development workers were interviewed for the study. Youth development workers from different types of organizations were sought to enhance understanding more broadly in various contexts. Study participants represented national and local nonprofit agencies, with small and large fiscal resources. As we specifically wanted to know about the experience of youth workers in programs serving youth of color and youth experiencing identity-based oppression, we specifically included programs working with youth of color, youth with disabilities, and gender and sexual minority youth.

The research team personally reached out to known service providers representing experiences of interest. For instance, we thought there might be differences between youth workers of color serving primarily youth of color and the experience of

White youth workers serving similar populations. As preliminary data analysis occurred, a difference emerged between White workers serving primarily youth of color between those with more significant and more minor training related to social justice youth development principles. To better understand these differences, specific participants were sought at two small local nonprofits, one with higher and one with lower levels of support. Data collection, analysis, and recruitment continued until saturation occurred. Theoretical saturation is not simply collecting information until participants fail to describe new experiences. It requires the researcher to fully explicate the range of categories for theory development (Charmaz, 2014).

Data Analysis

Semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews using an interview guide occurred both face-to-face and via virtual technology platforms. The interview guide focused on understanding youth workers' perceptions of challenges youth face inside and outside of programming, organizational value and support of their work, understanding of youth voice and activism, and strategies employed to promote youth voice and activism. Interviews were conducted by three research team members trained in qualitative interview methodology. Interviewers explained to participants the study purpose, and consent occurred prior to beginning the interview. Interviews took place between April 2019 and November 2021 at the location of the participants choosing or virtually. Each participant chose a pseudonym for reporting purposes which took the form of names, words, or numbers. As COVID-19 occurred during participant recruitment, interviews moved to virtual platforms to comply with state safety standards. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Congruent with CGT, initial, focused, axial, and selective coding were used. Initial coding was grounded in the voice of participants, using line-by-line gerunds for twenty percent of initial interviews. Once initial codes were established, focused codes were created by determining the most frequent and significant initial codes. These initial gerunds, combined with memo writing, served as the basis for creating focused codes relating to strategies, processes, and actions undertaken by participants relating to the study aims. Researchers used peer debriefing to build consensus around focus codes (Erlandson et al., 1993) and established a codebook consisting of code families and definitions. At that time, Dedoose (2019) was used as an organizational tool. Axial coding and selective coding followed, with peer debriefing occurring after multiple model iterations were developed.

Clarke et al. (2018) presented situational analysis (SA) as a qualitative method to extend grounded theory in new directions using complementary analysis techniques. SA emphasizes the importance of seeking marginalized or non-dominant discourse, making it highly congruent with the aims of this project. Relational analysis was performed on situational maps to understand the nature of relationships between present elements. Positional maps were incorporated to examine the positions of youth workers on two separate axes. Data matrixes were also used to organize and understand data relevant to the research aims.

After an initial context-specific framework was developed, it was shared and reviewed between researchers to discuss interpretations. These analysis sessions were conducted via videoconferences, with at least two researchers present for each peer debriefing session. Several iterations of the model were created before asking

participants for feedback. Feedback was incorporated, and the final model was produced and shared.

Rigor

Tracy (2010) proposed a model of eight markers of qualitative research which distinguish quality across paradigms: "the big ten." The application of these markers occurs throughout the research process. Rather than quantitative precision, qualitative rigor is marked by complexity and abundance with rich data (Weick, 2007). Rich data is developed by variety, including theoretical constructs, sources, and samples (Tracy, 2010). The intentional use of multiple sensitizing theories (social justice youth development, critical race theory, and symbolic interactionism) in study design and data evaluation enhances the overall rigor of this study. The questioning process within the interviews and the fit between current research goals and data collected through an iterative research process demonstrate attendance to rigor. The interviews and field notes are abundant and suffice to assist in answering the proposed research questions. Field notes, memos, and transcripts of interviews were used to triangulate data sources as researchers gathered and analyzed data in more than one way at more than one time. Additionally, member reflection interviews were used to dialogue with participants about findings. One researcher engaged participants in member reflections, offering opportunities "for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration" (p. 844).

Results

Sample Characteristics

There were 19 participants in this study, including 13 White participants, 5 African American or Black participants, and one Latina participant. Most participants were female (n=14), with all but one participant holding a degree from an institution of higher learning (bachelor's degree, n=11; master's degree, n=7). Over half the sample worked in youth development full-time, with annual salaries ranging from $22 to $ 66 thousand a year. In addition to full-time employment in youth development, over one-third of the sample had a second job (n=8). None of the participants were certified teachers or social workers. See Table 1 for additional sample characteristics.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

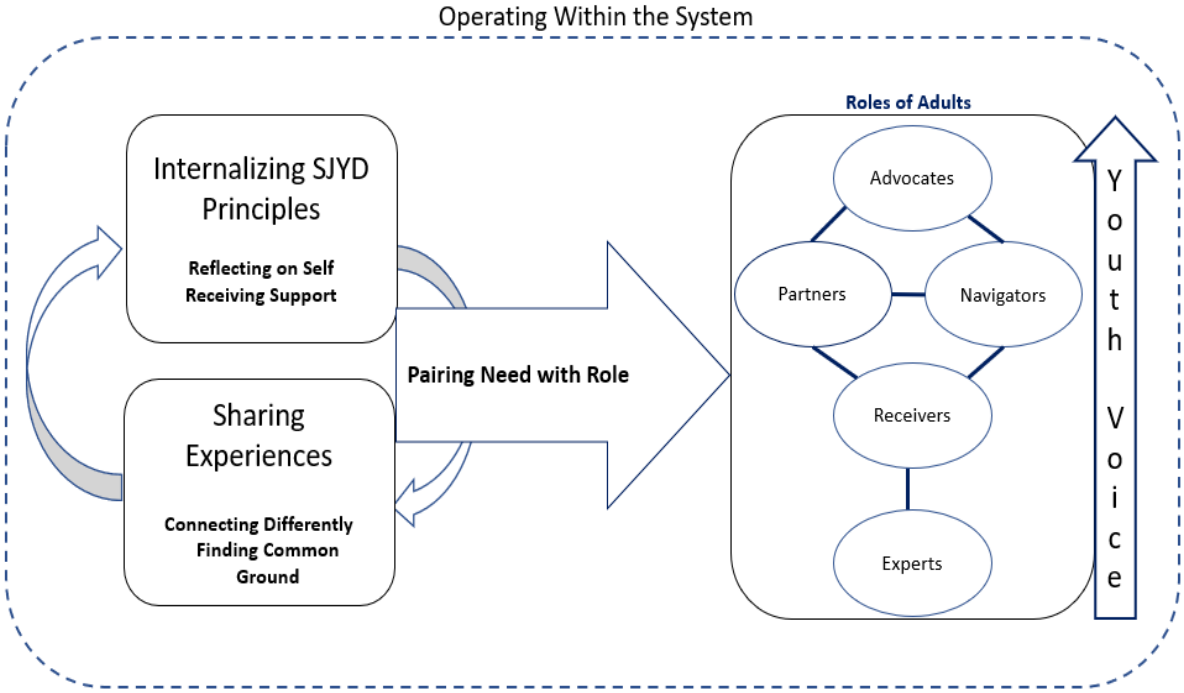
Variable	n (*%*), M(*SD*)
Age	45.25(8.45)
Race	
White	13(68.4%)
Black	5(26.3%)
Latino	1(5.3%)
Gender	
Female	14(74%)
Male	5(26.3%)
Education	
Bachelors	11(58%)
Masters	7(37%)
Yrs at current job	6.55(7.47)
Prior yrs in youth work	9(8.80)
Full-time employment	13(68%)
Works two jobs	8(42%)

Context-Specific Framework

This study explored the conditions necessary for youth workers to promote youth voice in youth development programs. The results are depicted in Figure 1, "Internalizing Social Justice Youth Development Principles: Conditions for Promoting High Levels of Youth Voice Programs." Youth workers adopted different roles in their interactions with youth that valued youth voice promotion at varying levels. From lowest to highest levels of voice promotion, roles described by youth workers included expert, receiver, partner, navigator, and advocate. Undertaking roles allowing youth to engage as partners, decision-makers, and leaders (corresponding with partner, navigator, and advocate) provided the best foundation for incorporating youth agency and voice. Internalizing social justice youth development principles and sharing experiences with youth established the foundation for role adoption, as workers conceptualized their purpose relative to these conditions. Workers described the need for flexibility in moving between roles for different situations, depending on the needs related to a specific interaction with youth. The youth worker may have appropriate conditions and knowledge for promoting high levels of youth voice but experience restrictions from organizational policies, which negatively impact their ability to adopt roles congruent with their values.

Figure 1

Internalizing Social Justice Youth Development Principles: Conditions for Promoting High Levels of Youth Voice in Programs



Roles of Adults

The role adopted by the youth worker in the youth-adult partnership determined the level of voice promoted by the worker. Youth workers described taking five different roles corresponding to navigating interactions and providing services for youth: experts, receivers, partners, navigators, and advocates. Roles were related to programmatic goals and how the youth worker made meaning of the purpose of their work, which often deviated from the vision of the employing organization. The services provided by a program or agency are also related to higher freedom for workers to adopt specific roles. For youth workers to engage youth at the highest levels, programs needed to offer the appropriate structure.

Expert

The role of expert illustrated the traditionally depicted relationship between adults and youth, with the adult acting as the bearer of knowledge and the youth acting as a passive recipient. In this role, adults expect the youth to conform to their ideals and values because they have more knowledge and understanding of how the world works and what will help them succeed. Adultism heavily permeated this position, with adults equating years lived with knowledge acquisition. The worker in this position often believed they were allowing youth to have a voice but tokenized youth experiences to enhance their argument justifying why the behavior was "bad." Lisa illustrated this stance, "*it is essential for us as youth workers to listen to what they are listening to, and explain to them why it is not appropriate or why their behavior is not appropriate, versus just saying, "No, you know, we are not doing that."*

Recipient

In this role, the adult begins to look at the youth as someone that may know their own lives and experiences. This role occurred with mandatory programs when youth were not choosing to be present. When programs were court-mandated, the roles of the workers were dictated by the program functions. The receiver provided choices, but the youth did not have complete autonomy to voice their decisions and actions. As Jeff described working with mandated youth, *"putting myself on their level to like, I'm not above you and just be in the now. You got to be here."*

With optional programs, the role of the receiver started the process of building towards higher levels of voice and partnerships with youth. Adults described wanting to engage youth as partners, but sometimes questioned youth capabilities. Often, workers

articulate an openness to listening to the youth but default to the role of expert, primarily when engaged in conflict with youth.

Partner

As suggested by the name, the partner role described youth and workers sharing responsibility and ownership of the program. Within a partnership, youth and workers held equal say in the decision-making process. At the individual level, the role of a partner often meant presenting available choices to youth and exploring the potential outcomes associated with each decision. In the programmatic context, it presented as youth and adults working together to decide program goals, the focus of the program, and future directions. Jeff described the role of partner, "*it's about listening and meeting them where they are at and helping them to decide what they want to do."*

Navigator

Youth workers assisted youth in navigating and prioritizing their needs. Programs with youth workers as navigators were a specific niche within the youth development sector. These programs incorporated aspects of case management or resource referral for youth and families, which allowed them to help “navigate” often confusing networks of social service systems. Adults taking this role needed to both want to prioritize youth voice and possess the necessary skill set. 001 illustrated the need for content knowledge when explaining her role: *“we can help the families, and the youth navigate the system. We offer resources because we don't have counseling here, so we offer counseling or whatever resources they may need."* Youth workers without knowledge of various systems could not adopt this role and sometimes expressed a desire to have more effective skills in serving youth. Rachel echoed this sentiment as she described the

difficulties she encountered when working with youth with complex needs without a degree in social work. She stated that youth workers operated on a bell curve, and "*it's easy to stay in the top of it, not know the other ends."* The role of navigator existed inside and outside of programming, with youth workers focusing on building youth decision-making skills.

Advocate

Youth workers adopting the role of advocate focused on supporting youth in taking leadership roles within the program and the community. Advocates recognized the capacity of youth to develop and lead projects and endeavors in various contexts. They understood that youth could be leaders and experts in their own lives. Youth workers taking the role of advocate most often did so within the programmatic context. However, they acknowledged the potential for youth to engage in activism with the community more broadly. When youth took the position of decision-maker in their interactions, youth workers were more reflective of navigators. Youth in the leader position engaged others in moving towards shared goals and outcomes, which occurred most frequently after youth within programming created community. Youth workers described the advocate position; however, many youth workers had not achieved this role. When they discussed the current role of youth in programming versus where the organization envisioned them, they were not the same. Because it takes time to build capacity for youth to take the leadership role, workers within most organizations were looking towards future opportunities for youth. Rachel explained,

> "*I think, ideally, we want these youth who actually live in these communities to be running things. That's the goal. So, I'm sure that down the line, if this is a*

successful program, it will look like them taking over my job, which is pretty cool to think about."

Workers adopted various roles depending on their skills and understanding of the purpose of their job. Whenever a youth worker adopted a role, they undertook the role that would meet the needs of that interaction most adequately. For example, suppose a youth worker needed to dictate something to youth or provide information they did not have. In that case, they may revert to an expert even if they traditionally use the approach congruent with partner. Youth workers engaged as partners, navigators, and advocates when interactions had a more intentional emphasis on fostering youth input and agency.

Sharing Experiences and Internalizing Social Justice Youth Development

There are five different roles adults took as youth workers, each role having corresponding levels of youth voice promotion. The conditions present when workers fostered more youth voice-related directly to the presence of two things: 1) the internalization of social justice youth development principles and 2) sharing experiences with youth, as identified by the youth worker.

Youth workers described the process of "reflecting on self" as vital to internalizing SJYD principles. Workers reflected on themselves in more profound ways, positioning themselves relative to their identities and making meaning of how their identities influenced their interactions in the world. They discussed how their upbringing and experiences in childhood impacted the way they viewed youth experiencing marginalization in society. For White workers, this process often resulted in becoming more aware of privileges associated with their racial identity. Youth workers identifying as Black or Latina "reflected on self" by building critical consciousness and awareness of

their positionality relative to race. Workers described "receiving support" as fundamental to leading them further down the path of self-reflection. Receiving support often looked like organizational investment and support by providing meaningful supervision and access to professional development and training relative to equity frameworks. Support also meant allowances in obtaining necessary skill sets to work with youth populations having high levels of trauma and needs. Youth workers internalizing SJYD principles placed a high value on promoting youth voice and agency. They recognized when they fell short of offering youth the most meaningful opportunities to build skills in these areas.

In some instances, sharing experiences was represented by youth workers and youth possessing shared identities experiencing social exclusion. An example was provided by Elliott, a White queer youth worker engaged with White queer youth. She described being better able to respond to the needs of youth (in contrast to someone not identifying as queer), as they shared norms and understanding. Elliott discussed how the youth felt comfortable sharing with her because she fostered emotional safety. Workers having shared identity with youth described "connecting differently" to youth than their peers without similar identities. Workers explained that having a shared identity established a foundation for their interactions. 001 spoke about how some African American youth felt connected with her because they felt "*at least we have this thing in common*" and "*I see that you're like me*."

While sharing identity represented one way that workers shared experiences with youth, it did not encompass the entirety of connections. For workers without shared identity, "finding common ground" was a strategy that enabled the worker to connect

with the youth. One worker with high levels of youth voice promotion spoke about their own experience with childhood poverty in relation to the children they were working with. He stated, "*I grew up poor and white*," which was "*a hell of a lot different*" than growing up poor "*and what is considered another*." While he found common ground in terms of poverty, he also recognized how his identity as a White male influenced that experience. This example demonstrates the interconnectedness between sharing experiences and adopting SJYD principles, as a reciprocal relationship often existed between the two constructs.

"Finding common ground" did not mean that the youth worker had to have shared identity or commonalities with the youth. If those things did not exist, the worker could focus on establishing connections by promoting youth voice. Workers needed to intentionally learn more about the areas of interest for youth. 001 stated

> *That, to me, is part of relationship building. Or even if you don't have any commonalities, just kind of, 'oh so you like anime? like what is that like?' Talk to me more about that. Okay, yeah.' Like, you can build that way as well.*

Workers described how connecting with youth about interests allowed workers to find common ground, resulting in identifying shared experiences in the future.

By itself, sharing experiences did not indicate a worker would operate as a partner, navigator, or advocate and promote high levels of voice. Many Black workers described working with youth in the role of receivers and experts, despite sharing identity. One worker discussed the potential for confusion by youth when acting in the capacity of multiple roles on different occasions. She shared that she believed kids are

"*an expert in their own lives*" and she "*likes that partnership role*," but due to her programming, she "*needs to be that receiver*."

The relationship between sharing experiences and internalizing social justice youth development principles created a pathway for workers to promote the highest levels of youth voice. Workers that internalized SJYD principles were able to "find common ground" with youth and work on "connecting differently" despite no evident shared experiences.

Similarly, the presence of shared experiences or identity did not mean workers had reflected on their positionality in terms of intersecting identities. The worker's race did not preclude a tendency to engage in adultism or taking the role of the expert, leading to lower levels of youth voice. One Black youth worker questioned the motivations of Black youth engaged in activism following an upsurge in social justice movements across the country. He felt "*some of the activism comes from a good place*," but COVID-19 lockdown made youth restless. They were *"involved in protests, and or some of the violence, because that was a way for them to get out of the house and to see people that parents weren't really going to argue with*." SJYD acknowledges youth voice as a powerful conduit for social change. As workers took positions congruent to SJYD principles, they achieved more significant levels of youth voice promotion.

Internalizing principles of SJYD and recognizing shared experiences with youth established a foundation for promoting high levels of youth voice. Even so, youth workers described having to function within the policies and procedures present in their organizations. If the organization's policies failed to reflect the principles of SJYD, youth workers were restricted in what roles they may undertake and how youth voice could be

fostered in programming. Because of this, the levels of youth voice promotion functioned within the confines of the organizational context. One worker described the need to alter program activities to meet the needs of funding organizations and the subsequent negative impact on youth voice promotion. As such, the trickle-down impact of organizational policies on youth voice promotion must be acknowledged.

Discussion

Internalizing principles of social justice youth development (SJYD) served as a foundational element for youth development workers in this study to adopt roles congruent with high youth voice promotion. Principles of SJYD push youth-serving adults and systems to recognize the autonomy and agency of young people, valuing their voices while acknowledging the existence of systemic and environmental factors that create disparities between various youth populations. SJYD calls for the development of critical consciousness in young people of color or youth experiencing identity-based marginalization, moving away from individual-level, deficit-based mindsets into agents of change in their communities (Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, 2015; Freire, 2000).

Many participants in this study identified that "finding common ground" allowed them to spark a connection with young people in programming. Participants also associated this shared connection as a building block towards fostering opportunities for youth to provide a voice in individual and program-based contexts. A barrier noted in establishing meaningful youth-adult relationships remained the difficulty experienced by youth development workers in relinquishing control, primarily when they viewed youth

with deficit-based mindsets. This finding reiterates the need for enhanced professional development opportunities highlighted by workers.

The youth development sector offers services in a range of contexts to a wide variety of youth, offering the potential for skill development, academic improvement, and social and emotional learning. In this study, youth development workers primarily served youth of color residing in neighborhoods experiencing high levels of multidimensional poverty. Multidimensional poverty in this instance included the following dimensions: income falling below 150 percent of the federal poverty limit 2) limited education demonstrated by no high school diploma 3) a lack of health insurance 4) living in a low-income area, defined by habitation in a Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) where poverty exceeds 20 percent of the federal poverty limit and 5) unemployment by everyone in the household from 25-61 years of age (The Brookings Institution).

The role of racism must be considered when exploring the difficulty adults experienced in relinquishing control while working with youth of color experiencing high levels of multidimensional poverty. Workers engaged in a process of pairing the role undertaken with the need of the interaction with youth, highlighting the consistent navigation of power and control within the youth development space. The historical underpinnings of racism within systems of the United States makes separating adultism and racism as potential catalysts for behaviors and role adoption difficult to differentiate.

Some participants shared identities with the youth populations participating in their programming, offering the potential for shared experiences and enhanced connections with young people. Some Black youth workers employed the receiver and expert roles with youth, questioning the motivations of youth engaging in social activism

and using relationships to push youth toward conformity. Shared identity alone failed to establish conditions consistent with the highest levels of youth voice promotion. This finding does not discount the potential benefits of having representation present within programs but highlights complementary conditions that nurture the highest levels of youth voice promotion. Workers emphasizing the value of youth voice and engaging in practices furthering its promotion were those expressing internalized SJYD principles and sharing experiences, identity-based experiences, or otherwise. Additionally, even when experiencing organizational or programmatic hindrances to engaging youth voices, workers attributing high value to fostering youth voice expressed a greater desire to find ways to better incorporate input throughout contexts.

An established body of literature exists reviewing the merits of Y-APs and engaging youth voices in programming. Jones (2005) described the continuum of youth-adult relationships parallel to Hart's Ladder (1992), ranging from adult-centered to youth-centered leadership. Even so, there is a dearth of scholarship exploring the process involved with engaging youth in participation and how adults should best support young people as they seek social change. Zeldin et al. (2015) discussed the importance of understanding the nature of developing relationships between youth and adults to achieve the most positive outcomes. Furthermore, Richards-Schuster and Timmermans (2017) conceptualized adult roles in Y-APs through the lens of their own experiences working with youth in programming. They placed a value on identifying skills relative to engaging in each role rather than understanding the value of that role within the context of Y-APs more broadly.

Codifying skills necessary for adults to engage in positive roles fostering youth voice remains vital to supporting and building capacity within the youth development workforce. Nevertheless, greater emphasis should be placed on clarifying what constitutes "partnerships" within Y-APs, especially when most youth-adult relationships have a power dynamic relative to age and employment status. For instance, youth act as service recipients in programming while adults act as service providers. As most youth and adults have limited experience engaging in equitable relationships, it is essential to understand how proposed tenets of youth-adult partnerships and youth voice play out in various practice settings.

Youth engaging in programmatic leadership does not occur overnight. Pushing youth into leadership positions before the program develops supportive infrastructure to promote youth success may lead to youth feeling unprepared and unsuccessful in leadership endeavors, impacting how they approach leadership opportunities in the future. Because of this, programs should take a scaffolded approach to move from adult-led towards youth-led activities. An intentional progression from expert to advocate offers both youth and adults the opportunity to build relationships while gaining perspective on the strengths and areas of growth. The participants in this study recognized the need to adopt a role relative to the purpose of the interactions. This give-and-take dynamic offers flexibility to both youth and adults as they undertake Y-APs, as each possesses unique skills and specified knowledge which may be better suited to a given circumstance. As various youth participate in programs, meeting each youth where they are and fostering relationships opens the door to meaningful Y-APs in the future.

Participants in this study emphasized the need for pairing their role with the situation and how organizational constructs impact their ability to promote youth voice. To date, little research exists focusing on organizational factors contributing to program staff valuing or promoting youth voice. Clarity of role is hypothesized in organizational literature to prevent burnout and stress related to job functioning. However, Maletsky & Evans (2017) found that greater job clarity with youth development workers decreased the promotion of youth voice. This may speak to organizational restrictions imposed by funders defining the youth worker role as an extension of the academic school day, taking positions of tutor and mentor rather than facilitator and partner. These constraints limit the ability of the worker to undertake roles promoting high levels of youth voice because they limit the worker's flexibility within interactions.

While this study offers insight into how and why youth development workers promote youth voice when working with youth experiencing high levels of multidimensional poverty, there are limitations on transferability. Despite the similarity of experiences described by all workers regarding the challenges of their positions, most workers were full-time and not representative of the part-time youth development workforce. Additionally, the populations served by the included programs do not represent the broader diversity of participation in youth development spaces. The study was undertaken during COVID-19, making additional recruitment difficult with programs halting programs and large-scale layoffs. Even so, the study provides a basis for understanding needs relative to an under-researched and underserved workforce.

Conclusion

As youth-serving organizations seek to engage youth experiencing identity-based oppression and/or poverty, a need exists for reconciling theoretical and practical programmatic goals. Engaging young people in organizational policy and operations is the goal of social justice youth development. However, organizations must appraise their capacity and organizational readiness relative to both youth worker and youth capacity. Even so, the starting place for meaningful youth engagement in community-based programming remains funding partners and fiscal agents. They require outcome measurements for youth development programs replicating the oppression imposed on youth of color through educational policies and standardized school outcome measures. Changing this dynamic will require more intentional endeavors to embed anti-racism within grant-seeking processes. This research study highlights the need for more significant resources to be allocated to the community-based youth development space. Youth workers are ready to receive professional development opportunities and work with youth in meaningful ways if given the opportunity. Future research should investigate the impact of organizational supports and job role clarity more fully, with larger sample sizes and diversity of organizations. Additionally, greater exploration of power dynamics and the role of racism within the youth development sector should be considered. Perhaps greater emphasis is needed to differentiate between equal and equitable relationships within youth-adult partnerships, which would require additional training and supports.

Ethical Approval

Study recruitment began after IRB approval was granted through the local

University. Care was taken not to reveal the identities of participants by excluding identifying information in reporting. Participants chose pseudonyms, which are included in the quotations provided in the reporting of results.

CHAPTER 3

THE INFLUENCE OF ROLE IDENTITY AND SELF-EFFICACY IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORKER PROMOTION OF YOUTH VOICE: A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

Introduction

The field of youth development has established core principles and values for working with young people, including promoting youth voice, agency, and empowerment (Hamilton et al., 2004; Ginwright & James, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). However, despite central features of best practices for programs, the sector caters to a broad range of youth with varied experiences and identities. This dynamic requires youth development workers to develop flexibility and accommodations within programmatic structures to build skills for various involved youth. In addition, the heterogeneous nature of youth development programs necessitates that workers possess skills corresponding to the employing program (Borden et al., 2011). Skills include the way that the program engages youth and their voices. Thus, while diversity between programs creates opportunities, it also challenges workers in identifying the necessary skills and mechanisms for fostering positive youth outcomes and engaging youth voice.

While youth development workers remain an under-researched population, existing studies highlight the ambiguous job roles and consistent turnover in the sector (Alley, 2020; Bloomer et al., 2021; Borden et al., 2011). The field of youth development centers on relational practice, building connections, and providing support for youth.

These practices require youth development workers to create space for youth to voice concerns, provide input, and be democratically involved in decision-making. Instead of seeking greater stability in staffing for youth program participants, youth-serving organizations have built staff turnover into their programmatic structures (Borden et al., 2011). While youth development professionals across various settings all need competence in relational practices, they are unlikely to receive it as organizations seek to minimize outputs and support placed on a temporary workforce (Akiva et al., 2020; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006; Yohalem et al., 2010; Colvin et al., 2020). The absence of skills in relational practice may generate role conflict for workers, as they perceive their organizational role to be less focused on interactions. It may also produce self-doubt, resulting in low self-efficacy perceptions relative to building relationships with youth.

Elucidating the relationship between job role, self-efficacy, and role conflict within the youth development sector offers an opportunity to understand better how those factors impact how youth workers prioritize task completion. It also offers insight into why youth workers value youth development principles like youth voice or not. Role identity may influence how and why youth workers promote youth voice and create opportunities for collaboration, but it has not been formally investigated. Little is known about how youth development professionals make meaning of their professional roles and its impact on their perceptions of abilities related to the job, including the promotion of youth voice. Exploring the connections between these factors offers the opportunity to clarify potential support mechanisms for youth development workers as they create spaces that value and foster youth input and voices.

Background Information

Youth Development

Afterschool programs emerged with societal shifts, as the creation of child-labor and mandatory education laws, coupled with increased numbers of mothers in the workforce, creating an unoccupied space of time for children and youth (Borden et al., 2011; Halpern, 2003; Mahoney et al., 2009). These changes resulted in young people, often immigrants experiencing poverty, playing unsupervised in the streets (Halpern, 2003; Colvin et al., 2020). Afterschool programs developed as a response to a large number of resulting unsupervised children, forging the legacy of afterschool programs existing for "at-risk" children that persists today (Baldridge, 2019; Colvin et al., 2020; Halpern, 2003). Baldridge (2019) asserted that Black and Latinx youth are today's "at-risk" youth, viewed with deficit-based lenses and replicating educational structures of oppression within the afterschool space.

The term "afterschool program" is often used interchangeably with youth development, but the terms are not synonymous. Hamilton et al. (2004) defined youth development as a natural process, set of principles, and practice of emphasizing an assets-based approach focusing on the role of supports, opportunities, programs, and services in the lives of youth (Pittman et al., 1991). Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) outlined the three characteristics of youth development programs that differentiate them from other youth-serving programs: 1) goals promoting positive development, "even when seeking to prevent problem behaviors" (p. 97) 2) workers creating an atmosphere of hope for all participants: programs create physically and psychologically safe places with solid buy-in

and commitment from youth, creating community 3) program activities offer youth informal and formal opportunities to nurture and develop skills, interests, talents.

Youth development programs occurring in the afterschool space are often pushed to focus on academic achievement, narrowing the scope of learning and leaving little time for cultural supports, social justice opportunities, and social-emotional learning (Baldridge, 2019; Hammer & White, 2014; Colvin et al., 2020). The push to center academics often occurs external to the program with funders. Youth development programs engage in homework help or STEM activities, even when they are not congruent with organizational mission or vision to meet funding criteria (Baldridge, 2019; Colvin et al., 2020). These external influences result in youth workers being pulled in various directions, which may be apparent in their understanding of their job role.

Youth Development Workers

Youth development occurs in a variety of settings, sponsored by organizations with diverse mission statements. Religious institutions, national and local nonprofits, and behavioral health facilities regularly offer youth development programming (Borden et al., 2011; Colvin et al., 2020). Borden et al. (2011) discussed the interdisciplinary nature of the sector, which leads to variation in levels of comprehension regarding youth development principles and role purpose between workers.

Youth development workers are often part-time and underpaid, with programs experiencing significant turnover (Alley, 2020; Bloomer et al., 2021; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006; Yohalem et al., 2006; Colvin et al., 2020). Despite attempts to promote youth worker competencies and curricula, the lack of professionalization and diversity makes standardized training and professional development challenging to implement

(National AfterSchool Association, 2011; Starr & Gannett, 2016). Without formal educational processes, youth development workers are reliant on organizations of employment to convey the focus of their positions and provide any additional tools or resources to appropriately engage with youth (Emslie, 2013; Fusco, 2012). As sponsoring organizations have access to varying infrastructure and resources, this creates the potential for youth development workers to experience role conflict due to role ambiguity. Role conflict may further lead to low perceptions of self-efficacy, as workers may not always have access to the resources or training to feel confident in their positions.

The disparate nature of the youth development sector and lack of professionalization create ambiguity around the job role undertaken by workers. Colvin et al. (2020) highlighted the discrepancy between the job role described by youth workers and social expectations and stereotypes. Workers experienced tension between social expectations and stereotypes of the position and the actual work performed, resulting in stress and disrespect (Colvin et al., 2020). As social expectations of their positions are inaccurate, it is not surprising that youth workers themselves experience an uncertainty about their job role, especially when they lack formal orientation to the position. Understanding the principles of practice for youth development is vital to youth development workers having job clarity and feeling comfortable engaging in the position's duties.

Colvin et al. (2020) reported the disagreement between the job role described by youth workers and social expectations and stereotypes of the youth worker position in afterschool programming. Workers felt that parents and other community partners

perceived them as glorified babysitters, not knowing they spent most of the time managing youth's "bad" behavior. Bloomer et al. (2021) echoed this finding, as workers reported managing youth behavior as a primary challenge of their work. Both studies found administrative duties took time away from workers in building relationships with youth. Additionally, youth workers in both studies understood the core feature of youth development as building connections with youth. Despite this knowledge, differences existed between workers' perceptions of what the job should entail versus what it entailed, leading to potential role conflict.

The conflict between societal expectations, priorities of the organization, and worker priorities place youth development workers in a position to experience job ambiguity, role conflict, and low perceptions of self-efficacy. If administrative duties and tasks take workers in frontline positions away from direct service with youth, it reduces their opportunities and capacity to forge meaningful connections. As relationships serve as the foundation for all other interactions with youth, this diminishes the ability of the worker to do their job, subsequently creating low perceived self-efficacy successfully.

Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-APs)

A central feature of Y-APs, youth voice, refers to youth involvement in decision-making processes for issues that affect them (Zeldin et al., 2008). Opportunities for youth voice are created through intentional design, reflection, and evaluation efforts (Zeldin et al., 2013; Zeldin et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2010). Youth voice is both principles and a process of enacting principles (Zeldin et al., 2008). Principles of youth voice 1) challenge power hierarchies between adults and youth 2) provide space for youth as experts of their own lived experiences, and 3) emphasize equity in decision-making, democratic values,

and co-learning within relationships (Wong et al., 2010). The principles require adults to alter their mindsets related to power and place value on youth as partners (Zeldin et al., 2008). Without organizational intentionality in constructing intentionally reflective spaces for challenging traditional mindsets, youth development workers may not recognize the importance of Y-APs or fostering youth voice within their roles. On the other hand, workers may understand the significance of Y-APs, but be restricted in their ability to develop them because of other duties expected in their position.

When youth experience empowerment, opportunities for positive development emerge (Perkins & Borden, 2006). Researchers in various contexts have demonstrated the readiness, willingness, and capacity of young people to be involved in decision-making and social change (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2004; Checkoway et al., 2003; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Ginwright & James, 2002). Rhodes et al. (2006) suggested that close relationships between youth and adults may spur identity development for youth. When investigating youth perceptions of benefits of youth development program participation, Serido et al. (2011) found that the quality of relationships perceived by youth contributed to strengthening youth voice. Additionally, the strength of youth voice and quality of the relationships positively impacted perceptions of benefits to participating. Several studies have demonstrated promising outcomes for involvement in youth development programming, showing significant benefits in academic gains, physical health, peer acceptance, and social and emotional development for program participants (Barber et al., 2001; Durlak et al., 2010; Taylor-Winney et al., 2018). Youth development workers can impact both the perceived and tangible benefits of program participation by fostering an environment that promotes youth voice.

On the other hand, Matthews (2003) discussed how failure to provide opportunities to listen to youth devalues their input, potentially leading to disinterest and low expectations of meaningful engagement. Access to spaces valuing youth voice may prove most salient for youth experiencing identity-based exclusion in society (Diversi & Mecham, 2005; Zeldin et al., 2005). Halpern (2006) described how repeated negative experiences with expressing voice might foster self-doubt and adult mistrust. Within the youth development sector, youth feeling undervalued or not heard may choose not to participate in activities as an act of expressing their voice (Newsome & Scarela, 2001). Kirby et al. (2003) described students boycotting programs with "bad youth workers" that exerted their control and failed to listen to youth input. It diminishes the value of the youth development space when workers fail to acknowledge the importance of youth voice for their positions. It also adds further to general societal confusion regarding the purpose and role of youth development professionals.

Youth development spaces engaging Y-APs and valuing youth voice have the potential to counter the effects of social exclusion while building skills, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging for participants (Zeldin, 2004). The positive impacts of YAPs remain evident, while other factors are unclear. The level of youth voice employed within YAPs, their frequency, and how workers view their role in these partnerships have not been determined. Given the often-ambiguous nature of the job role for youth development workers, investigating how the conceptualization of organizational job roles influence the stance taken by youth workers in promoting youth voice may provide insight into overarching organizational contributions to youth voice promotion.

Theoretical Sensitizing Concepts

This study used three theoretical frameworks as sensitizing concepts for exploring the relationship between youth development workers, organizational factors, and the promotion of youth voice within programming: organizational role theory, role episodic model, critical race theory, and symbolic interactionism (Biddle, 1985; Kahn et al., 1964; Blumer, 1969). The primary components of interest within those frameworks will be discussed to provide orientation for the reader.

Organizational Role Identity and Role Episodic Models

Biddle (1985) theorized that roles created predictable patterns for human behavior respective to social identities and the situation encountered. While professional identity and roles are not synonymous, the presence of an articulated role for youth development professionals would assist in providing clarity around purpose. Roles allow the individual to assign meaning congruent with the position. Roles have titles relative to position, whether within an organization or more broadly, that offer space to generate shared meaning. Expectations, obligations, and responsibilities emerge from shared meaning, which also assists in establishing how one may be evaluated for job purposes. Within an organization, an individual may take on multiple roles with various purposes assigned by different entities, such as coworkers or supervisors, to ensure organizational needs are met. Delegation of roles and corresponding duties may occur whether the individual feels prepared or even willing to undertake the responsibilities of that position.

The role episodic model centers on the cyclical interactions between a role sender and role receiver, with the interactive exchange of information defining expectations for both parties (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ashforth et al., 2016; Kahn et al., 1964). The role

episodic model acts as a partition separating organizations from other social situations and contexts, as organizations primarily exist in a hierarchal, task-oriented, pre-planned, and formally structured manner (Biddle, 1986; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Role conflict occurs when ambiguity, uncertainty, or confusion surround a role and its corresponding behaviors and performance evaluation (Kahn et al., 1964). Kahn et al. (1964) identified five types of role conflict, with three having significant implications for youth development professionals: 1) intra-sender: conflict arising when workers asked to fulfill role demand without necessary means and resources 2) inter-sender: conflict spurring from multiple entities within the organization having incompatible role demands (e.g., supervisor, peers, youth) and 3) person-role: conflict developing from incongruent role expectations with an individual's personal needs, values, and ethics. Intrasender conflicts may be the most emotionally exhausting conflict endured by youth development workers, as role expectations from the funders trickle down into organizational policies which restrict youth workers in engaging with youth and meaningfully promoting youth voice and partnerships.

Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer (1969) asserts symbolic interactionism has three primary premises:

> 1) human beings act towards things based on the meanings that the things have for them
>
> 2) the meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction that one has with one's fellows
>
> 3) these meanings are handled and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p.2)

Symbolic interactionism views the individual rather than society as primary, emphasizing the meaning-making process for individuals based on their experiences and

identities across the lifespan. The way one views the world and the way one views self emerges not from the interactions, but the meaning placed on the interactions by the individual. In this way, self-concept or how one view themselves is a product of the self. Reflexive interactions between individuals and their social environment create these cognitive constructs or "symbols" that inform further action.

Perceptions of self-efficacy develop in accordance with self-concept. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as the individual's belief that they can capably engage in specific behaviors necessary to navigate situations or roles successfully. Youth workers conceptualize their roles relative to job descriptions and interactions in the position. Based on those interactions, an internal stance towards their self-efficacy in their perceived job role develops. Wood and Bandura (1989) hypothesized a relationship between self-efficacy and the perceived difficulty of situations. Those with higher self-efficacy would experience multiple work roles with ease, while individuals with low self-efficacy would experience strain due to their believed inability to manage multiple roles. While self-efficacy initially spurred from social learning theory, the concept has subsequently been applied to various organizational structures and positions. Leadership self-efficacy (LSE) developed as a particularly relevant stream, as it evaluates the practical implications of how the judgment of capabilities impact behaviors (Paglis, 2010). Paglis (2010) found that research supported the relationship between high self-efficacy and job performance in a literature review. Their findings highlight the need for youth workers to understand the job requirements and have high levels of perceived self-efficacy.

Given the diversity of roles undertaken by youth development professionals and the potential to encounter challenging situations within those roles, better understanding the dynamics between the two remains vital for building more significant support for workers in the sector. Given the importance of youth voice promotion when working with youth historically facing identity-based exclusion within various spaces, exploring any potential relationships between roles and voice remains imperative. This qualitative study sought to understand better the relationship between the perception of job role and youth voice promotion for youth development workers in community-based programs engaging with youth historically excluded from sociopolitical participation due to identity-based discrimination.

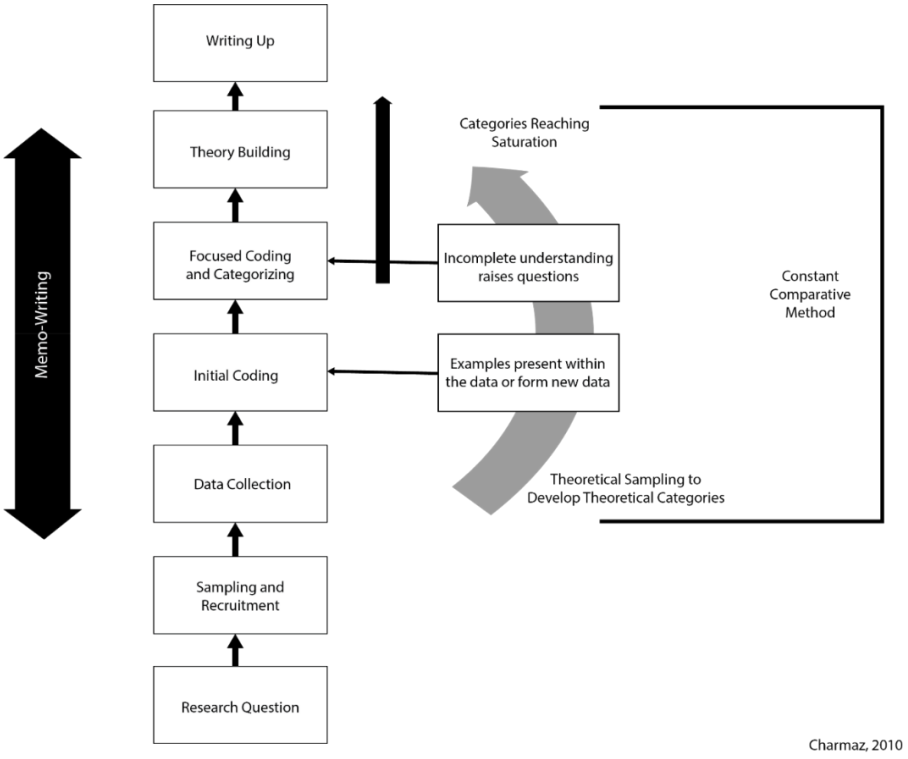
Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars assert racism as an ordinary feature of American society embedded within systems to create inequities for communities of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). CRT emphasizes the importance of counternarratives to dominant discourse, highlighting the importance of including diverse voices from people of color (Stepinsky & Ritzer, 2018). While CRT is often used when working with people of color, it is also a valuable tool for investigating experiences more broadly. The field of youth development employs individuals from diverse backgrounds. Despite this diversity, CRT offers a means to interrogate why youth development workers establish or endorse specific expectations for youth behavior related to the youth being served. For instance, how are youth development workers who primarily serve Black and youth of color imposing values and ideals on youth by centering expectations based on White middle class value structures?

Methods and Research Process

A constructivist grounded theory (CGT) research approach was employed to develop a context-specific framework describing the social process of how and why job roles impact youth workers' promotion and engagement of youth voice in programming. The research team sought to create a conceptual model describing the social process in question using CGT methods and situational analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke et al., 2018). Figure 1 illustrates the CGT process undertaken by the research team.

Figure 1



This study's youth development workers were employed in a community-based youth development program in a frontline position for 6 of the last 12 months. Semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews using an interview guide occurred at the

locations chosen by participants face-to-face and via Zoom. The interview guide focused on understanding organizational dynamics and clarity of job role and the understanding, implementation, and value placed on youth voice. Probing was used throughout interviews to explore the experiences of participants better, and additional questions were added to the interview guide to better understand the perceived dynamics between race and connections with youth. Three research team members trained in qualitative interview methodology conducted interviews. The study purpose was explained, and consent was garnered prior to commencing interviews. Interviews took place between April 2019 and November 2021. COVID-19 occurred during participant recruitment, and interviews were moved to Zoom to comply with social distancing standards. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Purposive sampling was used with theoretical sampling to ensure that a diverse group of youth development workers was interviewed. Participants came from a range of youth development programs, including local and national nonprofits with large and small fiscal resources and varying employees and resources. The common thread between all organizations was primary funding occurring through a sizeable local foundation that prioritizes programs serving youth of color, youth experiencing poverty, and youth with marginalized identities. Workers were sought through email via a listserv for youth development workers in the community. Additionally, those workers representing positions of interest received outreach by research team members for inclusion. Workers employed by programs primarily working with youth of color, youth with disabilities, and gender and sexual minority youth were included in this study.

A total of 19 individuals participated in a total of 33 semi-structured interviews. See Table 1 for additional sample characteristics. Data sources for this study included interviews, memos taken on sensitizing literature, situational maps, and data analysis. Initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding strategies were used while engaging in constant comparison with data (Charmaz, 2014). Peer debriefing assisted researchers in building consensus around focus codes (Erlandson et al., 1993). Following focused codes, a codebook consisting of code families and definitions was created, and Dedoose (2019) was used as an organizational tool. Axial coding and selective coding followed, with peer debriefing occurring at every stage of model development.

Table 1

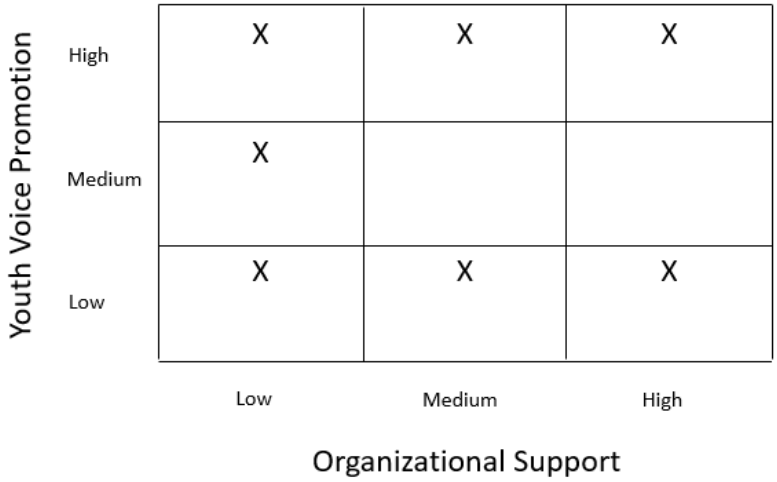
Sample Characteristics

Variable	n (*%*), M(*SD*)
Age	45.25(8.45)
Race	
White	13(68.4%)
Black	5(26.3%)
Latino	1(5.3%)
Gender	
Female	14(74%)
Male	5(26.3%)
Education	
Bachelors	11(58%)
Masters	7(37%)
Yrs at current job	6.55(7.47)
Prior yrs in youth work	9(8.80)
Full-time employment	13(68%)
Works two jobs	8(42%)

As preliminary data analysis occurred, a difference emerged between workers experiencing more job clarity and those with less. To better understand these differences, specific participants were sought at three small local nonprofits and one

national nonprofit, with varying job clarity and support levels. Relational maps were used to understand the dynamics between concepts such as youth worker race, perceptions of youth behavior, youth participant race, and perceptions of the job role. Subsequently, positional maps were implemented contrasting concepts of the value of youth voice by youth workers with the actual implementation of youth voice within programming. Positional maps also contrasted youth voice promotion with perceptions of organizational support, illustrated by how much the workers perceived the organization valued their input and opportunities for training (see Figure 2). Additional questions were asked of workers to understand silences in the data and how high levels of voice promotion occurred with low levels of support. Data collection, analysis, and recruitment continued until saturation occurred. Theoretical saturation is not simply collecting information until participants fail to describe new experiences. It requires the researcher to fully explicate the range of categories for theory development (Charmaz, 2014). In conjunction with participant feedback, peer debriefing and consensus-building occurred until the final model was produced and shared.

Figure 2



Rigor and Reflexivity

Tracy (2010) proposed a model of eight markers of qualitative research which distinguish quality across paradigms. They assert that “high quality qualitative methodological research is marked by (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence" (p.839). The application of these markers occurred throughout the research process. The profession of youth development work remains under-studied and theorized. As scant research currently exists, the topic is both relevant, significant, and interesting. Rather than quantitative precision, qualitative rigor is marked by complexity and abundance with rich data (Weick, 2007). Rich data is developed by variety, including theoretical constructs, sources, and samples (Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010) described, "a researcher with a head full of theories, and a case full of abundant data, is best prepared to see nuance and complexity" (p.841). The use of multiple sensitizing theories in the

evaluation of the data enhanced the overall rigor of this study. Prior to engaging in the research study, the research team engaged in self-reflexivity and examined motivations.

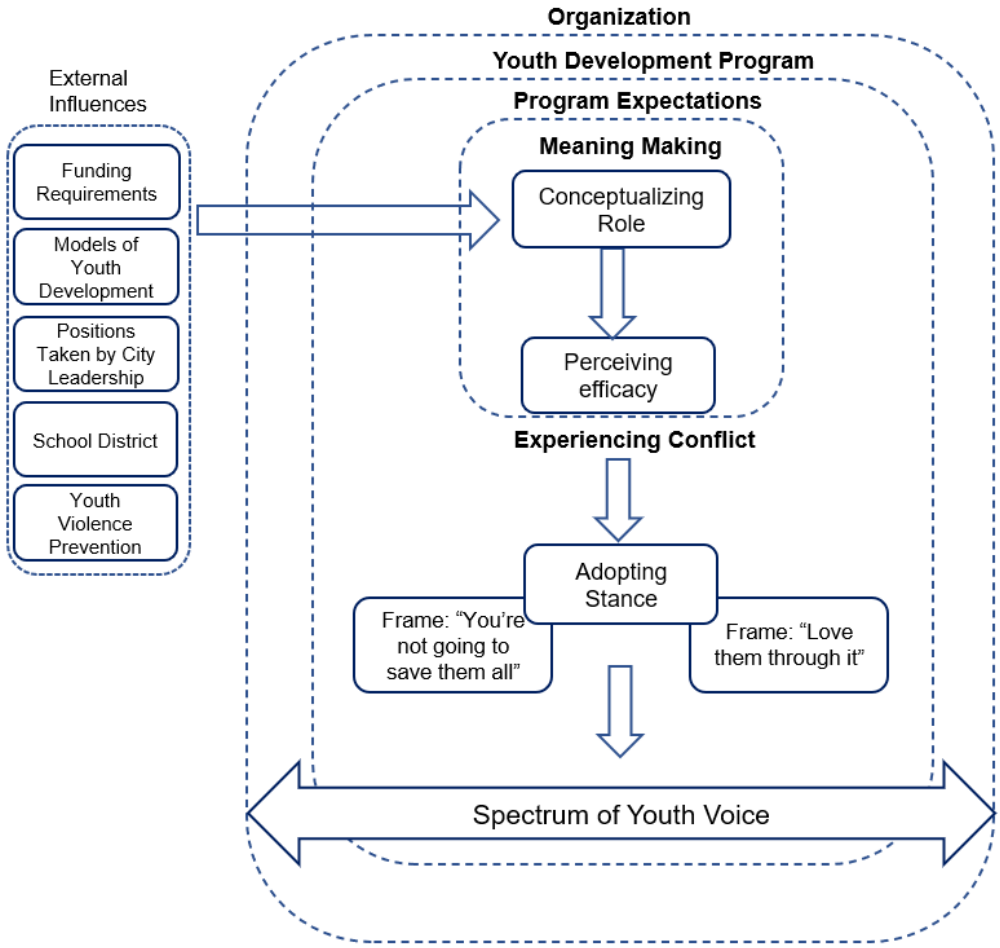
Engaging in reflexivity required the research team to consider their own identities and positionality related to the participants. The first author was a direct service provider and program director for youth development programs serving primarily youth of color experiencing poverty for five years. She continued to work with social work students placed with youth development programs and volunteered supervision and support. The third author worked in afterschool programs during practicum placements for her degree in higher education. She has served as the director of the Office of Youth Development. The first and third authors have provided professional development training on youth development and social justice youth development principles in the community to frontline workers, organizations, and city personnel. The second author is a qualitative methodologist. The first and second authors identify as White, and the third author identifies as Black. All authors identify as female. The team continually challenged preconceived notions and concepts of youth and youth workers by employing peer debriefing and memo writing.

Results

This study sought to understand the social process of how and why job roles impact youth workers' promotion and engagement of youth voice in programming. The context-specific framework, entitled "Promoting Youth Voice: The Influence of Role Identity and Self-Efficacy in Youth-Adult Relationships" (see Figure 3), describes how the direct engagement with youth impacts the process that youth development workers

undergo when promoting youth voice and agency for these youth within the programmatic context.

Figure 3



Context-Specific Framework

Youth development workers described navigating ambiguous job roles with various levels of efficacy in managing behaviors occurring outside programmatic expectations. Workers prioritized program participants' physical and psychological safety in navigating their adoption of a stance related to how the conflict was managed. A relationship existed between how the youth worker perceived their efficacy in mediating

conflict and the stance adopted. When youth workers had lower levels of perceived self-efficacy, they adopted the frame "you're not going to save them all." Workers with higher levels of perceived efficacy in managing conflict while maintaining programmatic safety often attempted to "love them through it" first and defaulted to "you're not going to save them all" if their efforts at conflict mediation were unsuccessful. Workers with higher levels of perceived self-efficacy typically promoted higher levels of youth voice in individual relationships. Self-efficacy is also related to the youth worker's understanding of their job role. Workers with greater job clarity demonstrated higher levels of perceived self-efficacy, possibly due to better understanding the purpose and goals of their position when interacting with youth. Workers with more nebulous job roles described having duties "piled on" and experiencing conflicting messages between their job description and subsequent organizational expectations.

Conceptualizing Role

Both youth development workers new to the profession and those practicing for many years need to understand the scope of their position. This understanding serves as the foundation for youth engagement within the programmatic context and determines how workers allocate time and resources. The conceptualization of the job role emerged from primarily two sources in this study: the job description provided by the employing agency and interactions with youth and peers concerning their role as a worker. Many youth workers indicated their job role as described at hire changed throughout employment, with organizations piling on additional job duties. In discussing the continuously changing nature of his job role, Red Said stated, "*I really would like to know what my job role is*." The continued accumulation of duties created difficulties for

workers, as they expressed confusion about the boundaries of their job and what constituted operating within the scope of practice for a youth development worker. Hope illustrated this point when saying, *I guess it is understanding job role, but just knowing where that line, where it's at, like how far do you go to help someone before you do start to refer them out?*"

Programmatic experiences with youth furthered job role confusion for participants, as youth brought a variety of needs that workers' felt compelled to address. Despite not constantly feeling prepared to tackle challenges, workers did their best to serve youth and provide resources whenever possible. One worker described "*rolling with things*" when additional needs presented themselves and "*try to make that accommodation*" if possible while also recognizing "*we can't always help*." Because the day-to-day duties changed over time, the process of conceptualizing the role occurred continually. Youth development workers took in the information, making meaning and creating individual conceptualizations of their role.

Perceiving Efficacy

The youth worker conceptualized their role, forming related boundaries and establishing skills necessary for successfully navigating the position. The conceptualized role shaped perceptions of required education or training relative to accomplishing the goals of the position in the program. The perceived skills necessary to function in the role were sometimes outside the worker's training, experiences, and education, impacting how the worker approached the role and perceived their capabilities and efficacy. Rachel explained how youth workers felt "*stressed*" working with youth "*when you're not a social worker*" or "*somebody who understands more about social development*." She

further elaborated, "*If you don't have those sorts of more clinical background, it's hard.*" The youth worker engaged with youth in the program conceptualized their role and potential efficacy in carrying out the related duties of the position.

Conflict emerged when the youth behaved outside of program expectations. The conflict established a need for youth workers to possess conflict mediation skills within their positions. When conflict arose, the priority of youth workers remained the physical and psychological safety of all program participants. If youth workers perceived themselves to have established relationships with youth or possessed high levels of perceived self-efficacy in resolving conflict, workers approached their roles with confidence. Experiencing conflict often resulted in emotional stress or burnout for those with less perceived efficacy because workers felt ill-equipped to manage the situation appropriately. The perception of efficacy concerning mediating conflict while securing the safety of all program participants directly impacted the subsequent stance adopted by workers.

Meaning Making

The starting point for each youth worker adopting a stance was youth engaging in behaviors falling outside the established expectations of the program. The meaning-making process was influenced by the youth workers' life experiences, belief systems, and norms. Each youth worker brought multiple identities and experiences, shaping how they made meaning of encounters and situations and the subsequent positions taken within their job role.

These coalescing identities and experiences in conjunction with perceptions of efficacy in the job role created the foundation from which workers operated and made

decisions. In addition, factors such as skills, training, education, cultural values, shared experiences with youth, empathy, and emotional bandwidth created perceptions of situations per their worldview. This process occurred internal to the worker. Rather than "making a decision" as a conscious endeavor of weighing pros and cons and the outcomes associated with each, workers processed behaviors through existing thought patterns to react in alignment with those factors.

The individual's perception of the behavior, not the behavior itself, guides how youth workers will approach conflict and manage the situation. Youth may exhibit unexpected behavior, but the worker's norms, expectations, and perceptions are the basis for interpretation.

Many youth workers served primarily Black youth and youth of color with low socioeconomic status and did not share cultural norms, identities, or experiences with program participants. However, race alone did not account for how youth workers valued or made meaning of youth behavior. The racial identity of workers impacted perceptions of desirability or comfort with behaviors exhibited by youth and their ability to establish meaningful connections. A race- and/or identity-based mismatch between the worker and the youth yielded the potential for increased misunderstandings and challenges in both directions: youth worker to youth and youth to youth worker. Rose discussed how whiteness could impact work with Black youth and youth of color in his position:

> *I think there are times when being White, I guess, you try to overcompensate in some way, and it makes you look so disingenuine. Then you try to backpedal and not be. And then you just look like a confused White person. And they're not dumb. They know what you're trying to do.*

Rose illustrates how the unique nature of thought patterns relative to identities and norms influenced how workers experiencing identity-based mismatch had trouble connecting to youth, which held weight in their perceived efficacy regarding positive conflict resolution. The ability to connect and establish relationships also acted as the foundation for promoting youth voice, creating difficulty for workers without shared identity, culture, or norms in enhancing youth voice opportunities with program participants.

Adopting a Stance

A primary responsibility of youth workers was maintaining the emotional and physical safety of program participants within the programmatic space. Youth workers adopted a stance based on their ability to ensure safety while resolving conflict between or with youth. Workers filtered conflict through identity, life experiences, skills, and perceptions of efficacy to adopt a stance. The stance taken is shaped by the behavior displayed at the moment and by previously exhibited behaviors and the amount of emotional bandwidth and resources to address and diffuse the situation safely.

Additionally, a worker may take more than one stance with youth when engaging in conflict mediation. In discussing how adopting a stance occurred in practice, 001 clarified, "*It can oscillate between both."* She shared that she sometimes changed stances when working with youth if additional information came available. For instance, she described working with youth on goals related to adhering to program expectations and subsequently becoming privy to information or interactions that demonstrated a safety risk. After starting with "love them through it" first, she recognized "*if there is a safety*

concern," she resorted to "you're not going to save them all" because they did "*need to be discharged from the program."*

Workers with less perceived efficacy in resolving conflict with youth adopted more rigid stances with continued exposure to challenging behaviors. JK discussed the lack of consequence for youth engaging in "*bad behavior*" as he wanted "*some students, some members, removed permanently."* He felt youth failing to follow program expectations *"caused havoc. And by causing havoc, you get into a safety situation."* While still prioritizing group safety, these stances often sought to remove youth from the program entirely to reduce risk.

Youth Worker Frame: "You're Not Going to Save Them All"

"You're not going to save them all" represented a path taken by workers in two contexts: 1) when youth workers had less perceived efficacy in remediating youth behavior and conflict or 2) strategies to combat unexpected behaviors and conflict were unsuccessful and/or exhibited behaviors posed a safety risk, and the worker had to prioritize the collective program over individual youth. In the first context, workers typically voiced frustration and negative stereotypes of "*troubled"* youth. In contrast, the second situation emerged from a worker taking the "love them through it" stance and finding conflict resolution unproductive, emotionally draining, or a threat to the safety of others.

Less Efficacy

Workers adopting "you're not going to save them all" often reflected adults seeking to preserve the hierarchal relationship between adults and youth, with workers taking authoritarian positions over program participants. Workers taking this stance

prioritized structure and order, which was demonstrated by discussions about accountability. When confronted with program expectations or norms violations, workers used their frames of reference to evaluate the situation and inform the response. Because youth workers often carried differing cultural norms, values, and expectations from the populations served, they often did not connect youth behavior to potential underlying motivations.

A few workers expressed more severe negative opinions regarding youth behaving outside program norms. These workers called for more consequences when youth caused programmatic conflict. One worker discussed the "*unreal*" behavior eliciting conflict at his site, saying, "*there's no discipline, there's no respect, there's no boundaries, there's no consequences."* This worker talked about the difficulties experienced in performing his role and his lack of preparedness for dealing with the challenges. He said he "*was not prepared*" and did not believe anyone would be "*unless they were a licensed therapist*." He gave the example of one youth that needed to be removed "*because of the danger that he was causing*" and the difficulty doing that because they lacked proper "*documentation."* In this instance, the worker demonstrated a more severe judgment of the youth; nevertheless, the frustration reflected the emotion felt due to the organizational "*bureaucracy*" restricting them from taking action to preserve safety.

Workers frequently criticized parents for being absent and not attending programmatic events, failing to understand that parents of youth in these communities may have other obligations and stressors, such as working or taking care of additional children. Many White youth workers adopting "love them through it" were often able to

develop some level of relationships with youth, even those exhibiting behaviors that violated group expectations. While White youth workers taking the "you're not going to save them all" stance often relied on individual level rather than structural level factors to explain motivations for behaviors that caused conflict. As one youth worker explained, the disrespect and disdain for the adult authority by youth stemmed from one place: "*it's from home."*

Prioritizing Program

In working towards adopting a stance, youth workers had to balance the well-being of one youth with the well-being of other youth in the program, individually and collectively. Workers described working with youth experiencing community violence, gangs, poverty, food instability, and trauma and had difficulty establishing meaningful relationships. Even when workers wanted to assist youth in setting and achieving goals to mitigate conflict, they had to strike a balance between the perceptions of their job role, their skill in addressing the presenting challenges, and the safety within programming.

Youth workers adopting the stance of "you're not going to save them all" may previously have believed they could deviate youth from an undesirable life path. Instead, workers engaged in actions to "*save*" youth from their circumstances. When doing this, workers were adjusting how they conceptualized their role and perceived efficacy in taking on roles more congruent with workers in the social service sector. Workers wanted more community collaboration between agencies, but most youth development agencies did not employ social workers or engage in formal assessment and referral processes with other organizations. Many workers emphasized the need for time and space to network with youth service providers to enhance collaboration and knowledge. Despite wanting to

serve youth better, many workers reported feeling drained by attempting to engage unready youth. Jeff described this experience as he would spend a great deal of time attempting to convince youth to demonstrate the potential of their worth. The closer they came to making change, the more frustrated he would become by their lack of progress. He described how this caused him to waste "*an opportunity"* and overlook other youth wanting help.

Given the time and resources available to workers, they did not always feel prepared to provide what some youth required in terms of support while also appropriately maintaining their job role. Some conflict resulted from the way that youth chose to engage with program activities. Workers described how youth engaging "*less vociferously*" distracted workers from recognizing the bigger picture. Warren discussed how getting one hundred percent of the youth to participate in an activity is unrealistic. Holding this standard had a detrimental impact on the program because "*if you allow two of them"* to act as a distraction, "*you're just going to lose the twenty who are paying attention."*

Adopting the stance of "you're not going to save them all" is not an umbrella that oversees all interactions a youth worker has with all youth. "You're not going to save them all" is often the result of attempting to balance time and resources while operating within one's available emotional bandwidth. In meeting youth where they are, ready or unready to work on their issues, youth workers can prevent "*wasting*" time engaging in unproductive work for which they lack the skills and training.

Many workers expressed the desire to have more training in behavior management, trauma, cultural humility, and clinical skills. Some specifically mentioned

the need to be a clinician or social worker to manage the conflicts created within programming. In illustrating the need for more education, one worker relayed how a youth "*lost it*" one day and resorted to "*tossing a chair*." While the worker did not react negatively at the moment, he admitted staff "*got upset*" by the situation, and they needed more coping skills to handle situations better. He explained needing to know "*how to calm that kid down and feel like he's being listened to and believed and trusted*." Another worker described engaging in conflicts emerging from a variety of sources. She described having "*to learn that by doing*" and felt it "*was not fair*" to the involved youth. Finally, many workers reiterated the need for more significant professional development to effectively work with youth bringing "*all the baggage that these kids are bringing in*."

Whether the initial stance or the one reverted to after attempts to "love them through it," "you're not going to save them all" often resulted in youth being dismissed from programming. Thus, youth voice was stifled. "You're not going to save them all" does not promote voice for individual youth engaged in conflict; however, the programmatic utility of this stance may serve to promote voice for youth remaining in the program.

Youth Worker Frame: "Love Them Through It"

Youth workers attempting to "love them through it" used prevention strategies to mitigate the possibility of escalating conflict with youth. Workers adopting this frame emphasized building individual relationships with youth, which served as the foundation for open communication both before and after experiencing conflict. When conflict with youth emerged, they sought to understand motivations provoking behaviors outside the bounds of programmatic norms. Due to the emphasis on building relationships, youth

workers in this frame believed youth were the experts in their lived experiences, and honoring their voice was vital.

Building Relationships

Many workers described "love them through it" as the starting point for their interactions with youth before conflict presented itself. Workers using this frame attempted to develop individualized relationships with youth to establish connections that opened the door for communication. In taking this position, workers learned that youth are the experts in their own lives and listening to them created pathways to understand their motivations and desire better. By engaging in direct, one-on-one interactions with youth, the workers promoted high levels of youth voice, allowing youth to express their feelings and choose how they wanted to move forward—allowing youth an opportunity for voice during conflict does not suggest that youth were allowed to engage in unsafe or challenging behaviors. One worker described this path as taking a "*harm-reduction*" approach, focusing on the positive progress demonstrated by youth rather than deficits, promoting growth in behaving within program expectations by providing encouragement and supports.

While conflict with youth due to unexpected behaviors represented a primary challenge for workers, many workers connected conflict within the program to external experiences of youth. For example, Camille explained that conflict arose because youth do not know how to gain adults' attention positively. In illustrating this point, she stated, *"they're the sweetest kids on the face of the planet, and that's what they want and crave, is attention."* Other youth workers also expressed that despite the hardships youth face

both in and outside of the program, supporting youth, helping them understand their choices, and promoting voice was important. 001 illustrated this point:

> *"But we're really on choices, letting the kids know that they do have choices even though they're children, and they can't make a lot of choices because of their age. You do have some choices, and your behaviors are in the situation. So, we help them and guide them through the choices that they do have."*

The "love them through it" frame represents the willingness of youth workers to assist and support youth in the face of conflict. For youth workers able to adopt this stance, the value of building relationships outweighed the ease accomplished by dismissing youth outright. When confronted with peers labeling youth "*bad*" or "*problems*" and wanting to "*get them out of here*," many youth development workers pushed their peers to see past the demonstrated behavior. Workers who adopted this frame were more likely to attribute unsafe behaviors to structural rather than individual factors. Betty explained, "*And it's like, 'Okay, hold up. There's a reason.' Not that you justify everything but try to figure out why they're behaving that way or why they're acting this way, and let's see if we can help fix it.*

Honoring Youth Voice

While loving youth through conflict often entailed engaging in one-on-one interactions, it sometimes meant allowing youth space to process or decompress without adult intervention. Workers described situations where conflict occurred, and youth needed to be separated from the rest of the group. Once they understood the needs of youth, workers provided youth the freedom to take care of their needs without assistance. In some cases, this meant youth sitting alone in designated spaces or standing up when an activity was underway. For example, one worker talked about one youth not wanting to participate in programming. Because she had built a relationship with the youth, she

knew sometimes she could engage the youth and "*other times when she just wasn't going to be engaged*." Youth workers understood that allowing the choice not to participate or step away when needed promoted voice and autonomy in those situations. This is not to be confused with simply ignoring conflict altogether, as recognizing and acknowledging the needs of youth is required for adopting this stance.

Individualized relationships with youth allowed for more significant voice promotion at the programmatic level. Youth voice is often conceptualized as youth providing input at the programmatic or organizational level, taking the role of partners and leaders by impacting the direction and operations of programming. This study conceptualized youth voice as having decision-making abilities and being provided options reflective of their identities within the programmatic space—both in individual and group interactions. Workers placed greater emphasis on individual relationship-building to de-escalate conflicts and build community. Due to historical exclusion within programs and decision-making systems, workers expressed a desire to have the youth take over their positions eventually. However, skill-building needed to occur before the youth could take those roles.

By fostering individual relationships, workers have promoted buy-in from an often difficult-to-engage population in the youth development space. In addition, once youth have established relationships within the program, workers perceive them to have greater faith in the importance of their voice in other contexts and settings. In this way, the one-on-one relationships fostered by workers adopting this frame served to promote higher levels of youth voice at the individual level, hoping to extend that programmatically.

External Factors for Adoption of Stance

The individual interactions between youth and workers occurred within the context of overarching macro structures that also impacted the ability of workers to promote youth voice. One prominent local funder for study participants required programs to utilize a specific tool assessing program quality. The tool has multiple domains that evaluate the environment's safety, relationships between adults and youth, and the activity offerings occurring within the observed day. Training supplements the tool to align the workers with the evaluated domains, focusing on relationships, choice, and youth voice. Workers described the training as great in theory but lacked tangible practices for implementation with broad youth ranges. Workers indicated funding was tied to their use of the tool, and they felt constrained in what they could provide based on what they were supposed to emphasize. Workers reported their conceptualization of youth voice emerged directly from the training for the tool and how the funding entity portrayed it. In attempting to adhere to the assessment tools, workers felt less able to allow youth actual agency and voice to inform programmatic activities and organizational workings. The introduction of the tool and standards of practice diminished the promotion of youth voice within the programmatic context in many instances.

The tension between the criminal legal system, youth, city leadership, violence prevention efforts, and models of youth development created conflict experienced by the city. Recently, a heavy emphasis was placed on youth violence prevention and adopting violence prevention as positive youth development. In this stance, city leadership prioritized preventing crime as a desired way to impact youth positively. Most of the youth involved in programs with these youth workers were Black or youth of color living

in areas of the city with higher crime rates and lower socioeconomic status, making them the target demographic for youth violence prevention efforts. While workers did not directly discuss the connection between these entities, they did indirectly discuss the impact this tension created on their work, youth in programming, and positive outcomes.

External factors impacted how the youth worker conceptualized their role by influencing perceptions of job functions, boundaries, and programmatic outcomes. For example, funding requirements are often tied to educational outcomes, expecting the youth development program to operate as an extension of the educational institution, allowing additional time added to the school day. For programs requiring academic-focused outcomes, workers were required to spend some of their programmatic time on homework assistance.

Viewing youth development programs as spaces exclusively for academic enrichment devalued the space and restricted workers from engaging youth in building leadership skills and sociopolitical involvement—both attributes amplify youth agency, voice, and community building skills. The skills required for youth to be change-makers and engage in active participation in their communities are not represented by many funders or youth development models, especially those emphasizing violence prevention. Systemic racism embedded deeply within youth-serving systems served to impact modes interactions heavily and desired outcomes for external influences on the paths to promote youth voice for youth workers. The macro external structures represented a specific view of youth and the programs serving them, establishing outcomes and strategies relative to their position, and promoting their perspective through funding, training, and community partnerships. As youth workers made meaning of behaviors and adopted a stance within

the overarching system promoted by these mechanisms, external influences influenced the promotion of youth voice.

Components internal to the youth worker, youth development program, and organization were all influenced by the position and stances taken by external influences. The macro perspective created a trickle-down effect into the mezzo and micro levels, as political and social capital related to funding and employment. External influences relate to role conceptualization and perceived efficacy, eventually impacting the level of youth voice promoted within the programmatic context. While external influences and models included youth voice as best practices, the failure to create policies at the macro level impedes the promotion of youth voice in programs. Despite being held accountable for engaging in specific "best practices" at the programmatic level, the autonomy of youth development workers to do so was impeded by restrictions related to their job roles created by funding entities and the sponsoring organization.

Discussion

Youth development workers navigated conflict emerging from youth behavior by prioritizing the physical and psychological well-being of all program participants. Workers with greater perceived self-efficacy attempted to mediate conflict with youth by adopting the stance "love them through it" first and resorted to "you're not going to save them all" when that consistently failed or safety became an issue—workers who had greater access to professional development opportunities, supervision and supports experienced more role clarity. Organizational supports fostered more excellent knowledge and capacity in workers, emphasizing relationship building and promoting youth voice, which was reflected in perceptions of self-efficacy related to mediating

conflict. Workers with unclear organizational roles were often required to do many tasks unrelated to youth development programming, which pulled them in varying directions. These workers experienced barriers in adopting the frame "love them through it." Workers adopting "you're not going to save them all" did not do so with malicious intent. Instead, workers appraised their skills and perceived their efficacy in the position performing various tasks. "You're not going to save them all," reflected workers that often-lacked necessary training in managing conflict within the program. As they determined the best method to maintain safety, they prioritized the collective program over the individual youth, fostering lower levels of youth voice. Workers in this frame experienced role conflict between their perceived job role and organizational expectations, which often shifted due to external influences.

Promotion of Youth Voices

As previously discussed, the potential benefits relative to participation in youth development programming remain vast. However, positive outcomes are dependent on the presence of quality staff. Adults must offer opportunities for youth to make decisions and witness the resulting outcomes (Zeldin et al., 2018). To do so requires implementing both the process and principles of youth voice (Zeldin et al., 2008). Youth workers had often adopted the appropriate principles for youth voice; however, they lacked programmatic and organizational processes and policies to democratically include youth in decision making (Zeldin et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2010). Meaningful empowerment opportunities are created when youth engage in the decision-making process and learn valuable skills in the process (Larson & Wood, 2006). Empowerment calls for collaborative work between adults and young people, enabling youth to have power over

decision-making in programming and the organization. Youth become empowered when they learn skills because they become less dependent on adults doing things on their behalf.

A key feature to emerge from the frame "love them through it" was the positive benefits experienced by workers due to building relationships with youth. Building relationships allowed workers to prevent and mediate conflict, as they could address potential conflicts before they occurred. Workers that had positive relationships with youth engaged in higher levels of voice promotion. Workers in these situations worked collaboratively with youth to mediate conflict rather than imposing disciplinary measures outright, producing an empowering environment for youth. This maps on to theoretical and empirical analysis of central features of effective Y-APs, which are characterized by youth believing they are trusted as both learners and leaders, having authentic opportunities for decision-making (Zeldin et al., 2014)

The variation in how workers adopted a stance highlights the factors external to both the individual worker and the program impacting youth worker success. As one worker discussed, their organization required activities to help achieve specific outcomes related to funding. The funder emphasized the importance of youth voice; however, they also mandated homework help and academic enrichment. Mandatory homework help diminished the time workers had to engage in activities chosen by youth. The foundation for deep connection and learning is relationships, which are stifled when workers cannot enact youth input (Li & Julian, 2012). The worker explained how the requirements restricted the youth's voice because the youth were not interested in homework. The worker's sentiments echo broader complaints with the affiliation between the youth

development sector and the formal education system and its outcome measures (Baldridge, 2019).

Youth workers adopting "you're not going to save them all" voiced frustration over being restricted by organizational policies that presented hazards to workers and other program participants. As discussed previously, youth development workers need training in relational practice to effectively perform their jobs (Akiva et al., 2020; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006; Yohalem et al., 2010; Colvin et al., 2020). When they lacked this training, workers were quicker to label youth behaviors "safety issues" than those with more behavioral management knowledge. They also discussed the need for and barriers to receiving training and professional development opportunities. Many organizations allowed for professional development but were unable to fund opportunities. Free community training often occurred at inconvenient times or sought to cater to youth workers in broad contexts, lacking actual application across populations. For workers to practice within their scope, some had to default to “you’re not going to save them all” simply due to a dearth of organizational supports.

Impact of Role Identity

How youth development workers conceptualize their role is dependent on a) expectations of the position and b) evaluations of efficacy. A broad spectrum of skills, education, and training was present between workers. Those with a greater understanding of social development and conflict mediation experienced less emotional strain than those with less familiarity. When confronted with conflict spurring from behaviors outside established programmatic boundaries, youth workers with lower perceptions of efficacy adopted the stance of "you're not going to save them all." Workers with greater

perceptions of efficacy in their skills possessed greater flexibility in adopting a stance, as they felt better situated to de-escalate situations and resolve conflict effectively. This finding aligns with research investigating relationships between self-efficacy and behaviors, which found connections between the perceptions of efficacy and job performance (Paglis, 2010).

Workers expressed job clarity as a foundational element to success navigating all other aspects of their positions but indicated it was often missing. Research has documented the lack of clarity experienced by frontline youth development workers regarding their job role expectations and objectives, making workers firmly situated to experience role conflict (Camino, 2005; Bloomer et al., 2021; Nalani, Yoshikawa, Godfrey, 2021). Role expectations are a direct response to prioritizing specific tasks, projects, objectives, and visions for the organization. Work roles emerge partially from job descriptions but also through daily interactions with the job. Many youth development programs exist within nonprofit organizations, and funding partners center their own desired participant outcomes. Because of this, the organization may create a position with a specific job role in mind, but that job role may not correspond with the priorities of the funding partners. Therefore, youth development workers must be flexible and think on their feet when confronted with conflicting role expectations with uncertain organizational environments.

An interesting finding emerging from positional maps was that workers most frequently operated at the extremes of youth voice promotion—either high or low. Operating at extremes was especially true for workers expressing higher levels of organizational support, which was contrary to expectations. Upon further inquiry, it

became clear that workers receiving high levels of support but promoting low levels of youth voice had greater job clarity. Organizations provided supervision and professional training opportunities but emphasized components other than youth voice and empowerment. The failure to incorporate structures for youth voice promotion failed to meet the process criteria of youth voice, as intentional structures for supporting youth in decision-making were missing (Zeldin et al., 2008).

The conflict between organization expectations and mechanisms to produce congruent outcomes further emphasizes the complex relationship between organizational and external factors and the promotion of youth voice for youth development workers. Macro-level factors must focus on creating prospects for youth development workers to engage in professional development and internalize the principles of youth voice (Zeldin et al., 2008). Youth development funders must recognize the merit and value of community-based youth programs beyond acting as academic supports.

It is important to note that the context-specific framework entitled "Promoting Youth Voice: The Influence of Role Identity and Self-Efficacy in Youth-Adult Relationships" conceptualized youth voice as freedom for youth to express their thoughts and concerns with youth workers individually rather than within youth-adult partnerships. Y-APs are conceptualized with varying levels of youth agency, but they refer distinctly to collective groups rather than individuals. This study's youth development workers faced difficulty in achieving Y-APs in the traditional context due to challenges faced within their organizations relative to their job roles, such as lacking adequate planning and training time. Those voicing greater understanding and placing greater value on youth voice often lacked the support and resources to build capacity around engagement.

Limitations

This study faced limitations relative to participants as the youth development workers were primarily full-time employees. As the vast number of youth development programs employ part-time workers and use volunteers, this is not reflective of the population of youth development workers more broadly. Part-time workers may have lacked time or flexibility to participate in the interview process. In addition, this study focused on youth development workers engaging with a specific client population in one city. The results of this study are not representative of all populations and contexts, although they may have transferability to similar groups. Youth development workers are under-researched, but the research and application of organizational role theory to this population remains even less so. This study adds to the limited existing literature base by developing a relevant theory.

Conclusion

Creating empowering environments for youth requires adults to challenge traditional views of youth and take intentional measures to foster youth participation and voice. Decision-making should be positioned in an egalitarian and democratic way that values the perspectives and insights of participants. Creating decision-making in this way calls for adults to create a culture of inclusivity by challenging concepts of "ideal" youth behavior that replicate systems of oppression. For adults to have the capacity to foster empowering environments, organizations and systems must also challenge traditional deficit-based thinking and mechanisms that produce oppressive environments for youth, including offering youth development workers the opportunity for meaningful "voice" and input in programmatic decision-making and policies. Youth development workers

engage in valuable work that benefits both youth and their communities. Their service should be recognized by providing enhanced supports and resources towards the professional development of the sector.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The field of youth development has established core principles and values for working with young people, including the promotion of youth voice, agency, and empowerment (Hamilton et al., 2004; Ginwright & James, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). Most empirical investigation of youth development (see 4-H Positive Youth Development Longitudinal Study) emphasizes assets or characteristics that lead to youth "thriving" (Lerner et al., 2014). Youth development workers play an integral role in developing and implementing programming in front-line direct service positions. Even so, a dearth of research investigates the mechanisms by which youth development workers foster environments conducive to building youth-adult partnerships, youth voice, or youth empowerment. Professionalized workforces, such as teachers, social workers, and psychologists, receive better support and training relative to their positions. As youth development lacks professionalization, workers are often under-resourced, undervalued, and underpaid, performing tasks to support youth outside their scope of practice. Broader research exploration and attention are necessary to understand youth development workers' experiences when seeking positive youth outcomes. Despite these challenges, youth development workers manage to achieve positive outcomes. Therefore, there is a need to understand the social processes, necessary conditions, and strategies to promote youth voice within the programmatic context. These two studies sought to add to the establishment of necessary research, exploring processes and meaning that inform actions and social processes of youth development workers in programs serving youth of color experiencing high levels of multidimensional poverty.

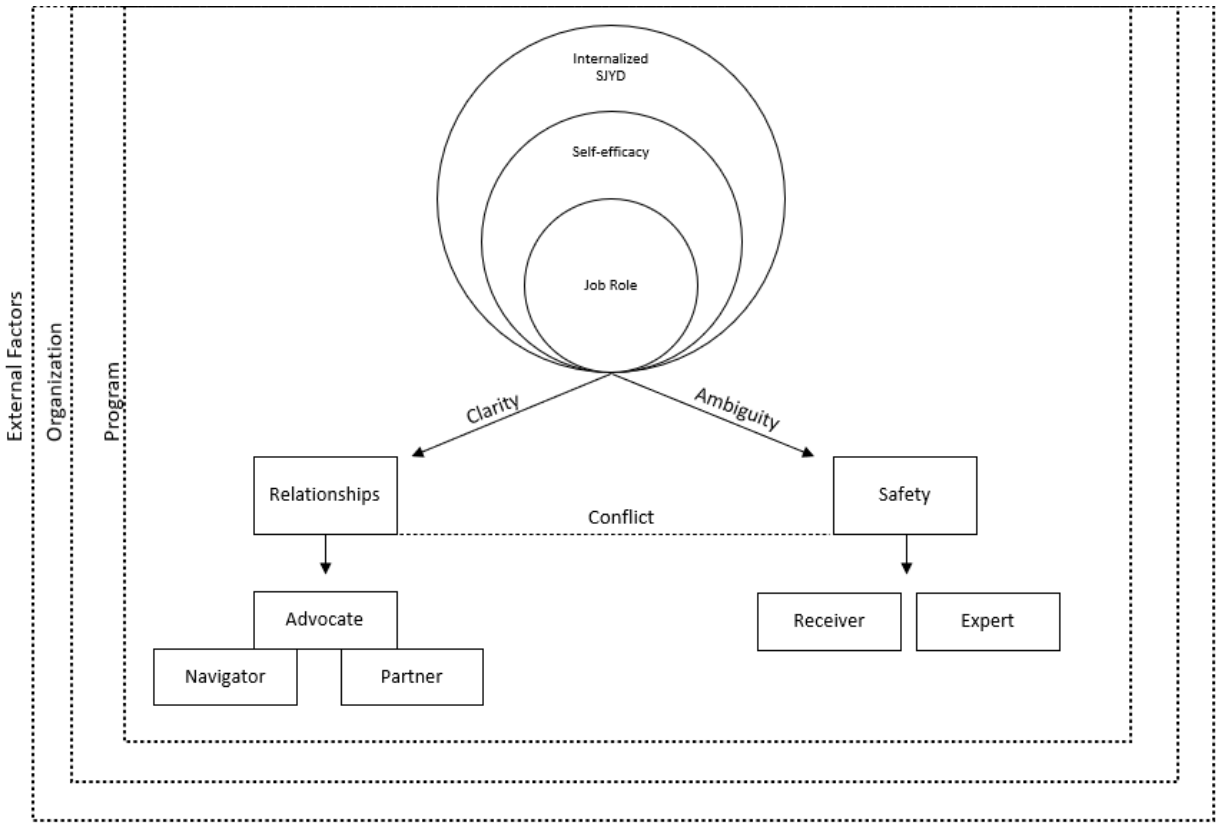
Connecting Study Results

Both papers used constructivist grounded theory (CGT) in addition to situational analysis to assist in developing two context-specific theories. The purpose of paper one was to create a context-specific theory, grounded in the voices of youth development workers, describing the necessary conditions for high youth voice promotion amidst fluctuating organizational supports while working with youth historically excluded from sociopolitical involvement. The purpose of the second paper was to develop a context-specific framework describing the social process of how and why job roles impact youth workers' promotion and engagement of youth voices in programs serving the same population.

The findings of both studies emphasized the interconnectedness of micro and macro-level structures impacting outcomes within the youth development sector. Internal processes occurred, allowing youth development workers to make meaning of their positions and interactions with peers, youth, and macro programmatic, organizational, and community factors. Workers engaged with youth through relationship building and conflict mediation, adopting roles congruent with the needs of their interactions. The sample's promotion of youth voice and activism was limited mainly to individual interactions due to restrictions imposed by external factors. Both studies also highlighted connections between constructs that may help understand the social processes related to youth development workers fostering youth voice. The figure entitled "The Bigger Picture in Youth Voice Promotion" (see Figure 1) provides a visual representation of potential relationships between constructs present in the two studies.

Figure 1

The Bigger Picture in Youth Voice Promotion



Job Role, Self-Efficacy, and Internalized SJYD

APs) (Zeldin et al., 2013). When youth are provided meaningful opportunities to provide a voice in organizations, potential positive outcomes include building community, increased sense of belonging and participation, and increased problem-solving skills (Akiva et al., 2014; Lulow et al., 2014; Mueller et al., 2000; Maletsky & Evans, 2017). The emphasis on youth voice, agency, and contributions leads to youth empowerment, as they develop skills allowing for greater independence from adults. Workers need access to training and professional development to be proficient, focusing on competence growth in relational practices. Additionally, workers should understand the principles of youth development practice. Workers engaging primarily with youth of color from areas of high multidimensional poverty should also receive supports in comprehending and applying principles of equity, moving towards behaviors congruent with the social justice youth development framework.

Despite the clear need, most youth workers rely on their sponsoring organizations to receive job training. Consequently, many youth workers are underprepared to engage with youth experiencing discrimination, oppression, and disproportionately poor outcomes. Because of this, workers experience conflict between the job description as written by the sponsoring organization and what the job requires of them on a day-to-day basis. When someone reads a job description, they may assess their potential fit with that position based on their job skills and what would be required. Youth workers in these studies accepted positions presented to them only to find significant variation from the tasks required of them (Bloomer et al., 2021).

Many may have entered the position with high perceptions of self-efficacy, the challenges related to relational practices were outside the scope of their perceived

abilities. Job role, therefore, is embedded within self-efficacy. Meaning, if a worker demonstrated alignment between what was required of the role and their skill set, there was greater potential to internalize social justice youth development principles. Internalizing the principles of social justice youth development requires intentional reflection and supports. When a worker possessed low self-efficacy due to a lack of alignment between job role and skills, a high potential existed that the organization did not provide substantial supports for the position. Because of this, exposure to principles of SJYD was limited, making internalizing principles of youth development or SJYD unlikely. The positionality of the youth development worker concerning their job role acted as the foundation for perceptions of efficacy and approaches chosen when conflict occurred.

Relationships vs. Safety

Relationships

Clarity of job role and alignment with skillset led workers to have enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy in performing the duties of their jobs. When workers prioritized relationship building with youth as foundational for the work, they had internalized a fundamental principle of SJYD. These workers demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy in their ability to navigate challenges, from building rapport with youth to mediating conflict arising from behavior outside established program norms. Youth development workers can act as stable forces in the lives of youth experiencing instability in other areas, but only when they maintain employment. The sector sees a great deal of turnover, potentially exacerbating issues of trust in adults for youth. This makes it difficult to establish effective relationships with youth without a firm grasp of relational

practices. Workers understanding the importance of relationship building and feeling confident in their abilities to forge partnerships with youth enjoyed more flexibility within their job roles.

Safety

When workers revealed that their skills and job requirements were incongruent, this led to greater emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout. This does not indicate that youth within their programs exhibited different behaviors than those within programs centering partnerships. Workers with alignment and misalignment described behaviors similarly; however, those with misalignment had less ability to mediate or diffuse conflict when it arose. The mismatch in job requirements and skills led to workers feeling less efficacy in the various aspects of their duties, including relationship building. While all workers prioritized program participants' physical and psychological safety, misaligned workers defaulted to safety whenever experiencing conflict with youth. This meant that they often looked to dismiss "problem" youth from programming to decrease chances of escalation or continued conflict.

Adopting Roles

As mentioned by one worker, job clarity was the foundation for every other aspect of the youth development workers' jobs. A firm grasp on the job role allowed the perceptions of self-efficacy to emerge and youth workers to centralize relationship building. These workers had also internalized SJYD principles at varying degrees, helping them put youth's experiences in context with their environments and life experiences. These coalescing factors allowed workers in this position to more frequently adopt the roles of advocate, navigator, and partner with youth, especially when

experiencing conflict. In contrast, workers centering program safety were designed to take on the roles of receiver and expert. In doing so, youth workers missed the opportunity to engage youth in conflict resolution and critical skill-building because they talked *at* the youth rather than *to* them. Workers expressed the need to pair the role with the intended outcomes. In those instances, workers sought to silence youth and mitigate further conflict.

Macro Factors

Youth development workers discussed the role of macro-level factors impacting their interactions with youth. Even workers well-aligned with their positions having high levels of perceived self-efficacy and internalized SJYD principles could not practice in isolation. The alignment and misalignment of workers in their job roles and perceptions of self-efficacy emerged in response to programmatic, organizational, and external community-level factors. The lack of congruence between job descriptions and job duties falls back on organizations for failing to appropriately convey the position's requirements. This occurred for two reasons: 1) youth development administrators did not attend the program to know the job required of the staff, and 2) organizations sought funding from available entities that did not align with the programmatic vision or mission. In the second case, workers were held accountable for funding requirements and original job duties, which compounded their stress and frustration.

The studies conducted assumed the youth development principle of youth voice would be highly valued within youth development programs. With this hypothesis, a worker with job clarity would understand the importance of youth-adult partnerships and the promotion of youth voice. This idea was challenged through situational analysis,

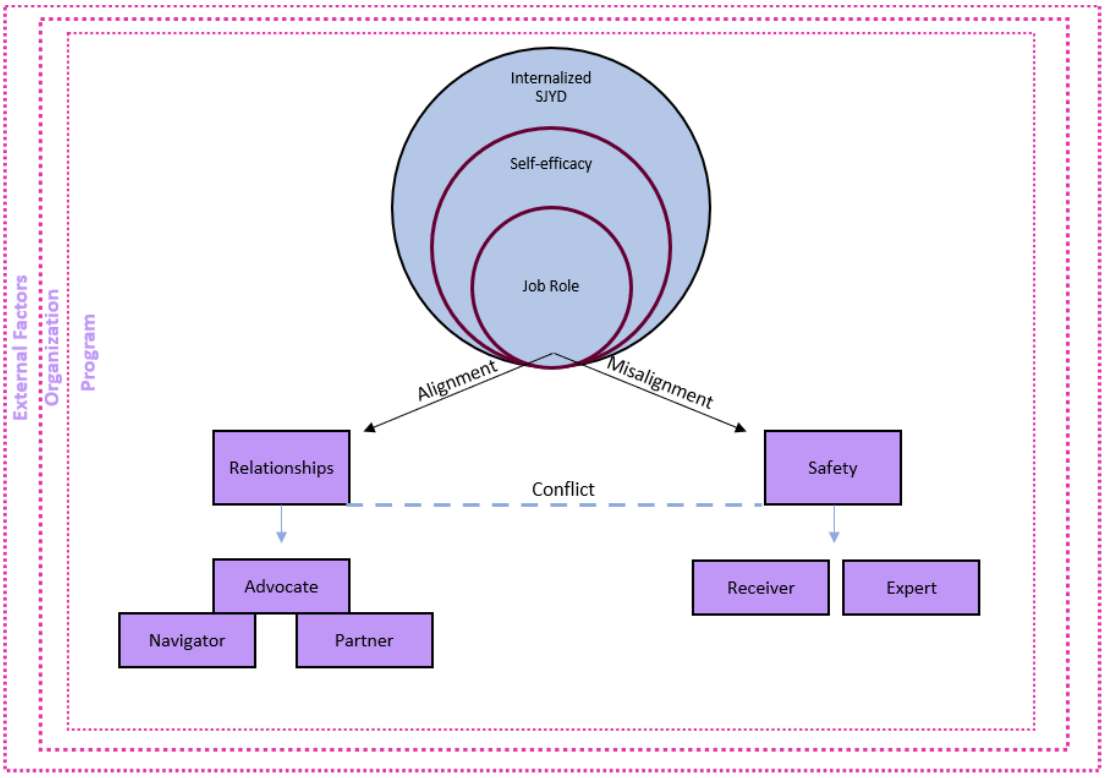
which demonstrated that some individuals possessed job clarity and organizational support but promoted low levels of youth voice. Whether individuals in this category were employed within youth development organizations or simply programs serving youth could be contested. The integral role of youth voice within youth development means its intentional absence precludes the program from that designation.

Theory Application

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss theories used as sensitizing concepts when approaching the respective studies, including social justice youth development, organizational role theory, symbolic interactionism (SI), and role episodic model. Each of these provided concepts relevant to their respective studies, which allowed for enhanced analysis. At the time these studies were conceptualized, ecological systems theory (EST), SI, and critical race theory (CRT) were proposed as overarching theoretical sensitizing concepts to be applied when developing both context-specific theories (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Blumer, 1969; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). "Color-Coded Application of Theory Within Model" (Figure 2) demonstrates the influence of each theory within the combined model with colors.

Figure 2

Color-Coded Application of Theory within Model



Organizational Role Theory and Role Episodic Model

Organizational role theory and role episodic model (designated plum) most heavily influenced the job role and self-efficacy experienced by youth development workers. Due to an overlap with ecological systems theory, organizational role theory and role episodic model are not visually depicted at the organizational level; however, these concepts impacted expectations placed on youth workers by external factors. Job clarity and self-efficacy impacted the alignment or misalignment of the worker with their position as youth development worker, highlighting the importance of clarity of role for youth development workers.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory (designated pink) acknowledges the multi-leveled influences impacting the promotion of youth voice for youth development workers. Rather than confining processes to individual choice, EST supports the idea that macro or outside factors influence individual choice. In youth voice promotion, the macro-level factors significantly impacted how the worker made meaning at the individual level. A process occurred whereby external factors extended from the outside into the worker and spurred from within the worker into a programmatic context.

Critical Race Theory

EST and CRT created complimentary orientations, as CRT (designated purple) is a macro theory that influences internal constructs. Continued exposure to racism and discrimination creates invisibility that allows it to persist unchallenged (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). External factors designate specific policies within the youth development sector that create oppressive practices for youth of color. As racism exists at every systemic level, additional macro levels could be represented in the figure impacting the stance of external factors. However, it is the relationship between macro constructs and individual meaning-making that holds the most importance. This allows for a clearer picture of how individuals differentiate and take positions relative to their understanding when interacting with systems and policies.

Workers in this study primarily served youth of color in areas of high multidimensional poverty. The influence of racist ideas and stereotypes were present within the interviews for this study. Workers discussed a lack of congruence between their identities and norms and the identities and norms of youth participants, emphasizing

the lack of respect demonstrated by youth during conflicts. They also used terms like "culturally deprived" and used deficit-based language to describe youth and their behavior. As emphasized by SI, the language used by youth development workers is an important finding of this study. Workers emphasized the need for additional training to better understand the youth's social environment, the impact of poverty, and cultural humility. Nevertheless, to engage youth as partners and value their voice, youth workers must approach them with respect and use non-stigmatizing and biased free language. Workers would benefit from additional training relative to strengths-based, equity-focused, and person-first language.

At times, the workers described stereotypical views of youth of color while simultaneously prioritizing safety and feeling ill-equipped to perform the job duties. Safety and the corresponding roles adopted pointed to the potential for White youth development workers to perceive greater safety threats due to the racial identity of youth participants. Relationships and the corresponding roles were also influenced by CRT but in a different way. Workers prioritizing relationships expressed varying levels of understanding regarding the relationship between social environments and experiences and youth behavior. Social justice youth development (SJYD) remains firmly grounded in the principles of CRT. Workers internalizing those principles challenged themselves to push past traditional stereotypes of youth of color and establish connections. These workers fostered greater levels of youth voice, as they understood the benefits of its promotion.

Symbolic Interactionism

Whereas CRT and EST emphasize object (society), symbolic interactionism (SI) views the individual as the central focus of analysis (Blumer, 1969). SI (represented by blue) was applied most apparently within the context of meaning-making for youth development workers as they navigated role ambiguity, self-efficacy, and internalization of SJYD principles. Despite the presence of commonalities between youth development workers, everyone navigated differing circumstances related to their organizational support, individual life experiences, and exposure to training and education. Because actions are taken based on the meaning ascribed to them by the individual (Blumer, 1969), ambiguity in job role was not enough to result in the same level of youth voice promotion for all workers lacking clarity. Education and training prior to employment influenced job role conceptualization for workers, as those with a greater understanding of social development felt more self-efficacy in relational practices with youth. Arrows or lines in the figure depict another area heavily impacted by SI. These signify meaning-making or internal processes occurring. Examples of this would be prioritizing relationships or safety, but also the process of role adoption.

Using multiple theories allowed for the application of more than one perspective when evaluating youth voice promotion by youth development workers in community-based programs. With micro or individual-based orientations, the significance of societal influences, policies, and external factors might have been excluded. Similarly, if macro perspectives were implemented, the individual meaning-making and subsequent actions would have been missed. Implementing multiple perspectives allowed for exploration of

the issue at multiple levels, which provided a more thorough depiction of areas for recommendation and exploration.

Recommendations

Intentional youth-adult partnerships (Y-APs) and opportunities for youth voice are central features of positive youth development programs and practices. The practice community has emphasized findings from youth development literature, training workers to value the importance of youth input within programs. Despite the central focus of these constructs within both practice and research, the consistent turnover within the youth development sector remains a barrier in training workers in relational practices and intentional programmatic design. Lacking appropriate supports, youth workers traversed challenges and conflict with the tools readily available. Unfortunately, remedying poor existing policies will require a multi-pronged approach that spans from the individual youth development workers outward into organizations, external factors, and oppressive systems more broadly. Each subsequent section will scaffold recommendations from the micro internal to macro external constructs.

Micro Recommendations

Job Role, Self-Efficacy, Internalized SJYD

Youth workers described the challenges associated with navigating ambiguous job roles and the complexities of building relationships with youth. As previously discussed, the conceptualization of the job role influenced both perceptions of self-efficacy and the foundations for SJYD principle internalization. Despite role conceptualization occurring within youth development workers, recommendations for improvement must occur at the organizational level. The primary responsibility of

training a youth development worker for the position rests with employing organizations. Until a more widespread education or professional development mechanism becomes available, organizations must build infrastructure for appropriate training and orientation at the onset of employment. This training should include relational practices, including fostering youth connections and building relationships with populations being served.

Additionally, organizations need to define job duties so workers can establish appropriate boundaries. The additional benefit of defining job duties for workers is knowing when something falls outside their scope of practice. Youth development workers should have access to resource referral options, in those instances, to remain focused on the tasks aligned with their roles.

When workers have clear expectations of tasks and mechanisms for performance evaluations, they have a greater ability to perceive themselves as capable—or receive professional development to get them there. Many workers highlighted the inconsistent nature of supervision and described job evaluations completed without direct observation of their work. Youth development workers could build higher levels of self-efficacy if provided constructive feedback while performing their job duties. This would allow skill-building and enhance perceptions of practice. It would also allow youth development workers to feel greater value in the undertaken work, as the organization provided supports to ensure their success.

Racism and oppressive practices are embedded within systems, hiding in plain sight and producing disproportionate outcomes. Most workers interviewed in these studies were White (68%). White workers internalizing social justice youth development cited outside mechanisms as catalysts prompting intentional reflection of their privilege.

A specific mechanism was supervision focusing on applying concepts of equity within programming. This educational and reflective process could occur within the organization through supervision if an expert in the framework were employed. Education could also occur at the community level and ensure workers across programs with varying organizational structures and resources receive equal access to quality information. Whether emerging from within the organization or community, the implementation of SJYD principles requires organizational support. This is done by including features of SJYD in the program structure and outcome measurements, as well as the job role of workers. If youth development workers prioritize youth-adult partnerships and promote youth voice, these must be features listed in job descriptions and evaluation measures.

Relationships vs. Safety and Role Adoption

The alignment of youth development workers with the job role influenced self-efficacy and internalizing SJYD, but it also shaped whether workers focused on relationship building or programmatic safety. When confronting conflict within the program, the meaning-making workers undertook led them to adopt a stance rooted in relationship building or safety. Conflict acted as a mechanism to push youth workers to demonstrate their stance externally. However, the internal processes associated with job role, self-efficacy, and internalized SJYD served as the basis for that role adoption.

In addition to previously mentioned supports, including enhanced onboarding and training, clarified job duties, identified point of contact for referrals, supervision, work evaluations, and SJYD education, organizations must assess and interrogate their practices and policies concerning diversity and equity. Program participants reflect

individuals with identities experiencing social exclusion and disproportionate outcomes. Because of this, the organization should evaluate its relationship to White supremacy and how organizational policies promote oppressive practices for employees and youth participants and their families. Traditional diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives focusing on building knowledge are not enough to overcome the insidious and entrenched nature of racism in systems. Organizations must undertake inclusive hiring practices and institute policies that support equity. Policies and initiatives should focus on behavior change rather than simply fostering knowledge of implicit bias. When organizations promote inclusion and equity through policy, service delivery is impacted positively. As workers understand the principles of SJYD and perceive themselves capable of engaging with the youth participant population, adopting roles in line with youth voice promotion naturally occurs.

Macro Level

The recommendations for improvement regarding individual youth development workers require intentional infrastructure and fiscal support. The trickle-down effect of financial constraints permeates all aspects of youth development organizations. Wages are not competitive with unskilled labor positions, resulting in difficulty recruiting quality prospective employees. Despite being employed full-time with their organizations, many workers had second jobs to make ends meet. Individuals well-suited for youth development in terms of skills often find the pay incongruent with job demands. Youth workers discussed the lack of supervision and evaluation, also emerging from organizational financial instability. Administrators and front-line staff both perform multiple job duties and are stretched too thin. Programs need staff, and staff need training

and support to foster positive outcomes for youth, both requiring significant financial assistance.

Creating Spaces for Youth Voice

Youth voice is both a process and principles created through intentional design, reflection, and evaluation efforts (Zeldin et al., 2008; Zeldin et al., 2013; Wong, 2010). Youth voice calls for organizations to challenge power hierarchies between young people and adults, creating spaces for youth decision-making, democratic values, and co-learning opportunities (Wong et al., 2010). Participants in this study discussed the concept of youth voice at its foundation level—with individual youth. Collaborative partnerships between young people and adults cannot be established without first building connections and buy-in at the individual level. Participants placing a high value of youth voice in this study engaged youth primarily at the individual level due to three barriers: 1) lack of participation or buy-in from youth, 2) absence of training or education, or 3) organizational barriers.

Lack of participation. The struggle of getting middle and high school participation in programs is well known in the practice community. Lack of participation reflects youth expressing their voice, indicating a disinterest or inability to engage in the selected activities. Youth should be partnering with adults to decide on areas of interest for investigation or activities. A lack of buy-in potentially reflects the partnership being adult-led at its initial stages. However, that is not always the case. Youth workers described the challenges faced by youth, discussing poverty, community violence, and behavioral health needs. Youth navigating challenges approached the program as a psychologically safe space. Correspondingly, youth engaged in critical reflection by

collectively discussing identity-based discrimination faced in broader society. Nevertheless, when the program became too psychologically taxing, youth checked out. In that way, the youth did not have the emotional bandwidth or critical motivation to engage in critical action.

The absence of critical motivation and critical action by youth described in this study suggests a dearth of supports external to the program, as well as unmet behavioral health needs. This placed youth in a vulnerable place, as they had developed an understanding of systemic and societal discrimination but did not feel empowered to act. Without further exploration, it is difficult to assess whether the behavioral health needs stemmed from experiences of discrimination. However, given the impact on impeding motivation and action, a cyclical relationship may exist. Greater partnership with social work clinicians and behavioral health providers is needed within the youth development sector. Many behavioral health organizations hold contracts with the local school district to provide therapeutic services during school hours. The same partnership should exist with youth development programs, allowing youth greater flexibility to access mental health services in a psychologically safe environment.

Training needs and organizational barriers. Most youth development workers in this study expressed placing a high value on youth voice. Despite this value, not all youth workers are engaged in high levels of youth voice promotion. This disparity existed because of unmet training needs and organizational barriers, which created barriers for workers. The need for youth worker training and organizational equity audits was discussed in previous sections and will not be reiterated.

An additional component for consideration is the role of youth in the development of training and organizational equity policies and practices. From micro individuals, mezzo programming to macro-organizational policies, youth have a role in shaping policies. The child welfare system provides a relevant example with youth advisory boards. Due to federal policy, emancipating foster youth have been engaged in youth advisory boards that advocate for their needs and the needs of other foster youth by engaging in policy advocacy and reform (Forenza, 2017).

Despite the presence of foster youth advisory boards in every state, no singular model exists for design and implementation (Forenza & Happonen, 2016; Forenza, 2017). The concept of youth advisory boards extends outside the child welfare system. More than one youth development worker discussed similarly related constructs (e.g., youth leadership council, youth advisory council) within their organizations. Even within organizations seeking to incorporate youth voice intentionally, youth failed to have power in decision-making outside of programmatic directions. Organizations must more intentionally create supports to empower youth participants to impact policies and decision-making meaningfully. This includes acting as creators, collaborators, facilitators, and evaluators across contexts within the organization.

Building Value for Youth Development: Resisting Replication

A relationship has always existed between the educational system and youth development programs. "Afterschool" emerged because of the unoccupied gap of time after youth left school. Despite this historical connection, both studies highlighted the pitfalls of youth development programming as extensions of the school system. Black and Latinx youth face disproportionately poor outcomes due to educational policies and

policing within schools (Anyon et al., 2014; Kayama et al., 2017; Bottiani et al., 2018; Mallett, 2017; APA, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The youth development space offers a respite from repressive school environments, opportunities to build community, positive identity, and skills. School districts often avoid dialogues concerning historical and current discrimination and oppression faced by communities of color (Krauth, 2021). Social justice youth development provides a context for critical consciousness building and positive racial identity formation, skill development opportunities often lacking in traditional school settings.

As disproportionality for youth of color continues within educational spaces, youth development programs are usurped for educational remediation and tutoring. This underscores the lack of value ascribed to the work performed by youth development programs. Available funding mechanisms reflect this mindset, as allotted moneys have never been abundant. Many youth development funding sources tie program outcomes to academic achievement or violence prevention, approaching youth experiencing poor outcomes as individual-level problems, failing to account for systems-level inequities. This leads organizations towards adopting roles as educational remediators rather than promoters of social justice youth development. One of the few federal grants available to community-based youth development programs emerges out of the U.S. Department of Education (see 21st Century Community Learning Centers), furthering the interconnectedness of the sectors. Like other funding streams delegated to the youth development sector, 21st Century grants focus on programs serving youth living in high-poverty areas attending low-performing schools. They also require programs to use

valuable "afterschool" hours for academic instructional time and tie academic improvement within the school to programmatic outcomes.

Youth of color experience disproportionate outcomes and need enhanced educational supports and resources. However, concerns of the educational sector should be solved within that space. The youth development space is meant to be informal, flexible, and youth-driven. When academic education is centered, programs lose their ability to engage youth in meaningful ways. Centering homework help and tutoring in youth development programs reflects that academics matter more than development in other areas. Youth development programs are valuable and worthy of funding based on positive outcomes derived from youth participation. Youth development should not shoulder the burdens and failures of the educational system, as it diminishes possibilities of youth development spaces for skill development and growth of youth experiencing marginalization.

It is possible that some of the youth development workers who participated in this study also experienced exclusion and performed poorly in academics. Workers tasked with academic instruction or tutoring may not have the appropriate skills to assist youth in applying concepts of patterns within mathematics. Nevertheless, youth development workers are not teachers and should not be expected to do the job of teachers within youth development spaces. A vast body of research has investigated disproportionate outcomes for youth of color stemming from systemically embedded racism within the education sector (Anyon et al., 2014; Kayama et al., 2017; Bottiani et al., 2018; Mallett, 2017; APA, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006). When youth development programs fall in line with educational policies and adopt the roles of teachers, youth development

replicates oppressive structures. Forcing youth development workers to undertake teaching responsibilities for significantly less pay than teachers is unfair and further blurs the job role boundaries for workers.

COVID-19

COVID-19 occurred in the middle of recruitment for this study. While the presence of COVID created logistical challenges, its occurrence presented a unique opportunity to witness the changing landscape of youth development in real-time. Rather than typically slow movement towards programmatic alignment with the schools, change was evident and abrupt. Many youth development workers were dismissed from their positions during this time—the inability to provide face-to-face programs created insurmountable hurdles. Programs still operating were required to move onto online platforms, which required an abundance of effort and the development of new skills. Youth development programs navigated poor infrastructures and barriers to engaging youth in online platforms. Programs typically offered hands-on activities, so programs also had to strategize ways to engage youth in experiential learning and participation while confined to their homes.

The local school system and teachers faced similar concerns, traversing issues of lesson development and student engagement. The education system needed assistance, and the youth development sector answered the call. Youth in areas of high multidimensional poverty experienced significant challenges to engaging online, including a lack of computer technology, internet accessibility, and digital literacy. Additional challenges emerged relative to childcare, as older youth were asked to care for younger children while parents worked. In response, the youth development sector

partnered with the school district to create spaces for youth to get additional academic assistance to garner funding to stay afloat. Even amidst this partnership, the school district prevented teachers from teaching at sites outside the school building due to COVID protocols. Youth development workers undertook the tasks of teaching content in addition to existing tasks.

During this time, youth development workers voiced concerns for youth outside academics. Workers described significant mental health challenges related to isolation. Multiple youth workers mentioned program participants dying by suicide and facing food and housing instability. Meanwhile, youth development programs had limited capacity for programming, and those occurring face to face were expected to center academic assistance. Youth facing the most difficult circumstances lacked a safe place to have community and hold space for their feelings. The descriptions of workers illustrated how the ties to education devalued the potential of youth development spaces, potentially eliminating its positive impact on youth mental health.

Professionalization and Funding

Criticisms exist regarding the professionalization of the sector, as some believe it will restrict accessibility for potential workers and negatively impact the field due to an inability to fill open positions (Colvin et al., 2020). However, workers in these studies indicated the sector needed the benefits of formal professionalization, including role recognition and clarity, and consistent education and training. An additional aspect of professionalization described by workers was creating organizational cultures that valued their work—many expressed frustrations related to a lack of oversight and care for the work performed by front-line workers. Workers described the benefits of

professionalism, including the increased value of work, organizational support, and wages.

The question remains how to obtain the financial resources to establish the necessary supports for the youth development sector. A reciprocal relationship exists between the increasing value of the work performed by the sector through community supports and funders providing monetary assistance. Currently, funding entities want to work with "vulnerable" youth through academic improvement and violence prevention efforts, limiting the scope of youth work and problematizing youth behaviors. Promising outcomes exist when youth participate in youth development programming emphasizing SJYD principles, including critical consciousness building, skill development, and sociopolitical action. Additionally, SJYD programs foster a place for collective organizing and healing for youth experiencing oppression.

Implications for Social Work

The earliest days of youth development focused primarily on preventing problem behaviors and keeping unsupervised young people off the streets. Even then, the field of youth development reflected human services more than education. Social work possesses a long history with the youth development sector. Jane Addams, a founder of social work, also provides one of the earliest examples of youth development programming (Addams, 1895). The Hull House, a settlement home in Chicago, served to assist immigrant families in assimilating to the United States. Programs offered at the Hull House specifically focused on children and youth with services and supports to prevent involvement in street gangs (Addams, 1895). The term youth development was not developed until later in the twentieth century. However, the philosophical underpinnings

of settlement houses served as the basis for the problem-prevention model used in youth development until this day.

Youth development workers expressed youth needs outside their scope of practice, often citing the need for social workers or clinicians within the space. Creating job clarity for youth development workers will provide boundaries and explain the scope of practice. Nevertheless, job clarity will not reduce the needs of youth participants or provide the necessary resources and supports. Youth workers described the need for social work professionals to provide clinical, case management, and resource referral within the youth development space. Youth development workers need training on principles of youth development and relational practices to perform their jobs adequately. They also need the presence and investment from the social work sector. Social workers have training and expertise related to behavioral health, social justice, and the interconnected nature of person and environment. Additionally, social workers are more familiar with the social service system and better situated to provide resources to youth and families.

Ideally, social work and youth development practitioners would work together to establish and implement strengths-based youth development spaces. Participants in youth development programming are often involved in multiple systems served by social workers. Despite sharing similar populations of interest, intertwining histories, and a founding practitioner, the presence of social work within the youth development sector is currently limited.

Youth Workers

Social work educators and practitioners have made a case for licensing and title restrictions for "social workers." This is to designate social workers as a profession requiring specific education, training, and skill demonstration. Youth development workers lack title recognition or formal professionalization, which creates difficulties in providing standardized supports for the sector. The term "youth worker" is more frequently denoting any professional assisting young people with skill development in informal settings. Youth workers in residential settings and child welfare experience similar challenges to youth development workers: de-escalating conflict, low pay, lacking supports and training, and high turnover (Purdy & Antle, 2021).

The potential relationship between social work and youth development is mutually beneficial. Social workers within child welfare settings often work within a system emphasizing problem prevention or deficit-focused approaches with youth. Even the term “child welfare” carries negative connotations, evoking images of child protective services and removing children from their homes. The child welfare system continues to investigate ways to engage anti-racism within its culture. However, children and families of color continue to experience disproportionate referrals and removals in the current system (Braynon & Tierney, 2021). The social justice youth development framework could provide a much-needed equity-focused lens within the sector, but an unnecessary separation exists.

The action of internalizing and applying principles of youth development distinguishes youth development workers from youth workers. Congruent with child welfare, this process promotes youth psychological and physical safety and well-being. Some child welfare settings have recognized the value of youth development principles,

establishing structures to support youth voice through youth advisory boards that guide organizational policy and directions.

The child welfare sector receives government funding and grants, eligible to apply for various funding streams for economic viability. If youth development and child welfare aligned, the sectors would benefit from diversity in perspectives. Youth development would enjoy more possibilities for funding opportunities and greater involvement by social workers. The youth involved in the child welfare sector may experience more favorable outcomes related to a shift in philosophy. Both sectors could benefit from more intentional partnerships, whether by collaboration or absorption.

Conclusion

The efficacy of youth development programs hinges mainly on the quality of youth development workers implementing activities. Youth of color impacted by racism and oppression face disproportionate outcomes related to involvement in a variety of settings. While researchers have extensively investigated turnover within other youth-serving sectors, little empirical evidence exists highlighting the experiences of youth development workers in community-based programs. These studies sought to fill a gap in the literature by exploring social processes undertaken and conditions present while youth development workers navigated their roles.

The emphasis on job ambiguity reflects a broader need for establishing baseline skills or a profile of highly successful youth development practitioners. Organizations may set minimum qualifications at degree completion (e.g., high school diploma, bachelor's degree), but completing a degree curriculum does not guarantee an understanding of equity and relational practices. Given the interrelationship between sharing experiences,

internalizing social justice youth development, and high levels of youth voice promotion, organizations should investigate establishing substantial onboarding and ongoing training opportunities for youth development professionals.

Organizations should consider completing an equity audit, as well, to ensure policies and hiring practices are congruent with principles of equity. Engaging in these tasks would alleviate job ambiguity, creating conditions for conceptualizing a role identity congruent with expectations, thus improving perceptions of efficacy. Once organizations build infrastructures that support workers promoting youth-adult partnerships and youth voice, youth should be meaningfully engaged in decision-making at all levels. Results suggested a need for more significant financial supports for programs and separation from the education system. Funders should engage in equity analysis of funding applications and distribution mechanisms to promote anti-racist practices within their organization. Future research should seek to explore and describe the experiences of youth development workers in greater detail to support recommendations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Youth Development Worker Needs Assessment
In-Depth Interview Guide

Introduction

1. Tell me about your agency and the services you offer.
2. Could you tell me how you came to your current position with this agency?
3. What experience(s) did you have working with youth prior to this position?
4. Could you tell me about the expectations of you in your role as youth worker?

Youth Populations Served

5. Tell me about the youth that attend programming at the agency.
6. What are the major challenges experienced by the youth when they're outside the agency?
7. What are the major challenges youth experience while at program?

Youth Worker Preparedness

8. Describe the challenges you face in working with these youth.
9. How does your agency incorporate youth voice into program development or organizational changes?
10. How prepared do you feel in addressing the challenges youth face?
11. What might make you feel more prepared in assisting youth at your program?
12. What types of trainings do you think are most important for you in your position as youth worker?
13. What barriers do you experience in attending trainings or professional development opportunities?

Training and Organizational Support

14. How valued is your voice at your agency?
15. How invested is your agency in the quality of the work you do?
16. How does your agency support you in your professional development?
17. What else would be important for me to know?

Appendix B

Sampling and Saturation Interview Guide

1. Can you bring me up to date with your program and your role as a youth development worker?
2. What additional challenges have occurred as a result of COVID?
   Probe: What information have you been given about what programming will look like moving forward?
3. How accurate is this model in describing your experience as a yd worker?
4. Which of these challenges speaks to your experiences?
   Probe: Tell me about a time you have dealt with that challenge and what you did.
   Probe: I noticed that you didn't mention this challenge, can you speak to why that does not resonate for you?
5. Are there any other challenges or needs you would like to talk about that weren't already mentioned?

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6. How has the murder of Breonna Taylor and uprisings/demonstrations in Louisville impacted your role as yd worker?
   Probe: How have events in the community impacted how you *view* your role?
7. What changes have you noticed in yourself as a result of the community events?
8. What does the term "youth voice" means to you?
9. How do you promote youth voice in your role as a yd worker?
10. What does youth activism mean to you?
11. How do you promote activism in your role as a yd worker?
    Probes: Tell me more about how you facilitate this in your program.
    What barriers do you face in doing youth activism work with youth?
    (If applicable) What strategies do you use to overcome those barriers?
    Tell me about an activity or program that you have run in your role as yd worker related to youth activism.
12. How does your race or ethnicity impact the work that you do with youth?
13. Is there anything else you think is important for us to know?

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EDUCATION

2021	**Doctorate of Philosophy in Social Work**	University of Louisville
2010	**MSSW**	University of Louisville
2005	Study Abroad (Paris) Studies	KY Institute International
2003	**BA: French** **BA: History** Specializations: Francophone Africa, Women and Gender Studies in Francophone Countries	Eastern Kentucky University

DISSERTATION

Exploring the Promotion of Youth Voice and Activism among Youth Development Workers
Committee Members: Drs. Lesley M. Harris (chair), Thomas Lawson, Aishia Brown, Shantel Crosby

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Social justice youth development; education with an emphasis on disparities; critical consciousness; community-based youth involvement; community-based participatory research and practice, arts-based research methods, constructivist grounded theory methods

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

University of Louisville Faculty Favorite
2017-2018
Building Louisville's Out of School Time Coordinated System (BLOCS) Scholarship

2015
National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health Grant
2013
Charlotte Schmidlapp Scholarship—Women's Writing
2003
Honors Presidential Scholarship
1999-2003
Books-on-Loan Award
1999-2003

PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS IN REVIEW

Harris, L.M., Smith, L., Thang, N.D. & **Bloomer, R.** (Revise & Resubmit). Caregiving Processes for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in the Wake of the AIDS Epidemic in Vietnam. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*

Harris, L.M., **Bloomer, R.**, Williams, S., Osezua, V., Sato, D., Thang, N.D., Byun, K. & Hambrick, H. "The Law Is Not Strong Enough to Protect Children": Using Photovoice to Identify Systems Risks among Youth Orphaned Due to HIV/AIDS in Vietnam. *Children and Youth Services Review.* (*Submitted)*

Harris, L.M., **Bloomer, R.** Mitchell, B. Williams, S., Osezua, V., Sato, D, Byun, K., Hambrick, M. & Thang, N.D. Exploring the Varied Dimensions of Youth's Ideas for Social Change: A Photovoice Project on HIV Risk and Resilience in Vietnam. *Social Work in Public Health. (Submitted)*

Bloomer, R., Brown., A., Winters, A., & Domiray, A. (Revise and Resubmit). "Trying to be Everything Else": Describing Youth Development Worker Experiences with Challenges in the Context of Out of School Time Settings. *Child and Youth Services Review.*

PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS IN PROGRESS

Bloomer, R., Harris, L.M., Brown, A. Internalizing social justice youth development and sharing experiences: Pairing roles and setting conditions for high levels of youth voice promotion.

Bloomer, R., Harris, L.M., Brown, A. The influence of role identity and self-efficacy in youth development worker promotion of youth voice: A constructivist grounded theory study.

PEER-REVIEWED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Bloomer, R., Brown, A., & Winters, A. (2022). "Trying to be Everything Else": Describing Youth Development Worker Experiences with Challenges in the Context of Out of School Time Settings. *Society on Social Work Research Annual Conference*. Washington, D.C.

Byun, K., Harris, L.M., **Bloomer, R**., Hambrick, M., Williams, S., Osezua, V. & Sato, D. (2021). Our World Our Say: Understanding HIV Risk and Resilience Among Adolescents Who Have

Been Orphaned By HIV/AIDS in Hai Phong, Vietnam. Environmental Design Research Association. May 2021.

Harris, L.M., **Bloomer, R**., Williams, S., Osezua, V., Sato, D, Byun, K., Hambrick, M. & Thang, N.D. (2021). "Our World, Our Say": The Use of Photovoice for Youth-Driven HIV Advocacy Efforts in Vietnam. International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Champaign, IL. May 2021.

Harris, L.M., **Bloomer, R**. Williams, S., Osezua, V., Sato, D, Byun, K., Hambrick, M. & Thang, N.D. (2021). "Not Strong Enough to Protect Children": Systems Risks Identified Among Youth Who Have Been Orphaned Due To HIV/AIDS In Vietnam: A Photovoice Project. Sixteenth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, Oxford, England, July 21-23, 2021.

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Bloomer, R., Middleton, A., & Purdy, L. (2019). Challenges Experienced and Opportunities for Improvement Noted by Social Work Adjunct Faculty. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Annual Program Meeting. Denver, CO, October 2019.

CREATIVE PRODUCTS

Byun, K., Harris, L.M., Williams, S., Osezua, V., Scoggins, C., Coleman, L., **Bloomer, R.**, Sato, D. & Hambrick, M. (2021, July). "Landscape of Crisis" [Art-Advocacy Exhibition]. SPACE XX Gallery, Seoul, Korea.

Harris, L.M**.**, Williams, S., Osezua, V., Byun, K. **Bloomer, R**. & Sato, D (2020, March 21). Our World Our Say Photovoice Project [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3uBODfFB1KFXEnAmYH4MCGhMWlZdeFfU

Byun, K. Harris, L.M., Williams, S., Osezua, V., Scoggins, C., Coleman, L., **Bloomer, R**. & Sato, D. (2020, February 21 – 2020, April 24). Our World Our Say Exhibition #2: Understanding HIV Risk and Resilience Among Adolescents Who Have Been Orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Hai Phong, Vietnam [Art-Advocacy Exhibition]. Retrieved from: https://mailchi.mp/cranehouse/crane-house-weekly-3108413

Byun, K. Harris, L.M., Williams, S., Osezua, V., Scoggins, C., Coleman, L., **Bloomer, R**. & Sato, D. (2020, January 10 – 2020, February 6). Our World Our Say Exhibition #1: Understanding HIV Risk and Resilience Among Adolescents Who Have Been Orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Hai Phong, Vietnam [Art-Advocacy Exhibition]. Retrieved from: https://louisville.edu/art/exhibitions/all/our-world-our-say

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Funded Awards

Co-Investigator 2021-Present
University of Louisville
PI: Dr. Aishia Brown

Social Justice Youth Development Certificate Program
Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence ($126,000)

Co-Investigator 2021-Present
University of Louisville
PI: Dr. Aishia Brown
Social Justice Youth Development Certificate Program Youth Advisory Board
Funded by: Humana Foundation ($75,000)

Co-Investigator 2020-Present
University of Louisville
PI: Dr. Lesley Harris
Our World Our Say: Exploring the Impact of Arts-Based Social Change Initiatives in Vietnam in the Era of the COVID-19 Pandemic
Funded by: Cooperative for Transdisciplinary Social Justice Research ($4000)

Co-Investigator 2020-Present
University of Louisville
PI: Dr. Scott LaJoie
"The Lived Experience of Black or African American Mothers Raising Children in West Louisville: A Photovoice Project"
Funded by: Cooperative for Transdisciplinary Social Justice Research ($6300)

Principal Investigator 2019-Present
University of Louisville
"CLASP Photovoice Project: Exploring strengths, needs, and challenges experienced by youth in an out of school time program"
Funded by: Jewish Family Heritage Foundation ($15000)

Co-Investigator 2019-Present
University of Louisville
PI: Dr. Lesley Harris
"Understanding HIV Risk and Resilience among Adolescents who have been Orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Hai Phong, Vietnam Using Photovoice and Social Network Analysis"
Funded by: Cooperative for Transdisciplinary Social Justice Research ($15000)

Co-Investigator 2018-Present
University of Louisville
PI: Dr. Andrew Winters
"Louisville Youth Development Workers' Needs Assessment"
Funded by: Kent Seed Grant Award ($5000)

Principal Investigator 2018-Present
University of Louisville
"Social Work Adjunct Instructors: Exploring Perceptions of Support and Readiness to Teach"

Principal Investigator 2017-2018
University of Louisville
PI: Dr. Thomas Lawson
"Youth and School-Age Program Quality Intervention: Relationship between Staff Training and Increased Performance"

Unfunded Awards

Co-Principal Investigator 2020
"Examining the Use of Social Justice Youth Development in a Coordinated System of Youth Serving Organizations". William T. Grant Foundation. $600,000.

Co-Investigator 2020
"Collaborative Learning After School Program (CLASP) Summer Arts & Activism: A Photovoice Project Addressing Multidimensional Poverty". Executive Vice President for Research and Innovation Internal Grant Program. $3000

Principal Investigator 2019
"Collaborative Learning After School Program (CLASP) Summer Arts & Activism: A Photovoice Project Addressing Multidimensional Poverty". Humana Foundation Community Partners Arts and Culture Grant. $49,500.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor 2018-Present
University of Louisville Summer, Fall, Spring
BSW Program: *Intro to Social Statistics* (*Online)*

- Transitioned course into online platform, developed and implemented content

Instructor 2017- 2019
University of Louisville Spring
BSW Program: *Practicum Seminar & Lab I*

- Revised course content and developed assignments for course across sections to be congruent with established program CSWE outcomes

Instructor 2017-2019
University of Louisville Fall
BSW Program: *Practicum Seminar & Lab II*

Revised course content and developed assignments for course across sections to be congruent with established program CSWE outcomes

Instructor 2016-Present
University of Louisville Fall/Spring
MSSW Program: *Advanced Practicum (Campus and Online)*

Instructor 2016-Present
University of Louisville Fall/Spring
MSSW Program: *Foundation Practicum (Campus and Online)*

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2015-Present **Field Education Coordinator**

University of Louisville

- Develop community-based projects to mentor field agencies in creating quality field placement experiences for BSW/MSSW students

- Processing student applications for practicum including advising students on practicum choices, navigating students through the referral process, interviewing, placement confirmation, maintain Field Education Database.

- Assisting the Director of Field Education with: planning and conducting orientations (face to face and online); trainings offered by the Field Education office including the annual Spring Conference; practicum faculty meetings; developing Field Forums; providing technical support to practicum faculty including Blackboard and Livetext; maintaining the Field Education website; attending University, Kent, and, Community meetings on behalf of the Field Education office; and other duties as assigned**.**

2015-2019 **PQI External Accessor**
BLOCS (Louisville Office of Youth Development/Metro United Way)

- Certified reliable accessor in using and scoring the Youth Programs Quality Assessment (PQA) tool developed by the David P. Weikert Center for Youth Program Quality.

2012-2015 **Assistant Director of Family and School Services**
Family & Children's Place

- Develop Trauma Informed Care initiatives for youth development workers in city
- Provide direct supervision to Family and School Services Site Supervisor; managed 12 staff; supervised up to 7 practicum students
- Supervised implementation of all Family and School Services programming and curricula.
- Contribute verbiage for grants/funding opportunities and quarterly reports: Louisville Metro, Metro United Way, 21CCLC, KY ASAP, Brown Forman, New Hope, YUM.
- Researched evidence-based practices for client populations served and ensured EBPs utilized in Out of School Time, Youth Development, and Family Programs.
- Ensured parameters are met for each grant by implementing and overseeing evaluation tools.

2011-2012 **Family and Youth Programs Coordinator**
Americana Community Center

2010-2011 **VISTA Family Education Coordinator**
Americana Community Center

- Worked with immigrant and refugee individuals and families, assisting them in navigating US social service and educational systems
- Worked with community partners to create, develop, and implement meaningful curricula for K-12 Out of School Time Program and Family Education Program.
- Assisted families with navigating U.S. social services and educational systems
- Use intersectional lens of identity to craft programming to meet needs of diverse youth populations

Grants Received: Sisters of Nazareth ($20,000), Book Buddies ($5000)

2010 **Research Analyst**
Kentucky Youth Advocates

- Researched experiences of immigrant/refugee families attempting to access pre-K in KY and developed issue brief for dissemination.

2009-2010 **Social Work Practicum**
Kentucky Youth Advocates

2008-2009 **Social Work Practicum**
Hebron Middle School/North Bullitt High School YSC

TRAININGS PROVIDED

The Challenges and Needs of Louisville Youth Development Workers. Metro United Way, BLOCS Community Practice Partners. 10 December 2020.

Supervising Social Work Practicum Students During COVID. University of Louisville, Kent School of Social Work. November 2020

Using a Trauma Informed Lens in Out of School Time Settings. Family & Children's Place. September 2017.

Generational Differences and Impacts on Supervising Practicum Students. University of Louisville, Kent School of Social Work. December 2016.

How to Manage Difficult Behavior in Youth. Office of Youth Development. 18 May 2016.

Building Resiliency to Overcome Trauma. Kentucky Prevention Network. May 2016.

Youth Worker Training: Module 1. Trauma Informed Care. BOUNCE Coalition. July 2015.

A Trauma Informed Approach to Out of School Time Settings. Louisville Office of Youth Development Summer Learning Summit. July 2015.

SERVICE

2016-Present **MSW Practicum Field Instructor and Consultant**
Family & Children's Place (Louisville)
Center for Social Justice Youth Development Research, University of Louisville
Louisville Youth Group (Louisville)
- Provided consultation and training to youth development programs in Louisville in social justice youth development framework
- Worked with youth development programs to integrate social work practice within out of school time setting
- Provided formal supervision to students placed with community agencies

2017 **Out of School Time Proposal Review Committee Member**
Metro United Way
- Reviewed applications for OST funding after historical funding structure dismantled

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

American Evaluation Association	2017-Present
Society for Research on Adolescence	2017-Present
National Association of Social Workers	2008-Present
Phi Alpha Theta—History Honors Society	2003-Present

MEDIA ARTICLES

Lee, Jae Wook (2020, April 1). "Human Health and Art". TK-21 [Online article]. Retrieved from https://www.tk-21.com/TK-21-LaRevue-no105?lang=fr#Our-World-

King, Niki (2020, January 15). "Our World, Our Way: Hite exhibition showcases photography of Vietnam youth affected by HIV. UofL news [Online article]. Retrieved from https://www.uoflnews.com/section/arts-and-humanities/our-world-our-say-hite-exhibition-showcases-photography-of-vietnam-youth-affected-by-hiv/